

to future of peace, to lovely lady, to American with mission," and he winked at me. We were all drunk, yessiree baby.

Outside on the Bulevar España you could hear the traffic going to and fro between the city to our right and Pocitos Beach, with its high-rise apartment houses, down to the left. I thought of the safe house where Chevi and I meet. From side streets, the tangential whoops of adolescents ricocheted through the evening air. Quite as abruptly as he had joined us, Varkhov bowed and left for another group.

"Do you play chess?" Masarov asked me.

"Yes," I said, "not all that well."

"But not so badly?"

"I can play," I said.

"Good. You must be very good. I will invite you to my home. It is nearby. And you, Miss Waterston."

"Name the date, I'll bring the cake," she said.

"An old American expression?" he asked. Was I reading too much into him, or was it said with something like longing? He not only spoke reasonably good English but seemed to take pleasure in it.

"No," she answered, "it's as hometown and hicky as you can get."

"Hometown and hicky," he repeated. "Hicky is . . . pustule, pimple?"

"Just about," said Nancy.

Kittredge, this was the hot core of the evening. The string was thrown across the abyss and now the cord and rope will follow. Indeed, it has. I will tell you in my next letter about the evening with the Masarovs.

My love to you, to Hugh, and to Christopher,
Harry the Betrothed

In my letter, I had jumped conveniently over the rest of the evening. Nancy was drunk and said she had eaten too many appetizers, so I took her home. Home proved to be three rooms on the second floor of a modest villa on the Calle Doctor Geraldo Ramón not three blocks from the Embassy. "I think freedom consists of being able to walk to work in the morning,"

she told me in most certain, if inebriated, terms. She certainly had a second voice installed behind the first. I made the mistake of kissing her.

She kissed back as if we were indeed betrothed and getting married tomorrow. I was discovering that the mouth of a virgin spinster was not like others. Her lips pressed against mine, a family seal upon wax. Her teeth offered the faint odor of dentifrice, mouthwash, and tooth inlay, but her breath was a furnace, and back of that was some baleful neutral zone inspired by her stomach. I had an awful set of impulses I could never have been able to confess to Kittredge. I knew that Nancy Waterston could be mine forever if I chose, and the centrality of such power stirred something awfully cold in me. ~~The image I had had of Hunt's finger stroking her vagina with precise professional strokes became the image of my finger. I had been using him as a cover story for my own impulses.~~ It was then I ~~kissed her a second time on the cheek~~, assured her that it had been a remarkable evening and perhaps we would visit the Masarovs together, and made my exit much impressed with the ability of one kiss to conduct me right up to the edge of a possible marriage.

On the way home, I had time to recollect that Sally (not at all witting of Hunt's improvised matchmaking) had had time to pass me on the lawn, and say, in a husky, shaky whisper which did not promise to be kept down for long, "Cheap son of a bitch, you could at least have some taste."

My immediate concern, however, was that the Finnish Micks might be photographing her lips. Quickly, I said: "A ploy. Hunt's idea. Don't zoom, Sally," and raised my glass in the salute you give to Company wives in whom you have no interest larger than minimal courtesy.

Only now, driving home, did it occur to me that the Russians may also have had a camera trained on the garden. They would have seen my face. What would my words communicate to them? "*A ploy. Hunt's idea. Don't zoom.*" I might have given away much too much. On the other hand, it could prove rich in interpretation for Soviet eyes and send them off into far-flung scenarios.

One of Harlot's thoughts now came back to me. Evil, he had once informed me, was to know what was good, and do one's

best to tamper with it. Whereas wickedness was merely one's readiness to raise the stakes when one did not know what one was doing. By that measure, I was wicked. It also occurred to me for a moment that everything we were doing in Uruguay might by that logic be equally wicked, but then I recognized that I did not care. Let no one say that the innocent are always good. I drove on to bed.

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January 27, 1958

Dearest Kittredge,

I was hoping for a letter, but perhaps you are waiting to hear more about the Masarovs. In any event, I feel like writing. You see, I'm obliged to report these days on each step taken with Boris and Zenia. Then the Groogs and Sourballs masticate my cables down to the molecules.

As one example of the present work mode, the Groogs and Sours decide in concert with Hunt (for he refuses to be bypassed on any decision, minor or major) that Nancy should not accompany me to the Masarov home. Their reasoning is that a continuing presentation of Miss Waterston and myself as prospective bride and groom might put our histrionic abilities to too great a test—Nancy's, anyway, Hunt allows. I suspect that Hunt messed up in the first place by putting an Administrative Officer like Nancy into such a slot.

At any rate, Miss Waterston was sufficiently disappointed to show chagrin. "Oh, fudge," she said, "oh, fudge and yee-God crackers," so help me, Kittredge, is what she said. Then, with a sigh and a formal, professional smile—Lord, she is profes-

sional—she went back to auditing one more of Gordy Morewood's Byzantine accounts. Poor Nancy—she is so weathered by disappointment.

Meanwhile, I get ready to visit the Masarovs. I call, and, via Hunt's specific instructions, make the date for Nancy and myself. The idea is to keep Zenia at home with Boris. If she knows Nancy is not accompanying me, she may absent herself, and Howard is trying to forestall that. It's deemed more rewarding to get a take on husband and wife together. If the Masarovs are near to a breakup, there may be indications which of the two could be more likely to defect. On the off chance that they present themselves as a strong, well-knit couple, maybe they'll fly the coop together. Such is our advance reasoning.

The day arrives. I trot over for tea and make my apologies about Nancy's indisposition. They seem disappointed. I cannot help thinking that Hunt was right. If Zenia had been told in advance, she might not have been there.

Given the limited supply of desirable real estate in Montevideo, my friendly Russian couple is living in a high-rise apartment house just two blocks further down the Rambla from the similar high-rise in which is located our safe house. The Masarovs are on the tenth floor, and also have a view through their picture window of Pocitos Beach and the sea. There, all resemblances end. They have truly furnished their place. I do not know if it is to my taste, but their belongings do fill the living room. There are heavy velvet drapes looped around the picture window, several fat armchairs and a plump sofa with lace antimacassars, a small oriental carpet on top of a large one, two samovars—one in brass, the other in silver—a number of standing lamps with beaded shades, a large piece of mahogany furniture with open glass cases for the display of their plates and dishes, small casts of heavy nineteenth-century sculpture on every table, a bronze maiden, for example, with a filmy bronze gown clinging to her half-exposed breasts, then Apollo, standing on the ball of one foot, and gold-framed prints of paintings wherever there is space: Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, plus a couple of Russian painters I do not recognize who portray czars flanked by Russian Orthodox high priests, and nobles dressed half like pirates—must be boyars. In the corner of one painting,

a defeated boyar is bleeding to death from a wound in his neck. The agony on his mouth is expressive. Quite a picture to look at every day.

There are also oriental carpets put up as wall hangings, and I count four chess sets, two of which look to be of value. One of the boards is made of inlaid wood.

I can't help contrasting this old-fashioned, middle-class opulence with Sherman Porringer's child-scuffed, dog-chewed, blonde-wood furniture and bookshelves on bricks. The Masarovs, possessing not all that much space (now that they've filled it), have converted the hallway that ties their three and a half rooms together into a long, very narrow library. It is a squeeze for two people to walk side by side, yet both walls are lined with dark-stained oak bookcases. Later I get to look at Boris' collection of tomes, and will tell you that he reads French, German, English, Spanish, Italian, and several Soviet languages whose names I would not know how to spell. That is a lot for him to have learned, but, then, he says he is thirty-seven. While this conflicts with the Sourball dossier, which pegs him at thirty-two, I must say it adds up. He speaks of the Second World War, where he rose to the rank of captain, and countless framed photographs on a collection of end tables are certainly there to verify his military career. I do take mental note of the shoulder-board epaulets in these photographs so the Sours can check it out. Of course, I am not able to swear these are World War II snapshots, but they do have the feel of those times, and on one photograph you can witness for background an incredibly littered city of rubble and jagged artifacts. "Berlin," he told me, "in the last days. That is why we are smiling."

"Yes, you must have been happy the war was coming to an end."

He shrugged. Suddenly, he was gloomy. "Half happy," he replied gnomically, but then, as if it were not congenial to speak in such fashion to a guest, he added, "There is always question. Does one deserve life? Better men have perished."

"Still, you laugh in photograph," remarked Zenia.

"I am happy," he said, contradicting himself.

"We were meeting two days before," said Zenia. "Brishka and myself. First time."

"You, too, happened to be in Berlin?" I asked.

"Entertain troops."

"Zenja is a poet," said Masarov.

"Was," said Zenja.

"She has not written a poem in two years."

"Oh," I said.

"Close to goofy," said Zenja. "*Moi.*"

"Well," I said. (Kittredge, I swear, we have to be as bad as the English when it comes to receiving sudden confession.)

"Well, it must be difficult to sit in these well-furnished rooms when one's pen is dry." (To myself, I sounded like the Earl of Phumpherdom.)

The Russians have one virtue, however. They are so abrupt that no deadening remark can keep a half-life of more than three seconds. "Well-furnished?" asked Zenja. "Aggregate. Is but aggregate."

I heard "aggravate" at first, so was, of course, confused, until her next speech brought clarification. "His family, my family. Aggregate of Moscow apartment—his father; Leningrad apartment—my mother. Remnants of families now complete."

"None of it yours?"

"All mine. All belongs to Boris. *Aussi.* Also."

"Yes," I said, "and your government shipped it over here for you?"

"Of course," she said, "why not?"

"But your apartment in Moscow must be empty."

She shrugged. "People in it."

We sat down at this point before the second-best chess set and Boris handed me the white pawn. "You are my guest," he said.

Kittredge, you know I am not at all in Hugh's class as a player, but I'm not bad—once I won a low-level tournament of *patzers*, as modest players are referred to, and in a simultaneous exhibition with a ranked master who was taking on twenty Yale students at twenty boards, I happened to be one of three who came away with a draw. The other seventeen all lost. All the same, I am, when it comes to real levels of chess, essentially talentless.

I could sense, however, as soon as we commenced, that the

game meant much to him. As if a first whiff of the great international contest for the soul of man had finally entered our mood, I was aware of his tension, and then, reciprocally, of mine. "When in doubt, open with a king's pawn," I said cheerfully to him, and did just that. He nodded curtly, but then was rude enough for the first time—since his manners, as I hope I've indicated, are the best of that whole Russian gang on Bulevar España—to sit in his chair and study me openly for a minute. He did not look at the board, rather at my face, my posture, my uncertain smile, my—in short—my emanations. He made me feel as if I were back in the gym at St. Matthew's, and was going to wrestle with the determined-looking fellow at the other end of the mat in just twenty seconds.

"I think," he said at last, "Sicilian Defense is appropriate reply," and he advanced a queen's bishop's pawn to the fourth rank. Kittredge, I remember clearly that you spoke once of giving chess up at the age of twelve because you could think of nothing else. I would not wish to stir any half-buried cerebration, but I have to tell you this much: The black reply that always puts my king's-pawn opening into trouble is the Sicilian Defense. It seems to take a different turn every time, and I never get to play my game. I'm white, but I'm reacting all the while to what black is up to. It was uncanny of Boris to look me over so carefully, then pick the Sicilian.

Well, that's all you need to know. By the sixth move I was uncomfortable, by the eighth I was beginning to glimpse future defeat, and by the tenth move he had gotten up from his chair in impatience at how long it was taking me—we employed no clock—and came back with a book, and was impolite enough, or superior enough, or maybe it is elegant enough, to sit there reading while I cogitated over my next move. Then, as soon as I had come to a decision, he would look up, pull his upper teeth over his lower lip with the gentlest sound of tasteful appreciation, reach forward, make his move, which always took immediate account of whatever small positional scheme I was hoping to advance, and then without a by-your-leave, go back to his book, which happened to be—do you believe this?—the Modern Library Giant of *Moby-Dick*. He was, incidentally, well into it.

Masarov took a knight on the fourteenth move, and I gave

up on the fifteenth. He had all the position by then and his rooks were ready to go. I never succeeded in castling. He kept me too busy.

Now Zenia brings out the tea. There is, in the wake left by the game, nothing to talk about. I comment that she does not use the samovars, but a teapot. "English tea," she replies. I ask for her patronymic. "My father's name—Arkady. I am Zenia Arkadyova."

"The sounds are beautiful," I say. "Zenia Arkadyova."

We make a little game of getting the accent right. "Many sounds in Russian," she tells me, "woods, earth, small animals in forest, rivers. English different. Derives from roads, hills, beaches. Surf of sea."

The largest generalizations are always begging to be adopted by me, but this is too basic.

"I'm sure you are right," I say.

She stares at me. It is disconcerting. She seems to be searching for some person in hiding just behind myself. "May I look at your library?" I ask Boris.

He pulls himself out of the deep depression in which he has sat since the end of the game. He passes with a wave of his hand over the three quarters of his books that are in Cyrillic, and brings me to his American section. In English, ~~most~~ is all of Hemingway and most of Faulkner. Also Mary McCarthy, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, all of O'Neill, Clifford Odets, and T. S. Eliot—*The Cocktail Party*.

"Do you have ambitions to be a playwright?" I asked.

He grunted. "A playwright?" he replied. "I would not know how to talk to actors."

"Nonsense," said Zenia.

He shrugged. "Hemingway I like," he said. "'Tis the essence of pre-World War Two America, would you agree?" (" 'Tis!") We had taken another step along the bookcase and were passing the works of Henry James. "Much studied by Lenin and Dzerzhinsky," said Masarov, tapping the binding of *The Golden Bowl*.

"Is that really true?" I asked. I was overcome by such news.

"No," said Zenia. "Brishka makes jokes."

"Not at all. *Golden Bowl*. Perfect symbol for capitalism. Of course Dzerzhinsky would read such work."

"Boris, ridiculous. Is insult to our guest."

He shrugged. "I apologize," he said, and looked me in the eye. "Who do you like? Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky?"

"Dostoyevsky," I said.

"Good. Dostoyevsky writes semi-atrocious Russian, but is, in fact, my preference. So we have possibility for friendship."

"First, I must improve my chess."

"Cannot be done," he said. His candor caught me by surprise, and I began to laugh. He soon joined me. He's got this heavy body and prematurely graying hair, much-lined face, one tough guy, but there's an odd youth lurking in the corners of his expression, as if he hasn't figured everything out yet.

"*Zakuski*," said Zenia. "Have *zakuski* with more tea. Or vodka."

I declined. She protested. Despite an atrocious accent, her voice is deep and suggestive. At public functions, she seems like a mysterious and sensuous woman, exotic, occult, as removed from both of us as an oracle; this afternoon, she is middle-aged, fussy, maternal, the mistress of a small and very bourgeois establishment. I am finding it hard to piece together any sense of these two people as KGB, whether together or apart. Yet he has gone out of his way to mention Dzerzhinsky—that is obliged to be some sort of signal.

We sit down and chat about cultural matters American. He is interested in Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, in Thelonius Monk, in Sonny Rollins, whom I have never heard of. He has a record of Sonny Rollins and plays it for me and beams when I say that I have never heard a better tenor saxophone.

Abruptly, he opens a new direction. "Zenia was telling untruth," he says.

"Zenia Arkadyova was lying?" I ask.

He smiles at my use of the patronymic. "She has, actually, written one poem in last two years."

"No, is awful. Do not show," says Zenia.

"In English," says Masarov. "This year, in Russian tongue, Zenia cannot express herself. Not this year. Is total block. So, in your language, she has essayed . . . attempted . . ."

"*Zakuski*. Little poem. Appetizer," says Zenia. She is wholly flushed now, and her ample bosom is, I could swear, surging. "Nugatory," she says. "Trivial." (Sounds like tree-vee-owl.)

"Let him read it," says Brishka.

They argue in Russian. She yields. She goes to the bedroom and comes back with a sheet of cheap notebook paper. On it, in a somewhat unwieldy hand, she has put this head: "Vertigo Is Joy."

You can believe that after encountering such a title, I picked up her offering with no happiness, but . . . let me write it out for you. Lord knows, I've not only got a copy, but can recite it by heart after the workout it got from the Sourballs.

Vertigo Is Joy

*Our bird passed away in my hand,
its feathers a shroud.
I knew the moment.
Its last heartbeat
spoke to my palm.
Comrade, said bird,
do not wait in line
to mourn for me.
I fall into depths
that are great heights.*

"Better if in Russian," said Zenia, "but cannot find *les mots justes*. Not for Russian. Words speak from English. Boris gives correct grammar? Correct punctuation? Is correct?"

"Yes," I said.

"Is good? Good poem?"

"I think so."

"Zenia is recognized in Russia," said Boris, "although perhaps not recognized enough."

"Is good for printing in America?" asked Zenia.

"Probably," I said. "Let me take it. I have two friends who edit literary magazines."

"Yes," she said, "yours," and folded it into my hand, and

looked at me with embarrassing intimacy considering that we were standing there in front of her husband. "Print with pseudonym for me," she said.

"No," said Boris. "Present as work of a Soviet poet."

"Madness," she muttered.

"I think you might change the title," I said. "It's a little too direct for English."

She would not change her title. She loved the sound. "Am adamant for *vertigo*," she said. In her pronunciation, it rhymes with tuxedo. Ver-tee-go.

I left after some discussion of when we would visit again. Masarov proposed a picnic with Nancy and me. I agreed. But, by the time that day arrived, Nancy was not on board, and Zenia had decamped for the day. Boris and I went on the picnic together.

I am beginning to rush, however, and would rather wait for a day or two and finish this off with another letter.

Yours,
Harry

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February 16, 1958

Dear Kittredge,

It was my intent to get back to you a couple of weeks ago. The Sourballs, however, have been taking me through session after session, and I come back to my hotel room each night hoping to empty my head long enough to find sleep. In addition, I am concerned by your lack of response. Sometimes I even wonder whether my letters pile up unread. Ah, well, if you are

interrogated often enough by the Sourballs, there is no drear scenario that will not raise its paranoid head.

You may recollect how modest was my meeting with the Masarovs. Well, the Soviet Russia Division did not think so. After I sent off a lengthy cable to Washington concerning my little get-together with the new Soviet friends, I received by return cable a questionnaire about as long as my last letter to you. Answering it kept me busy for a day and a half. Then, a man flew down to us, care of Soviet Russia Division, to interrogate me personally. By accent and appearance, he has to be another Finnish Mick. He calls himself Omaley. (Pronounced like "homily" without the *h*.) He is not too tall, and very thin, and has horns, yes, horns of hair on an otherwise near-bald head. He also has a profusion of what I am tempted to call reverse whiskers. His chest thatch is apparently so thick that it grows out of his shirt and half up his neck. It gives him a ruff above his collar. He looks like a malnourished wild boar. You can imagine how well Howard Hunt takes to Hjalmar Omaley.

Well, Hjalmar Omaley doesn't care one goddamn what anyone thinks of him. He lives to do his work. Around the second day of living in his implacably chill company, I recognize that he reminds me of the exterminator who used to come to my mother's Park Avenue apartment on those cheerful mornings when cook discovered cockroaches in the oven and was ready to quit because maid was not washing the grill. I don't want to throw your stomach into the next meal, but Omaley looks like a liquidator ready to leave nothing of our enemy but the last of its bodily seepage. Communists are vermin, Soviet Communists are rabid vermin, KGB Communists are rabid *occult* vermin, and I had been in contact with the latter.

Now, I exaggerate. Except, I don't. I was queried on what I could remember of the Masarovs' war photographs until I began to feel profoundly guilty that I could not remember more, indeed, I began to wonder at my lack of motivation in memorizing relatively so little. Hjalmar, who must have simmered in sperm-soups of suspicion before being received by the clear-eyed ovum in his mother's womb, led me through endless rephrasings of each question. I had made the large mistake in my first cable of describing Boris and Zenia as "reasonably agreea-

ble." I had intended to give an objective appraisal, but it stirred frightful concerns in the counterintelligence gang at Soviet Russia Division. I can tell you that I was interrogated on every aspect of the meeting. Could I remember the exact sequence of moves in the chess game? I did my best to replay the game to their satisfaction but could not connect the opening to our final position. This infuriated Hjalmar Omaley. Apparently, Masarov is so good at chess (at least by their original dossier on him—which, I would remind you, places him at age thirty-two, not thirty-seven) that they wanted to see whether he was carrying me in the game; that might indicate whether his motive was to charm me. No, I told them over and over, he was not carrying me—it was embarrassing to have to resign by the fifteenth move.

Next, we catalogued the furniture. The Sourballs are looking into their sources to see if more can be learned about Masarov's father's Moscow apartment and Zenia's mother's Leningrad apartment. After which, they proceeded to interrogate me about the American novels and plays in his bookcase. How new were the volumes? How well thumbbed? The question is how close he is to what he presents himself as being—a Russian official with specialties on American cultural affairs.

Then we went to the poem. I had been wired with a sneaky which possessed only an hour's capacity, so the tape was finished before we came to the poem. I was asked, therefore, to reconstruct all dialogue not recorded. In what ways did the couple react to my suggestion that the poem was printable in America? Am I certain that Zenia muttered the word *madness*?

I won't bore you with how long they spent on "I fall into depths that are great heights." (It is, of course, being interpreted as the Masarov offer to defect.)

On the second day, I said to Omaley, "Do you always pursue details this intensively after Agency meetings with Russians?"

He smiled as if only an idiot like myself could ask such a question. I felt as if I were in the dentist's chair.

On the third day, Howard Hunt took me to El Águila, his favorite restaurant, for lunch. The Sourballs were in an uproar, he confided, over the discrepancy in Boris' dossier. Since my report that he was thirty-seven gummed up their Soviet Person-

nel Record file, they were damned upset. The question now is whether our present Boris is the original, or a new body? "Next question," said Hunt. "Does Boris want to defect, or does he wish to entrap you?"

"For practical purposes, he has," I said. "I can't get any of my other work done."

"This will pass," he answered. ~~"Your bad mark in Berlin may put a little extra heat on you now, but~~ Just keep to the positive side of the equation. Get Boris to defect and you will hold all the bouquets." He nodded. "But, buddy, you've got to be more observant next time."

"It doesn't add up," I said. "If Boris wants to come over to us, why would he entertain me and put himself at risk?"

"Given Zenia's affair with Varkhov, Boris' judgment might be off." Hunt now tasted the first glass of wine from the bottle just opened for him, and made a face. "*Joven*," he said to the waiter, "*esta botella es sin vergüenza. Por favor, trae un otro con un corcho correcto.*"

"Bottom line," he said to me. "The situation does not add up. Why fraternize with you? What can you give them, Harry Hubbard? Maybe they believe you can offer them something."

"Way beyond me, Howard," I said, ~~but at this moment, I had an image of Chevi Fuertes' face. Could the Russians be writing of AV/OCADO?~~

"Back to basics," said Howard. "What do we know for certain? It is that Boris, whether Masarov One or Masarov Two, is KGB. As the Montevideo *residentura*, he is definitely Number Two man under Varkhov."

"Definitely?"

"Heulihaen and Flarrety have studied their films comprehensively enough to establish an authoritative pecking order. They can document precisely whose ass is exposed to whose beak. Varkhov has precedence over the Soviet Ambassador and his minions. And Masarov is Number Two. Meanwhile, Number One is banging the boobies off the wife of his own Number Two, while Number Two seeks to fraternize with you."

"I'm dreading the picnic," I said. "It's not the picnic. It's the three days with Omaley that are going to follow."

"Get a couple of real pieces of Masarov meat, and I will

grind Hjalmar's testes into powder. But do your best to avoid inconclusive results."

Thus armed, Kittredge, thus armed. Yesterday, Zenia phoned to ask if Nancy was coming. When I said that she was still indisposed, Zenia gave a grunt that sounded much like Boris. Zenia will not be with us either.

Then, today, Sunday morning—it is now late Sunday evening as I write to you—Boris and I drove out to the country. He took along his fishing gear, and little else since Zenia had neglected to pack a hamper. I felt wrung out and distracted; so, I suspected, was Boris. We hardly talked. After half an hour on the road, he reached over to his glove compartment and handed me a flask of Scotch, which was, under the circumstances, agreeable. On the *laissez-passer* of the booze, we uttered a word or two.

"Do you like the countryside?" he asked.

"Not much."

Kittredge, this was only my second trip out of Montevideo. In almost a year and a half! I can't believe the fact even as I write this; I am such an underground animal! At Yale, I never left New Haven. Here, all my world is contained within the Embassy, the safe house, Hunt's villa in Carrasco, and my cheap hotel room. I think it is because everything I do means so much to me that I simply don't notice from month to month how circumscribed are my movements. I saw more of the city in my first three days than in all the time since.

Of course, outside Montevideo, there is not much to look at. Along the sea are third-rate resorts trying to rise to the second level. Stucco debris stirs dust in half-finished villas by the side of the road. Inland are no more than gently rolling grassy plains, occasionally fenced in with cattle, but, over the whole, monotonous.

Masarov speaks out of a silence. "*Cuando el Creador llegó al Uruguay, ha perdido la mitad de Su interés en la Creación.*" We laugh. His Spanish is not as good as his English, but I laugh heartily—partly at the Russian accent in Spanish. It's true. God did lose half His interest in creating the world after He came to Uruguay.

"Yet I like this country," he says. "Conducive to inner calm."

I am not feeling much of that. The highway has dwindled

into a narrow two-lane road, much broken and humped and oil-stained by the weight and effluvia of truck commerce, and when we pull over to have lunch at a café *cum* gas station, it is for the omnipresent hamburgers, the local *cerveza*, and the smell of rendered beef fat and onions—what Porringer has called “the whorehouse-full-of-traffic smell.”

Yet, Masarov is known in this café. We are apparently near his fishing hole, and he must have stopped here often. I am wondering if these poor roads, flat country, and functional little roadhouse do not remind him of his native country, and, as if we are curiously tuned to one another, he now says on the first sip of beer, “Uruguay is like small corner of Russia. Nondescript. To my liking.”

“Why?”

“When nature grows awesome, man turns small.” He lifts his mug. “Homage to the Swiss!”

“Whereas here, you feel larger than nature?”

“On good days.” He looks at me carefully. “You know Uruguayans?”

“Not many.” I am thinking, however, of Chevi.

“Me neither.” He sighs and lifts his beer. “To Uruguayans.”

“Why not?”

We click glasses. We eat in silence. It occurs to me that Boris may be under as much tension as myself. I remember Hunt’s injunction: Avoid inconclusive results.

“Boris,” I say. “What are we up to?”

“That will develop.”

I feel as if I am back in the chess game. Does he long for a book to read while waiting for each of my cautious moves?

“Let me put it,” he says. “I know who you are, and you know who I am.”

Now I have to turn on the sneaky. The switch is in my pants pocket, but the shift of position entailed to get my left hand over (for it is the left hand that has been holding the hamburger) cannot possibly appear as clumsy to him as it feels to me.

“Yes,” I say, now that I have pressed the recording button, “you claim to know who I am, and that I know who you are.”

He will not keep from smiling at this obvious move. “Of such nature,” he replies.

"What does that promise?" I ask.

"Extended discourse. Is a possibility?"

"Only if we trust each other."

"Half-trust," he says, "sufficient for such discussion."

"Why choose me?"

He shrugs. "You are here."

"Yes."

"Seem cautious," he says.

"Apparently I am."

He drinks a good portion of his beer at a gulp. "I have more to lose," he says, "than you."

"Well, that," I say, "depends on what you want."

"Nothing," he says.

"Do you want to come over to us?" I ask.

"Are you mad, or clumsy?" he replies in a gentle voice.

Kittredge, I am thinking of how bad this is going to look on the typed transcript. It will not convey the lack of personal offense in his voice. It will, to the contrary, project me as maladroit.

"No, Boris," I say, "I am neither mad nor clumsy. You approach me. Your overtures are friendly. You suggest that we have much to talk about. What can I suppose that to be but an indication of your desire to come nearer to us?"

"Or demonstration," he says, "of absolute ignorance of your people about mine."

"Are you prepared to tell me why we are here?"

"Could disappoint you."

"May I be the judge?"

He said nothing, and we sat side by side at our table looking out to the open end of the café, which had no front window but only an awning that flapped with a sound as sharp as a pistol shot each time a truck went by.

"Let's approach this again," I said. "What do you really want?"

"Political intelligence." He smiled, however, as if to deny the remark.

"I may be more ready to receive than to give."

"Could not be otherwise," he said. He gave a weary sigh. "KGB," he said, "stands for *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*. Committee for State Security."

"I know all that," I said. "Even a Foreign Service Officer in the State Department knows that much."

He looked amused that I would still insist on maintaining cover. "Many Directorates in KGB," he said.

"I know that as well."

"Will speak of First Directorate, and Second. First is for Soviet officers abroad; Second for home security. Respectively, CIA, FBI."

"Yes," I said.

"Our FBI, Second Directorate, has fine reputation in America. Is seen as effective. But, by many of us, is considered stupid. Wish to hear joke?"

"Yes," I said, "I would."

"Of course," he said. "Why not?"

Now, we both laughed. It was droll. We both knew that my sneaky was on, and everything said would generate analysis. We quaffed our beer. Down the hatch. He clapped his hands and *el patrón* came forward with two more mugs, and a bottle of vodka. It occurred to me that this café could conceivably be a Russian outpost with microphones in the woodwork and a camera in the ceiling cranking away.

Or—Masarov merely came here often enough for the owner to stock a few bottles of vodka.

Yes, Kittredge, droll. Masarov, with a glass in his hand was not unlike other sturdy souls who live for a booze-up—he mellowed quickly.

"Two men," he said, "from Second Directorate are in car following boy and girl in other car through multitudes of Moscow streets, then zip out to highway. The boy and girl have been with foreigners they should not visit, but are children of very high officials, so not frightened. Say to each other, 'We get rid of these yeggs, yes?' " He stopped. "Yeggs?"

"Perfect use of the word."

"Dumb cops. Yeggs. Yes?"

"Perfect."

"So boy and girl pull their car over to side of road. Behind them, other car also stops hundred meters back. Our brave boy gets out. Lifts car hood to indicate motor trouble. What do yeggs do?"

"Tell me," I said.

"Get out of car," Boris said solemnly, "and lift *their* hood.

Copycats, yes?"

"Yes," I said, "stupid."

"Our Second Directorate," he said, "has undue complement of stupid people."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because your CIA should distinguish between First and Second Directorate. Your CIA sees all KGB as brutes."

"Oh, that's not true," I said. "We spend weeks analyzing what Dzerzhinsky learned from *The Golden Bowl*."

Now he starts to roar. He laughs with a great bellow and smacks me on the back. Boris is one hell of a strong man.

"I like you," he says.

"Vertigo is joy," I reply.

We both laugh again. We are practically hugging one another. When the mirth ceases, he is suddenly and powerfully serious.

"Yes," he says, "in First Directorate, we go abroad. By our work, are obliged to study other nations. Become aware, sometimes painfully, of deficiencies in Soviet system. Within limitations of bureaucratic tact, we give accurate picture to home base. We try to help rectify our great Soviet dream. Yes. Even when answers are ugly and show it is our fault. The leaders of the First Directorate know more of everything wrong in the Soviet Union than anyone in your country."

"That's not the impression we get."

"Of course not. For you, KGB is equal to killers."

"It's a little more sophisticated than that."

"No! Low level! You speak of us as killers. We are professionals. Name one CIA officer who loses one little finger because of us."

"It's the hired help who get it," I said. I was thinking suddenly of Berlin.

"Yes," said Boris, "hired help get hell. True for you, true for us."

I was silent. "When do we go fishing?" I said at last.

"Fuck fishing," he said. "Let's drink."

We did. After a while I began to feel as if he had been

waiting all his life to have a dialogue with one American. I was getting to know him so well that it was almost carnal, by which I mean that like most Russians he spoke with his face in mine (I suppose it is due to their small, crowded apartments) and so I came to know his exterior intimately—the places where his razor had missed some stubble, the spike-hairs in his nose, the breath of hamburgers, Turkish tobacco, onions, vodka, beer, and just enough caries to be, I swear, half-agreeable, as if a touch of rot in the mouth keeps a man honest. Hugh once imparted to me that unforgettable line of Engels—quantity changes quality—well, a touch of bad breath is altogether different from the odor of a badly corrupted mouth. I offer this aside because I lived for so long at a café table with Brishka, as he soon insisted I call him—Brishka and Harry, for sure—that the lunch drank itself down into the late afternoon, and the sun glared out of the west into the corner of our eyes as it dipped below the awning open to the road, and once in a while, a car went by or a drunk wandered in or out.

Masarov must have gone on for an hour about Nikita Khrushchev. Nobody in America could understand the Soviet Union, said Brishka, unless they came to comprehend the Premier. He was a great man. "Great in relation to present situation of Soviet Union." And he recited a litany to me. *Countless killed*, was the phrase. Countless Russians had been killed in the First World War, countless were also killed in the Civil War initiated, he would remind me, by Americans, British, and French, countless killed by Stalin in collectivization of the farms, and countless-countless Soviet soldiers and citizens killed by Hitler, countless-countless killed again by Stalin after the war. The Soviet Union had been battered more than "a wife," he said, "who is beaten every day by an ugly husband. For forty years! If it were American wife, she would hate such husband. But Russian wife knows better. Underneath everything in such marriage is man's desire for improvement."

"I'm lost," I said. "Who is the Russian wife, and who is the husband?"

"Oh," he said, "obvious. Russian wife is Russia. Husband is the Party. Some days, one must recognize that Russian wife is at fault. She may deserve her beating. Looks at ground. Won't

move forward. Husband may be drunk, but looks at sky." He stopped here and slapped himself across the cheek with a blow hard enough to rattle the crockery in the kitchen (if it were listening). "Drunk," he said, and ordered black coffee.

Now his syntax improved. "What I said before is *kvatch*."
"Kvatch?"

"Of no value. Too general. The relation of Communist Party to people not easy to explain. Soviet children grow up with belief that one becomes a better person by sheer force of will. *The* will to be good and unselfish. We try to destroy interest in enriching ourselves personally. Very hard to do. In my childhood, I would feel ashamed of greedy desires. Weight upon the leader of such a people has to be immense. All trying to be better than they are. Stalin—I am ashamed to confess this—lost inner balance. Then Khrushchev, one of the brave, replaced Stalin. I love Khrushchev."

"Why?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Because he was bad man. And gets better."

"Bad? He was the Butcher of the Ukraine."

"Oh, *they* teach you. *They* give you good course for the winter, Harry. But, *they* forget spring."

"Who is *they*?"

"Your teachers. Miss huge point. Take question from Russian point of view. We see cruel people magnetized by power."

"Isn't this a little beyond Marx?"

"Ultra-Marxist," said Brishka. "Comes from Russian people. Not Marx. We expect cruel leaders. Our question is how can leaders transcend origins? Become better men. Stalin was great, but Stalin would not transcend. Turned worse. Evil deeds drive him crazy. Khrushchev *is the* opposite." He slapped himself again as if English were about to misprint itself on his tongue, and he had to jar his brain into line with his mouth. His English might be relatively polished, but underneath, Russky Tarzan lurked. As Boris got drunk, I could feel a cruder mode of expression come nearer and nearer to asserting itself. Of course, he would never say "Khrushchev opposite," but you could feel the words he was ready to leave out. "Khrushchev *is the* opposite."

"Yes," he said, "contemplate Khrushchev. *He* is not wholly popular. Many Russian detractors. Some say *he* is too emo-

tional. ~~Kittredge, you get the idea, I hope. Only this trace of deformation showed.~~ Yes," he said, "almost all agree Khrushchev is *nyet kulturny*. You comprehend *nyet kulturny*?"

"I speak no Russian."

"Stick to your story." He laughed at this. Like Zenia, he has two persons in him, and they are not accommodated to each other. He had been drunk, and heavy in his sentiments; now, the irony of the chess master leaped out again. "Stick to your story," he said once more, as if he had a clear dossier on me. (Probably he did, and doubtless it was as inaccurate as ours on him.)

"Does *nyet kulturny* mean not cultured?"

"Of course. Crystal clear. Not cultured. Gross. That is worst thing you can say of a Russian"—yes, his better English was still with him. "Hordes of my people lived for centuries in huts. Nobody need to wipe his shoes. Floors were dirt. Animals slept with family. *Nyet kulturny*. Crude. Void of high culture. So, Khrushchev embarrasses many. Will ruin him yet."

"But he's a great man, you say?"

"Believe me. Gross, brutal, minion of Stalin. Yet, grows in stature. Immeasurable bravery to repudiate Stalin. You should try explaining to your people. In Moscow now, many high party leaders say to Khrushchev, 'U.S. has four times more nuclear capacity. We are obliged to catch up.' Khrushchev says, 'If U.S. attacks, we answer. Both nations *are* destroyed. So, will be no war. Our Soviet need is to develop *our* economy.' Khrushchev resists huge military pressure. Khrushchev a good man."

"On our side, we find that a little harder to believe. We think you are responsible for your past, and you don't shake it so quickly."

He nodded. "That is because you represent corporate capitalism. Linear. Unilinear people in corporation." He took a large swallow of his black coffee, which was thick as filtered mud, and nodded. "Yes," he said, "Americans never understand how Communist Party works. See us as living under total relation to ideology. Grave error. Only corporate capitalism lives in total relation to ideology. We, who you call slave people, more individual."

"I believe you really think that."

"Of course. No two Russians alike. All Americans, to me, are same breed."

"In no way could this be a misapprehension on your part?"

He touched my elbow in amelioration. "Speak of corporate capitalist Americans. Managers. Executive class. They believe American ideology. We believe, but only by half."

"By half?"

"By half, Harry, you bet." Again, his heavy hand clapped me on the back.

"And the other half?"

"Our secret half. We brood."

"Over what?"

"Our soul. I taste *my* soul. American people speak of free-floating anxiety, yes? Lack of identity, yes? But Russian says: I am losing my soul. Americans used to be like Russians. In nineteenth century. When were individual entrepreneurs. Then, still *the* baroque spirit. In your hearts. In American architecture. Individual people, eccentric. Now, Americans are corporate capitalists. Brainwashed."

There was a glint in his eye at the expression on my face. "Khrushchev does not want to lose his soul," Masarov said, "so, works hard to improve *the* world."

"You tell me all this with a straight face?" I confess I was getting angry at his consummate gall.

"Straight face."

"Tell me about your prison camps."

His good mood vanished. "The Russian Bear," he said, "lives with dinosaur's tail. Tail crawls with infestations. From *the* past. Eventually, eat *the* tail. *We* will absorb horrendous history. But, as of now, immense convulsions. Tragedies. Horrors. Still."

I could hardly believe he had said this much. He was scowling at his coffee as if it had been a mistake to leave his old comrade-in-arms, vodka, for this new acquaintance. Then he gave a great sigh as if to clean his breath of old memories. "Do you know about *beriozhka*?" he asked. "Birch trees."

"Yes. You are all said to love them."

"Yes." He nodded. "Zenia wrote beautiful poem in Russian about *beriozhka*. Translated into English by me. With liberties, however. Zenia would not recognize it. She would leave me." He looked as if he were about to cry, but instead took out a piece of paper and read aloud to me.

To the Birches

*pale sentinels
silent arrows
light and moonlight
our silver sun*

"Uruguay is not like Russia," he said. "Are no birches here."

Then he tore off the unmarked bottom half of the sheet on which the poem was written, scribbled a note upon it for me, and passed it over. The wording, Kittredge, (and you will soon see why) is offered to you from memory.

Caution. Just as one of ours may be, in secret, yours, so one of yours may be ours. Do not trust the people in your Soviet Russia Division. Such remarks can hang me. Silence. Caution. Speak only to your most trusted own.

I had time to read it carefully before he whipped back the note and held it in his hands. I do not know if I was inhabiting his mind at that point, but I did envision him setting this half sheet of paper on fire in the ashtray, which, I swear to you, he proceeded to do just then, as if I had either willed him to do it, or had read his mind before he expressed it.

Kittredge, that was indeed the curious tone on which we left the café and took the drive back to Montevideo in the late summer dusk of February. It is late now, and I am weary, but we are, at last, caught up.

Devotedly,
Harry

20 | It was understood that I would call Howard so soon as I came back from the picnic, but I found myself in a peculiar and rebellious state. I did not wish to be debriefed into the late hours of Sunday night. Instead, I chose to write to Kittredge. It was as if my best hope of understanding what had taken place between Masarov and myself would be obtained by setting it down for her. I knew that once my formal report was perused by Hjalmar Omaley, converted to cable traffic, and subjected to the Soviet Russia Division's questionnaires, the experience would be altered, and I felt some need, no matter how unprofessional, to keep it intact.

I was in a dilemma, however. "*Do not trust the people in your Soviet Russia Division,*" was a dangerous remark to bring back. Since I now had no evidence of Boris' note other than my personal description of it, I was bound to be seen as the untrustworthy bearer of a wholly disturbing communication. Maybe the KGB had designed the afternoon to get me to return with a message that would disrupt our Soviet Russia Division. In that case, it might be prudent not to mention the note.

Of course, there was the real possibility that a movie camera had been installed behind a peephole in the café to record the moment when Boris passed his written message over to me and I read it and he then incinerated it in the ashtray, both of us watching solemnly. In such a case, if I did not report the incident to Hunt and Omaley, and there was indeed a KGB mole at Soviet Russia Division in position to see my report on the picnic, then I would be prey to blackmail if I made no mention of Masarov's message.

I decided to state in my report, therefore, that the note had been passed to me; I would, however, leave out the reference to the Soviet Russia Division. If the intent of the KGB was to increase our suspicion of our own people, then I would be thwarting their purpose. The remaining contents of the note would prove vague. I decided to accept the risk.

Why? As if someone had poked a rude finger into my stomach, the question hit with force. Why, indeed? Why not tell the truth? If it disrupted the Soviet Russia Division, well, they had suffered, no doubt, in such fashion before. Yet I knew I would

not change my mind. Not only was living in close quarters with Al Omaley much like cohabiting with a contagious disease, but I did not feel ready to face his meticulous paranoia. I, the messenger, had to be tainted by the message.

All the same, my private motive remained inaccessible to me. Some stubborn depth of instinct was speaking.

It was now ten o'clock on Sunday night, and one could put off calling Howard Hunt no longer. I went down to the street and found a pay phone. On the Avenue of the 18th of July, the night was as quiet as a midnight Tuesday in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

"Where in hell have you been?" was his opening remark.

"Getting drunk with our friend."

"Until now?"

"A confession, Howard. I got back to the hotel at seven, started to call just to say that I was back and would ring again from downstairs in ten minutes, but, so help me, I fell asleep with the phone in my hand."

"Oh, no."

"Did you ever match vodka for vodka with the Russians?"

"Yes. And successfully. Don't you know enough to drink olive oil before you start?"

"Well, maybe I do now."

"All right. One question. Was it conclusive?"

"Not wholly affirmative on that."

"Shit."

"A fair amount of stuff, all the same."

"Enough to begin an all-night session right now?"

"I doubt it."

"Then, I will let it keep till tomorrow. But you get over to the Embassy now. Nancy is waiting to type up the tape."

"Well, yes."

"Hang around to help her with garbled transmission."

"Of course."

"I know this is open wire, boy, but give a clue. What was our friend up to?"

"Wiser minds than mine will determine that."

"Any chance of your buddy riding down the river?"

"Twenty-percent possibility."

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"Twenty-percent," repeated Hunt. I could picture his study at Carrasco; I could all but hear his long fingers tapping on the desk. "That's a bit of a disappointment," he said.

"All the same," I told him, "there are a few new flowers in the nosegay."

"We'll be busy tomorrow," said Hunt. "Get some sleep."

"I intend to—after the next three hours with Nancy."

"That's all right, Harry. You were snoring it off while I was pacing my study worrying over what to say at your grave."

My relations with Nancy during the hours it took to transcribe the tape proved as formal as the muted aftereffect of our single kiss, a sad void for her, I was certain, but by two in the morning, the transcript was done, and so was my accompanying report. I went back to the hotel, while Nancy, loyal to the code of all the unsung soldiers, was still sending our text on the encoding machine. Our five-letter groups would be deciphered by communications people in Washington before the dawn.

Hjalmar Omaley, whether alerted by Hunt, or paranoically instinctive, came by some twenty minutes in advance of my departure, a precise timing that enabled him to read my report and go through the transcript just as Nancy was finishing the last page. He had the oddest style of perusal. ~~Reminiscent of the way General Gehen used to muller over the chessboard,~~ he all but crooned into the contents. "Holy hooligans, Hjalmar, holy hooligans," he kept saying as he read, but whether this was praise for the operation or astonished disapproval, I had no idea. Just as I was leaving, Nancy, quick as a bird darting into the eaves (for I was not supposed to see it), flashed one tender smile at Hjalmar. It seemed to me then that I would be wiser to worry over the empty space in my own heart rather than the void in others.

By the middle of Monday morning, Howard was in a state of great excitement. The Sourballs had succeeded in closing the discrepancy on Masarov's age. Their Soviet Personnel Record dossier was now in order. While Hunt would not, or could not, provide me with more detail than to say, "Masarov is not thirty-two but thirty-nine, not, as he claims, thirty-seven. Get set for this: He is higher echelon than we thought. Considerably above Varkhov in rank."

"I thought the Finnish Micks had concluded Boris was Number Two KGB here."

"They did, but the Sovs must have been sending contrived signals. It's a kangaroo pouch."

While I had never heard the expression before, the metaphor obviously spoke of an operation where the number-one man is concealed.

"What of Zenia and Varkhov?" I asked.

"In for reappraisal. One thing is nailed down, though. Our Masarov here in Uruguay is one of the leading KGB experts on America."

"Why, then, is he in these parts?"

"That may be the focal enigma, may it not?" said Howard.

If my visit to the home of Boris and Zenia had taken me through heavy cross-examination, the picnic subjected me to an eighteen-hour day with Hjalmar, followed by two more eighteen-hour days responding to questionnaires from Washington. More than once I came close to confessing what I now called (in the last redoubts of the privacy of my mind) "The Abominable Omission," for the questionnaires certainly kept returning to the contents of Boris' note. What certainty could I submit that the message, as recollected by me, was complete: 60 percent? 70 percent? 80 percent? 90 percent? 95 percent? 100 percent? I made the mistake of answering 80 percent. As if they were psychically attuned to the topography of culpability, the Sourballs follow-up question stated: *In your reconstruction, the note has three full statements plus three one-word exhortations. If recall is 80% complete, what is the possibility that a fourth sentence is missing?*

To which I replied: *Zero possibility.*

Repeat query: 50%? 40%? 30%? 20%? 10%? 5%? 0%?

Zero possibility.

Boris note lacks concerted impact. How do you account for that?

I was sitting at a typewriter console hooked up to our Encoder-Decoder. An encrypted question would come in from Washington, go through the decoder, activate the keys of my typewriter, and come out in deciphered, five-letter groups on my typewriter page, which I could read, by now, as quickly as plain text. BORIS NOTEL ACKSC ONCER TEDIM PACT didn't cost me one-tenth of a second more. Then, so soon as I typed out a reply

to the comment, my five-letter groups would begin their trip back through the same typewriter and Encoder-Decoder to the Sourballs in Cockroach Alley. I would sit and wait for my typewriter to commence clacking again. After hours of such back and forth, I began to feel as if I were playing chess with an opponent in another room. Over my shoulder, Hjalmar Omaley read the questions and my answers.

On this last comment, *Boris note lacks concerted impact*, I turned to him.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

He had an irritating smile. His teeth would gleam in concert with the gleam that came off his eyeglasses. "It means," said Hjalmar, "precisely what it says."

This annoyed me sufficiently to type for my reply exactly what I had said to him. WHATD OESTH ISMEA N

PRECI SELYW HATIT SAYS came back.

"All right, we have a problem," I said. "I can't comment if I don't know what I'm replying to."

At Yale, I had always detested the superior sort of graduate student who looked like Hjalmar Omaley. Their heads were invariably held at odd angles. They listened with a half-smile. They appeared to be sniffing the inferior odor of your turds as compared to the integrated concert of their own. They would answer inquiries with questions or with such throwaways as *precisely what it says*. When, however, they finally took account of the subject, they left you in no doubt of their credentials. "We have under consideration," said Hjalmar, "a high-echelon member of the KGB, expert in American studies, who dallies with a minor case officer in a country with small to negligible geopolitical impact. Said KGB officer then proceeds to incriminate himself to said minor case officer by dint of extreme remarks, allusions, and unorthodox comparisons of his country and party to a sordid husband and wife. He abuses Marxist tenets. All such product would guarantee, at the least, his recall, and imprisonment if we were to forward transcript obtained to the KGB and they were to believe it. Do you follow me now?"

"Yes."

"Good. Since he is, however, heading up the KGB cadres here, his own transcript, if he has one, need not be of concern

to him. He has obviously been given sanction. There are elements in the KGB who do have sanction to speak freely and, on occasion, act freely. Such post-Neanderthals can be seen as the equivalent of seventeenth-century Jesuits. Are you still capable of following me?"

"Yes."

"Good. We now encounter the specific implausibility of the entire situation. To summarize what I have just said: A major KGB operative who, so far as we can see, has no intention of defecting, nonetheless engages in major conversational indiscretions with the opposition. If there is an entelechy in his process—and there must be entelechy, or else, why commence?—he succeeds in presenting a note which is destroyed almost immediately after it is delivered. That is a dubious business, since the message has no incisive content. It names no person, attacks specifically none of our departments, and in sum, is too general to be disruptive. He has given you a shovel without a handle. What explanation do you offer?"

I was about to reply, but he said, "Wait," and turned on a tape recorder placed next to the Encoder-Decoder. "Speak your piece into that."

The position of the microphone placed my back to Omaley, and I could feel his malign presence leaning in full psychic drapery upon my shoulders.

"Repeat your question," I said.

"What explanation do you offer of your meeting?"

"I think we are dealing with a man rather than a scenario."

"Expatriate."

"I'm not as certain as all of you that Masarov has a clear message to pass on. If he is the number-one man, and his wife is indeed in love with Varkhov, who now, it seems, is his assistant, I believe that could prove disorienting to his behavior."

"Masarov is ruthless, skillful, and highly capable of discharging ultimate functions. It is difficult to believe that his marital troubles, if bona fide, would prove unsettling. In 1941, at the age of twenty-two, as a young officer in the NKVD, he was present in the Katyn Forest during the Soviet massacre of the Polish officers. He is a man, therefore, who has shot others in the back of the head." Standing behind me, Hjalmar did tap me lightly on the head.

Could I place Boris into this new portrait? My stomach was reacting. "Katyn Forest helps to explain his appraisal of Khrushchev," I said.

"To employ Masarov's own terminology—*kvatch*. An attempt to beguile you, misdirect you, have you, in short, follow the wrong shell in his game."

"If you know all of it, why do you keep questioning me?"

" 'Boris note lacks concerted impact.' Try replying to that on the E-D."

I turned to my typewriter and sent the following into the Encoder-Decoder.

ICANN OTDOA NYTHI NGTOR ESOLV ETHIS IMPAS SEIWI LLALT
ERMYE STIMA TEOFP ROBAB ILITY OFREC OLLEC TIONO FTHEN OTEFR
OM80% TO95%

There was a long pause. Omaley sat there shaking his head slowly from side to side like a metronome oscillating alone in a vault. It was late at night and we were the only two people left in our wing of the Embassy.

FINAL, asked the E-D.

FINAL, I typed back.

This time the pause was short. DOYOU AGREE TOTAK INGAL
IEDET ECTOR TEST

Omaley looked happy for the first time in three days.

INPRI NCIPL EYESP ROVID EDJUR ISDIC TIONA LHEGE MONIE
SDONO TOVER RIDET HEPRI NCIPL E

"In principle, yes," read Hjalmar over my shoulder, and very much aloud, "provided jurisdictional hegemonies do not override the principle." He laughed. "What would you suppose are the probabilities that your Chief of Station will enable you to avoid the flutter box? Fifty percent? Forty percent?"

There was a high-pitched note so hateful in his voice that I came very close to hitting him. I was still smarting from the tap on the back of my head.

21 | “Preposterous,” said Howard next morning, “outrageous. You have been doing your best to stay afloat with a KGB heavyweight, and they want to flutter you because they are not happy with the results? You are absolutely right. This is jurisdictional. I’m not letting any paranoid peacocks drive a truck right through the middle of my Station.”

“I’m ready to take the test if it comes to it,” I said.

“Glad you said that, but I’m here to protect my people fully as much as I am ready to expose them to appropriate risk-taking.” He paused. “I want all the tarps tied down on this one, however. Are you really 95-percent sure of your accuracy about this note? That’s what ticked them off, you know. You can’t get cheeky with their evaluation process. It’s like defiling the Torah or the Koran.” He looked most carefully at me. “Between us, cozy as thieves, what is your real estimate?”

“Ninety percent.”

“Okay. I have to buy that. But why is Masarov’s message so anemic? The name of the game is to maim someone’s name.”

“Howard, I put it in my report. I have a theory that no one gives credence to: Just a couple of weeks ago, on February 2, the Russians asked for a summit meeting. I think Masarov wanted me to bear the same message that the Russians are sending in a thousand different ways all over the world. ‘Give the summit a try, Khrushchev is okay.’ Part of their personal propaganda approach.”

“All right. Those lines of possibility do stand out in the transcript. But why confuse matters? Boris is an old pro. He knows the cardinal differences between a clandestine note and a political pitch—which, by the way, I don’t trust for one minute, those Sovietskys don’t want peace ever, just a breathing space to find a new way to screw us.” He paused. “But, all right. Boris gives his sermon. We can all cry for the Soviet Union. Countless-countless killed. Yes, and how about the five thousand Polish officers Masarov helped to shoot in the back of the head, and the other ten thousand Polish officers that remain missing? Stalin knew what he was doing. He was killing the cadres of a possible future independent Poland, yeah, those Sovs want peace—I’ll believe that when pimps stop taking their cut.” He tapped his desk as if it were a podium.

"You ought to be in politics, Howard," I said.

"I could have been in many things. It kills me to look at the properties you could develop out in Carrasco. We pay a stiff price, Harry, for giving our allegiance to the Company. A CIA man makes a whole financial sacrifice for life. But that's another matter. Let's keep the target in our sights. Explain to me one more time your understanding of Masarov's note."

"Howard, I think Boris was drunk and full of misery, half ready to defect and knows he won't—unless he does—he's a Russian, after all, he's half crazy, he loves his wife, he's sinking in guilt, he has a lot on his conscience, he wants to save his soul, and if you add it all up, he must be very self-destructive. He loves Dostoyevsky. I think he wanted to hang himself with that meaningless note, but then he changed his mind and burned it."

"So you buy his speech at face value?"

"I think I do. Why else write a meaningless note?"

"God, you're young."

"I guess I am."

Actually, I was amazed at the felicity with which I was able to lie. How much of my mother was in me after all. For the first time I understood her pleasure in little creations. Lies were also a species of spiritual currency.

"Well, I'm going to bat for you," said Howard.

"I appreciate that."

"Kid, do you have any idea how expensive this could prove for yours truly?"

"I think a lot of people up and down the line will respect you for taking a tough stand," I said.

"Yes. How much won in respect, and how much lost to future deep-dyed, unalloyed enmity. Yes. Tell me, Harry, why are you reluctant to take the test?"

"I'll take it, Howard. I'm ready to. I'm innocent. It's just that they get you feeling so goddamn guilty once they put those electrodes on."

"Say that again. I remember my indignation when they asked me if I were homosexual. Years ago. I controlled myself long enough to say no—when in doubt, observe the proprieties—but, I tell you, fellow, if any man was ever crazy enough to try to put his pecker in my mouth, and I don't care if that man is a buck nigger, six feet six inches tall, I would bite his master-

piece off at the root. So, yes, I can hook on to your feelings. I hate lie detectors too. We'll stop those bastards right where they live. This is, after all, my Station."

I caught a whiff of his breath. He had had a few belts, and that was certainly not his habit for the morning. It was possible that he was more agitated than me.

Howard left soon after to keep a date for lunch with one of his Uruguayan friends. "I'm going to hold the line," he said.

As if to show his trust in me, he quit his office while I was still in it. That was not customary. He usually locked his door. Now, he merely left it ajar so that from her desk just outside, Nancy Waterston could certainly check on whether I was looking into any of his drawers. Just then, the secure phone in the locked closet began to ring.

"Nancy," I said, "do you hear that?"

She did after a moment.

"I think," I told her, "we had better answer it. Do you have a key?"

She did. She made a point of unlocking the closet door herself. By the time she lifted the receiver, there had been twelve rings. "Yes," she said, "He's here. Who wishes to speak to him?" A pause. "Oh, it's classified. Oh, I'm afraid I don't know the protocol on classified secure phone referrals." Meanwhile, she was stabbing her finger directly into the air between us. "For you," her finger was saying.

"I'll take it," I said.

"I don't know," she said, covering the mouthpiece, "who is asking for you."

"Never fear. It's more routine than you'd expect."

"I don't know," she repeated, "who is asking for you."

"Nancy, I could, if necessary, tell you what this is all about, but I won't. You are interfering with a priority."

"All right," she said, then added as she handed me the phone, "it's a woman."

"Hello," I said into the mouthpiece.

"Is that other person standing at your elbow?" said Kit-tredge in my ear.

"More or less."

"Banish her."

"It'll take some doing."

"All the same!"

"Nancy," I said, "this is a secure phone. I'd like privacy. That is the designated purpose of these phones."

"Only intended for use," said Nancy, "by the Chief of Station."

"In his absence, I have entitlement. This involves something co-developed by Howard and me."

Nancy receded, but grudgingly, like a tide not yet ready to accept its summons back from high water. She left Howard's door still ajar. I, in turn, did not feel ready to close the closet. Under these exceptional circumstances, Nancy might feel emboldened to listen at the keyhole. So, through two half-opened doors, we managed to keep an eye on each other even as I spoke in the lowest tones.

"Are we clear?" asked Kittredge.

"Yes."

"Harry, I love your letters. I know I haven't been responding lately, but I love them. Particularly the last one. It's invaluable."

"Are you all right?"

"Couldn't be better. It's all turned around now. I'm in splendid shape."

Her voice, however, was coming to me out of the long reverberations of the secure phone. All I could determine about her state of being was that she was speaking quickly.

"Yes," she said, "I want your permission on a small but precise fabrication."

"You've got it," I said. Given the proportions of the Abominable Omission, why deny anything small and precise?

"I'm not ready to inform Hugh we're corresponding, because that would upset him much too much, but I do ask for your permission to tell him that you were sufficiently concerned by what took place on your Soviet picnic to place a call to the Stable's secure phone. He was out, I'll say, and so you told me all. Then you and he can get together tonight on this same lovely red phone."

"The first thing wrong with your proposal," I said, "is that your call right now has already ticked off a nasty response."

Unless I can come up with a feasible explanation, I'll never be able to get a second call out tonight on my lovely red phone, which, incidentally, dear lady, is housed in a stifling closet—"

"Don't talk so much," she said, "there's an off-putting echo."

"The second difficulty," I said, "is that I don't believe you. I think you've told Hugh already."

"I have," she said.

"About my last letter?"

"No, never the letter. About Masarov's crazy note. Your letter arrived yesterday, yes, yesterday, Wednesday, and I made up the story of your phone call, said it was at 4:00 P.M., and Hugh was sufficiently exercised—"

"Speak more slowly. Did you say exercised?"

"Exercised, not ex-or-cised. Hugh tapped into his source over at Soviet Russia Division, and, yes, the Sourballs are agog. Darling boy, you must have tampered with the message. Hugh gave me the wording. It's not what you put in the letter to me. They must be trying to sweat the last gamma globulin—"

"Slower, please."

"Not getting their last bit of fat, are they?"

"No." Pause. "What does Hugh think of what I did?"

"Thinks your natural instinct has a touch of the divine tar."

"Divine tar?"

"Harry, that's Hugh's accolade. The stuff God filched back from the Devil. Divine tar."

"Well, Kittredge, you've left me impressed with myself."

Suddenly, however, all amusement was gone. "Oh, Harry, it just occurred to me. When you speak to Hugh, do get *our* little story straight. When you phoned me yesterday, you did impart the missing contents to me."

"Yes, I'll keep the new chronology in place," I said.

"I think you're wonderful. However, that's not what's at issue. How are you and my spouse going to speak if you can't get a secure phone?"

"I guess," I said, "that Hugh should ring me at eleven o'clock tonight," and I gave the number of a street phone near my hotel that I sometimes used to call Chevi Fuertes.

"Is it virgin?" she asked.

"Hell, no."

"You must select another pay phone you've never used before. Then phone us at home around eleven tonight on any pay phone. Hugh will pick up. Don't speak to him by name. Just give the color code for the selected phone and hang up. Of course, you had better skew the color code."

"By how many digits?"

"Choose a number."

"Four . . ."

"I just picked two. Make it three then," Kittredge said.

"Three."

"Skewed by three."

"Shouldn't it be a continuing skew?"

"Agreed."

"By the way, only six digits on phones here, not seven," I said. "And I will call at eleven o'clock. If I can't make it, then by midnight."

"Agreed," she said.

"By the way, they want to put me in the flutter box."

"Hugh will probably get you out of that."

"How?"

"Harry, be content."

She hung up before I could say good-bye.

It was a long afternoon and made more nervous by thoughts of the skew. My recall of the color code for phone numbers was still absolute—on that I could feel well trained. Zero was white; 1, yellow; 2, green; 3, blue; 4, purple; 5, red; 6, orange; 7, brown; 8, gray; 9, black. A full skew turned zero into 9, 1 to 8, 2 to 7, so forth. A skew of three changed 3 to 9, 4 to 8, 5 to 7, 6 to 6, 7 to 5, so forth. But continuing skew was a misery. The first digit in the telephone number was skewed by three, the next by three more, or six, the third by nine, the fourth by three again, the fifth by six again, the sixth by nine once more. One didn't dare do it in one's mind but reached for pencil and pad. The virtue of the continuing skew, however, was that anyone tapping in on the first conversation who happened to be familiar with the color code would still, if he did not know the continuing skew, need time to break down the number. By then, presumably, the pay phone would have been used and never employed again.

Hunt returned from lunch and locked his door. I surmised

he was on the phone to Washington. Then he called in Hjalmar Omaley, who looked expressionless when he came out. It took no great acumen to recognize that the demand by SR Division for a lie-detector test was not going to be decided by Hunt, but back in Cockroach Alley. The Encoder-Decoder was certainly silent.

Porringer went home at five, ditto Gatsby. Nancy Waterston quit at six, which was as early as she had left in several weeks. Hjalmar soon followed; I had the idea he and Nancy would meet for dinner tonight.

Hunt stopped at my desk as he was leaving. "What was that secure phone call about? More illness in the family?"

"Yessir."

He lost his temper. Mean storm warnings passed across his face. "I don't want you using the red box again."

"I won't."

He slammed out of the office. I understood his fury. He was not going to circle the encampment with our wagons after all.

Alone in the office, I felt gainfully employed for the first time since Sunday afternoon. My regular meeting with Chevi Fuertes was scheduled for Friday at the safe house, and I had to go over his file. Then my accounts with AV/ALANCHE, sadly screwed up. I had not been out with them in two weeks and they were in a state of disarray from a couple of bloody street fights. My undone account books concerned not only AV/OCADO and AV/ALANCHE, but AV/OUCH-1, AV/OUCH-2, and AV/ERAGE, all on my desk to be brought up to date for Nancy Waterston. As I sat alone in the office, I could even feel AV/ERAGE, my homosexual society journalist, sulking—I had not met him this week for a drink. Yet the thought of all these unaccomplished tasks was curiously soothing as if I could wrap them about myself like a poultice against the raw adrenaline of the last three days.

That evening, after choosing the critical phone for my serious conversation with Harlot, I ate alone in a trucker's café in the Old City, an uneasy but pleasurable anticipation suffusing itself into my broiled meats and wine as if I were getting ready to meet Sally on a good night for me. I obtained from the waiter a fistful of change, and my pants pocket, on leaving the restaurant, lolled concupiscently against my thigh.

By ten-thirty, I had chosen the phone booth for the first call, and at ten of eleven, I called the international operator, gave her the number of the Stable in Georgetown, and deposited my coins. When I heard Harlot's voice, I said, "In front of a yellow wall is a white table with a purple lamp. A man in a brown jacket, yellow pants, and red shoes is standing. There is no chair."

"Repeat in brief," said Harlot's voice.

"Yellow, white, purple, brown, yellow, red." That would convert to 10-47-15.

"Twelve to fifteen minutes," said Harlot and hung up.

Ten-47-15 was but the immediate conversion. Calculated for a continuing skew of three, it would come out to 15-45-45.

I had chosen to receive the second telephone call in a nearby bar of reasonable decorum. It had two phones in private booths and thereby offered less likelihood that some stranger would be kept waiting if our conversation should take a while. Indeed, I was in the booth five minutes in advance with the phone up to my ear and my other hand on the hang-up lever so that the apparatus would be able to ring.

In the fourteenth minute, it did.

"Well," said Harlot, "back to the old rigamarole. I dislike pay phones quite as much as you do."

"This one has been interesting," I said.

"Time-consuming." He paused. "Here is the hygiene. If necessary, for purposes of clarity, names are permissible. Should we, for any reason, disconnect, hold your place and I will call again. If you don't hear in five minutes, wait until midnight. I'll call then."

"Make it eleven-forty," I said. "This place shuts down at midnight. I've asked."

"Good fellow. Now, purpose of my call. Verification. There is no doubt in your mind that your drinking pal named the Soviet Russia Division?"

"Zero doubt," I said.

"Why did you not report it?"

"My drinking partner had obviously set me up to do so. I thought I'd spike his game."

"Presumptuous of you."

"I can only say that my deepest instinct told me to follow

such a course," I said. "I had a hunch you would want me to follow such a course."

"This is amazing," said Harlot. "Do you know, if you had consulted me, I would have told you to do just what you did. The real object of the Russian's billet-doux was not SR Division, but closer to home."

"My God," I said.

"Yes. GHOUL. I think there is a furry little creature loose in the Soviet Russia Division. They, in turn, agree that the Agency is suffering a penetration, but place the mole in GHOUL. Dear boy, you were instinctively bright. Since you and I, for better or worse, are seen by now as umbilically attached, even Allen would have had to give some credence to SR's claim that the mole is in my cellar, if you had, that is, reported correctly. I expect Masarov chose you precisely for that reason. No question, you see—they're after me. The Russkys do appreciate my value more than the Agency. And I appreciate your new drinking pal even more than the KGB does. He's a hell of a fellow. Stay away from him. Competitively speaking, he's nearly as competent as myself."

"Good Lord," I said.

"You wouldn't care to trade wits with me yet, would you?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Ho. Good for you. Not yet. Well, by the same logic, stay away from your new friend."

"If I will be permitted to."

"You will." Pause. "Now, about the lie detector test. You won't have to take it."

"May I query you further?"

"Lord, no. You've got all you need. This call is costing a lot, and I can hardly put it on my expense account."

"Well, good-bye, then."

"Yes. Remember that I'm pleased with you." He hung up.

22 |

February 22, 1958

Dearest Harry,

There will be no flutter test. If my husband is Byzantine on matters so minor as a dinner party, I assure you that he is Bach's harpsichordist when it comes to tweaking Company strings. So, to pull you out of the clutches of Soviet Russia Division, Hugh chose the Right Gobsloptious Baron of your Western Hemisphere Division, J. C. King. J.C. is not the sort of fellow to welcome Soviet Russia Division's poachers onto his preserve. You are saved. Isn't it a fact that my husband can take care of everyone's career but his wife's?

Actually, Hugh and I have been getting along far better than ever, and since my illness he has been sharing a good deal more of his work with me. You don't know what a great step that is for him. Hugh, for all emotional purposes, was scourged in childhood when his mother killed his father. Since he cannot know whether the death was accidental or purposeful, his Alpha and Omega, built, of necessity, on rival propositions, are like two hill kingdoms facing each other across an abyss. Conceive, then, how difficult it is for him to trust me with any details of his work. (Which, collaterally, is why it would be a disaster for him to know that we are corresponding.) You may ask how I can encourage our letters, then, and I say that Hugh and I belong to a typical bond-and-bombs marriage, which is to say, we are half-wed. Alpha-Hugh and Alpha-Kitt are as joined as our sacraments, but his Omega cannot allow him to put faith in any woman, and my Omega, eager to be free and alone and full of taste for life, is obliged to suffer in the iron parameters of our marriage.

After my illness we did talk about such matters for the first time. I was able to point out that some of our sense of mutual oppression might be relieved by allowing me to live with a few of his adventures, if only in spirit.

"They are not adventures," he told me. "They are webs, and quite as sticky as spiderwebs."

All the same, Hugh proved to be man enough, and husband

enough to enter my horrors last summer. When he finally came to understand, despite all his cautions and incalculable filigree of paranoia, that by closing me out of his professional life he was helping to unbalance my mind, he began to reveal to me a bit here and there about the pieces on his playing board. So I may know more now about your situation than you. I wish to give you a warning. The KGB, according to Hugh, has taken great strides in these last few years since Stalin's death. The all-out reign of terror is over, and they have begun to get fearfully skillful again. You might try worrying about them in serious respectful fashion. Hugh's estimate of the Masarov picnic is as follows: The KGB has succeeded in placing a mole in the Soviet Russia Division. The best way to protect said mole is to insinuate a notion into the upper reaches of the Agency that the fellow is to be found in GHOUL. By Hugh's estimate, the KGB set up the picnic in order to hand you a note that would point directly to Soviet Russia Division. This was done on the firm premise that Allen Dulles would then conclude the furry creature was to be located anywhere but in SR Div. Since you were the recipient of the note, but could not produce it, inasmuch as Boris had taken it back, a shadow would fall on GHOUL. The antipathy between GHOUL and SR Division is, after all, no secret. So we would have one more bad mark against Hugh. A provocation set up by the KGB in Uruguay would have been manipulated to great effect by the mole in SR Div back at Headquarters.

The purpose of the picnic, therefore, was not merely to injure GHOUL, but to crimp Hugh's influence in the Agency. That would be a disaster. Hugh is not the man to make such a claim aloud, but I know he feels the KGB are going to be able to penetrate to the very top of the Agency if he is not there to stop them. And it won't take all that many years.

Harry, I know you hate the idea of backing off from Masarov, so I'm going to offer the sum of my modest wisdom. I believe that people like you and me go into intelligence work in the first place because to a much greater degree than we realize, we've been intellectually seduced. And often by nothing more impressive than good spy novels and movies. We want, secretly, to act as protagonists in such ventures. Then we go to work for the Company, and discover that, whatever we are, we are never

protagonists. We pop into the spy novel at chapter six, but rarely find out what was going on in chapter five, let alone earlier times. Just as seldom are we privy to what happens in the rest of the book. I offered this once to Hugh, and he said, "If you must feel sorry for yourself, read a book on the calculus of partial derivatives. That will give you paradigmatic solace, darling." The key to our lives, Harry, is in the drear word *patience*. We are incompetent without it.

As a test of your patience, I now inform you that I have news, but it is not for this letter. To whet your appetite to a slather, I will only say that ~~I have changed my slot in TSS~~ I am now behind one of the doors that Arnie Rosen used to call "Dracula's Lair." Yes, I am being trained for what we might as well term *heavier* work. I've decided it's time to stop being a nice Radcliffe girl and step onto the dance floor with the barbarian in me ~~who, breathing in great secret, does get somewhat short of wind over Lavinia's stumps~~

You had better tell ~~me~~ what you are up to, or you simply won't get the next letter.

Love,
Kittredge

23 |

March 10, 1958

Dear Kittredge,

I have let two weeks go by since receiving your extraordinary letter of February 22, but you gave me such a jolt with talk of Dracula's Lair. I hope you know what you are getting into—whatever it is. I confess to being consumed with curiosity, and

1956-1959

Start

The Jewish Princess

~~of course in the case of Miller, the
old press? The newspaper life is
from production to the press, and
from edition to edition, and Miller's
comment, "I've been in the news on his return from
Paris. Now there are fifty variants on one
fertile idea: the Great American Brain is marry-
ing the Great American Body. Because Marilyn
is taking up the faith (Reformed Synagogue),
the New York Post, whose base of readership
is suburban liberal, trade union, middle class and
—in the absence of other sheets—progressive, goes
in for tooth-sucking analyses of the wedding to
come, plus an interview with Arthur Miller's
mother. "She opened her whole heart to me,"
said Mrs. Miller, who then told how Marilyn
was learning to make gefilte fish, borscht, chicken
soup with matzoh balls, chopped liver, tsimis,
potato pirogen. Marilyn is obviously going to
have to come her way from Dougherty's carrots
and peas."~~

Now the House Un-American Affairs Sub-
committee provides an interruption to their plans
for marriage. Looking for publicity, they sum-
mon Miller as a witness to explain why he was
not granted a passport in 1954. ~~That is an old
case, which has been brought up again only
because Miller is re-applying for a passport; he
desires to go to England for the making of *The
Prince and the Showgirl*, and has been quietly
negotiating with the State Department, who act
as if they are prepared to refuse him again (under
the terms of a regulation ready to deny passports
to people "supporting Communist movements"—
although by 1956 that has become an embar-
rassing power).~~ It is four years since the peak
of the McCarthy days and, next to testing a new
hydrogen bomb, Miller and Marilyn are the

most newsworthy item in America. Everybody
in Washington understands that the Un-Amer-
ican Affairs Subcommittee, which has been alto-
gether out of the news, now hopes to regain
some of its lost attention by being able to cite
Arthur Miller for contempt should he refuse to
testify. Since publicity is a subcommittee angel,
they are naturally slavish in their secret respect
for Marilyn. So they also offer a secret deal:
if Miss Monroe will pose for a picture with
Chairman Walter of the Subcommittee, Mil-
ler's difficulties may begin to disappear.
Miller refuses. He is even warned by his law-
yers not to tell anyone. Who will believe such
farce?

In the meantime, the hearings are given head-
lines. Marilyn endears herself to everyone from
liberal Democrats to the *Daily Worker*! She tells
the press her fiancé will win. There is a newsreel
clip that shows her in the midst of an interview
at this time on a lawn outside a Washington
home, and she is never more beautiful. She looks
in love. It could be said, if we are to invest in
the logic of sentiment, that she looks deeply in
love as she slowly replies out of a profound and
pretty confusion to the questions which are asked
of her. She seems bemused, as if thinking of
pleasant hours with Miller rather than of the
questions besieging her now. Of course, she is
probably on sedation. We must live in two lives
whenever we think of her one life.

It is still a year in which a movie star can be
persecuted in the press for open left-wing asso-
ciations, and so the suggestion that her fortune
is committed to Miller's fortune gives her status
as a heroine. She is beginning to capture the
imagination of America's intellectuals; grudgingly,
they are obliged to contemplate the remote

about 20 pages

possibility that she is not so much a movie star as a major figure in American life—of a new sort! Of course, they will not move too far in this direction until her death. But since European intellectuals are agog at this new portrait—America persecuting its outstanding author and most attractive movie star in a neo-McCarthyian wholly sophomoric hysteria, et cetera—the State Department quietly intervenes, Chairman Walter quietly breaks his wind, and Miller and Monroe have held their first fort. He gets the passport. They can be married and go to England to make the movie with Olivier.

So Marilyn is indoctrinated by Rabbi Robert Goldberg from the environs of New Haven on some general tenets and theory of Judaism (for two hours!), embraces the faith, enters the fold, and is told there is no afterlife. (What is the pride of Reformed Judaism if it is not the absence of an afterlife?) A double-ring ceremony takes place in Katonah at the home of Kay Brown, Miller's literary agent, and follows by two days the unscheduled civil ceremony in White Plains, which had been quickly arranged on Friday evening after an horrific press conference on early Friday afternoon at Miller's farm in Connecticut. That was when Myra Sherbatoff of *Paris-Match* was killed chasing their newsworthy automobile, and four hundred people ~~by Zolotow's estimate (he was there)~~ gathered around Milton Greene to hear how they would be given twenty minutes for newsreels, twenty for still photographers, thirty for reporters, a technological ceremony for the stifling midday landlocked heat of a Connecticut farm in the end of June.

"Give him a kiss, Marilyn," sing the photographers.

"One shot of the lovebirds, please."

One nightmare. Yet we have pictures of the day, and she looks happy. Death, press hysteria, Congress, and religious vows soon to come—it is all part of the *tohu-bobu* (if we are to use a good Hebrew word) of what has always been her public life.

Still, how beautiful they look in their wedding pictures. Staid Arthur Miller has been a scandal to his friends ever since he came back from Reno, for he and Marilyn sit in entwinement for hours. Like Hindu sculpture, their hands go over one another's torsos, limbs, and outright privates in next to full view of company, a questionable activity to perform in front of cynics, but it is as if the hero and heroine will each declare to the world that no matter the extent of *her* sexual scholarship and *his* meager schooling, they meet as equals in the godly art. They are lovers, and that is the only law of balance in sexual thermodynamics. They will immolate the past with the heat of the present. He buys her a gold wedding ring and inscribes it, "*A to M, June 1956. Now is Forever.*" It is a fervent response to whatever sentiments of confidence he hears pounding in his heart.

There is in retrospect a dialogue on the wedding day of Quentin and Maggie in *After the Fall*.

MAGGIE: . . . you said we have to love what happened, didn't you. Even the bad things.

QUENTIN: Sweetheart—an event itself is not important; it's what you took from it. Whatever happened to you, this is what you made of it, and I love this!

A few lines later Maggie says, "There's people who're going to laugh at you."

QUENTIN: Not any more, dear, they're going to see what I see. . . .

MAGGIE: What do you see? Tell me! [*Bursting out of her*] 'Cause I think . . . you were ashamed once, weren't you?

QUENTIN: I see your suffering, Maggie; and once I saw it, all shame fell away.

MAGGIE: You . . . were ashamed?

QUENTIN [*with difficulty*]: Yes. But you're a victory, Maggie, you're like a flag to me, a kind of proof, somehow, that people can win.

It is his rallying cry. One can hardly remain a left-wing writer if one does not believe that the people who are coming up from the bottom have enough goodness to win, have enough moral wherewithal to deserve to win, yes, she is his living testament, for she—his blessed heroine—is up from the people. So she becomes the affirmation to replace all lost left-wing certainties.

Of course, Miller, like many a playwright before him, is too complex a man to remain in one consistent piece. He is also a *practical* poet and much immersed in studies of money coming in and money going out. There is more to life than affirmations of passion and sexual vaults over the past. Miller is always asking Greene about Marilyn Monroe Productions, its details, its plans, its financing, its projects, its difficulties, until Greene says to him, "Be a husband! Leave the corporation to Marilyn and me." No, there is no quick love between Miller and Milton, nor much more between Miller and the Strasbergs. Lee Strasberg will give Marilyn away at the double-ring wedding, but Arthur, still keeping his opinion to himself, does not approve of Actor's Studio, nor Strasberg's mode of teaching that makes actors "secret people," and "makes acting secret [when] it's the most communicative art known to man." (Never has the inborn antipathy of the

progressive mind for the dialectical hitch been more in evidence!) We can be witness to a small part of their first meeting. It is at Strasberg's home before the marriage, and one can anticipate Marilyn's excitement. But it all goes wrong. Marilyn begins to talk of a special record—Woody Herman playing Stravinsky—which Lee Strasberg has let her hear. Arthur wishes to share this pleasure, and Strasberg puts it on. A marvelous record, says Arthur, where can one purchase it? Can't be done, Strasberg assures him. The record is one of a kind. Arthur looks at it. It has a commercial label. May be hard to find, Arthur suggests, but not one of a kind. Most certainly is, says Strasberg, ending the discussion. It is evident to Miller that Strasberg is trapped in a boast he must have made on another occasion to Marilyn that the Woody Herman-Stravinsky record was unique. No, no quick love between Miller and Strasberg.

Still, for a honeymoon they will all go over to England to work on *The Prince and the Showgirl*, Millers, Greenes, and Strasbergs. A troika! Strasberg is no happier with Greene. A half year earlier, consulted by Milton as to the advisability of taking on Olivier to be director of the film as well as its leading man, Strasberg committed himself to no more than a mild opinion that the possibility "was a good idea." Greene immediately took this speech as his opportunity to cable Olivier a firm offer as director. A misunderstanding, they might agree, but who could be certain, including Greene himself, that the secret motive may not have been to cut off flirtation with any possibility that Strasberg might direct his first film—or did Greene wish to ingratiate himself with Olivier for future films? Who could know? In business, ambiguity poisons several more relations than betrayal.

Marilyn travels as her own kind of queen. Shades of Zelda! The Millers fly to England with twenty-seven pieces of luggage (of which three are Arthur's—like Barry Goldwater, he is ready to hold on to his socks!). There is \$1,500 in overweight luggage, of which \$1,333.33 is her share, and they are deluged by hundreds of press at the airports in New York and London. Guiles reports Miller in a near state of shock as they are conducted from terminal to plane, "strange arms under their elbows . . . no air to breathe . . . voices become a muffled roar . . . a little like drowning." Miller shows just such torture in his expression for photographers. The corners of his mouth have become the creases in the smile of a stone dragon. Given the dragon's stern principles, this wrack of publicity will never end. Perhaps he will suffer most when he finds himself trying to enjoy it. There seems a will to torture himself reminiscent of Richard Nixon being jovial on command.

At London Airport they are met by Sir Laurence Olivier and wife Vivien Leigh. A photographer is trampled in the crush. Off they go with a thirty-car caravan to a "large rented estate" at Egham in the royal grounds of Windsor Park. They have been expecting a "cottage" but find an English country mansion. All one-family homes in England, they are assured, are cottages.

Ga-ga is the prose of the English press. One London weekly prints a special Marilyn-Monroe edition. That is an honor given to no human since Queen Elizabeth's coronation. "She is here," says the London *Evening News*. "She walks. She talks. She really is as luscious as strawberries and cream." *The Seven-Year Itch* has had exactly

the kind of success one would expect in England, where many an Englishman can identify with Tom Ewell. Miller is naturally expected to be clever, superb, well-spoken, and romantic—a tall knight who has been ready to go to war with bloody McCarthy. England offers its oyster.

She was invited to be the patroness of a cricket match for charity at Tichborne Park and to taste the rockbound solitude of the island of Aran; the Scottish knit goods industry was preparing for her a lifetime collection of hand-knit cashmere twin-set sweaters; a group of teddy boys invited her to join them for a bit of fish and chips in Penge, a London suburb.

But it is comedy. For the Millers are tied in class knots. English accents, Olivier's in particular, have to certainly remind them that she is a girl from a semi-slum street and he is a boy from Brooklyn. She says the wrong things at her first press conference. The British do not care if she is witty, or refreshingly dumb, but she must choose to be one, or be the other—instead, she is pretentious.

"Do you still sleep in Chanel No. 5?"

"Considering I'm in England now, let's say I am now sleeping in Yardley's Lavender." That will waft no balm to English noses. It is like coming out four-square for Catholicism at Notre Dame—they have heard that already.

"Can you give us your tastes in music?"

"I like, well, jazz, like Louis Armstrong, you know, and Beethoven."

"Oh, Beethoven?" We hear the nasal flush of Anglican tides in the Bay of Beethoven. "What Beethoven numbers in particular, Miss Monroe?"

She gives a hopelessly American reply. "I have a terrible time with numbers." Now the recovery. "But I know it when I hear it." No worse mis-

take! You do not offer something to the English unless you deliver it altogether. They are not tolerant of conversations that belly-flop from one unfinished line to another.

In turn, Miller is hopelessly stiff. No more do the English need his chill. They have their own castles for chill. Miller is described to Zolotow by a London friend as "cold as a refrigerated fish." They turn down invitations to fashionable parties, and invite no one in return. Off to a very bad start.

Soon they begin to recognize new trouble. Olivier *bates* the Method. Where is Milton Greene, who had the genius to make him the director? It is possible Olivier is the foremost representative in all the world of the school of Coquelin. An actor does well to do his homework, and come to the set with characterization superbly in hand. One does not wallow in depths. One delivers the point. Eli Wallach can speak of taking Olivier to Actor's Studio to watch the Method in operation. The reactions of Sir Laurence then are to show that he is not to be party to this revolution.

It can be said with no great strain that most of the male and female population of England are good amateur actors, well schooled in Coquelin. One lives in the creation of one's manner; one delivers the manner on call. None of your crude American fumbling toward the point while gorging on the charity of all. Can we conceive of a worse situation for Marilyn? She is an extermination camp to millions of cells in each of the brains of her co-workers as she gasses their patience—yes, Tony Curtis will speak of kissing Hitler, and Olivier will tell Milton Greene he is ready to "squeak!" What makes it even worse is that her troika is pulling next to no

chariot for her. Milton Greene is smooth as rum and butter with Olivier, and Miller has been lumbered by English upmanship and secretly respects Sir Laurence much too much. Strasberg delivers Big Bertha pronunciamientos from safe London, miles away from the studio. "Why does Olivier say he had difficulty with her," he remarks in later years. "I would say she had difficulty with him," but he is an outmoded gun for wars like this. *Joshua*

While Olivier has been warned in many a note from Logan to be patient with Marilyn, and not to raise his voice, nor expect "disciplined stage deportment," and Olivier has promised to iron himself out "nice and smooth," it is likely Olivier is contemptuous of the situation even before the film begins. He has already done *The Sleeping Prince* as a play with Vivien Leigh and so is conceivably in this for the profit rather than the glory of Marilyn Monroe's profession. Monroe, on the other hand, carrying all the secret snobbery that has led her to consider becoming Princess of Monaco, has to quicken to the thought she is playing with the monarchical actor of them all—her own secret coronation! We can measure the great and royal hollow of the orphanage by the size of her noble ambition now—yet there is Olivier brimming with hostility he cannot even begin to swallow at Logan-like injunctions to take care of darling little spoiled *lèse-majesté* wild animal actresses and Method madness and American money, upstart Millers and ogre Strasbergs, goes out, does Sir Laurence, and roils Miss Monroe's ego royally on the first week of work by saying, "All right, Marilyn, be sexy!" One might as well ask a nun to have carnal relations for Christ. Olivier has exposed that little gulf, wider than the Atlantic,

between Method and Coquelin. In common-sensical Coquelin it don't take long to get sexy. If God was good enough to give it, throw it, babe! Indeed, the more unheralded English actors on the set have been looking at her with giggles. They have been waiting for the sex machine to start.

But in the Method, one does not get sexy. She calls Strasberg in London. Her voice burns wire. "Lee, how do you become sexy? What do you do to be sexy?" She cannot be soothed. Olivier has jammed into the tender roots of ontology and revealed his secret contempt for her. "The naughtiest little thing. . . ." Balzac, describing a bourgeois who purchased a false title, could do justice to her wrath. Now Olivier will get *her* treatment. He will learn, naughty little English boy, that sexiness is not a shiver in the pickle but the whole evocation of the whole woman in relation to the whole role: Marilyn proceeds to get ill. Quickly the cast is instructed by Greene not to giggle when she appears, and indeed, in reaction, are now funereal at the sight of her.

Soon they are in the familiar clutch of not knowing whether she will show up two hours late, four hours late, or not at all. Morning after morning, Miller phones that she is sick. In fact, she is back on quantities of sleeping pills. ~~Arthur is beginning to discover the maelstrom~~ ("I have a terrible time with numbers.") Nights go by when she cannot sleep at all. The unnumbered count of pills goes up. Then the gamble. Does she splurge for a few more and get a couple of hours sleep, thereby to stagger forth in drastic stupor for a working day, or should she pass into morning without sleep and try the job on stimulants? And red-rimmed eyes? Or does she skip the job and miss another day?

Arthur

He is on vigil. Already there are intimations that the bucket by which she lowers herself into the well is tied to a frayed rope. It is fair to wonder if Miller is still full of love, or whether rage at her habits is now begun with him as well. He is a most ambitious man. In his own way, he is as ambitious as she is, and if she had only been an actor in the school of Coquelin—small detail!—and could get the work out on time, they could go far together. During those days in Washington when he fought for his passport he must have thought once or twice that no national office was necessarily too small for him. The public loved them so! Instead, after years of cramped work, he is now doing less writing than ever. He is her god, her guard, her attendant, and her flunky. Old friends, much impressed with his importance in the past, are now horrified to see Miller pasting up news clippings of Marilyn in a scrapbook, or standing around to approve her stills. Greene, who reads the situation better, senses that Miller is immersing himself in all the corners of movie business by way of preparing to replace him.

Still, how she must irritate Miller with her endless journeys to the simplest point. He is becoming all too aware of her capacity to inflict damage in secret wars. He cannot help it—he has sympathy for Olivier. Honest Jewish lover, he must write "a letter from hell" and leave it for her to see. (Perhaps he thinks it will give the proper reorientation to her heart.) When she reads these few lines (left on his desk open) she phones Strasberg again. Guiles gives the recollection:

She was so overwrought in telling the story it was not easy to determine precisely what the notebook entry had said, but Strasberg remembers there was

indignation in her voice. "It was something about how disappointed he was in me. I was some kind of angel but now he guessed he was wrong. That his first wife had let him down, but I had done something worse. Olivier was beginning to think I was a troublesome bitch and that he [Arthur] no longer had a decent answer to that one."

The Strasbergs naturally would believe in later years that the episode was "the seed of her later destruction." Miller as naturally would see it as one episode among many. Marilyn, always ready to shift the burial ground of each corpse in her past, would say after she broke with Miller that he had called her a "whore." In *After the Fall*, Miller will recreate the episode and give this language to the note: "The only one I will ever love is my daughter. If I could only find an honorable way to die." What a nightmare is beginning for him. It is the cauldron in which Marilyn has spent her life, but he has no habits for it.

The movie progresses with absences, breakdowns, crises. Olivier is close to collapse himself. The irony is that when one sees *The Prince and the Showgirl*, it is better than anyone has a right to expect from the history of its making, but that is because Monroe is superb—will wonders never cease?

Dame Sybil Thorndike, who plays the Dowager Queen, is even going to say after the film is done, "I thought, surely she won't come over, she's so small scale, but when I saw her on the screen, my goodness how it came over. She was a revelation. We theatre people tend to be so outgoing. She was the reverse. The perfect film actress, I thought. I have seen a lot of her films since then, and it's always there—that perfect quality."

She is also lovely. Milton H. Greene is indeed

a genius with makeup. Never will Marilyn exhibit so marvelous a female palette, her colors living in the shades of an English garden. A hue cannot appear on her face without bearing the tone of a flower petal. Her lips are rose, her cheeks have every softened flush. Lavender shadows are lost in her hair. Once again she inhabits every frame of the film.

Of course, Olivier in his turn cannot fail to be excellent. He is too great an actor not to offer some final delineation of a Balkan Archduke. If there are a thousand virtuositys in his accent, it is because his virtuositys are always installed within other virtuositys—a consummate house of cards. It is just that he is out there playing by himself. So one can never get to believe he is attracted to Monroe. (Indeed, he is most believable when he snorts, "She has as much *comme il faut* as a rhinoceros!") Willy-nilly, he is therefore emphasizing the high level of contrivance in the plot.

A day arrives when Paula Strasberg strikes with "torrents of love and interest." She tells Olivier that his performance is artificial. It will not be long before she is banned from the set, then sent home from England. (Somehow, Olivier cannot grow accustomed to Monroe's habit of walking away from him to confer with Paula.) Mrs. Strasberg has been struck down, however, for loyalty on the right front. After this, Paula would be working with Marilyn for the rest of her life. And Milton Greene would catch the backed-up cess. From Marilyn's point of view, she was the producer of the film, but had no artistic control. Greene had given all that away to Olivier! One gets a glimpse of her rage, plus the mode in which Arthur and she have been talking about Milton, right after Greene announces to

the British press *on his own* that he is ready to set up a British subsidiary of Marilyn Monroe Productions in order to make films in England. How unaware Milton must have been of Marilyn's feelings. Obviously, she had given him too small a clue.

Miller put in a call to Greene, but his anger was such that he was shouting into the instrument and all Greene could hear was an incoherent roar. He recalls his angry reply, "If you want to talk to me, talk to me. If you're going to yell, then I'm not going to listen." When the roar continued, he slammed down the receiver.

Doubtless, he could then measure the beginning of the end of his relation to Marilyn Monroe Productions. Implicated Greene! He was also forced to serve as Olivier's emissary to inform Paula Strasberg that she was exiled. Somewhere in these embattled weeks, Monroe summons her analyst from New York and delays production another week.

For a taste of mutual relations just before the banishment, then we must trust Zolotow. If this glimpse of a scene is not true, we know it ought to be.

One day when Monroe was being insufferably slow about everything, Olivier said something about speeding things up a bit. Mrs. Strasberg said, "You shouldn't rush Marilyn. After all, Chaplin took eight months to make a movie."

Olivier looked from Monroe to Mrs. Strasberg to Greene. He didn't say a word. But his expression indicated that the analogy between Monroe and Chaplin was possibly the most nauseating remark he had ever heard.

Olivier is wrong. British snobbery is once again building empires and buggering them. All parties

concerned finish the film in a cloud of detestations and Marilyn makes a little speech to the cast. "I hope you will all forgive me. It wasn't my fault. I've been very, very sick all through the picture. Please—please don't hold it against me."

She is introduced to the Queen. It does not go good. She has lost the British press. They sniff and snipe to a fare-thee-well. She did not have the common touch, she did not know *in the way Winston Churchill did* how to take fish and chips with Cockneys.

The Millers return to America. The dream that they were destined for a great and mighty marriage may already have foundered. One would like a picture of Olivier's face as he said goodbye.

They come back to the Greenes' apartment on Sutton Place, and divide their time between New York and Miller's farm in Connecticut. The racketing assembly line of daily publicity shuts down. They begin to have some of the married life Miller once envisaged. Later he will indicate that this fall, winter, and spring, plus the summer they had together in Amagansett, was their happiest time, and if this would clash with the Strasbergs' view that the marriage was already hurt in final fashion by the discovery of Miller's notebook in Egham, it is better to recognize that their marriage requires love to enter the service of medicine. So for a period he will be the most deeply devoted physician of her life, and she will love him back—in very much the way genteel girls are supposed to love Jewish doctors. There

is so much concern for healing you! In all of Miller's early plays is one progressive theme: social evil derives from minds sickened by inhuman values. Those minds can best be cured by healing the heart. He loved her heart. It is significant that Paula Strasberg, interviewed in New York right after *The Prince and the Showgirl* (which is to say right after Egham), was sufficiently uninhibited to say, "I have never seen such tenderness and love as Arthur and Marilyn feel for each other. How he values her! I don't think any woman I've ever known has been so valued by a man." It seems Egham had not blown all the walls just yet.

Actually, they settle into good days and bad days. Which is the narrative line of marriage. In England he has been a failure to her. In *After the Fall*, Maggie cries, "You should've gone in there roaring! 'Stead of a polite liberal and affidavits. . . ." Greene remarked: "She wanted a fuhrer to deal with Olivier, and got a broker." No, Marilyn has not wanted Miller's insights into the complexity of the artist's working situation. So Arthur has been, yes, a failure in England, and at Egham a traitor. But the marriage can hardly be dead. She is in the deepest need of a cure. Her illness is made up of all that oncoming accumulation of ills she has postponed from the past, all that sexual congress with men she has not loved, and all those unfinished hours with men she has loved, all the lies she has told, all the lies told about her, all unavenged humiliations sleeping like unfed scorpions in the unsettled flesh. Worse!—all unfinished family insanity, plus her own abused nerves. Plus the need to come to rest in some final identity. (Even in her last *Life* interview with Meryman, she will say, "My work is the only ground I've ever had to stand on. . . .

To put it bluntly, I seem to have a whole superstructure with no foundation.") If she has known the best sexual athletes of Hollywood (that capital of sex) and Miller at his worst has to be an inhibited householder from Brooklyn, nonetheless she loves him. He is the first man she has met upon whom she can found an identity, be Marilyn Monroe, the wife of Arthur Miller. That alone may provide her such happiness that she is able for this period at least to grant him that indispensable fiction for the maintenance of marriage—you are the best lover I ever had. Of course, *best lover* is its own happy category. Many a man or woman has a sexual life with oncoming lovers who appear each in turn the *best*, one lover for each face of the sexual best; somehow there are twenty best faces. It would hardly be unnatural if, feeling some tenderness with him she has not necessarily known before, she would decide tenderness was, yes, best, tenderness was best, even as the number of certified sexual arrivals—call Dr. Kinsey!—may once have been best, or some high electric discharge into the stratosphere of the shaking sexual tree, some sweet taste of liberty (the freedom to fuck!), any category can be best: lips, smell, skin, *whatever*—there is no standard to keep us from deciding that our present sex is at the maximum. Of course, we all grow old—that little problem! Still, we can always carry our sexual past into the present (even as Miller suggested in *After the Fall*), but then we are able to succeed at making the present lover equal to the sum of all which has gone before only if we are also increasing, that is becoming wiser, wittier, or possessed of more psychic strength. We have to transcend what is past—in our emotions, at least, if not in our bodies. Emotion has to work through the

sorrow of the past without self-pity; so, one must find more wealth in the heart—no small requirement!

But there is small evidence that they were ever in such a state. Like everything else in Marilyn's life, she lived in the continuing condition of a half-lie, which she imposed upon everyone as an absolute truth—it was that Miller adored her out of measure. Like a *goddess*. Since Miller was also a man with such separate needs as the imperative to write well, as well as to profit from her talents as much as anyone else was prospering, yes, whenever he emerged as a *separate person*—fell phrase of romance!—this half-lie or half-truth that he adored her without limit had to collapse. Where she had claimed an absolute truth that was ill-founded, now there was an absolute denial, equally ill-founded. He did not love her at all. He wished only to use her.

A picture of just such emotional swings is revealed in her habits at Amagansett. The summer of 1957 is the period in which he works best as Young Doctor Miller, and often will get her off sleeping pills, or down to just one or two a night; sometimes she will even sleep. Restored by the least bit of rest, there are days when she will have endless energy and show exquisite sensitivity—at least to his lover's eye. She has only to study the petals of a flower to invoke the full appreciation of his adoring view—"she was able to look at a flower as if she had never seen one before," he would say in an interview—and we get a glimpse of what was most tender and attractive between them in a quotation Guiles selects for us from Miller's short story, "Please Don't Kill Anything."

The waves were breaking into the net now, but they could not yet see any fish. She put her two

hands up to her cheeks and said, "Oh, now they know they're caught!" She laughed. "Each one is wondering what happened!" He was glad she was making fun of herself even if her eyes were fixed in fear on the submerged net. She glanced up at her husband and said, "Oh, dear, they're going to be caught now."

He started to explain, but she quickly went on, "I know it's all right as long as they're eaten. They're going to eat them, aren't they?"

"They'll sell them to the fish stores," he said softly, so the old man at the winch wouldn't hear. "They'll feed people."

"Yes," she said, like a child reassured. "I'll watch it. I'm watching it," she almost announced to him. But in her something was holding its breath.

We are finally dealing with the root of human comedy, and it is tragic. She is a girl who cannot bear the death of one little fish—she is thus genuinely sensitive to the expiration of life, to the *instant* when it stirs intimations, which go to the root of her divine nerves—yet she is ready to kill herself before she can allow his will to influence her will.

During years to come when her suicide attempts will be not infrequent, he will come to recognize that her desire to kill herself would kill him almost as effectively in the eyes of society. "I'm all the evil in the world, aren't I?" Quentin says to Maggie in the middle of just such an attempt. "A suicide kills two people, Maggie, that's what it's for!"

Of course, Miller is not without his own purchase on contradiction. He is a masterpiece of love and thrift, generosity and pinch. If he comes to her as a man bursting with the desire to offer his love to someone who has need of it, she must know all the pleasure of a thief who rips off a consummate miser. What a treasure in the hoard! For the first time in her life she can live

in a milieu which adores her, adores her twice, first as a star, and then because she has chosen Arthur and so prefers intelligentsia and the theatre to capitalists, professional sports, or Hollywood. Moreover, there are the near to unlimited funds of his attention—it is such a special and loving attention. She has the most talented slave in the world. And she has full need to manipulate a slave after a life in which her nerves have been pulled by the imperatives of others.

That, however, is only one side of Miller. He is also ambitious, limited and small-minded, an intellectual who is often scorned by critics outside the theatre for his intellectual lacks. Nor has he developed to meet such criticisms. Rather, he has reinforced his old walls. He has virtually a terror of the kind of new experience that might open his ideas; so she is enough new experience to last him for a lifetime.

If these limitations have cut off his work even before he has come to live with her, the inability to do much writing in their first year together sets early patterns that will later hurt him. (Of course, the fact that he is still being harassed by congressional committees is no help to his work, either.) But from the beginning it is her money which they live on. From her work. In such a condition, it is natural to toady to her. Can anything be worse for him? He begins to develop the instincts of a servant. Since he is already full of the middle-class nose for petty increments of power, the vacuum in his own creative force has to be filled by becoming a species of business manager, valet, and in-residence hospital attendant. He manages too much. She, with her profound distrust of everyone about her, begins to suspect him. Has he married her because he can't write anymore? Is his secret ambition to

become a Hollywood producer? Or does he want to use her as a meal ticket? Such mean suspicions warm up the dynamos of all throttled insanity. Over and over, through the good months at Amagansett, she will plunge into sudden depressions. They are inexplicable to him. What he cannot recognize as he comes to grips with the full incalculable complexity of a woman is that he is just as much of an enigma to her, and unlike him she sickens before mysteries. They do not offer new literary lines of work, but are connotative of the pit.

In Amagansett they also discover she is pregnant. By the sixth week she is in such pain they rush to New York for an operation. It is announced that the pregnancy is tubular. But there is ambiguity even about this. The question remains whether her pregnancies were tubular or hysterical. Greene claims she once had a fearful abortion that made it impossible for her to be pregnant. Miller, in an interview, said she could not, but then later in the same interview thought she did have a tubular pregnancy. It is a confusion that she may even have disseminated herself and it persists. What may be the best explanation, from a friend who knew Marilyn well, is that she had had many abortions, perhaps so many as twelve! And in cheap places—for a number of these abortions came in the years she was modeling or a bit player on seven-year contracts—thus her gynecological insides were unspeakably scarred, and her propensity for tubular pregnancies was increased. Since her periods were unendurable—"the pain was so great she would writhe on the floor"—a doctor began to inhibit her menstruation with a drug that anticipated the Pill, and for such duration not able to become pregnant, she would "in hysterical compensation

think she was. Can you conceive what a frightful mess this had to make of her?"

"She never wore a diaphragm?"

"She hated them," said the woman friend. "What people don't understand is that Marilyn loved sex." (We are in *Rashomon* once more!) "I don't think she went a week in her life without having some man around. She took sex with men the way men used to take sex with women."

"Still, she needed sleeping pills."

"Nobody's perfect."

Now, with Miller, faithful to Miller, she will have an operation and then another to make a child possible, and will claim to have other pregnancies—what stays constant is the depth of depression each time the pregnancy, real, tubular or hysterical, is over. It is as if Zanuck's verdict upon her as a sexual freak is being confirmed. If few women are without depression after a miscarriage—they are dealing, finally, with a mystery, which for whatever reason, has chosen not to be born—then what an avalanche of depression for Marilyn. The unspoken logic of suicide insists that an early death is better for the soul than slow extinction through a misery of deteriorating years.

This depression lies so heavy upon her that Miller crosses his Rubicon. He has never written before with an actor or actress in mind. He derives from the high literary tradition that true theatre depends upon the play, and the script is inviolate. Great playwrights live with themes, not actors. But he will write a movie script for her. He will adapt his short story, "The Misfits," into her vehicle. It is, from Marilyn's point of view, either the highest offering of his love or the first aggressive calculation of a mean and ambitious brain. Her mood rises and she is gay for a

few days, but on their return from the hospital she slides back into depression and begins to increase her count of Nembutals. One day he sees her stumble into a chair and go immediately into a heavy doze. Her breathing is labored. Then for the first time he hears what will become the unmistakable sounds of a half-paralyzed diaphragm—her breath is coming with an eerie continuing sigh. The wind of death is in the winding sheet. He does not try to brew coffee or walk her around, slap her face, or pinch the back of her knees. Instead, he seeks "immediate medical help." It is in his character not to look for amateur solutions. Apparatus and technicians from a nearby clinic come *quickly*—can this be medical assistance with which any of us is familiar?—and they resuscitate her. He has saved her life. He will have to save it more than once again. In the days after this incident she will, according to Guiles, be endlessly affectionate to Miller, kiss his hands over and over.

What do we witness? Has she actually supposed (with her abominable facility for living in the unconscious of others) that he might let her die? Or has her hatred been put to rest by the look of relief in his eyes that she is still alive?

They begin to put down roots. He finds another farm in Connecticut, and they buy it. She is busy and happy with the details of alteration and studies the daily work of the carpenters, while he begins to work on *The Misfits*. It is a happy time, but will end he knows so soon as the alterations are finished. He is right. She is bored with the country, and begins to talk of their own apartment in New York. They move from the Greenes' apartment on Sutton Place to another at 444 East Fifty-seventh Street. Her love of Brooklyn is obviously not as intense now as it

used to be. If there will be a view across the East River, it is from Manhattan that they will look at unhappy squats on the skyline of Queens. Now she picks up her classes with Strasberg again, and spends many an evening talking to other actors at the Strasberg home. Miller does not often accompany her, but he does not oppose her either. It is as if he senses that she must be forever engaged in feathering the nest of some future identity. Being among actors offers a culture she can finally acquire the way others pick up a foreign language—she is at least absorbing the milieu of the New York Method actor, his gossip, his prospects, his sophistication, his cynicism, and his sharp horizons. To live at last in a milieu must be the equivalent of oxygen to her. Yet, she is also most respectful of Miller during this time. When guests visit the New York apartment, she takes them on tiptoe past the important room of the house—it is the place where her husband writes. We must conceive of him sitting there, unable to put down a word for dint of listening to her caution the guests. Of course, during this time Milton Greene is also being sued for control of Marilyn Monroe Productions, a sordid episode. At Miller's urging, she even attempts through her lawyers to have Greene's name removed as executive producer of *The Prince and the Showgirl*, like Natasha Lytess, Milton has heard nothing from her in the interval. Since he has just turned down a \$2,000,000 offer from television because "she isn't up to the strain of a series," he can feel he has legitimately been protecting her interests. Half of that \$2,000,000 would after all have gone to him. While Greene threatens a lawsuit in which he will claim huge amounts, he feels small heart for the project and finally accepts \$100,000, far less than Monroe's lawyers were

prepared to pay. "My interest in Marilyn's career," he says with sad dignity, "was not for gain," and after three years of activity that has telescoped the focus of his life inside out, he goes back to his profession as a *fashion photographer*.

Whether this victory for Miller contributes a bit to the excellence of *The Misfits* is hardly knowable, but the script in any case proceeds well. He is out of his literary doldrums. Some time after a first draft of the movie is finished, he invites his old friend and neighbor, Frank Taylor, who has been a book editor and a Hollywood producer, to listen to the script. On an afternoon in July of 1958, Miller reads it to him, and Taylor is obviously impressed, for he suggests sending the work to John Huston in Paris, at once! and Huston wires back within the week that it is "magnificent." He will be happy to direct it. Clark Gable is given a copy and is also anxious to do it. Taylor agrees to take a leave from publishing and be the producer. United Artists is interested in financing. Now they have not only a major production, well launched, but a sudden sense of all-surrounding excitement. And promises at last of fulfillment. They seem to have emerged onto the good-working married ground that they have an exciting job they will do together. It is a long time since so much talent and celebrity have come together on a film.

Terminia/Speculations

1958

(441)

~~The Shits are Killing Us~~~~THE WHITE NEGRO~~~~Dead End~~

Like many another vain, empty, and bullying body of our time, I have been running for President these last ten years in the privacy of my mind, and it occurs to me that I am less close now than when I began. Defeat has left my nature divided, my sense of timing is eccentric, and I contain within myself the bitter exhaustions of an old man, and the cocky arguments of a bright boy. So I am everything but my proper age of thirty-six, and anger has brought me to the edge of the brutal. ~~In sitting down to write a sermon for this collection,~~ I find arrogance in much of my mood. It cannot be helped. The sour truth is that I am imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time. Whether rightly or wrongly, it is then obvious that I would go so far as to think it is my present and future work which will have the deepest influence of any work being done by an American novelist in these years. I could be wrong, and if I am, then I'm the fool who will pay the bill, but I think we can all agree-it would cheat this collection of its true interest to present myself as more modest than I am.

~~The reader who is curious to test my claims is instant is advised to turn to the pages of "The White Negro," and to the portion from my new novel which ends this book. He can then decide after a few hours of his finest attention if he is likely to agree. But those of you who want a sense of clear focus, like to know left from right, and up from not-so-up, may find it more restful to enter this book by degrees.~~

There was a time when Pirandello could tease a comedy of pain out of six characters in search of an author, but that is only a whiff of purgatory next to the yaws of conscience a writer learns to feel when he sets his mirrors face to face and begins to jiggle his Self for a style which will have some relation to him. I would suspect it is not possible, no more than one can remake oneself significant for signature, but I have to admit I am not suited for this.

of confrontation despite two novels put down in the first person and a bloody season of overexpressed personal opinions as a newspaper columnist. To write about myself is to send my style through a circus of variations and postures, a fireworks of virtuosity designed to achieve . . . I do not even know what. Leave it that I become an actor, a quick-change artist, as if I believe I can trap the Prince of

That is the act of searching a style.

For instance, when the invitation came, not so very long ago, to make out my fifteenth anniversary report to the Harvard Class of 1943 I thought first of not answering, and then I considered an abbreviated and (by inference) disdainful few lines, and finally I thought, fuck it, let's have something in this class report which is a little less predictable than:

We are now living in the country, and find to our surprise that we like it, although the children miss the ambiguities and partial unshelterings of a New York public school education. Suburban life is great, qualifiedly great—I find to my perhaps overstructured horror that I rather enjoy the high-pressured rubber of bridge on the evening rocket back—wife and I are working you see with local PTA to initiate Master Point tournaments. These activities do not quite satisfy my programmatic ambitions of fifteen years ago, but still if I will be granted my enthusiasm for one cliché, the little realities of the graying poll and the burgeoning paunch are bracing realities.

And so, foreseeing (correctly) that ninety per cent of my class's answers to the report would have that inimitable lead-kitten charm of Harvard prose, I wrote my reply with the desire to be destructive and therefore useful:

For the last few years I have continued to run in that overcrowded mob of unconscionable egotists who are all determined to become the next great American writer. But, given the brawl, the wasting of the will, and the sapping of one's creative rage by our most subtle and dear totalitarian time, politely called the time of conformity, I do not know that I would be so confident as to place the bet on myself any longer nor indeed on any of my competitive peers.

Yes, I wanted to say, my creative rage is being sapped, I have been dying a little these fifteen years, and so have a good

many of you, no doubt—none of us are doing quite so much as we once thought we would. But then this has been a bad time, we've all been flattened by the dead air of this time, dinched and tamped into a flat-footed class.

Much of this meaning depended on the word "sapping" with its connotations of weakening, enervating, deadening—that word was the nerve of my paragraph. Unfortunately, the "sapping of one's creative rage" was printed in the Class Report as the "slapping of one's creative rage," an interesting montage of words, but my meaning was tricked. As the years go by and I become a little more possible for Ph. D. mills, graduate students will begin to write about the slapping of my creative rage, of Mailer's vision of his rage as his shield, when what I was trying to say was simply, "The shits are killing us."

~~Now, in the writing of our days, when no ache of evidence can ever be believed unless it is presented by a Doctor of Jargon, a remark like "the shits are killing us" is so declarative that fifty pages of closely reasoned argument should follow in support. I would rather not make the attempt. My mood has shifted, and I prefer to unload some bitter end of overchewed opinions which will show the churl in me, and beef up a drunken bruise or two, but at least will clear the air for us to go ahead.~~

So, mark you. Every American writer who takes himself to be both major and macho must sooner or later give a faena which borrows from the self-love of a Hemingway style. Any reader who will let me circle back later, in my own way, via the whorls and ellipses of my knotted mind, to earlier remarks, will be entertained en route by a series of comments I have to make (not altogether out of the rhythms of Hemingway) on the man, on my contemporaries and on myself. Brief remarks, absolutely not exhaustive, but still an historic moment.

For you see I have come finally to have a great sympathy for The Master's irrepressible tantrum that he is the champion writer of this time, and of all time, and that if anyone can pin Tolstoy, it is Ernest H. Soylerwhere in Hemingway is the hard mind of a shrewd small-town boy, the kind of boy who knows you have a red cigar only when you are the biggest man in town, because to be just one of the big men in town is tiring, much too tiring, you inspire no red, and what is worse than hatred, a wave of anger talk in every one

~~mind. I never have good men to interview since I began~~
 to get into disagreeable situations with reporters—they sense no
 matter how pleasant I try to be, that I do not like them—I think
 the psychological requirement for working on a newspaper is to be
~~a pathological liar and a compulsive liar.~~ Perhaps I should hire a
 public relations man to grease my career, but I do not know if I can
 afford him (not with the size of the job he would have to do for me),
 and moreover I would be obliged sooner or later to spoil his work.
 While there would be hardly a limit to how lovable he could make
 me in the public eye it would be exhausting for me to pretend to be
 nicer than I really am. Indeed, it would be downright debilitating
 to the best of my creative energies. So I do not care to approach
 the public as a lover, nor could I succeed for that matter. I started
 as a generous but very spoiled boy, and I seem to have turned into
 a slightly punch-drunk and ugly club fighter who can fight clean
 and fight dirty, but likes to fight. I write this not solely out of self-
 pity (although self-pity is one of my vices) but also to tell the
 simple truth: I have not gotten nicer as I have grown older, and I
 suspect that what has been true for me may be true for a great
 many of you. I've burned away too much of my creative energy,
 and picked up too slowly on the hard, grim, and maybe manly
 knowledge that if I am to go on saying what my anger tells me it is
 true to say, I must get better at overriding the indifference which
 comes from the snobs, arbiters, managers and conforming maniacs
 who manipulate most of the world of letters and sense at the core
 of their unconscious that the ambition of a writer like myself is to
 become consecutively more disruptive, more dangerous, and more
 powerful. It will be fine if I can write so well and so strongly as to
 call my shot, but unfortunately I may have fatigued the earth of
 rich language beyond repair. I do not know, but it is possible. I've
 been in too many fights, I've been hit on the head by a hammer,
 and had my left eye gouged in a street fight—and of course I'm
 proud of this (I was a physical coward as a child), and so I'm proud
 I learned a bit about fighting even though the cost may end as
 waste. There may have been too many fights for me, too much sex,
 liquor, marijuana, benzedrine and seconal, much too much ridicu-
 lous and brain-blasting rage at the minuscule frustrations of a most
 loathsome literary world, necrophilic to the core—they murder
 their writers, and then decorate their graves.

If I put down words so final as these, it is not in any sense that

I alone have been mistreated—on the contrary I have had more good luck and conceivably more bad luck than most writers (which tends to give one the hard satisfaction of knowing a little more of what the swindle is about). No, these ill-mannered bleedings and gripes are to record a clear record: I had the luck to have a large talent and to use some of it, and if I know how very much more I could have done if new luck had come my way, well—that is not my story, but everyone's story, every last one of us could have done more, a creation or two more than we have done, and while it is our own fault, it is not all our own fault, and so I still feel rage at the cowardice of our time which has ground down all of us into the mediocre compromises of what had been once our light-filled passion to stand erect and be original. Yes,

~~You can see then that this collection of pieces and parts, of advertisements, short stories, articles, short novels, fragments of novels, poems and parts of a play cannot be taken, after all, and for the most part, on just such a street theme—the shits are killing us, even as they kill themselves—each day a few more lies eat into the seed with which we are born, little institutional lies from the print of newspapers, the shock waves of television, and the sentimental cheats of the movie screen. Little lies, but they pipe us toward insanity as they starve our sense of the real. We have grown up in a world more in decay than the worst of the Roman Empire, a cowardly world chasing after a good time (of which last one can approve) but chasing it without the courage to pay the hard price of full consciousness, and so losing pleasure in pips and squeaks of anxiety. We want the heats of the orgy and not its murder, the warmth of pleasure without the grip of pain, and therefore the future threatens a nightmare, and we continue to waste ourselves. We've cut a corner, tried to cheat the heart of life, tried not to face our uneasy sense that pleasure comes best to those who are brave, and now we're a nation of drug addicts (caffeine, ~~alcohol~~, ~~cocaine~~ and nicotine), of homosexuals, hoodlums, fart-faced Southern governors and a President so passive in his mild old panics that women would be annoyed if one called him feminine. The heat in our juvenile delinquency is matched only by the unadmitted acceleration of our race into cancer, that disease which is other than disease, that wave of the undifferentiated function, the orgy of the lost cells.~~

So, yes, it may be time to say that the Republic is in real peril, and we are the cowards who must defend courage, sex, con-

sciousness, the beauty of the body, the search for love, and the capture of what may be, after all, an heroic destiny. But to say these words is to show how sad we are, for those of us who believe the most have spent our years writing of fear, impotence, stupidity, ugliness, self-love, and apathy, and yet it has been our act of faith, our attempt to see—to see and to see hard, to smell, even to touch, yes to capture that nerve of Being which may include all of us, that Reality whose existence may depend on the honest life of our work, the honor of ourselves which permits us to say no better than we have seen.

Hip, Hell and the Navigator

An Interview

with Richard G. Stern and Robert Lucid



RICHARD STERN: I've been reading "The White Negro" and a fair amount of other material on the hipster, and I must say that intellectually I resent Hip as much as I can resent anything. Now I wonder about the extent of your allegiance to Hip. Are you using this material for fiction, or are you committed to it as a style of life, one which you want to practice yourself and recommend to others?

NORMAN MAILER: All right, good, I think the difficulty for most people who are at all interested in my work is that I started as one kind of writer, and I've been evolving into another. Most serious readers like a writer to be a particular thing. It's important; it's reassuring, somehow. So, I think if I'm going in this direction, it has to be assumed at least from the outside that I'm serious.

STERN: The interesting thing about Hip is that Hip shouldn't belong to writers. If you're a genuine hipster you're committed, it seems to me, to a kind of anti-expressionism. If you're a sincere hipster you shouldn't be a writer. Then there's another thing as far as writing goes. Isn't a novel controlled by some overriding notion, by a kind of fanaticism which organizes a great deal of disparate material? In a sense, a novel is like the mind of a madman: everything — casual looks, street signs, world news reports — is charged with meaning. That's why novelists write about ruling passions like love and ambition, passions which put their mark on

all they touch, trivial or major. Now I can't believe that Hip allows for such overriding notions and passions. For the hipster, the cool one, detail is illumined, livid, but for its own sake, unqualified by the sort of organization which novels demand. I wonder if such material can be put into fiction.

MAILER: I think it can; and not only that, but I think Hip is particularly illumined by one notion so central and so shattering that its religious resonances and reverberations are going to dominate this coming century. And I think there is one single burning pinpoint of the vision in Hip: it's that God is in danger of dying. In my very limited knowledge of theology, this never really has been expressed before. I believe Hip conceives of Man's fate being tied up with God's fate. God is no longer all-powerful.

STERN: Now that's a fantastic assertion. That really makes me sit up. What is the notion of God behind all this? Do you mean that some kind of personal god is dying with us?

MAILER: Now I only talk about my own vision of it, really. I think that the particular God we can conceive of is a god whose relationship to the universe we cannot divine; that is, how enormous He is in the scheme of the universe we can't begin to say. But almost certainly, He is not all-powerful; He exists as a warring element in a divided universe, and we are a part of — perhaps the most important part of — His great expression, His enormous destiny; perhaps He is trying to impose upon the universe His conception of being against other conceptions of being very much opposed to His. Maybe we are in a sense the seed, the seed-carriers, the voyagers, the explorers, the embodiment of that embattled vision; maybe we are engaged in a heroic activity, and not a mean one.

STERN: This is really something.

MAILER: Well, I would say it is far more noble in its conception, far more arduous as a religious conception than the notion of the all-powerful God who takes care of us.

STERN: And do you take to this conception for its perilous nobility, or do you take to it because you believe in it?

MAILER: I believe in it.

STERN: You believe in it.

MAILER: It's the only thing that makes any sense to me. It's the only thing that explains to me the problem of evil. You see, the answer may well be — how to put it? — that God Himself is engaged in a destiny so extraordinary, so demanding, that He too can suffer

from a moral corruption, that He can make demands upon us which are unfair, that He can abuse our beings in order to achieve His means, even as we abuse the very cells of our own body.

STERN: Is it a person's duty to find out whether he's of God's party, whether he's working with God-beneficent or God-maleficent?

MAILER: Well, look, let's go back; let's go back to something much more modest for the moment which I think may tie this up, to a small extent, anyway. You asked me before why Hip is interesting for the novel. Well, up to now, when a novelist treats someone like a drug addict, the Square way is to treat the addict as a poor sociological cripple who is doomed and damned and goes down to his inevitable defeat. In Hip, which has after all to a certain extent come out of drug-taking (it's one of the elements in the growth of Hip) the attitude would be more that if taking drugs gives one extraordinary sensations, then the drug-taker is probably receiving something from God. Love perhaps. And perhaps he is. Let's just entertain the notion as a rational hypothesis which may or may not be true and let's see how far we go with it. If the hipster is receiving love from God he may well be draining some of the substance of God by calling upon this love, you see, which the drug releases. And in draining the substance of God he's exhausting Him, so that the drug-taker may be indulging an extraordinarily evil act at the instant he is filled with the feeling that he is full of God and good and a beautiful mystic. This involves new moral complexities which I feel are far more interesting than anything the novel has gotten into yet. It opens the possibility that the novel, along with many other art forms, may be growing into something larger rather than something smaller, and the sickness of our times for me has been just this damn thing that everything has been getting smaller and smaller and less and less important, that the romantic spirit has dried up, that there is almost no shame today like the terror before the romantic. We're all getting so mean and small and petty and ridiculous, and we all live under the threat of extermination. In contrast, the notions of Hip enlarge us, they make our small actions not necessarily large, but more meaningful. If we pick up a bottle while listening to some jazz and we feel each of our five fingertips in relation to the bottle, the bottle begins to have a kind of form for us and we begin to feel each of our fingertips is receiving a different thing from the shape and the structure of the glass, and we then begin to think that maybe the very structure of this glass could conceivably contain some kind of hell within its constitution, some inorganic frozen

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state of imprisoned being less being than us. I think it's a more interesting notion that just picking up a bottle and pouring out some whisky.

STERN: It's a very pretty notion.

MAILER: Hip is pretty.

STERN: But it's all action, it's all erectile, isn't it? It's all feeling and taste and touch and smell. Isn't that the trouble with it?

MAILER: The trouble is that it's enormously difficult to return to the senses. We're all civilized, and to return to the senses and keep the best parts of our civilized being, to keep our capacity for mental organization, for mental construction, for logic, is doubly difficult, and there's a great danger that the nihilism of Hip will destroy civilization. But it seems to me that the danger which is even more paramount—the danger which has brought on Hip—is that civilization is so strong itself, so divorced from the senses, that we have come to the point where we can liquidate millions of people in concentration camps by orderly process.

STERN: Every powerful and refining force involves danger and waste. Does this divorce from the senses you talk about justify cashing in two or three thousand years of continuous culture?

MAILER: Well, your argument is moot. It's too vast for this—for me. But let me try to put it this way. If the divorce from the senses I talk about is becoming a human condition, then by all means, yes, civilization must be cashed in or we will destroy ourselves in the cold insensate expressions of due process of law and atomic radiation.

STERN: All right, let's concentrate on what all this has to do with you as a practicing novelist. How are these notions going to work for you? The idea of art seems to me to be to generate emotion from the treated material, not to point out some material and some feeling and say, "Put them together, reader."

MAILER: Well, let me avoid answering you directly. I feel that the final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel is at its best the most moral of the art forms because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, if you will. It is the most inescapable. Ideally, what I would hope to do with my work is intensify a consciousness that the core of life cannot be cheated. Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or retreating into less. One is always living a little more or dying a little bit. That the choice is not to live a little more or to not live a

little more; it is to live a little more or to die a little more. And as one dies a little more, one enters a most dangerous moral condition for oneself because one starts making other people die a little more in order to stay alive oneself. I think this is exactly the murderous network in which we all live by now.

STERN: And this is what the hipster does; he strikes out at others; he's constantly craving for more. He faces the risk of the extinction of his senses, extinction of his being, extinction of his capacity for making distinctions.

MAILER: He does certain things that are very brave in their way; he gambles for one thing with his soul — he gambles that he can be terribly, tragically wrong, and therefore be doomed, you see, doomed to Hell. Which the churchy people don't do at all. They're thinking of nothing but maintaining their souls for some careful preservation afterward. The hipster is gambling with death and he is gambling with the Hereafter; and he may be wrong.

STERN: And the novelist is gambling with his talent as a novelist.

MAILER: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

STERN: The one talent he's got.

ROBERT LUCID: This is what kills me. You presume consciousness, you presume purpose, you presume direction on the part of this class — if that's the word — analogous to the novelist. And it seems to me that the whole notion of Hip is, in fact, unconscious, it is mere action. It seems to me the kind of guy we're talking about as hipster *qua* hipster is a guy who is, in fact, unconscious of risks of this kind, of the profundity . . .

MAILER: Consciously, he may think it's cutting quite a few corners as far as that goes. What I'm postulating in all this — the notion I've been working with all along that's been tacit to my remarks, implicit in my remarks, is that the unconscious, you see, has an enormous teleological sense, that it moves towards a goal, that it has a real sense of what is happening to one's being at each given moment — you see — that the messages of one's experience are continually saying, "Things are getting better," or "Things are getting worse." For me. For that one. For my future, for my past, mmm? It is with this thing that they move, that they grope forward — this navigator at the seat of their being.

From:
Advertisements
For Myself
on Thursday Out

1959

The Oldest Hag of Them All

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our poor soured flesh to the wistful cemetery grass. In a century or two perhaps they will let the cows enter there to eat and make the milk and give the meat which will permit one distant relative of a molecule, ten hundred dynasties of family removed, to slip into a human body again. A few of our cells may make the transmigration from our body, which is gone, to the body of another—all that was us reduced to a molecule whose minor deviations from the classical form of the giant protein chain recapture (as do all deviations from classical form) some wry shrunken ion's head of the contradictions and possibilities which were once a man, general of the armies of his cells, Deus to his body-universe.

And is that all? a sacred cow. ("I dig the Hindu bit," said Marion once) our best poor bridge to make it back, no matter how cruelly reduced, to the life of those beings who have the power—all too unconsciously—to smother the changing heat of Time? Or is there more?

And if I say I think there is, I turn the key in the category of my own secret, for as some of you may have sensed by now, the list I offered up to your amusement is from me, and I am, oh yes, now I know who I am or was, I am the dead man on the floor, for so I am, yes (what a pure moment of grief at all that has not been done), I am in the endless deliberate instant of the vision given by death, the million dying spasms of the radiating consciousness of words, this last of me, wailing within, turbulent with the terror that I no longer know where I am, nor if there are voices to hear me and answer back. I am off finally, departed on the demented journey whose first echoes I knew in those overpromiscuous moments of malice, license, promise and horror at the heart of a cocktail party when, too drunk with the knowledge of what courage was demanded of me, and what little I had, I used to close my eyes, sitting in the saviorship of a chair, and I would give up the ghost of ego-erect will, and let the vertigo of the liquors suck me away, a far long way in those few instants when I was spinning out with a rapidity to match the salacious pace of our revolving earth, and I was one with something other until the wife or the mistress or whichever latest embodiment of the royal bitch was at my elbow, nudging me back, feminine fingers of fury at spineless disappearing man wrenching me with procreative determination clean up to the living so I would hear:

~~See Other~~
~~Adverts~~
~~For~~
~~Myself~~
~~on~~
~~Thursday~~
~~Out~~

"Are you all right?"

"I was thinking of something," I would say, "and I like to think with my eyes closed," but that was the lie of appearances to share between us, a bread of false flour, forcibly refreshing me back to my determinations, back to the party after the long swoon away.

But now I go, the vortex does not stop, the winds of the whirlpool—God's gyre again?—are heavy with consequence, and I sink or do I fly? all vectors gone, while in my center, clear as the icy eye of cocaine, I race toward a point of judgment, my courage and cowardice (my masculine thrust and retreat from the avaricious energy-plucking hairy old grotto of Time) trailing behind me in that comet of connotations which is the past topologically reversed by the vision of *now*, as if in recovering the past I am chasing after the future, so that the past, the net of the name-giving surface-perceiving past, is my future again, and I go out into the past, into the trail of the cold eye of past relationship, the eye of my I at home in the object-filled chaos of any ego I choose, at least for this short while between the stirrup and the ground, for in an instant—will it be eternally long? like some cell at the crisis of its cellvish destiny, I race into the midnight mind, the dream-haunted determinations of that God of whom I was a part, and will He choose me to be born again? have I proven one of his best? am I embryo in some belly of the divisible feminine Time, or is the journey yet to make? Or worst of all am I?—and the cry which is without sound shrieks in my ears—am I already on the way out? a fetor of God's brown sausage in His time of diarrhea, oozing and sucking and bleating like a fecal puppy about to pass away past the last pinch of the divine sphincter with only the toilet of Time, oldest hag of them all, to spin me away into the spiral of star-lit empty waters.

So I approach Him, if I have not already lost Him, God, in His destiny, in which He may succeed, or tragically fail, for God like Us suffers the ambition to make a destiny more extraordinary than was conceived for Him, yes God is like Me, only more so.

Unless—spinning instead through the dark of some inner Space—the winds are icy here—I do no more than delude myself, fall back into that hopeless odyssey where libido never lingers, and my nature is nothing other than to search for the Devil while I carry with me the minds of some of you.

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Preface is taken from
Tat. ~~the~~
Writer's Choice

1951

A Preface to The Time of Her Time

impact, it was not hard to decide on a best piece. My only ones worth
more than the passing mark of good have to be "The Man Who Studied
Lolita" and "The Time of Her Time" and of course neither was
received as a short story. Both are fragments from that mammoth
novel I first finished close to fifteen years ago.
Of these two, I am obviously

Start → ~~the~~ "The Time of Her Time" was a salacious object in ~~its~~ ^{its} ~~the~~
Secretly, I didn't believe it could be printed. Then my publisher, Walter
Minton of G. P. Putnam's, agreed that it could not be included in
Advertisements for Myself. Not as it stood.

"You have to, Walter. Advertisements is no book without it."

"Don't I know it," he whined.

Walter Minton is the only man I ever met who gets stronger as he
whines. Before it was over he agreed to take the chance without asking
me to remove a word. Then a year or two later he published Lolita.
"You know," he confided once, "I think it was publishing "The Time
of Her Time" and seeing how little trouble came to us which made me
realize you could do Lolita."

Reader, the story you are about to peruse is the godfather of Lolita.

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the window frames (it took twelve hours to scrape the calcimine from the glass), even parts of the floor had white drippings (although that was scuffed into dust as time went on) and yet it was worth it: when I took the loft it stank of old machinery and the paint was a liverish brown—I had tried living with that color for a week, my old furniture which had been moved by a mover friend from the Village and me, showed the scars of being humped and dragged and flung up six flights of stairs, and the view of it sprawled over twenty-five hundred feet of living space, three beat old day beds, some dusty cushions, a broken-armed easy chair, a cigarette-scarred coffee table made from a door, a kitchen table, some peeled enamel chairs which thumped like a wooden-legged pirate when one sat in them, the bookshelves of unfinished pine butted by bricks, yes all of this, my purview, this grand vista, the New York sunlight greeting me in the morning through the double filter of the smog-yellow sky and the nineteen dirt-frosted windows, inspired me with so much content, especially those liver-brown walls, that I fled my pad like the plague, and in the first week, after a day of setting the furniture to rights, I was there for four hours of sleep a night, from five in the morning when I maneuvered in from the last closed Village bar and the last coffee-klatsch of my philosopher friends' for the night to let us say nine in the morning when I awoke with a partially destroyed brain and the certainty that the sore vicious growl of my stomach was at least the onset of an ulcer and more likely the first gone cells of a thoroughgoing cancer of the duodenum. So I lived it that way for a week, and then following the advice of a bar-type who was the friend of a friend, I got myself up on the eighth morning, boiled my coffee on a hot-plate while I shivered in the October air (neither the stove nor the gas heaters had yet been bought) and then I went downstairs and out the front door of the warehouse onto Monroe Street, picking my way through the garbage-littered gutter which always made me think of the gangs on this street, the Negroes on the east end of the block, the Puerto Ricans next to them, and the Italians and Jews to the west—those gangs were going to figure a little in my life, I suspected that, I was anticipating those moments with no quiet bravery considering how hung was my head in the morning, for the worst clue to the gangs was the six-year-olds. They were the defilers of the garbage, knights of the ordure, and here, in this province of a capital Manhattan, at the southern tip of the island,

with the overhead girders of the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges the only noble structures for a mile of tenement jungle, yes here the barbarians ate their young, and any type who reached the age of six without being altogether mangled by father, mother, family or friends, was a pint of iron man, so tough, so ferocious, so sharp in the teeth that the wildest alley cat would have surrendered a freshly caught rat rather than contest the meal. They were charming, these six-year-olds, as I told my uptown friends, and they used to topple the overloaded garbage cans, strew them through the street, have summer snowball fights with orange peel, coffee grounds, soup bones, slop, they threw the discus by scaling the raw tin rounds from the tops of cans, their pillow fights were with loaded socks of scum, and a debauch was for two of them to scrub a third around the inside of a twenty-gallon pail still warm with the heat of its emptied treasures. I heard that the Olympics took place in summer when they were out of school and the streets were so thick with the gum of old detritus, alluvium and dross that the mash made by passing car tires fermented in the sun. Then the parents and the hoods and the debts and the grandmother dowagers cheered them on and promised them murder and the garbage flew all day, but I was there in fall and the scene was quiet from nine to three. So I picked my way through last night's stew of rubble on this eighth morning of my hiatus on Monroe Street, and went half down the block to a tenement on the boundary between those two bandit republics of the Negroes and the Puerto Ricans, and with a history or two of knocking on the wrong door, and with a nose full of the smells of the sick overpeppered bowels of the poor which seeped and oozed out of every leaking pipe in every communal crapper (only as one goes north does the word take on the Protestant propriety of john), I was able finally to find my man, and I was an hour ahead of him—he was still sleeping off his last night's drunk. So I spoke to his wife, a fat masculine Negress with the face and charity of a Japanese wrestler, and when she understood that I was neither a junk-peddler nor fuzz, that I sold no numbers, carried no bills, and was most certainly not a detective (though my Irish face left her dubious of that) but instead had come to offer her husband a job of work, I was admitted to the first of three dark rooms, face to face with the gray luminescent eye of the television set going its way in a dark room on a bright morning, and through the hall curtains I could hear them talking in the bedroom.

"Get up, you son of a bitch," she said to him.

He came to work for me, hating my largesse, lugging his air compressor up my six flights of stairs, and after a discussion in which his price came down from two hundred to one, and mine rose from fifty dollars to meet his, he left with one of my twenty-dollar bills, the air compressor on the floor as security, and returned in an hour with so many sacks of whitewash that I had to help him up the stairs. We worked together that day, Charley Thompson his name was, a small lean Negro maybe forty years old, and conceivably sixty, with a scar or two on his face, one a gouge on the cheek, the other a hairline along the bridge of his nose, and we got along not too badly, working in sullen silence until the hangover was sweated out, and then starting to talk over coffee in the Negro hashhouse on the corner where the bucks bridled a little when I came in, and then ignored me. Once the atmosphere had become neutral again, Thompson was willing to talk.

"Man," he said to me, "what you want all that space for?"

"To make money."

"Out of which?"

I debated not very long. The people on the block would know my business sooner or later—the reward of living in a slum is that everyone knows everything which is within reach of the senses—and since I would be nailing a sign over my mailbox downstairs for the pupils to know which floor they would find me on, and the downstairs door would have to be open since I had no bell, the information would be just as open. But for that matter I was born to attract attention; given my height and my blond hair, the barbarians would notice me, they noticed everything, and so it was wiser to come on strong than to try to sidle in.

"Ever hear of an *Escuela de Torear*?" I asked him without a smile.

He laughed with delight at the sound of the words, not even bothering to answer.

"That's a bullfighter's school," I told him. "I teach bullfighting."

"You know that?"

"I used to do it in Mexico."

"Man, you can get killed."

"Some do." I let the exaggeration of a cooled nuance come into my voice. It was true after all; some do get killed. But not so

many as I was suggesting, maybe one in fifty of the successful, and one in five hundred of the amateurs like me who fought a few bulls, received a few wounds, and drifted away.

Charley Thompson was impressed. So were others—the conversation was being overheard after all, and I had become a cardinal piece on the chaotic chessboard of Monroe Street's sociology—I felt the clear bell-like adrenalins of clean anxiety, untainted by weakness, self-interest, neurotic habit, or the pure yellows of the liver. For I had put my poker money on the table, I was the new gun in a frontier saloon, and so I was asking for it, not today, not tomorrow, but come sooner, come later, something was likely to follow from this. The weak would leave me alone, the strong would have respect, but be it winter or summer, sunlight or dark, there would come an hour so cold or so hot that someone, somebody, some sexed-up head, very strong and very weak, would be drawn to discover a new large truth about himself and the mysteries of his own courage or the lack of it. I knew. A year before, when I had first come to New York, there was a particular cat I kept running across in the bars of the Village, an expert with a knife, or indeed to maintain the salts of accuracy, an expert with two knives. He carried them everywhere—he had been some sort of hophead instructor in the Marines on the art of fighting with the knife, and he used to demonstrate nice fluid poses, his elbows in, the knives out, the points of those blades capering free of one another—he could feint in any direction with either hand, he was an artist, he believed he was better with a knife than any man in all of New York, and night after night in bar after bar he sang the love-song of his own prowess, begging for the brave type who would take on his boast, and leave him confirmed or dead.

It is mad to take on the city of New York, there is too much talent waiting on line; this cat was calling for every hoodlum in every crack gang and clique who fancied himself with the blade, and one night, drunk and on the way home, he was greeted by another knife, a Puerto Rican cat who was defective in school and spent his afternoons and nights shadow-knifing in the cellar clubhouse of his clique, a real contender, long-armed for a Latin, thin as a Lehmbrock, and fast as a hungry wolf; he had practiced for two months to meet the knife of New York.

So they went into an alley, the champion drunk, a fog of vanity blanketing the point of all his artistic reflexes, and it turned

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out to be not too much of a fight: the Puerto Rican caught it on the knuckles, the lip, and above the knee, but they were only nicks, and the champion was left in bad shape, bleeding from the forearm, the belly, the chest, the neck, and the face: once he was down, the Puerto Rican had engraved a double oval, labium majorum and minorum on the skin of the cheek, and left him there, having the subsequent consideration or fright to make a telephone call to the bar in which our loser had been drinking. The ex-champion, a bloody cat, was carried to his pad which was not far away (a bit of belated luck) and in an hour, without undue difficulty the brother-in-law doctor of somebody or other was good enough to take care of him. There were police reports, and as our patois goes, the details were a drag, but what makes my story sad is that our ex-champion was through. He mended by sorts and shifts, and he still bragged in the Village bars, and talked of finding the Puerto Rican when he was sober and in good shape, but the truth was that he was on the alcoholic way, and the odds were that he would stay there. He had been one of those gamblers who saw his life as a single bet, and he had lost. I often thought that he had been counting on a victory to put some charge below his belt and drain his mouth of all that desperate labial libido.

Now I was following a modest parallel, and as Thompson kept asking me some reasonable if openly ignorant questions about the nature of the bullfight, I found myself shaping every answer as carefully as if I were writing dialogue, and I was speaking particularly for the black-alerted senses of three Negroes who were sitting behind me, each of them big in his way (I had taken my glimpse as I came in) with a dull, almost Chinese, sullenness of face. They could have been anything. I had seen faces like theirs on boxers and ditch diggers, and I had seen such faces by threes and fours riding around in Cadillacs through the Harlem of the early-morning hours. I was warning myself to play it carefully, and yet I pushed myself a little further than I should, for I became ashamed of my caution and therefore was obliged to brag just the wrong bit. Thompson, of course, was encouraging me—he was a sly old bastard—and he knew even better than me the character of our audience.

“Man, you can take care of yourself,” he said with glee.

“I don’t know about that,” I answered, obeying the formal minuet of the *macho*. “I don’t like to mess with anybody,” I told

him. "But a man messes with me—well, I wouldn't want him to go away feeling better than he started."

"Oh, yeah, ain't that a fact. I hears just what you hear." He talked like an old-fashioned Negro—probably Southern. "What if four or five of them comes on and gangs you?"

We had come a distance from the art of the *corrida*. "That doesn't happen to me," I said. "I like to be careful about having some friends." And part for legitimate emphasis, and part to fulfill my image of the movie male lead—that blond union of the rugged and the clean-cut (which would after all be *their* image as well)—I added, "Good friends, you know."

There we left it. My coffee cup was empty, and in the slop of the saucer a fly was drowning. I was thinking idly and with no great compassion that wherever this fly had been born it had certainly not expected to die in a tan syrupy ring-shaped pond, struggling for the greasy hot-dogged air of a cheap Negro hashhouse. But Thompson rescued it with a deft little flip of his fingers.

"I always save," he told me seriously. "I wouldn't let nothing be killed. I'm a preacher."

"Real preacher?"

"Was one. Church and devoted congregation." He said no more. He had the dignified sadness of a man remembering the major failure of his life.

As we got up to go, I managed to turn around and get another look at the three spades in the next booth. Two of them were facing me. Their eyes were flat, the whites were yellow and flogged with red—they stared back with no love. The anxiety came over me again, almost nice—I had been so aware of them, and they had been so aware of me.

2.

That was in October, and for no reason I could easily discover, I found myself thinking of that day as I awoke on a spring morning more than half a year later with a strong light coming through my nineteen windows. I had fixed the place up since then, added a few more pieces of furniture, connected a kitchen sink and a metal stall shower to the clean water outlets in the john, and most noticeably I had built a wall between the bullfight studio and the half in which I lived. That was more necessary than one might guess—I had painted the new wall red; after Thompson's job of

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whitewash I used to feel as if I were going snow-blind; it was no easy pleasure to get up each morning in a white space so blue with cold that the chill of a mountain peak was in my blood. Now, when I opened my eyes, I could choose the blood of the wall in preference to the ice slopes of Mt. O'Shaugnessy, where the sun was always glinting on the glaciers of the windows.

But on this particular morning, when I turned over a little more, there was a girl propped on one elbow in the bed beside me, no great surprise, because this was the year of all the years in my life when I was scoring three and four times a week, literally combing the pussy out of my hair, which was no great feat if one knew the Village and the scientific temperament of the Greenwich Village mind. I do not want to give the false impression that I was one of the lustiest to come adventuring down the pike—I was cold, maybe by birth, certainly by environment: I grew up in a Catholic orphanage—and I had had my little kinks and cramps, difficulties enough just a few years ago, but I had passed through that, and I was going now on a kind of disinterested but developed competence; what it came down to was that I could go an hour with the average girl without destroying more of the vital substance than a good night's sleep could repair, and since that sort of stamina seems to get advertised, and I had my good looks, my blond hair, my height, build, and bullfighting school, I suppose I became one of the Village equivalents of an Eagle Scout badge for the girls. I was one of the credits needed for a diploma in the sexual humanities, I was par for a good course, and more than one of the girls and ladies would try me on an off-evening like comparison-shoppers to shop the value of their boy friend, lover, mate, or husband against the certified professionalism of Sergius O'Shaugnessy.

Now if I make this sound bloodless, I am exaggerating a bit—even an old habit is livened once in a while with color, and there were girls I worked to get and really wanted, and nights when the bull was far from dead in me. I even had two women I saw at least once a week, each of them, but what I am trying to emphasize is that when you screw too much and nothing is at stake, you begin to feel like a saint. It was a hell of a thing to be holding a nineteen-year-old girl's ass in my hands, hefting those young kneadables of future power, while all the while the laboratory technician in my brain was deciding that the experiment was a routine success—routine because her cheeks looked and felt just about the way I had

thought they would while I was sitting beside her in the bar earlier in the evening, and so I still had come no closer to understanding my scientific compulsion to verify in the retort of the bed how accurately I had predicted the form, texture, rhythm and surprise of any woman who caught my eye.

Only an ex-Catholic can achieve some of the rarer amalgams of guilt, and the saint in me deserves to be recorded. I always felt an obligation—some noblesse oblige of the kindly cocksman—to send my women away with no great wounds to their esteem, feeling at best a little better than when they came in, I wanted it to be friendly (what vanity of the saint!). I was the messiah of the one-night stand, and so I rarely acted like a pig in bed, I wasn't greedy, I didn't grind all my tastes into their mouths, I even abstained from springing too good a lay when I felt the girl was really in love with her man, and was using me only to give love the benefit of new perspective. Yes, I was a good sort, I probably gave more than I got back, and the only real pains for all those months in the loft, for my bullfighting classes, my surprisingly quiet time (it had been winter after all) on Monroe Street, my bulging portfolio of experiments—there must have been fifty girls who spent at least one night in the loft—my dull but doggedly advancing scientific data, even the cold wan joys of my saintliness demanded for their payment only one variety of the dead hour: when I woke in the morning, I could hardly wait to get the latest mouse out of my bed and out of my lair. I didn't know why, but I would awaken with the deadliest of depressions, the smell of the woman had gone very stale for me, and the armpits, the ammonias and dead sea life of old semen and old snatch, the sour fry of last night's sweat, the whore scent of overexercised perfume, became an essence of the odious, all the more remarkable because I clung to women in my sleep, I was one Don John who hated to sleep alone, I used to feel as if my pores were breathing all the maternal (because sleeping) sweets of the lady, wet or dry, firm or flaccid, plump, baggy, or lean who was handled by me while we dreamed. But on awakening, hung with my head—did I make love three times that year without being drunk?—the saint was given his hour of temptation, for I would have liked nothing more than to kick the friendly ass out of bed, and dispense with the coffee, the good form, my depression and often hers, and start the new day by lowering her in a basket out of my monk-ruined retreat six floors down to the garbage pile (now

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blooming again in the freshets of spring), wave my hand at her safe landing and get in again myself to the blessed isolations of the man alone.

But of course that was not possible. While it is usually a creep who generalizes about women, I think I will come on so heavy as to say that the cordial tone of the morning after is equally important to the gymkhana of the night before—at least if the profit made by a nice encounter is not to be lost. I had given my working hours of the early morning to dissolving a few of the inhibitions, chilled reflexes and dampened rhythms of the corpus before me, but there is not a restraint in the world which does not have to be taken twice—once at night on a steam-head of booze, and once in daylight with the grace of a social tea. To open a girl up to the point where she loves you or it or some tremor in her sexual baggage, and then to close her in the morning is to do the disservice which the hateful side of women loves most—you have fed their cold satisfied distrust of a man. Therefore my saint fought his private churl, and suffering all the detail of abusing the sympathetic nervous system, I made with the charm in the daylight and was more of a dear than most.

It was to be a little different this morning, however. As I said, I turned over in my bed, and looked at the girl propped on her elbow beside me. In her eyes there was a flat hatred which gave no ground—she must have been staring like this at my back for several minutes, and when I turned, it made no difference—she continued to examine my face with no embarrassment and no delight.

That was sufficient to roll me around again, my shoulder blades bare to her inspection, and I pretended that the opening of my eyes had been a false awakening. I felt deadened then with all the diseases of the dull—making love to her the night before had been a little too much of a marathon. She was a Jewish girl and she was in her third year at New York University, one of those harsh alloys of a self-made bohemian from a middle-class home (her father was a hardware wholesaler), and I was remembering how her voice had irritated me each time I had seen her, an ugly New York accent with a cultured overlay. Since she was still far from formed, there had been all sorts of Lesbian hysterics in her shrieking laugh and they warred with that excess of strength, complacency and deprecation which I found in many Jewish women—a sort of “Ech” of disgust at the romantic and mysterious All. This one was medium

in size and she had dark long hair which she wore like a Village witch in two extended braids which came down over her flat breasts, and she had a long thin nose, dark eyes, and a kind of lean force, her arms and square shoulders had shown the flat thin muscles of a wiry boy. All the same, she was not bad, she had a kind of Village chic, a certain snotty elegance of superiority, and when I first came to New York I had dug girls like her—Jewesses were strange to me—and I had even gone with one for a few months. But this new chick had been a mistake—I had met her two weeks ago at a party, she was on leave from her boy friend, and we had had an argument about T. S. Eliot, a routine which for me had become the quintessence of corn, but she said that Eliot was the apotheosis of manner, he embodied the ecclesiasticism of classical and now futureless form, she adored him she said, and I was tempted to tell her how little Eliot would adore the mannerless yeasts of the Brooklyn from which she came, and how he might prefer to allow her to appreciate his poetry only in step to the transmigration of her voice from all urgent Yiddish nasalities to the few high English analities of relinquished desire. No, she would not make that other world so fast—nice society was not cutting her crumpets thus quickly because she was gone on Thomas Stearns Eeeee. Her college-girl snobbery, the pith for me of eighty-five other honey-pots of the Village aesthetic whose smell I knew all too well, so inflamed the avenger of my crotch, that I wanted to prong her then and there, right on the floor of the party, I was a primitive for a prime minute, a gorged gouge of a working-class phallus, eager to ram into all her nasty little tensions. I had the message again, I was one of the millions on the bottom who had the muscles to move the sex which kept the world alive, and I would grind it into her, the healthy hearty inches and the sweat of the cost of acquired culture when you started low and you wanted to go high. She was a woman, what! she sensed that moment, she didn't know if she could handle me, and she had the guts to decide to find out. So we left the party and we drank and (leave it to a Jewish girl to hedge the bet) she drained the best half of my desire in conversation because she was being psychoanalyzed, what a predictable piss! and she was in that stage where the jargon had the totalitarian force of all vocabularies of mechanism, and she could only speak of her infantile relations to men, and the fixations and resistances of unassimilated penis-envy with all the smug gusto of a female com-

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missar. She was enthusiastic about her analyst, he was also Jewish (they were working now on Jewish self-hatred), he was really an integrated guy, Stanford Joyce, he belonged on the same mountain as Eliot, she loved the doers and the healers of life who built on the foundationless prevalence of the void those islands of proud endeavor.

"You must get good marks in school," I said to her.

"Of course."

How I envied the jazzed-up brain of the Jews. I was hot for her again, I wanted the salts of her perspiration in my mouth. They would be acrid perhaps, but I would digest them, and those intellectual molecules would rise to my brain.

"I know a girl who went to your bullfighting school," she said to me. She gave her harsh laugh. "My friend thought you were afraid of her. She said you were full of narcissistic anxieties."

"Well, we'll find out," I said.

"Oh, you don't want me. I'm very inadequate as a lover."

Her dark hard New York eyes, bright with appetite, considered my head as if I were a delicious and particularly sour pickle.

I paid the check then, and we walked over to my loft. As I had expected, she made no great fuss over the back-and-forth of being seduced—to the contrary. Once we were upstairs, she prowled the length of my loft twice, looked at the hand-made bullfighting equipment I had set up along one wall of the studio, asked me a question or two about the killing machine, studied the swords, asked another question about the cross-guard on the descabellar, and then came back to the living-room-bedroom-dining-room-kitchen of the other room, and made a face at the blood-red wall. When I kissed her she answered with a grinding insistence of her mouth upon mine, and a muscular thrust of her tongue into my throat, as direct and unfeminine as the harsh force of her voice.

"I'd like to hang my clothes up," she said.

It was not all that matter-of-fact when we got to bed. There was nothing very fleshy about the way she made love, no sense of the skin, nor smell, nor touch, just anger, anger at her being there, and another anger which was good for my own, that rage to achieve . . . just what, one cannot say. She made love as if she were running up an inclined wall so steep that to stop for an instant would slide her back to disaster. She hammered her rhythm at me, a hard driving rhythm, an all but monotonous drum, pound into pound against pound into pound until that moment when my anger found

its way back again to that delayed and now recovered Time when I wanted to prong her at the party. I had been frustrated, had waited, had lost the anger, and so been taken by her. That finally got me—all through the talk about T. S. Eliot I had been calculating how I would lay waste to her little independence, and now she was alone, with me astride her, going through her paces, teeth biting the pillow, head turned away, using me as the dildo of a private gallop. So my rage came back, and my rhythm no longer depended upon her drive, but found its own life, and we made love like two club fighters in an open exchange, neither giving ground, rhythm to rhythm, even to even, hypnotic, knowing neither the pain of punishment nor the pride of pleasure, and the equality of this, as hollow as the beat of the drum, seemed to carry her into some better deep of desire, and I had broken through, she was following me, her muscular body writhed all about me with an impersonal abandon, the wanton whip-thrash of a wounded snake, she was on fire and frozen at the same time, and then her mouth was kissing me with a rubbery greedy compulsion so avid to use all there was of me, that to my distant surprise, not in character for the saint to slip into the brutal, my hand came up and clipped her mean and openhanded across the face which brought a cry from her and broke the piston of her hard speed into something softer, wetter, more sly, more warm, I felt as if her belly were opening finally to receive me, and when her mouth kissed me again with a passing tender heat, warm-odored with flesh, and her body sweetened into some feminine embrace of my determination driving its way into her, well, I was gone, it was too late, I had driven right past her in that moment she turned, and I had begun to come, I was coming from all the confluences of my body toward that bud of sweetness I had plucked from her, and for a moment she was making it, she was a move back and surging to overtake me, and then it was gone, she made a mistake, her will ordered all temptings and rhythms to mobilize their march, she drove into the hard stupidities of a marching-band's step, and as I was going off in the best for many a month, she was merely going away, she had lost it again. As I ebbed into what should have been the contentments of a fine after-pleasure, warm and fine, there was one little part of me remaining cold and murderous because she had deprived me, she had fled the domination which was liberty for her, and the rest of the night was bound to be hell.

Her face was ugly. "You're a bastard, do you know that?" she asked of me.

"Let it go. I feel good."

"Of course you feel good. Couldn't you have waited one minute?"

I disliked this kind of thing. My duty was reminding me of how her awakened sweets were souring now in the belly, and her nerves were sharpening into the gone electric of being just nowhere.

"I hate inept men," she said.

"Cool it." She could, at least, be a lady. Because if she didn't stop, I would give her back a word or two.

"You did that on purpose," she nagged at me, and I was struck with the intimacy of her rancor—we might as well have been married for ten years to dislike each other so much at this moment.

"Why," I said, "you talk as if this were something unusual for you."

"It is."

"Come on," I told her, "you never made it in your life."

"How little you know," she said. "This is the first time I've missed in months."

If she had chosen to get my message, I could have been preparing now for a good sleep. Instead I would have to pump myself up again—and as if some ghost of the future laid the squeak of a tickle on my back, I felt an odd dread, not for tonight so much as for some ills of the next ten years whose first life was stirring tonight. But I lay beside her, drew her body against mine, feeling her trapped and irritable heats jangle me as much as they roused me, and while I had no fear that the avenger would remain asleep, still he stirred in pain and in protest, he had supposed his work to be done, and he would claim the wages of overtime from my reserve. That was the way I thought it would go, but Junior from New York University, with her hard body and her passion for proper poetry, gave a lewd angry old grin as her face stared boldly into mine, and with the practical bawdiness of the Jew she took one straight utilitarian finger, smiled a deceptive girlish pride, and then she jabbed, fingernail and all, into the tight defended core of my clenched buttocks. One wiggle of her knuckle and I threw her off, grunting a sound between rage and surprise, to which she laughed and lay back and waited for me.

Well, she had been right, that finger tipped the balance, and

three-quarters with it, and one-quarter hung with the mysteries of sexual ambition, I worked on her like a beaver for forty-odd minutes or more, slapping my tail to build her nest, and she worked along while we made the round of the positions, her breath sobbing the exertions, her body as alive as a charged wire and as far from rest.

I gave her all the Time I had in me and more besides, I was weary of her, and the smell which rose from her had so little of the sea and so much of the armpit, that I breathed the stubborn wills of the gymnasium where the tight-muscled search for grace, and it was like that, a hard punishing session with pulley weights, stationary bicycle sprints, and ten breath-seared laps around the track. Yes, when I caught that smell, I knew she would not make it, and so I kept on just long enough to know she was exhausted in body, exhausted beyond the place where a ten-minute rest would have her jabbing that finger into me again, and hating her, hating women who could not take their exercise alone, I lunged up over the hill with my heart pounding past all pleasure, and I came, but with hatred, tight, electric, and empty, the spasms powerful but centered in my heart and not from the hip, the avenger taking its punishment even at the end, jolted clear to the seat of my semen by the succession of rhythmic blows which my heart drummed back to my feet.

For her, getting it from me, it must have been impressive, a convoluted, smashing, and protracted spasm, a hint of the death throe in the animal male which cannot but please the feminine taste for the mortal wound. "Oh, you're lucky," she whispered in my ear as I lay all collapsed beside her, alone in my athlete's absorption upon the whisperings of damage in the unlit complexities of my inner body. I was indeed an athlete, I knew my body was my future, and I had damaged it a bit tonight by most certainly doing it no good. I disliked her for it with the simple dislike we know for the stupid.

"Want a cigarette?" she asked.

I could wait, my heart would have preferred its rest, but there was something tired in her voice beyond the fatigue of what she had done. She too had lost after all. So I came out of my second rest to look at her, and her face had the sad relaxation (and serenity) of a young whore who has finished a hard night's work with the expected lack of issue for herself, content with no more than the money and the professional sense of the hard job dutifully done.

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"I'm sorry you didn't make it," I said to her.

She shrugged. There was a Jewish tolerance for the expected failures of the flesh. "Oh, well, I lied to you before," she said.

"You never have been able to, have you?"

"No." She was fingering the muscles of my shoulder, as if in unconscious competition with my strength. "You're pretty good," she said grudgingly.

"Not really inept?" I asked.

"*Sans façons*," said the poetess in an arch change of mood which irritated me. "Sandy has been illuminating those areas where my habits make for destructive impulses."

"Sandy is Doctor Joyce?" She nodded. "You make him sound like your navigator," I told her.

"Isn't it a little obvious to be hostile to psychoanalysis?"

Three minutes ago we had been belaboring each other in the nightmare of the last round, and now we were close to cozy. I put the sole of my foot on her sharp little knee.

"You know the first one we had?" she asked of me. "Well, I wanted to tell you. I came close—I guess I came as close as I ever came."

"You'll come closer. You're only nineteen."

"Yes, but this evening has been disturbing to me. You see I get more from you than I get from my lover."

Her lover was twenty-one, a senior at Columbia, also Jewish—which lessened interest, she confessed readily. Besides, Arthur was too passive—"Basically, it's very comprehensible," said the commissar, "an aggressive female and a passive male—we complement one another, and that's no good." Of course it was easy to find satisfaction with Arthur, "via the oral perversions. That's because, vaginally, I'm anaesthetized—a good phallic narcissist like you doesn't do enough for me."

In the absence of learned credentials, she was setting out to bully again. So I thought to surprise her. "Aren't you mixing your language a little?" I began. "The phallis narcissist is one of Wilhelm Reich's categories."

"Therefore?"

"Aren't you a Freudian?"

"It would be presumptuous of me to say," she said like a seminar student working for his pee-aitch-dee. "But Sandy is an eclectic. He accepts a lot of Reich—you see, he's very ambitious,

he wants to arrive at his own synthesis." She exhaled some smoke in my face, and gave a nice tough little grin which turned her long serious young witch's face into something indeed less presumptuous. "Besides," she said, "you are a phallic narcissist. There's an element of the sensual which is lacking in you."

"But Arthur possesses it?"

"Yes, he does. And you . . . you're not very juicy."

"I wouldn't know what you mean."

"I mean this." With the rich cruel look of a conquistador finding a new chest of Indian gold, she bent her head and gave one fleeting satiric half-moon of a lick to the conjugation of my balls. "That's what I mean," she said, and was out of bed even as I was recognizing that she was finally not without art. "Come back," I said.

But she was putting her clothes on in a hurry. "Shut up. Just don't give me your goddammed superiority."

I knew what it was: she had been about to gamble the reserves which belonged to Arthur, and the thought of possibly wasting them on a twenty-seven-year-old connoisseur like myself was too infuriating to take the risk.

So I lay in bed and laughed at her while she dressed—I did not really want a go at things again—and besides, the more I laughed, the angrier she would be, but the anger would work to the surface, and beneath it would be resting the pain that the evening had ended on so little.

She took her leisure going to the door, and I got up in time to tell her to wait—I would walk her to the subway. The dawn had come, however, and she wanted to go alone, she had had a bellyful of me, she could tell me that.

My brain was lusting its own private futures of how interesting it would be to have this proud, aggressive, vulgar, tense, stiff and arrogant Jewess going wild on my bottom—I had turned more than one girl on, but never a one of quite this type. I suppose she had succeeded instead of me; I was ready to see her again and improve the message.

She turned down all dates, but compromised by giving me her address and the number of her telephone. And then glaring at me from the open door, she said, "I owe you a slap in the face."

"Don't go away feeling unequal."

I might have known she would have a natural punch. My

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jaw felt it for half an hour after she was gone and it took another thirty minutes before I could bring myself back to concluding that she was one funny kid.

All of that added up to the first night with the commissar, and I saw her two more times over this stretch, the last on the night when she finally agreed to sleep over with me, and I came awake in the morning to see her glaring at my head. So often in sex, when the second night wound itself up with nothing better in view than the memory of the first night, I was reminded of Kafka's *Castle*, that tale of the search of a man for his apocalyptic orgasm: in the easy optimism of a young man, he almost captures the castle on the first day, and is never to come so close again. Yes, that was the saga of the nervous system of a man as it was bogged into the defeats, complications, and frustrations of middle age. I still had my future before me of course—the full engagement of my will in some go-for-broke I considered worthy of myself was yet to come, but there were times in that loft when I knew the psychology of an old man, and my second night with Denise—for Denise Gondelman was indeed her name—left me racked for it amounted to so little that we could not even leave it there—the hangover would have been too great for both of us—and so we made a date for a third night. Over and over in those days I used to compare the bed to the bullfight, sometimes seeing myself as the matador and sometimes as the bull, and this second appearance, if it had taken place, in the Plaza Mexico, would have been a *fracaso* with kapok seat cushions jeering down on the ring, and a stubborn cowardly bull staying in *querencia* before the doubtful prissy overtures, the gloomy trim technique of a veteran and mediocre *torero* on the worst of days when he is forced to wonder if he has even his *pundonor* to sustain him. It was a gloomy deal. Each of us knew it was possible to be badly worked by the other, and this seemed so likely that neither of us would gamble a finger. Although we got into bed and had a perfunctory ten minutes, it was as long as an hour in a coffee shop when two friends are done with one another.

By the third night we were ready for complexities again; to see a woman three times is to call on the dialectic of an affair. If the waves we were making belonged less to the viper of passion than the worm of inquiry, still it was obvious from the beginning that we had surprises for one another. The second night we had been

hoping for more, and so got less; this third night, we each came on with the notion to wind it up, and so got involved in more.

For one thing, Denise called me in the afternoon. There was studying she had to do, and she wondered if it would be all right to come to my place at eleven instead of meeting me for drinks and dinner. Since that would save me ten dollars she saw no reason why I should complain. It was a down conversation. I had been planning to lay siege to her, dispense a bit of elixir from my vast reservoirs of charm, and instead she was going to keep it *in camera*. There was a quality about her I could not locate, something independent—abruptly, right there, I knew what it was. In a year she would have no memory of me, I would not exist for her unless . . . and then it was clear . . . unless I could be the first to carry her stone of no-orgasm up the cliff, all the way, over and out into the sea. That was the kick I could find, that a year from now, five years from now, down all the seasons to the hours of her old age, I would be the one she would be forced to remember, and it would nourish me a little over the years, thinking of that grudging souvenir which could not die in her, my blond hair, my blue eyes, my small broken nose, my clean mouth and chin, my height, my boxer's body, my parts—yes, I was getting excited at the naked image of me in the young-old mind of that sour sexed-up dynamo of black-pussied frustration.

A phallic narcissist she had called me. Well, I was phallic enough, a Village stickman who could muster enough of the divine It on the head of his will to call forth more than one becoming out of the womb of feminine Time, yes a good deal more than one from my fifty new girls a year, and when I failed before various prisons of frigidity, it mattered little. Experience gave the cue that there were ladies who would not be moved an inch by a year of the best, and so I looked for other things in them, but this one, this Den-of-Ease, she was ready, she was entering the time of her Time, and if not me, it would be another—I was sick in advance at the picture of some bearded Negro cat who would score where I had missed and thus cuckold me in spirit, deprive me of those telepathic waves of longing (in which I obviously believed) speeding away to me from her over the years to balm the hours when I was beat, because I had been her psychic bridegroom, had plucked her ideational diddle, had led her down the walk of her real wedding night. Since she did not like me, what a feat to pull it off.

In the hours I waited after dinner, alone, I had the sense—which I always trusted—that tonight this little victory or defeat would be full of leverage, magnified beyond its emotional matter because I had decided to bet on myself that I would win, and a defeat would bring me closer to a general depression, a fog bank of dissatisfaction with myself which I knew could last for months or more. Whereas a victory would add to the panoplies of my ego some peculiar (but for me, valid) ingestion of her arrogance, her stubbornness, and her will—those necessary ingredients of which I could not yet have enough for my own ambition.

When she came in she was wearing a sweater and dungarees which I had been expecting, but there was a surprise for me. Her braids had been clipped, and a short cropped curled Italian haircut decorated her head, moving her severe young face half across the spectrum from the austerities of a poetess to a hint of all those practical and promiscuous European girls who sold their holy hump to the Germans and had been subsequently punished by shaved heads—how attractive the new hair proved; once punished, they were now free, free to be wild, the worst had happened and they were still alive with the taste of the first victor's flesh enriching the sensual curl of the mouth.

Did I like her this way? Denise was interested to know. Well, it was a shock, I admitted, a pleasant shock. If it takes you so long to decide, you must be rigid, she let me know. Well, yes, as a matter of fact I was rigid, rigid for her with waiting.

The nun of severity passed a shade over her. She hated men who were uncool, she thought she would tell me.

"Did your analyst tell you it's bad to be uncool?"

She had taken off her coat, but now she gave me a look as if she were ready to put it on again. "No, he did not tell me that." She laughed spitefully. "But he told me a couple of revealing things about you."

"Which you won't repeat."

"Of course not."

"I'll never know," I said, and gave her the first kiss of the evening. Her mouth was heated—it was the best kiss I had received from her, and it brought me on too quickly—"My fruit is ready to be plucked," said the odors of her mouth, betraying that perfume of the ducts which, against her will no doubt, had been plumping for me. She was changed tonight. From the skin of her face and the

glen of her neck came a new smell, sweet, sweaty, and tender, the smell of a body which had been used and had enjoyed its uses. It came to me nicely, one of the nicest smells in quite some time, so different from the usual exudations of her dissatisfied salts that it opened a chain of reflexes in me, and I was off in all good speed on what Denise would probably have called the vertical foreplay. I suppose I went at her like a necrophiliac let loose upon a still-warm subject, and as I gripped her, grasped her, groped her, my breath a bellows to blow her into my own flame, her body remained unmoving, only her mouth answering my call, those lips bridling hot adolescent kisses back upon my face, the smell almost carrying me away—such a fine sweet sweat.

Naturally she clipped the rhythm. As I started to slip up her sweater, she got away and said a little huskily, "I'll take my own clothes off." Once again I could have hit her. My third eye, that athlete's inner eye which probed its vision into all the corners, happy and distressed of my body whole, was glumly cautioning the congestion of the spirits in the coils of each teste. They would have to wait, turn rancid, maybe die of delay.

Off came the sweater and the needless brassière, her economical breasts swelled just a trifle tonight, enough to take on the convexities of an Amazon's armor. Open came the belt and the zipper of her dungarees, zipped from the front which pleased her not a little. Only her ass, a small masterpiece, and her strong thighs, justified this theatre. She stood there naked, quite psychically clothed, and lit a cigarette.

If a stiff prick has no conscience, it has also no common sense. I stood there like a clown, trying to coax her to take a ride with me on the bawdy car, she out of her clothes, I in all of mine, a muscular little mermaid to melt on my knee. She laughed, one harsh banker's snort—she was giving no loans on my idiot's collateral.

"You didn't even ask me," Denise thought to say, "of how my studying went tonight."

"What did you study?"

"I didn't. I didn't study." She gave me a lovely smile, girlish and bright. "I just spent the last three hours with Arthur."

"You're a dainty type," I told her.

But she gave me a bad moment. That lovely flesh-spent smell, scent of the well used and the tender, that avatar of the feminine

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my senses had accepted so greedily, came down now to no more than the rubbings and the sweats of what was probably a very nice guy, passive Arthur with his Jewish bonanzas of mouth-love.

The worst of it was that it quickened me more. I had the selfish wisdom to throw such evidence upon the mercy of my own court. For the smell of Arthur was the smell of love, at least for me, and so from man or woman, it did not matter—the smell of love was always feminine—and if the man in Denise was melted by the woman in Arthur, so Arthur might have flowered that woman in himself from the arts of a real woman, his mother?—it did not matter—that voiceless message which passed from the sword of the man into the cavern of the woman was carried along from body to body, and if it was not the woman in Denise I was going to find tonight, at least I would be warmed by the previous trace of another.

But that was a tone poem to quiet the toads of my doubt. When Denise—it took five more minutes—finally decided to expose herself on my clumped old mattress, the sight of her black pubic hair, the feel of the foreign but brotherly liquids in her unembarrassed maw, turned me into a jackrabbit of pissy tumescence, the quicks of my excitement beheaded from the resonances of my body, and I wasn't with her a half-minute before I was over, gone, and off. I rode not with the strength to reap the harem of her and her lover, but spit like a pinched little boy up into black forested hills of motherly contempt, a passing picture of the nuns of my childhood to drench my piddle spurtings with failures of gloom. She it was who proved stronger than me, she the he to my silly she.

All considered, Denise was nice about it. Her harsh laugh did not crackle over my head, her hand in passing me the after-cigarette settled for no more than a nudge of my nose, and if it were not for the contempt of her tough grin, I would have been left with no more than the alarm to the sweepers of my brain to sweep this failure away.

"Hasn't happened in years," I said to her, the confession coming out of me with the cost of the hardest cash.

"Oh, shut up. Just rest." And she began to hum a mocking little song. I lay there in a state, parts of me jangled for forty-eight hours to come, and yet not altogether lost to peace. I knew what it was. Years ago in the air force, as an enlisted man, I had reached the light-heavyweight finals on my air base. For two weeks I

trained for the championship, afraid of the other man all the way because I had seen him fight and felt he was better than me; when my night came, he took me out with a left hook to the liver which had me conscious on the canvas but unable to move, and as the referee was counting, which I could hear all too clearly, I knew the same kind of peace, a swooning peace, a clue to that kind of death in which an old man slips away—nothing mattered except that my flesh was vulnerable and I had a dim revery, lying there with the yells of the air force crowd in my ears, there was some far-off vision of green fields and me lying in them, giving up all ambition to go back instead to another, younger life of the senses, and I remember at that moment I watered the cup of my boxer's jock, and then I must have slipped into something new, for as they picked me off the canvas the floor seemed to recede from me at a great rate as if I were climbing in an airplane.

A few minutes later, the nauseas of the blow to my liver had me retching into my hands, and the tension of three weeks of preparation for that fight came back. I knew through the fading vistas of my peace, and the oncoming spasms of my nausea, that the worst was yet to come, and it would take me weeks to unwind, and then years, and maybe never to overcome the knowledge that I had failed completely at a moment when I wanted very much to win.

A ghost of this peace, trailing intimations of a new nausea, was passing over me again, and I sat up in bed abruptly, as if to drive these weaknesses back into me. My groin had been simmering for hours waiting for Denise, and it was swollen still, but the avenger was limp, he had deserted my cause, I was in a spot if she did not co-operate.

Co-operate she did. "My God, lie down again, will you," she said, "I was thinking that finally I had seen you relax."

And then I could sense that the woman in her was about to betray her victory. She sat over me, her little breasts budding with their own desire, her short hair alive and flowering, her mouth ready to taste her gentleman's defeat. I had only to raise my hand, and push her body in the direction she wished it to go, and then her face was rooting in me, her angry tongue and voracious mouth going wild finally as I had wished it, and I knew the sadness of sour timing, because this was a prize I could not enjoy as I would have on first night, and yet it was good enough—not art, not the tease and languor of love on a soft mouth, but therapy, therapy for her, the

quick exhaustions of the tension in a harsh throat, the beseechment of an ugly voice going down into the expiation which would be its beauty. Still it was good, practically it was good, my ego could bank the hard cash that this snotty head was searching me, the act served its purpose, anger traveled from her body into mine, the avenger came to attention, cold and furious, indifferent to the trapped doomed pleasure left behind in my body on that initial and grim piddle spurt, and I was ready, not with any joy nor softness nor warmth nor care, but I was ready finally to take her tonight, I was going to beat new Time out of her if beat her I must, I was going to teach her that she was only a child, because if at last I could not take care of a nineteen-year-old, then I was gone indeed. And so I took her with a cold calculation, the rhythms of my body corresponding to no more than a metronome in my mind, tonight the driving mechanical beat would come from me, and blind to nerve-raddlings in my body, and blood pressures in my brain, I worked on her like a riveter, knowing her resistances were made of steel, I threw her a fuck the equivalent of a fifteen-round fight, I wearied her, I brought her back, I drove my fingers into her shoulders and my knees into her hips. I went, and I went, and I went, I bore her high and thumped her hard, I sprinted, I paced, I lay low, eyes all closed, under sexual water, like a submarine listening for the distant sound of her ship's motors, hoping to steal up close and trick her rhythms away.

And she was close. Oh, she was close so much of the time. Like a child on a merry-go-round the touch of the colored ring just evaded the tips of her touch, and she heaved and she hurdled, arched and cried, clawed me, kissed me, even gave of a shriek once, and then her sweats running down and her will weak, exhausted even more than me, she felt me leave and lie beside her. Yes, I did that with a tactician's cunning, I let the depression of her failure poison what was left of her will never to let me succeed, I gave her slack to mourn the lost freedoms and hate the final virginity for which she fought, I even allowed her baffled heat to take its rest and attack her nerves once more, and then, just as she was beginning to fret against me in a new and unwilling appeal, I turned her over suddenly on her belly, my avenger wild with the mania of the madman, and giving her no chance, holding her prone against the mattress with the strength of my weight, I drove into the seat of all stubbornness, tight as a vise, and I wounded her, I knew it, she thrashed beneath me like a trapped little animal, making not a sound,

but fierce not to allow me this last of the liberties, and yet caught, forced to give up millimeter by millimeter the bridal ground of her symbolic and therefore real vagina. So I made it, I made it all the way—it took ten minutes and maybe more, but as the avenger rode down to his hilt and tunneled the threshold of sexual home all those inches closer into the bypass of the womb, she gave at last a little cry of farewell, and I could feel a new shudder which began as a ripple and rolled into a wave, and then it rolled over her, carrying her along, me hardly moving for fear of damping this quake from her earth, and then it was gone, but she was left alive with a larger one to follow.

So I turned her once again on her back, and moved by impulse to love's first hole. There was an odor coming up, hers at last, the smell of the sea, and none of the armpit or a dirty sock, and I took her mouth and kissed it, but she was away, following the wake of her own waves which mounted, fell back, and in new momentum mounted higher and should have gone over, and then she was about to hang again, I could feel it, that moment of hesitation between the past and the present, the habit and the adventure, and I said into her ear, "You dirty little Jew."

That whipped her over. A first wave kissed, a second spilled, and a third and a fourth and a fifth came breaking over, and finally she was away, she was loose in the water for the first time in her life, and I would have liked to go with her, but I was blood-throttled and numb, and as she had the first big moment in her life, I was nothing but a set of aching balls and a congested cock, and I rode with her wistfully, looking at the contortion of her face and listening to her sobbing sound of "Oh, Jesus, I made it, oh Jesus, I did."

"Compliments of T. S. Eliot," I whispered to myself, and my head was aching, my body was shot. She curled against me, she kissed my sweat, she nuzzled my eyes and murmured in my ear, and then she was slipping away into the nicest of weary sweet sleep.

"Was it good for you too?" she whispered half-awake, having likewise read the works of The Hemingway, and I said, "Yeah, fine," and after she was asleep, I disengaged myself carefully, and prowled the loft, accepting the hours it would take for my roiled sack to clean its fatigues and know a little sleep. But I had abused myself too far, and it took till dawn and half a fifth of whisky before I dropped into an unblessed stupor. When I awoke, in that moment before I moved to look at her, and saw her glaring at me,

I was off on a sluggish masculine debate as to whether the kick of studying this Denise for another few nights—now that I had turned the key—would be worth the danger of deepening into some small real feeling. But through my hangover and the knowledge of the day and the week and the month it would take the different parts of all of me to repair, I was also knowing the taste of a reinforced will—finally, I had won. At no matter what cost, and with what luck, and with a piece of charity from her, I had won nonetheless, and since all real pay came from victory, it was more likely that I would win the next time I gambled my stake on something more appropriate for my ambition.

Then I turned, saw the hatred in her eyes, turned over again, and made believe I was asleep while a dread of the next few minutes weighed a leaden breath over the new skin of my ego.

"You're awake, aren't you?" she said.

I made no answer.

"All right, I'm going then. I'm getting dressed." She whipped out of bed, grabbed her clothes, and began to put them on with all the fury of waiting for me to get the pronouncement. "That was a lousy thing you did last night," she said by way of a start.

In truth she looked better than she ever had. The severe lady and the tough little girl of yesterday's face had put forth the first agreements on what would yet be a bold chick.

"I gave you what you could use," I made the mistake of saying.

"Just didn't you," she said, and was on her way to the door. "Well, cool it. You don't do anything to me." Then she smiled. "You're so impressed with what you think was such a marvelous notch you made in me, listen, Buster, I came here last night thinking of what Sandy Joyce told me about you, and he's right, oh man is he right." Standing in the open doorway, she started to light a cigarette, and then threw the matches to the floor. From thirty feet away I could see the look in her eyes, that unmistakable point for the kill that you find in the eyes of very few bullfighters, and then having created her pause, she came on for her moment of truth by saying, "He told me your whole life is a lie, and you do nothing but run away from the homosexual that is you."

And like a real killer, she did not look back, and was out the door before I could rise to tell her that she was a hero fit for me.

(END)

1958

Summer 1960

CONVENTION TIME

~~Summer 60~~

July, 1960

480 (27-57)
Superman Comes to the

The Existential Hero

were uncharted. Regardless of his politics, and even then one could expect his politics would be as conventional as his personality was unconventional, indeed one could expect his politics to be pushed toward conventionality precisely to counteract his essential unconventionality, one knew nonetheless that regardless of his overt politics, America's tortured psychotic search for security would finally be torn loose from the feverish ghosts of its old generals, its Mac-Arthurs and Eisenhowers—ghosts which Nixon could cling to—and we as a nation would finally be loose again in the historic seas of a national psyche which was willy-nilly and at last, again, adventurous. And then, I thought, that was the hope for America. So I swallowed my doubts, my disquiets, and my certain distastes for Kennedy's dullness of mind and prefabricated politics, and did my best to write a piece which would help him to get elected.

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Superman
the shot.

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For once let us try to think about a political convention without losing ourselves in housing projects of fact and issue. Politics has its virtues, all too many of them—it would not rank with baseball as a topic of conversation if it did not satisfy a great many things—but one can suspect that its secret appeal is close to nicotine. Smoking cigarettes insulates one from one's life, one does not feel as much, often happily so, and politics quarantines one from history; most of the people who nourish themselves in the political life are in the game not to make history but to be diverted from the history which is being made.

If that Democratic Convention which has now receded behind the brow of the Summer of 1960 is only half-remembered in the excitements of moving toward the election, it may be exactly the time to consider it again, because the mountain of facts which concealed its features last July has been blown away in the winds of High Television, and the man-in-the-street (that peculiar political term which refers to the quixotic voter who will pull the lever for some reason so salient as: "I had a brown-nose lieutenant once with Nixon's looks," or "that Kennedy must have false teeth"), the not so easily estimated man-in-the-street has forgotten most of what happened and could no more tell you who Kennedy was fighting against than you or I could place a bet on who was leading the American League in batting during the month of June.

So to try to talk about what happened is easier now than in the days of the convention, one does not have to put everything in—an act of writing which calls for a bulldozer rather than a pen—one can try to make one's little point and dress it with a ribbon or two of metaphor. All to the good. Because mysteries are irritated by facts, and the 1960 Democratic Convention began as one mystery and ended as another.

Since mystery is an emotion which is repugnant to a political animal (why else lead a life of bad banquet dinners, cigar smoke, camp chairs, foul breath, and excruciatingly dull jargon if not to avoid the echoes of what is not known), the psychic separation between what was happening on the floor, in the caucus rooms, in the headquarters, and what was happening in parallel to the history of the nation was mystery enough to drown the proceedings in gloom. It was on the one hand a dull convention, one of the less interesting by general agreement, relieved by local bits of color, given two half hours of excitement by two demonstrations for Stevenson, buoyed up by the class of the Kennedy machine, turned by the surprise of Johnson's nomination as vice-president, but, all the same, dull, depressed in its over-all tone, the big fiestas subdued, the gossip flat, no real air of excitement, just moments—or as they say in bullfighting—details. Yet it was also, one could argue—and one may argue this yet—it was also one of the most important conventions in America's history, it could prove conceivably to be the most important. The man it nominated was unlike any politician who had ever run for President in the history of the land, and if elected he would come to power in a year when America was in danger of drifting into a profound decline.

*A Descriptive of the Delegates: Sons and Daughters
of the Republic in a Legitimate Panic;
Small-time Practitioners of Small-town Political
Judo in the Big Town and the Big Time*

Depression obviously has its several roots: it is the doubtful protection which comes from not recognizing failure, it is the psychic burden of exhaustion, and it is also, and very often, that discipline of the will or the ego which enables one to continue working when one's unadmitted emotion is

panic. And panic it was I think which sat as the largest single sentiment in the breast of the collective delegates as they came to convene in Los Angeles. Delegates are not the noblest sons and daughters of the Republic; a man of taste, arrived from Mars, would take one look at a convention floor and leave forever, convinced he had seen one of the drearier squats of Hell. If one still smells the faint living echo of a carnival wine, the pepper of a bullfight, the rag, drag, and panoply of a jousting tourney, it is all swallowed and regurgitated by the senses into the fouler cud of a death gas one must rid oneself of—a cigar-smoking, stale-aired, slack-jawed, butt-littered, foul, bleak, hard-working, bureaucratic death gas of language and faces ("Yes, those faces," says the man from Mars: lawyers, judges, ward heelers, *mafiosos*, Southern goons and grandees, grand old ladies, trade unionists and finks), of pompous words and long pauses which lay like a leaden pain over fever, the fever that one is in, over, or is it that one is just behind history? A legitimate panic for a delegate. America is a nation of experts without roots; we are always creating tacticians who are blind to strategy and strategists who cannot take a step, and when the culture has finished its work the institutions handcuff the infirmity. A delegate is a man who picks a candidate for the largest office in the land, a President who must live with problems whose borders are in ethics, metaphysics, and now ontology; the delegate is prepared for this office of selection by emptying wastebaskets, toting garbage and saying yes at the right time for twenty years in the small political machine of some small or large town; his reward, one of them anyway, is that he arrives at an invitation to the convention. An expert on local catch-as-catch-can, a small-time, often mediocre practitioner of small-town political judo, he comes to the big city with nine-tenths of his mind made up, he will follow the orders of the boss who brought him. Yet of course it is not altogether so mean as that: his opinion is listened to—the boss will consider what he has to say as one interesting factor among five hundred, and what is most important to the delegate, he has the illusion of partial freedom. He can, unless he is severely honest with himself—and if he is, why sweat out the low levels of a political machine?—he can have the illusion that he has helped to choose the candidate, he can even worry most sincerely about his choice, flirt with defection from the boss, work out his own small political gains by the road of loy-

alty or the way of hard bargain. But even if he is there for no more than the ride, his vote a certainty in the mind of the political boss, able to be thrown here or switched there as the boss decides, still in some peculiar sense he is reality to the boss, the delegate is the great American public, the bar he owns or the law practice, the piece of the union he represents, or the real-estate office, is a part of the political landscape which the boss uses as his own image of how the votes will go, and if the people will like the candidate. And if the boss is depressed by what he sees, if the candidate does not feel right to him, if he has a dull intimation that the candidate is not his sort (as, let us say, Harry Truman was his sort, or Symington might be his sort, or Lyndon Johnson), then vote for him the boss will if he must; he cannot be caught on the wrong side, but he does not feel the pleasure of a personal choice. Which is the center of the panic. Because if the boss is depressed, the delegate is doubly depressed, and the emotional fact is that Kennedy is not in focus, not in the old political focus, he is not comfortable; in fact it is a mystery to the boss how Kennedy got to where he is, not a mystery in its structures; Kennedy is rolling in money, Kennedy got the votes in primaries, and, most of all, Kennedy has a jewel of a political machine. It is as good as a crack Notre Dame team, all discipline and savvy and go-go-go, sound, drilled, never dull, quick as a knife, full of the salt of hipper-dipper, a beautiful machine; the boss could adore it if only a sensible candidate were driving it, a Truman, even a Stevenson, please God a Northern Lyndon Johnson, but it is run by a man who looks young enough to be coach of the Freshman team, and that is not comfortable at all. The boss knows political machines, he knows issues, farm parity, Forand health bill, Landrum-Griffin, but this is not all so adequate after all to revolutionaries in Cuba who look like beatniks, competitions in missiles, Negroes looting whites in the Congo, intricacies of nuclear fallout, and NAACP men one does well to call Sir. It is all out of hand, everything important is off the center, foreign affairs is now the lick of the heat, and senators are candidates instead of governors, a disaster to the old family style of political measure where a political boss knows his governor and knows who his governor knows. So the boss is depressed, profoundly depressed. He comes to this convention resigned to nominating a man he does not understand, or let us say that, so far as he understands the candi-

date who is to be nominated, he is not happy about the secrets of his appeal, not so far as he divines these secrets; they seem to have too little to do with politics and all too much to do with the private madnesses of the nation which had thousands—or was it hundreds of thousands—of people demonstrating in the long night before Chessman was killed, and a movie star, the greatest, Marlon the Brando out in the night with them. Yes, this candidate for all his record, his good, sound, conventional liberal record has a patina of that other life, the second American life, the long electric night with the fires of neon leading down the highway to the murmur of jazz.

*An Apparent Digression: A Vivid View of the
"City of Lost Angels"; The Democrats Defined;
A Pentagon of Traveling Salesmen;
Some Pointed Portraits of the Politicians*

"I was seeing Pershing Square, Los Angeles, now for the first time . . . the nervous fruithustlers darting in and out of the shadows, fugitives from Times Square, Market Street SF, the French Quarter—masculine hustlers looking for lonely fruits to score from, anything from the legendary \$20 to a pad at night and breakfast in the morning and whatever you can clinch or clip; and the heat in their holy cop uniforms, holy because of the Almighty Stick and the Almighty Vagrancy Law; the scattered junkies, the small-time pushers, the queens, the sad panhandlers, the lonely, exiled nymphs haunting the entrance to the men's head, the fruits with the hungry eyes and the jingling coins; the tough teen-age chicks —'dittybops'—making it with the lost hustlers . . . all amid the incongruous piped music and the flowers—twin fountains gushing rainbow colored: the world of Lonely America squeezed into Pershing Square, of the Cities of Terrible Night, downtown now trapped in the City of lost Angels . . . and the trees hang over it all like some type of apathetic fate."

—JOHN RECHY: Big Table 3

Seeing Los Angeles after ten years away, one realizes all over again that America is an unhappy contract between the East (that Faustian thrust of a most determined human will which reaches up and out above the eye into the skyscrapers

of New York) and those flat lands of compromise and mediocre self-expression, those endless half-pretty repetitive small towns of the Middle and the West, whose spirit is forever horizontal and whose marrow comes to rendezvous in the pastel monotonies of Los Angeles architecture.

So far as America has a history, one can see it in the severe heights of New York City, in the glare from the Pittsburgh mills, by the color in the brick of Louisburg Square, along the knotted greedy façades of the small mansions on Chicago's North Side, in Natchez' antebellum homes, the wrought-iron balconies off Bourbon Street, a captain's house in Nantucket, by the curve of Commercial Street in Provincetown. One can make a list; it is probably finite. What culture we have made and what history has collected to it can be found in those few hard examples of an architecture which came to its artistic term, was born, lived and so collected some history about it. Not all the roots of American life are uprooted, but almost all, and the spirit of the supermarket, that homogenous extension of stainless surfaces and psychoanalyzed people, packaged commodities and ranch homes, interchangeable, geographically unrecognizable, that essence of the new postwar SuperAmerica is found nowhere so perfectly as in Los Angeles' ubiquitous acres. One gets the impression that people come to Los Angeles in order to divorce themselves from the past, here to live or try to live in the rootless pleasure world of an adult child. One knows that if the cities of the world were destroyed by a new war, the architecture of the rebuilding would create a landscape which looked, subject to specifications of climate, exactly and entirely like the San Fernando Valley.

It is not that Los Angeles is altogether hideous, it is even by degrees pleasant, but for an Easterner there is never any salt in the wind; it is like Mexican cooking without chile, or Chinese egg rolls missing their mustard; as one travels through the endless repetitions of that city which is the capital of suburbia with its milky pinks, its washed-out oranges, its tainted lime-yellows of pastel on one pretty little architectural monstrosity after another, the colors not intense enough, the styles never pure, and never sufficiently impure to collide on the eye, one conceives the people who live here—they have come out to express themselves, Los Angeles is the home of self-expression, but the artists are middle-class and middling-minded; no passions will calcify

here for years in the gloom to be revealed a decade later as the tessellations of a hard and fertile work, no, it is all open, promiscuous, borrowed, half bought, a city without iron, eschewing wood, a kingdom of stucco, the playground for mass men—one has the feeling it was built by television sets giving orders to men. And in this land of the pretty-pretty, the virility is in the barbarisms, the vulgarities, it is in the huge billboards, the screamers of the neon lighting, the shouting farm-utensil colors of the gas stations and the monster drugstores, it is in the swing of the sports cars, hot rods, convertibles, Los Angeles is a city to drive in, the boulevards are wide, the traffic is nervous and fast, the radio stations play bouncing, blooming, rippling tunes, one digs the pop in a pop tune, no one of character would make love by it but the sound is good for swinging a car, electronic guitars and Hawaiian harps.

So this is the town the Democrats came to, and with their unerring instinct (after being with them a week, one thinks of this party as a crazy, half-rich family, loaded with poor cousins, traveling always in caravans with Cadillacs and Okie Fords, Lincolns and quarter-horse mules, putting up every night in tents to hear the chamber quartet of Great Cousin Eleanor invaded by the Texas-twanging steel-stringing geetarists of Bubber Lyndon, carrying its own mean high-school principal, Doc Symington, chided for its manners by good Uncle Adlai, told the route of march by Navigator Jack, cut off every six months from the rich will of Uncle Jim Farley, never listening to the mechanic of the caravan, Bald Sam Rayburn, who assures them they'll all break down unless Cousin Bubber gets the concession on the garage; it's the Snopes family married to Henry James, with the labor unions thrown in like a Yankee dollar, and yet it's true, in tranquility one recollects them with affection, their instinct is good, crazy family good) and this instinct now led the caravan to pick the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles for their family get-together and reunion.

The Biltmore is one of the ugliest hotels in the world. Patterned after the flat roofs of an Italian Renaissance palace, it is eighty-eight times as large, and one-millionth as valuable to the continuation of man, and it would be intolerable if it were not for the presence of Pershing Square, that square block of park with cactus and palm trees, the three-hundred-and-sixty-five-day-a-year convention of every junkie, pot-head, pusher, queen (but you have read that good

writing already). For years Pershing Square has been one of the three or four places in America famous to homosexuals, famous not for its posh, the chic is round-heeled here, but because it is one of the avatars of the good old masturbatory sex, dirty with the crusted sugars of smut, dirty rooming houses around the corner where the score is made, dirty book and photograph stores down the street, old-fashioned out-of-the-Thirties burlesque houses, cruising bars, jukeboxes, movie houses; Pershing Square is the town plaza for all those lonely, respectable, small-town homosexuals who lead a family life, make children, and have the Philbrick psychology (How I Joined the Communist Party and Led Three Lives). Yes, it is the open-air convention hall for the small-town invert who live like spies, and it sits in the center of Los Angeles, facing the Biltmore, that hotel which is a mausoleum, that Pentagon of traveling salesmen the Party chose to house the headquarters of the Convention.

So here came that family, cursed before it began by the thundering absence of Great-Uncle Truman, the delegates dispersed over a run of thirty miles and twenty-seven hotels: the Olympian Motor Hotel, the Ambassador, the Beverly Wilshire, the Santa Ynez Inn (where rumor has it the delegates from Louisiana had some midnight swim), the Mayan, the Commodore, the Mayfair, the Sheraton-West, the Huntington-Sheraton, the Green, the Hayward, the Gates, the Figueroa, the Statler Hilton, the Hollywood Knickerbocker—does one have to be a collector to list such names?—beauties all, with that up-from-the-farm Los Angeles décor, plate-glass windows, patio and terrace, foam-rubber mattress, pastel paints, all of them pretty as an ad in full-page color, all but the Biltmore where everybody gathered every day—the newsmen, the TV, radio, magazine, and foreign newspapermen, the delegates, the politicians, the tourists, the campaign managers, the runners, the flunkies, the cousins and aunts, the wives, the grandfathers, the eight-year-old girls, and the twenty-eight-year-old girls in the Kennedy costumes, red and white and blue, the Symingtons, the Johnson Ladies, the Stevenson Ladies, everybody—and for three days before the convention and four days into it, everybody collected at the Biltmore, in the lobby, in the grill, in the Biltmore Bowl, in the elevators, along the corridors, three hundred deep always outside the Kennedy suite, milling everywhere, every dark-carpeted grey-brown hall of the hotel, but it was in the Gallery of the Biltmore where one first felt the mood

which pervaded all proceedings until the convention was almost over, that heavy, thick, witless depression which was to dominate every move as the delegates wandered and gawked and paraded and set for a spell, there in the Gallery of the Biltmore, that huge depressing alley with its inimitable hotel color, that faded depth of chiaroscuro which unhappily has no depth, that brown which is not a brown, that grey which has no pearl in it, that color which can be described only as hotel-color because the beiges, the tans, the walnuts, the mahoganies, the dull blood rugs, the moaning yellows, the sick greens, the greys and all those dumb browns merge into that lack of color which is an over-large hotel at convention time, with all the small-townners wearing their set, starched faces, that look they get at carnival, all fever and suspicion, and proud to be there, eddying slowly back and forth in that high block-long tunnel of a room with its arched ceiling and square recesses filling every rib of the arch with art work, escutcheons and blazons and other art, pictures I think, I cannot even remember, there was such a hill of cigar smoke the eye had to travel on its way to the ceiling, and at one end there was galvanized-pipe scaffolding and workmen repairing some part of the ceiling, one of them touching up one of the endless squares of painted plaster in the arch, and another worker, passing by, yelled up to the one who was working on the ceiling: "Hey, Michelangelo!"

Later, of course, it began to emerge and there were portraits one could keep. Symington, dogged at a press conference, declaring with no conviction that he knew he had a good chance to win, the disappointment eating at his good looks so that he came off hard-faced, mean, and yet slack—a desperate dullness came off the best of his intentions. There was Johnson who had compromised too many contradictions and now the contradictions were in his face: when he smiled the corners of his mouth squeezed gloom; when he was pious, his eyes twinkled irony; when he spoke in a righteous tone, he looked corrupt; when he jested, the ham in his jowls looked to quiver. He was not convincing. He was a Southern politician, a Texas Democrat, a liberal Eisenhower; he would do no harm, he would do no good, he would react to the machine, good fellow, nice friend—the Russians would understand him better than his own.

Stevenson had the patina. He came into the room and the room was different, not stronger perhaps (which is why ultimately he did not win), but warmer. One knew why some

adored him; he did not look like other people, not with press lights on his flesh; he looked like a lover, the simple truth, he had the sweet happiness of an adolescent who has just been given his first major kiss. And so he glowed, and one was reminded of Chaplin, not because they were the least alike in features, but because Charlie Chaplin was luminous when one met him and Stevenson had something of that light.

There was Eleanor Roosevelt, fine, precise, hand-worked like ivory. Her voice was almost attractive as she explained in the firm, sad tones of the first lady in this small town why she could not admit Mr. Kennedy, who was no doubt a gentleman, into her political house. One had the impression of a lady who was finally becoming a woman, which is to say that she was just a little bitchy about it all; nice bitchy, charming, it had a touch of art to it, but it made one wonder if she were not now satisfying the last passion of them all, which was to become physically attractive, for she was better-looking than she had ever been as she spurned the possibilities of a young suitor.

Jim Farley. Huge. Cold as a bishop. The hell he would consign you to was cold as ice.

Bobby Kennedy, that archetype Bobby Kennedy, looked like a West Point cadet, or, better, one of those unreconstructed Irishmen from Kirkland House one always used to have to face in the line in Harvard house football games. "Hello," you would say to the ones who looked like him as you lined up for the scrimmage after the kickoff, and his type would nod and look away, one rock glint of recognition your due for living across the hall from one another all through Freshman year, and then bang, as the ball was passed back, you'd get a bony king-hell knee in the crotch. He was the kind of man never to put on the gloves with if you wanted to do some social boxing, because after two minutes it would be a war, and ego-bastards last long in a war.

Carmine DeSapio and Kenneth Galbraith on the same part of the convention floor. DeSapio is bigger than one expects, keen and florid, great big smoked glasses, a suntan like Mantan—he is the kind of heavyweight Italian who could get by with a name like Romeo—and Galbraith is tall-tall, as actors say, six foot six it could be, terribly thin, enormously attentive, exquisitely polite, birdlike, he is sensitive to the stirring of reeds in a wind over the next hill. "Our grey eminence," whispered the intelligent observer next to me.

Bob Wagner, the mayor of New York, a little man, plump, groomed, blank. He had the blank, pomaded, slightly worried look of the first barber in a good barbershop, the kind who would go to the track on his day off and wear a green transparent stone in a gold ring,

And then there was Kennedy, the edge of the mystery. But a sketch will no longer suffice.

Perspective from the Biltmore Balcony: The Colorful Arrival of the Hero with the Orange-brown Suntan and Amazingly White Teeth; Revelation of the Two Rivers Political Theory

"... it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that the essence of his political attractiveness is his extraordinary political intelligence. He has a mind quite unlike that of any other Democrat of this century. It is not literary, metaphysical and moral, as Adlai Stevenson's is. Kennedy is articulate and often witty, but he does not seek verbal polish. No one can doubt the seriousness of his concern with the most serious political matters, but one feels that whereas Mr. Stevenson's political views derive from a view of life that holds politics to be a mere fraction of existence, Senator Kennedy's primary interest is in politics. The easy way in which he disposes of the question of Church and State—as if he felt that any reasonable man could quite easily resolve any possible conflict of loyalties—suggests that the organization of society is the one thing that really engages his interest."

—RICHARD ROVERE: *The New Yorker*, July 23, 1960

The afternoon he arrived at the convention from the airport, there was of course a large crowd on the street outside the Biltmore, and the best way to get a view was to get up on an outdoor balcony of the Biltmore, two flights above the street, and look down on the event. One waited thirty minutes, and then a honking of horns as wild as the getaway after an Italian wedding sounded around the corner, and the Kennedy cortege came into sight, circled Pershing Square, the men in the open and leading convertibles sitting backwards to look at their leader, and finally came to a halt in a space cleared for them by the police in the crowd. The television cameras were out, and a Kennedy band was play-

ing some circus music. One saw him immediately. He had the deep orange-brown suntan of a ski instructor, and when he smiled at the crowd his teeth were amazingly white and clearly visible at a distance of fifty yards. For one moment he saluted Pershing Square, and Pershing Square saluted him back, the prince and the beggars of glamour staring at one another across a city street, one of those very special moments in the underground history of the world, and then with a quick move he was out of the car and by choice headed into the crowd instead of the lane cleared for him into the hotel by the police, so that he made his way inside surrounded by a mob, and one expected at any moment to see him lifted to its shoulders like a matador being carried back to the city after a triumph in the plaza. All the while the band kept playing the campaign tunes, sashaying circus music, and one had a moment of clarity, intense as a *déjà vu*, for the scene which had taken place had been glimpsed before in a dozen musical comedies; it was the scene where the hero, the matinee idol, the movie star comes to the palace to claim the princess, or what is the same, and more to our soil, the football hero, the campus king, arrives at the dean's home surrounded by a court of open-singing students to plead with the dean for his daughter's kiss and permission to put on the big musical that night. And suddenly I saw the convention, it came into focus for me, and I understood the mood of depression which had lain over the convention, because finally it was simple: the Democrats were going to nominate a man who, no matter how serious his political dedication might be, was indisputably and willy-nilly going to be seen as a great box-office actor, and the consequences of that were staggering and not at all easy to calculate.

Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation.

The twentieth century may yet be seen as that era when civilized man and underprivileged man were melted together into mass man, the iron and steel of the nineteenth century giving way to electronic circuits which communicated their messages into men, the unmistakable tendency of the new

century seeming to be the creation of men as interchangeable as commodities, their extremes of personality singed out of existence by the psychic fields of force the communicators would impose. This loss of personality was a catastrophe to the future of the imagination, but billions of people might first benefit from it by having enough to eat—one did not know—and there remained citadels of resistance in Europe where the culture was deep and roots were visible in the architecture of the past.

Nowhere, as in America, however, was this fall from individual man to mass man felt so acutely, for America was at once the first and most prolific creator of mass communications, and the most rootless of countries, since almost no American could lay claim to the line of a family which had not once at least severed its roots by migrating here. But, if rootless, it was then the most vulnerable of countries to its own homogenization. Yet America was also the country in which the dynamic myth of the Renaissance—that every man was potentially extraordinary—knew its most passionate persistence. Simply, America was the land where people still believed in heroes: George Washington; Billy the Kid; Lincoln, Jefferson; Mark Twain, Jack London, Hemingway; Joe Louis, Dempsey, Gentleman Jim; America believed in athletes, rum-runners, aviators; even lovers, by the time Valentino died. It was a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another—is there a county in all of our ground which does not have its legendary figure? And when the West was filled, the expansion turned inward, became part of an agitated, overexcited, superheated dream life. The film studios threw up their searchlights as the frontier was finally sealed, and the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land turned into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life, each choosing his own archetype of a neo-renaissance man, be it Barrymore, Cagney, Flynn, Bogart, Brando or Sinatra, but it was almost as if there were no peace unless one could fight well, kill well (if always with honor), love well and love many, be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be wily, be resourceful, be a brave gun. And this myth, that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected, had a force which could not be tamed no matter how the nation's regulators—politicians, medicos, policemen, professors, priests, rabbis, ministers, *idéologues*, psychoanalysts, builders, executives and

endless communicators—would brick-in the modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle-brow homily over platitude; the myth would not die. Indeed a quarter of the nation's business must have depended upon its existence. But it stayed alive for more than that—it was as if the message in the labyrinth of the genes would insist that violence was locked with creativity, and adventure was the secret of love.

Once, in the Second World War and in the year or two which followed, the underground river returned to earth, and the life of the nation was intense, of the present, electric; as a lady said, "That was the time when we gave parties which changed people's lives." The Forties was a decade when the speed with which one's own events occurred seemed as rapid as the history of the battlefields, and for the mass of people in America a forced march into a new jungle of emotion was the result. The surprises, the failures, and the dangers of that life must have terrified some nerve of awareness in the power and the mass, for, as if stricken by the orgiastic vistas the myth had carried up from underground, the retreat to a more conservative existence was disorderly, the fear of communism spread like an irrational hail of boils. To anyone who could see, the excessive hysteria of the Red wave was no preparation to face an enemy, but rather a terror of the national self: free-loving, lust-looting, atheistic, implacable—absurdity beyond absurdity to label communism so, for the moral products of Stalinism had been Victorian sex and a ponderous machine of material theology.

Forced underground again, deep beneath all *Reader's Digest* hospital dressings of Mental Health in Your Community, the myth continued to flow, fed by television and the film. The fissure in the national psyche widened to the danger point. The last large appearance of the myth was the vote which tricked the polls and gave Harry Truman his victory in '48. That was the last. Came the Korean War, the shadow of the H-bomb, and we were ready for the General. Uncle Harry gave way to Father, and security, regularity, order, and the life of no imagination were the command of the day. If one had any doubt of this, there was Joe McCarthy with his built-in treason detector, furnished by God, and the damage was done. In the totalitarian wind of those days, anyone who worked in Government formed the habit of being not too original, and many a mind atrophied from disuse and private shame. At the summit there was benevolence without leadership, regularity without vision, security without safety, rhet-

oric without life. The ship drifted on, that enormous warship of the United States, led by a Secretary of State whose cells were seceding to cancer, and as the world became more fantastic—Africa turning itself upside down, while some new kind of machine man was being made in China—two events occurred which stunned the confidence of America into a new night: the Russians put up their Sputnik, and Civil Rights—that reluctant gift to the American Negro, granted for its effect on foreign affairs—spewed into real life at Little Rock. The national Ego was in shock: the Russians were now in some ways our technological superiors, and we had an internal problem of subject populations equal conceivably in its difficulty to the Soviet and its satellites. The fatherly calm of the General began to seem like the uxorious mellifluousness of the undertaker.

Underneath it all was a larger problem. The life of politics and the life of myth had diverged too far, and the energies of the people one knew everywhere had slowed down. Twenty years ago a post-Depression generation had gone to war and formed a lively, grousing, by times inefficient, carousing, pleasure-seeking, not altogether inadequate army. It did part of what it was supposed to do, and many, out of combat, picked up a kind of private life on the fly, and had their good time despite the yaws of the military system. But today in America the generation which respected the code of the myth was Beat, a horde of half-begotten Christs with scraggly beards, heroes none, saints all, weak before the strong, empty conformisms of the authority. The sanction for finding one's growth was no longer one's flag, one's career, one's sex, one's adventure, not even one's booze. Among the best in this newest of the generations, the myth had found its voice in marijuana, and the joke of the underground was that when the Russians came over they could never dare to occupy us for long because America was too Hip. Gallows humor. The poorer truth might be that America was too Beat, the instinct of the nation so separated from its public mind that apathy, schizophrenia, and private beatitudes might be the pride of the welcoming committee any underground could offer.

Yes, the life of politics and the life of the myth had diverged too far. There was nothing to return them to one another, no common danger, no cause, no desire, and, most essentially, no hero. It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time, a man whose personality might suggest

contradictions and mysteries which could reach into the alienated circuits of the underground, because only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people, and so be good for the vitality of his nation; a hero embodies the fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and find a way to grow. Each mind can become more conscious of its desire and waste less strength in hiding from itself. Roosevelt was such a hero, and Churchill, Lenin and De Gaulle; even Hitler, to take the most odious example of this thesis, was a hero, the hero-as-monster, embodying what had become the monstrous fantasy of a people, but the horror upon which the radical mind and liberal temperament foundered was that he gave outlet to the energies of the Germans and so presented the twentieth century with an index of how horrible had become the secret heart of its desire. Roosevelt is of course a happier example of the hero: from his paralytic leg to the royal elegance of his geniality he seemed to contain the country within himself; everyone from the meanest starving cripple to an ambitious young man could expand into the optimism of an improving future because the man offered an unspoken promise of a future which would be rich. The sexual and the sex-starved, the poor, the hard-working and the imaginative well-to-do could see themselves in the President, could believe him to be like themselves. So a large part of the country was able to discover its energies because not as much was wasted in feeling that the country was a poisonous nutrient which stifled the day.

Too simple? No doubt. One tries to construct a simple model. The thesis is after all not so mysterious; it would merely nudge the notion that a hero embodies his time and is not so very much better than his time, but he is larger than life and so is capable of giving direction to the time, able to encourage a nation to discover the deepest colors of its character. At bottom the concept of the hero is antagonistic to impersonal social progress, to the belief that social ills can be solved by social legislating, for it sees a country as all-but-trapped in its character until it has a hero who reveals the character of the country to itself. The implication is that without such a hero the nation turns sluggish. Truman for example was not such a hero, he was not sufficiently larger than life, he inspired familiarity without excitement, he was a character but his proportions came from soap opera: Uncle Harry, full of salty common-sense and small-minded certainty, a storekeeping uncle.

Whereas Eisenhower has been the anti-Hero, the regulator. Nations do not necessarily and inevitably seek for heroes. In periods of dull anxiety, one is more likely to look for security than a dramatic confrontation, and Eisenhower could stand as a hero only for that large number of Americans who were most proud of their lack of imagination. In American life, the unspoken war of the century has taken place between the city and the small town: the city which is dynamic, orgiastic, unsettling, explosive and accelerating to the psyche; the small town which is rooted, narrow, cautious and planted in the life-logic of the family. The need of the city is to accelerate growth; the pride of the small town is to retard it. But since America has been passing through a period of enormous expansion since the war, the double-four years of Dwight Eisenhower could not retard the expansion, it could only denude it of color, character, and the development of novelty. The small-town mind is rooted—it is rooted in the small town—and when it attempts to direct history the results are disastrously colorless because the instrument of world power which is used by the small-town mind is the committee. Committees do not create, they merely proliferate, and the incredible dullness wreaked upon the American landscape in Eisenhower's eight years has been the triumph of the corporation. A tasteless, sexless, odorless sanctity in architecture, manners, modes, styles has been the result. Eisenhower embodied half the needs of the nation, the needs of the timid, the petrified, the sanctimonious, and the sluggish. What was even worse, he did not divide the nation as a hero might (with a dramatic dialogue as the result); he merely excluded one part of the nation from the other. The result was an alienation of the best minds and bravest impulses from the faltering history which was made. America's need in those years was to take an existential turn, to walk into the nightmare, to face into that terrible logic of history which demanded that the country and its people must become more extraordinary and more adventurous, or else perish, since the only alternative was to offer a false security in the power and the panacea of organized religion, family, and the FBI, a totalitarianization of the psyche by the stultifying techniques of the mass media which would seep into everyone's most private associations and so leave the country powerless against the Russians even if the denouement were to take fifty years, for in a competition between totalitarianisms the first maxim

of the prizefight manager would doubtless apply: "Hungry fighters win fights."

The Hipster as Presidential Candidate: Thoughts on a Public Man's Eighteenth-Century Wife; Face-to-Face with the Hero; Significance of a Personal Note, or the Meaning of His Having Read an Author's Novel

Some part of these thoughts must have been in one's mind at the moment there was that first glimpse of Kennedy entering the Biltmore Hotel; and in the days which followed, the first mystery—the profound air of depression which hung over the convention—gave way to a second mystery which can be answered only by history. The depression of the delegates was understandable: no one had too much doubt that Kennedy would be nominated, but if elected he would be not only the youngest President ever to be chosen by voters, he would be the most conventionally attractive young man ever to sit in the White House, and his wife—some would claim it—might be the most beautiful first lady in our history. Of necessity the myth would emerge once more, because America's politics would now be also America's favorite movie, America's first soap opera, America's best-seller. One thinks of the talents of writers like Taylor Caldwell or Frank Yerby, or is it rather *The Fountainhead* which would contain such a fleshing of the romantic prescription? Or is it indeed one's own work which is called into question? "Well, there's your first hipster," says a writer one knows at the convention, "Sergius O'Shaugnessy born rich," and the temptation is to nod, for it could be true, a war hero, and the heroism is bona-fide, even exceptional, a man who has lived with death, who, crippled in the back, took on an operation which would kill him or restore him to power, who chose to marry a lady whose face might be too imaginative for the taste of a democracy which likes its first ladies to be executives of home-management, a man who courts political suicide by choosing to go all out for a nomination four, eight, or twelve years before his political elders think he is ready, a man who announces a week prior to the convention that the young are better fitted to direct history than the old.

Yes, it captures the attention. This is no routine candidate calling every shot by safety's routine book ("Yes," Nixon said, naturally but terribly tired an hour after his nomination, the TV cameras and lights and microphones bringing out a sweat of fatigue on his face, the words coming very slowly from the tired brain, somber, modest, sober, slow, slow enough so that one could touch emphatically the cautions behind each word, "Yes, I want to say," said Nixon, "that whatever abilities I have, I got from my mother." A tired pause . . . dull moment of warning, ". . . and my father." The connection now made, the rest comes easy, ". . . and my school and my church." Such men are capable of anything.)

One had the opportunity to study Kennedy a bit in the days that followed. His style in the press conferences was interesting. Not terribly popular with the reporters (too much a contemporary, and yet too difficult to understand, he received nothing like the rounds of applause given to Eleanor Roosevelt, Stevenson, Humphrey, or even Johnson), he carried himself nonetheless with a cool grace which seemed indifferent to applause, his manner somehow similar to the poise of a fine boxer, quick with his hands, neat in his timing, and two feet away from his corner when the bell ended the round. There was a good lithe wit to his responses, a dry Harvard wit, a keen sense of proportion in disposing of difficult questions—invariably he gave enough of an answer to be formally satisfactory without ever opening himself to a new question which might go further than the first. Asked by a reporter, "Are you for Adlai as vice-president?" the grin came forth and the voice turned very dry, "No, I cannot say we have considered *Adlai* as a vice-president." Yet there was an elusive detachment to everything he did. One did not have the feeling of a man present in the room with all his weight and all his mind. Johnson gave you all of himself, he was a political animal, he breathed like an animal, sweated like one, you knew his mind was entirely absorbed with the compendium of political fact and maneuver; Kennedy seemed at times like a young professor whose manner was adequate for the classroom, but whose mind was off in some intricacy of the Ph.D. thesis he was writing. Perhaps one can give a sense of the discrepancy by saying that he was like an actor who had been cast as the candidate, a good actor, but not a great one—you were aware all the time that

the role was one thing and the man another—they did not coincide, the actor seemed a touch too aloof (as, let us say, Gregory Peck is usually too aloof) to become the part. Yet one had little sense of whether to value this elusiveness, or to beware of it. One could be witnessing the fortitude of a superior sensitivity or the detachment of a man who was not quite real to himself. And his voice gave no clue. When Johnson spoke, one could separate what was fraudulent from what was felt, he would have been satisfying as an actor the way Broderick Crawford or Paul Douglas are satisfying; one saw into his emotions, or at least had the illusion that one did. Kennedy's voice, however, was only a fair voice, too reedy, near to strident, it had the metallic snap of a cricket in it somewhere, it was more impersonal than the man, and so became the least-impressive quality in a face, a body, a selection of language, and a style of movement which made up a better-than-decent presentation, better than one had expected.

With all of that, it would not do to pass over the quality in Kennedy which is most difficult to describe. And in fact some touches should be added to this hint of a portrait, for later (after the convention), one had a short session alone with him, and the next day, another. As one had suspected in advance the interviews were not altogether satisfactory, they hardly could have been. A man running for President is altogether different from a man elected President: the hazards of the campaign make it impossible for a candidate to be as interesting as he might like to be (assuming he has such a desire). One kept advancing the argument that this campaign would be a contest of personalities, and Kennedy kept returning the discussion to politics. After a while one recognized this was an inevitable caution for him. So there would be not too much point to reconstructing the dialogue since Kennedy is hardly inarticulate about his political attitudes and there will be a library vault of text devoted to it in the newspapers. What struck me most about the interview was a passing remark whose importance was invisible on the scale of politics, but was altogether meaningful to my particular competence. As we sat down for the first time, Kennedy smiled nicely and said that he had read my books. One muttered one's pleasure. "Yes," he said, "I've read . . ." and then there was a short pause which did not last long enough to be embarrassing in which it was yet obvious no

title came instantly to his mind, an omission one was not ready to mind altogether since a man in such a position must be obliged to carry a hundred thousand facts and names in his head, but the hesitation lasted no longer than three seconds or four, and then he said, "I've read *The Deer Park* and . . . the others," which startled me for it was the first time in a hundred similar situations, talking to someone whose knowledge of my work was casual, that the sentence did not come out, "I've read *The Naked and the Dead* . . . and the others." If one is to take the worst and assume that Kennedy was briefed for this interview (which is most doubtful), it still speaks well for the striking instincts of his advisers.

What was retained later is an impression of Kennedy's manners which were excellent, even artful, better than the formal good manners of Choate and Harvard, almost as if what was creative in the man had been given to the manners. In a room with one or two people, his voice improved, became low-pitched, even pleasant—it seemed obvious that in all these years he had never become a natural public speaker and so his voice was constricted in public, the symptom of all orators who are ambitious, throttled, and determined.

His personal quality had a subtle, not quite describable intensity, a suggestion of dry pent heat perhaps, his eyes large, the pupils grey, the whites prominent, almost shocking, his most forceful feature: he had the eyes of a mountaineer. His appearance changed with his mood, strikingly so, and this made him always more interesting than what he was saying. He would seem at one moment older than his age, forty-eight or fifty, a tall, slim, sunburned professor with a pleasant weathered face, not even particularly handsome; five minutes later, talking to a press conference on his lawn, three microphones before him, a television camera turning, his appearance would have gone through a metamorphosis, he would look again like a movie star, his coloring vivid, his manner rich, his gestures strong and quick, alive with that concentration of vitality a successful actor always seems to radiate. Kennedy had a dozen faces. Although they were not at all similar as people, the quality was reminiscent of someone like Brando whose expression rarely changes, but whose appearance seems to shift from one person into another as the minutes go by, and one bothers with this comparison

because, like Brando, Kennedy's most characteristic quality is the remote and private air of a man who has traversed some lonely terrain of experience, of loss and gain, of nearness to death, which leaves him isolated from the mass of others.

The next day while they waited in vain for rescuers, the wrecked half of the boat turned over in the water and they saw that it would soon sink. The group decided to swim to a small island three miles away. There were other islands bigger and nearer, but the Navy officers knew that they were occupied by the Japanese. On one island, only one mile to the south, they could see a Japanese camp. McMahon, the engineer whose legs were disabled by burns, was unable to swim. Despite his own painfully crippled back, Kennedy swam the three miles with a breast stroke, towing behind him by a life-belt strap that he held between his teeth the helpless McMahon . . . it took Kennedy and the suffering engineer five hours to reach the island.

The quotation is from a book which has for its dedicated unilateral title, *The Remarkable Kennedys*, but the prose is by one of the best of the war reporters, the former *Yank* editor, Joe McCarthy, and so presumably may be trusted in such details as this. Physical bravery does not of course guarantee a man's abilities in the White House—all too often men with physical courage are disappointing in their moral imagination—but the heroism here is remarkable for its tenacity. The above is merely one episode in a continuing saga which went on for five days in and out of the water, and left Kennedy at one point “miraculously saved from drowning (in a storm) by a group of Solomon Island natives who suddenly came up beside him in a large dugout canoe.” Afterward, his back still injured (that precise back injury which was to put him on crutches eleven years later, and have him search for “spinal-fusion surgery” despite a warning that his chances of living through the operation were “extremely limited”) afterward, he asked to go back on duty and became so bold in the attacks he made with his PT boat “that the crew didn’t like to go out with him because he took so many chances.”

It is the wisdom of a man who senses death within him and gambles that he can cure it by risking his life. It is the

therapy of the instinct, and who is so wise as to call it irrational? Before he went into the Navy, Kennedy had been ailing. Washed out of Freshman year at Princeton by a prolonged trough of yellow jaundice, sick for a year at Harvard, weak already in the back from an injury at football, his trials suggest the self-hatred of a man whose resentment and ambition are too large for his body. Not everyone can discharge their furies on an analyst's couch, for some angers can be relaxed only by winning power, some rages are sufficiently monumental to demand that one try to become a hero or else fall back into that death which is already within the cells. But if one succeeds, the energy aroused can be exceptional. Talking to a man who had been with Kennedy in Hyannis Port the week before the convention, I heard that he was in a state of deep fatigue.

"Well, he didn't look tired at the convention," one commented.

"Oh, he had three days of rest. Three days of rest for him is like six months for us."

One thinks of that three-mile swim with the belt in his mouth and McMahon holding it behind him. There are pestilences which sit in the mouth and rot the teeth—in those five hours how much of the psyche must have been remade, for to give vent to the bite in one's jaws and yet use that rage to save a life: it is not so very many men who have the apocalyptic sense that heroism is the First Doctor.

If one had a profound criticism of Kennedy it was that his public mind was too conventional, but that seemed to matter less than the fact of such a man in office because the law of political life had become so dreary that only a conventional mind could win an election. Indeed there could be no politics which gave warmth to one's body until the country had recovered its imagination, its pioneer lust for the unexpected and incalculable. It was the changes that might come afterward on which one could put one's hope. With such a man in office the myth of the nation would again be engaged, and the fact that he was Catholic would shiver a first existential vibration of consciousness into the mind of the White Protestant. For the first time in our history, the Protestant would have the pain and creative luxury of feeling himself in some tiny degree part of a minority, and that was an experience which might be incommensurable in its value to the best of them.

*A Vignette of Adlai Stevenson; The Speeches:
What Happened When the Teleprompter
Jammed: How U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy
Played the Matador. An Observation
on the Nannie Fitzgerald*

As yet we have said hardly a word about Stevenson. And his actions must remain a puzzle unless one dares a speculation about his motive, or was it his need?

So far as the people at the convention had affection for anyone, it was Stevenson, so far as they were able to generate any spontaneous enthusiasm, their cheers were again for Stevenson. Yet it was obvious he never had much chance because so soon as a chance would present itself he seemed quick to dissipate the opportunity. The day before the nominations, he entered the Sports Arena to take his seat as a delegate—the demonstration was spontaneous, noisy and prolonged; it was quieted only by Governor Collins' invitation for Stevenson to speak to the delegates. In obedience perhaps to the scruple that a candidate must not appear before the convention until nominations are done, Stevenson said no more than: "I am grateful for this tumultuous and moving welcome. After getting in and out of the Biltmore Hotel and this hall, I have decided I know whom you are going to nominate. It will be the last survivor." This dry reminder of the ruthlessness of politics broke the roar of excitement for his presence. The applause as he left the platform was like the dying fall-and-moan of a baseball crowd when a home run curves foul. The next day, a New York columnist talking about it said bitterly, "If he'd only gone through the motions, if he had just said that now he wanted to run, that he would work hard, and he hoped the delegates would vote for him. Instead he made that lame joke." One wonders. It seems almost as if he did not wish to win unless victory came despite himself, and then was overwhelming. There are men who are not heroes because they are too good for their time, and it is natural that defeats leave them bitter, tired, and doubtful of their right to make new history. If Stevenson had campaigned for a year before the convention, it is possible that he could have stopped Kennedy. At the least, the convention would have been enormously more ex-

citing, and the nominations might have gone through half-a-dozen ballots before a winner was hammered into shape. But then Stevenson might also have shortened his life. One had the impression of a tired man who (for a politician) was sickened unduly by compromise. A year of maneuvering, broken promises, and detestable partners might have gutted him for the election campaign. If elected, it might have ruined him as a President. There is the possibility that he sensed his situation exactly this way, and knew that if he were to run for president, win and make a good one, he would first have to be restored, as one can indeed be restored, by an exceptional demonstration of love—love, in this case, meaning that the Party had a profound desire to keep him as their leader. The emotional truth of a last-minute victory for Stevenson over the Kennedy machine might have given him new energy; it would certainly have given him new faith in a country and a party whose good motives he was possibly beginning to doubt. Perhaps the fault he saw with his candidacy was that he attracted only the nicest people to himself and there were not enough of them. (One of the private amusements of the convention was to divine some of the qualities of the candidates by the style of the young women who put on hats and clothing and politicked in the colors of one presidential gent or another. Of course, half of them must have been hired models, but someone did the hiring and so it was fair to look for a common denominator. The Johnson girls tended to be plump, pie-faced, dumb sexy Southern; the Symingtons seemed a touch mulish, stubborn, good-looking pluggers; the Kennedy ladies were the handsomest; healthy, attractive, tough, a little spoiled—they looked like the kind of girls who had gotten all the dances in high school and/or worked for a year as an airline hostess before marrying well. But the Stevenson girls looked to be doing it for no money; they were good sorts, slightly horsy-faced, one had the impression they played field hockey in college.) It was indeed the pure, the saintly, the clean-living, the pacifistic, the vegetarian who seemed most for Stevenson, and the less humorous in the Kennedy camp were heard to remark bitterly that Stevenson had nothing going for him but a bunch of Goddamn Beatniks. This might even have had its sour truth. The demonstrations outside the Sports Arena for Stevenson seemed to have more than a fair proportion of tall, emaciated young men with thin, wry beards and three-

string guitars accompanied (again in undue proportion) by a contingent of ascetic, face-washed young Beat ladies in sweaters and dungarees. Not to mention all the Holden Caulfields one could see from here to the horizon. But of course it is unfair to limit it so, for the Democratic gentry were also committed half en masse for Stevenson, as well as a considerable number of movie stars, Shelley Winters for one: after the convention she remarked sweetly, "Tell me something nice about Kennedy so I can get excited about him."

What was properly astonishing was the way this horde of political half-breeds and amateurs came within distance of turning the convention from its preconceived purpose, and managed at the least to bring the only hour of thoroughgoing excitement the convention could offer.

But then nominating day was the best day of the week and enough happened to suggest that a convention out of control would be a spectacle as extraordinary in the American scale of spectator values as a close seventh game in the World Series or a tied fourth quarter in a professional football championship. A political convention is after all not a meeting of a corporation's board of directors; it is a fiesta, a carnival, a pig-rooting, horse-snorting, band-playing, voice-screaming medieval get-together of greed, practical lust, compromised idealism, career-advancement, meeting, feud, vendetta, conciliation, of rabble-rousers, fist fights (as it used to be), embraces, drunks (again as it used to be) and collective rivers of animal sweat. It is a reminder that no matter how the country might pretend it has grown up and become tidy in its manners, bodiless in its legislative language, hygienic in its separation of high politics from private life, that the roots still come grubby from the soil, and that politics in America is still different from politics anywhere else because the politics has arisen out of the immediate needs, ambitions, and cupidities of the people, that our politics still smell of the bedroom and the kitchen, rather than having descended to us from the chill punctilio of aristocratic negotiation.

So. The Sports Arena was new, too pretty of course, tasteless in its design—it was somehow pleasing that the acoustics were so bad for one did not wish the architects well; there had been so little imagination in their design, and this arena would have none of the harsh grandeur of Madison Square Garden when it was aged by spectators' phlegm and

feet over the next twenty years. Still it had some atmosphere; seen from the streets, with the spectators moving to the ticket gates, the bands playing, the green hot-shot special editions of the Los Angeles newspapers being hawked by the newsboys, there was a touch of the air of promise that precedes a bullfight, not something so good as the approach to the Plaza Mexico, but good, let us say, like the entrance into El Toreo of Mexico City, another architectural monstrosity, also with seats painted, as I remember, in rose-pink, and dark, milky sky-blue.

Inside, it was also different this nominating day. On Monday and Tuesday the air had been desultory, no one listened to the speakers, and everybody milled from one easy chatting conversation to another—it had been like a tepid Kaffeeklatsch for fifteen thousand people. But today there was a whip of anticipation in the air, the seats on the floor were filled, the press section was working, and in the gallery people were sitting in the aisles.

Sam Rayburn had just finished nominating Johnson as one came in, and the rebel yells went up, delegates started filing out of their seats and climbing over seats, and a pullulating dance of bodies and bands began to snake through the aisles, the posters jogging and whirling in time to the music. The dun color of the floor (faces, suits, seats and floor boards), so monotonous the first two days, now lit up with life as if an iridescent caterpillar had emerged from a fold of wet leaves. It was more vivid than one had expected, it was right, it felt finally like a convention, and from up close when one got down to the floor (where your presence was illegal and so consummated by sneaking in one time as demonstrators were going out, and again by slipping a five-dollar bill to a guard) the nearness to the demonstrators took on high color, that electric vividness one feels on the side lines of a football game when it is necessary to duck back as the ballcarrier goes by, his face tortured in the concentration of the moment, the thwomp of his tackle as acute as if one had been hit oneself.

That was the way the demonstrators looked on the floor. Nearly all had the rapt, private look of a passion or a tension which would finally be worked off by one's limbs, three hundred football players, everything from seedy delegates with jowl-sweating shivers to livid models, paid for their work that day, but stomping out their beat on the floor

with the hypnotic adulatory grimaces of ladies who had lived for Lyndon these last ten years.

Then from the funereal rostrum, whose color was not so rich as mahogany nor so dead as a cigar, came the last of the requests for the delegates to take their seats. The seconding speeches began, one minute each; they ran for three and four, the minor-league speakers running on the longest as if the electric antenna of television was the lure of the Sirens, leading them out. Bored cheers applauded their concluding Götterdämmerungen and the nominations were open again. A favorite son, a modest demonstration, five seconding speeches, tedium.

Next was Kennedy's occasion. Governor Freeman of Minnesota made the speech. On the second or third sentence his television prompter jammed, an accident. Few could be aware of it at the moment; the speech seemed merely flat and surprisingly void of bravura. He was obviously no giant of extempore. Then the demonstration. Well-run, bigger than Johnson's, jazzier, the caliber of the costumes and decorations better chosen: the placards were broad enough, "Let's Back Jack," the floats were garish, particularly a papier-mâché or plastic balloon of Kennedy's head, six feet in diameter, which had nonetheless the slightly shrunken, over-red, rubbery look of a toy for practical jokers in one of those sleazy off-Times Square magic-and-gimmick stores; the band was suitably corny; and yet one had the impression this demonstration had been designed by some hands-to-hip interior decorator who said, "Oh, joy, let's have fun, let's make this *true* beer hall."

Besides, the personnel had something of the Kennedy *élan*, those paper hats designed to look like straw boaters with Kennedy's face on the crown, and small photographs of him on the ribbon, those hats which had come to symbolize the crack speed of the Kennedy team, that Madison Avenue cachet which one finds in bars like P. J. Clarke's, the elegance always giving its subtle echo of the Twenties so that the raccoon coats seem more numerous than their real count, and the colored waistcoats are measured by the charm they would have drawn from Scott Fitzgerald's eye. But there, it occurred to one for the first time that Kennedy's middle name was just that, Fitzgerald, and the tone of his crack lieutenants, the unstated style, was true to Scott. The legend of Fitzgerald had an army at last, formed around the self-image in the mind of every superior Madison Avenue opportunist

that he was hard, he was young, he was In, his conversation was lean as wit, and if the work was not always scrupulous, well the style could aspire. If there came a good day . . . he could meet the occasion.

The Kennedy snake dance ran its thirty lively minutes, cheered its seconding speeches, and sat back. They were so sure of winning, there had been so many victories before this one, and this one had been scouted and managed so well, that hysteria could hardly be the mood. Besides, everyone was waiting for the Stevenson barrage which should be at least diverting. But now came a long tedium. Favorite sons were nominated, fat mayors shook their hips, seconders told the word to constituents back in Ponderwaygot County, treacly demonstrations tried to hold the floor, and the afternoon went by; Symington's hour came and went, a good demonstration, good as Johnson's (for good cause—they had pooled their demonstrators). More favorite sons, Governor Docking of Kansas declared "a genius" by one of his lady speakers in a tense go-back-to-religion voice. The hours went by, two, three, four hours, it seemed forever before they would get to Stevenson. It was evening when Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota got up to nominate him.

The gallery was ready, the floor was responsive, the demonstrators were milling like bulls in their pen waiting for the *toril* to fly open—it would have been hard not to wake the crowd up, not to make a good speech. McCarthy made a great one. Great it was by the measure of convention oratory, and he held the crowd like a matador, timing their *oles!*, building them up, easing them back, correcting any sag in attention, gathering their emotion, discharging it, creating new emotion on the wave of the last, driving his passes tighter and tighter as he readied for the kill. "Do not reject this man who made us all proud to be called Democrats, do not leave this prophet without honor in his own party." One had not heard a speech like this since 1948 when Vito Marcantonio's voice, his harsh, shrill, bitter, street urchin's voice screeched through the loud-speakers at Yankee Stadium and lashed seventy thousand people into an uproar.

"There was only one man who said let's talk sense to the American people," McCarthy went on, his muleta furled for the *naturales*. "There was only one man who said let's talk sense to the American people," he repeated. "He said the promise of America is the promise of greatness. This was his call to greatness. . . . Do not forget this man. . . . Ladies and