

TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE

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1.

In the dawn, if it were low tide on the flats, I ^{would} might awaken to the chatter of gulls. On a bad morning, ^{would feel} I would feel as if I had died, and the birds were feeding on my heart. Later, after I had dozed for a while, the tide would come up over the sand as swiftly as a shadow descends on the hills when ^{the sun} light lowers behind the ridge, and ^{before} ~~it was~~ not long before the first swells ^{would} ~~began to~~ pound on the bulkhead of the deck below my bedroom window, the shock rising in one fine fragment of time from the sea-wall to the innermost passages of my flesh. "Boom" the waves would go against the wall, and I could have been ^{alone} ~~awakening~~ on a freighter in a dark sea.

In fact, I was awakening alone in bed, on the twenty-fourth drear morning after my wife had decamped. That

evening, still alone, I would celebrate the twenty-fourth night. Later, over days to come, when I would be searching for a clue to ~~my~~ several horrors, I would attempt to peer through the fog banks of my ~~poor~~ memory to recall just what acts I might or might not have committed on all of that twenty-fourth night.

Little came back to me, however, of what I did after I got out of bed. It must have been a day like all the others. There is a joke about a man who is asked on his first visit to a new doctor to describe his daily routine. He promptly offers: "I get up, I brush my teeth, I vomit, I wash my face. . ." at which point the doctor inquires, "You vomit every day?"

"Oh, yes, doctor," replies the patient. "Doesn't everyone?"

I was that man. Each morning, after breakfast, I could not light a cigarette. I had no more than to put one in my mouth and was ready to retch. The foul plenitude of losing a wife was embracing me.

For ^{twelve} ten years I had been trying to give up smoking. As Mark Twain said--and who does not know ^{the} this remark?-- "It's nothing to quit. I've stopped a hundred times," I used to feel as if I had ^{said it myself} conceived that remark myself, for certainly I had given cigarettes up on ten times ten

occasions, once for a year, once for nine months, once for four months. Over and over again, I gave them up a hundred times over the years, but finally I had come close ^{always I went back.} to ridding myself of nicotine forever. I had extirpated, ^{For in my dream, sooner or later, I struck a match.}

one by one, all the enjoyable habits that lived next to smoking itself, the pleasure of opening a pack, the manly elegance to be lightly extracted from the way one peeled the cellophane, unfolded the silver wrapping, tapped the first one forth, presented its near-military éclat to my lips, struck the match, brought flame to the tip, then took in all my hunger for existence with the first puff. ^{I felt infinite}

after I gave up smoking ^{a few} ~~once, twice, ten times~~, I no longer needed to keep a pack in my pocket to satisfy the joys of handling the stuff itself, ^{but do} Do you know that in my first attempts to quit ^{the} my addiction, I used to shred twenty cigarettes a day, slowly, by no more than the grip of my fingers as I held each one and waved it about, yet succeeded, like a tight-rope wire artist, in keeping it unlit. What a tottering of equilibrium over each spasm of desire for a smoke!

After ten such failures (for I always went back to tobacco) ^{as I saw} I began to notice that I no longer had to keep the pack in my pocket. Those collateral habits, those elegant fingerings, were done. I could proceed to the core

on
of desire itself--those ^{lungs} lungs trapped in my chest and
screaming for one puff. ^{Change} Change the given!

So I learned what addiction is. A beast had me by
the throat and its vitals were in my lungs. I wrestled that
devil for ^{twelve} ten years and sometimes I beat him back. Usually,
it was at great loss to myself, and great loss to others.
For when I did not smoke, I grew violent. My reflexes lived
in the place where the match used to strike, and my mind
would lose those bits of knowledge that keep us serene (at
least if we are American.) In the throes of not smoking, I
might rent a car and never notice whether it was a Ford or
a Chrysler. That can be seen as the beginning of the end.
On one occasion, when I did not smoke ~~for nine months~~, I
went on a long trip with a girl I loved named Madeleine to
meet up with a married couple who wanted to have ^{a weekend} an orgy.
of wife-swapping. We indulged them.
~~We did.~~ Driving back, Madeleine and I had a quarrel, and
I wrecked the car. Madeleine's insides were badly hurt. I
went back to smoking.

I used to say: "It's easier to give up the love of
your life than to kick cigarettes," and suspect I was prob-
ably right in such a remark. But then last month, twenty-
four days ago, my wife took off. Twenty-four days ago. I
learned a little more about addiction. It may be less dif-
ficult to give up love than dispense with the first inhale

of the morning, but when it comes to saying goodbye to love-and-hate--ah, that reliable standby of the head-shrinkers, the love-hate relationship!--why, ^{giving up} giving-up your marriage was easily as difficult as relinquishing your smokes, and much the same, for I can tell you that after ^{twelve} ten years of kicking nicotine, I had gotten to hate the filthy stuff just so much as a bitter wife. Even the first smoke of the morning (whose sure bliss once seemed the ineradicable reason I could never give up tobacco) had now become a convulsion of coughing ~~and retching.~~ Still, I had to work to give up cigarettes. No more might remain than the addiction itself, but addiction is still a signature on the bottom line of your psyche.

That is how it was with my marriage as well now that Patty Lareine was gone. If I had loved her once while knowing her faults--even as we smoke like happy fiends and shrug away the thought of a lung cancer still decades away, so did I always perceive that Patty Lareine could be my doom around the bend of some treacherous evening, yet, so be it, I adored her. Who knew? Love might inspire us to transcend our dire faults. That was years ago. Now, for the last ^{year and more} eighteen months, we had been trying to kick the habit of each other. Intimate detestations ^{had grown} grew each season until they rooted out all the old pockets of good humor. I

had come to dislike her as much as I ~~had come to dislike~~
my morning cigarette. Which, indeed, I had finally given
up. After ^{four}ten years, I felt finally free of the largest
addiction of my life. That is, until the night she left.
That was the night I discovered that my wife ^{was} might be a
greater addiction.

Before her departure, I had not had a cigarette for all
of that year. Patty Lareine and I might, on the consequence,
fight ferociously, but I was quits at last with my Camels.
Small hope. Two hours after she drove off, I knocked on the
door of the old ^{habit} addiction, took up one coffin nail from a
half-empty pack Patty ~~had~~ left behind, and was, in two days
of battling myself, hooked once again. Now that she was gone,
I began each day with a cigarette accompanied by the most
horrendous convulsion of my spirit. God, I choked in
cataracts of misery. For with the return of this bumper
habit came back every bit of the old longing for Patty Lareine.
Each cigarette smelled in my mouth like the ashtray I soon
ground it into, but it was not tar I sniffed, rather my own
charring flesh. Such is the odor of funk and loss.

Well, as I indicated, I do not remember how I spent
my Twenty-Fourth Day. My clearest recollection is yawping
over that first cigarette, strangling the smoke down. Later,
after four or five such transactions, I was sometimes able to

inhale in peace, thereby cauterizing what I had come to decide (with no great respect for myself) must be, ~~no~~ doubt, the wound of my life. How much more I longed for Patty Lareine than I wished to. In those twenty-four days, I did my best to see no one, I stayed at home, I did not always wash, I drank as if the great river of our blood is carried by bourbon not water, I was--to put a four-letter word on it--a mess.

In summer, it might have been more obvious to others what a sorry hour I was in, but this was late in the fall, the days were gray, the town deserted, and on many a shortening November afternoon you could have taken a bowling ball and rolled it down the long one-way lane of our narrow main street (a true New England alley) without striking a pedestrian or a car. The town withdrew into itself, and the cold, which was nothing remarkable when measured with a thermometer (since the seacoast off Massachusetts is, by Fahrenheit, less frigid than the ~~strong~~ ^{stony} hills west of Boston) was nonetheless a cold sea air filled with the bottomless chill that lies at the cloistered heart of ghost stories and is ~~there~~ at many a seance. Indeed, there had been a seance Patty and I attended at the end of September with disconcerting results: short and dreadful, it ended with a shriek. I suspect that part of the reason I was now bereft of Patty Lareine was that something

-3-

intangible but nonetheless repulsive attached itself to our marriage in that moment.

There was a week--which, by my new calendar, went from Day Eighteen to Day Twenty-Four--when the weather never shifted. One chill morose November sky went into another. The ^{place} town turned gray before one's eyes. Back in summer, the population had been thirty thousand and doubled on week-ends. It could seem as if every vehicle on Cape Cod decided to drive down the four-lane state highway to the end of the road. Provincetownⁿ was as colorful ^{then} as St. Tropez, and as dirty by Sunday evening as Coney Island. In the Fall, however, with everyone gone, the town revealed its other presence. Now the population did not boil up daily from thirty thousand to sixty, but settled down to its honest sediment, three thousand souls, and on empty weekday afternoons, you might have said the true number of inhabitants was thirty men and women, all hiding.

There could be no ^{other} town like it. If you were sensitive to crowds, you might expire in summer from the press of human propinquity. On the other hand, if you were unable to endure loneliness, the vessel of your person could fill with dread during the long winter. Martha's Vineyard, not fifty miles to the south and west, had lived through the upsurge of mountains and their erosion, through the rise and fall of

-9-

oceans, the life and death of ~~great~~ forests and swamps. Dinosaurs had passed over Martha's Vineyard and their bones were compacted into the bed-rock. Glaciers had come and gone, sucking the island to the north, pushing it like a ferry to the south again. Martha's Vineyard had fossil deposits one million centuries old. ^{However, the} The northern reach of Cape Cod on which my house sat, ~~however~~, the land I inhabited --that long curving spit of shrub and dune that curves in upon itself in a spiral at the tip of the Cape--had only been formed by wind and sea over the last ten thousand years. That cannot amount to more than a night of geological time.

Perhaps this is why Provincetown is so beautiful. Conceived at night (for one could swear it was created in the course of one dark storm) its sand flats still glistened in the dawn with the moist primeval innocence of land exposing itself to the sun for the first time. Decade after decade, artists came to paint the light of Provincetown, and comparisons were made to the lagoons of Venice and the marshes of Holland, but then the summer ended and most of the painters left, and the long dingy undergarment of the gray New England winter, gray as the spirit of my mood, came down to visit. One remembered then that the land was only ten thousand years old, and one's ghosts had no roots. We did not have old Martha's Vineyard's one million centuries of fossil remains

subdue
specters who concerned
curving
to erode each spirit, of its rage, no, nothing to domicile
our ghosts who ripped with the wind down the two long streets
of the town, which curved together around the bay like two
spinsters on their way to church.

If this is a fair sample of how my mind worked on the
Twenty-Fourth Day, it is obvious I was feeling introspective,
long-moldering, mournful, and haunted. Twenty-four days of
being without a wife you hate and fear is guaranteed to leave
you cleaving to her like the butt end of addiction itself.
How I hated the taste of cigarettes, now that I was smoking
again.

It seems to me that I walked the length of the town
that day and back again to my house--her house--it was
Patty Lareine's money that bought the place. Three miles
along Commercial Street I walked and back through all the
shank of that gray afternoon, but I do not remember whom I
spoke to, nor how many or few might have passed in a car and
invited me to ride. No, I remember I walked to the very
end of town, out to where the last house meets the place
on the beach where the Pilgrims first landed in America.
Yes, it was not Plymouth, but here, that they first landed.

I contemplate that event on many a day. Those Pilgrims,
having crossed the Atlantic, encountered the cliffs of the
back shore of Cape Cod as their first sight of land. On
that back reach, the surf, at its worst, can break in waves

ten feet high. On windless days the peril is worse; a deep draft sailing vessel of ~~that era~~ ^{can} could be carried in by relentless tides to founder on ~~many~~ ^{the} a shoal. It is not the rocks that sink you ~~on~~ ^{off} Cape Cod but the shifting sands. What fear those Pilgrims must have known in hearing the dull eternal boom of the surf, the echo coming to their ears ~~from~~ ^{after} three thousand miles of water ~~driving~~ ^{had driven} unopposed onto that white deserted shore. Who would dare come near with boats such as theirs? They turned south, and the shore ~~remained~~ ^{stayed} unrelenting--no hint of a cove. Just the long straight beach and the boom of the surf. So they went to the north and in a day, or was it two, saw the shore give way to the west, then continue to curve, ^{until it went around again} turn even to the south. What sport of the land was this? The shore continued to turn until they were sailing to the east, three quarters of the way around from the north. Were they circumnavigating the spiral of a god-like ear? They came around the point ~~at last, the point~~ of all that long cape, and dropped anchor in the lee. It was a natural harbor, as protected indeed as the inside of one's ear. From there, they put down small boats and rowed to shore. A plaque commemorates the landing. It is by the breakwater that now protects

all the marshes ^{at} ^{end} on that side of town from being severed by the sea. So you come to the end of the road, to the farthest place a tourist can ride out toward the tip of Cape Cod and there you ^{encounter} meet the landing place of the Pilgrims ~~grims, to learn for certain the plaque will tell you--that, it was not at Plymouth they landed, but at Provincetown.~~ Only some weeks later, after bad weather, and the recognition that there was no game and few fields to till in these sandy lands, did the Pilgrims sail west across the bay to Plymouth on the main shore of America.)

Here, however, was where they first landed in all the terror and exaltation of encountering the new land. New land it was, not ten thousand years old. A strew of sand. How many Indian ghosts must have howled on the wind through the first nights of ^{the} that encampment. Or did the Pilgrims row back each evening to the safety of their anchored ships, the wind too fierce to bear on shore?



I think of the Pilgrims whenever I walk to those
emerald green marshes at the end of town. ^{Beyond} ~~There, the~~
⁴⁶ coastal dunes ~~in the near distance~~ are so low that one
can follow ^{see} ~~the passage of~~ ships ^{above} of the horizon even when
the water ^{is not visible} cannot be seen. The flying bridges of the sport
^{boats} fishing ships seem to travel in caravans across the sand,
and if I have a drink in me, ~~or am turned on too high (by~~
~~marijuana I have grown myself)~~ then I can begin to laugh,
~~standing by the Pilgrims' Plaque,~~ ^{the} because across from me,
^{Pilgrims' Plaque} not fifty yards away, there where the United States began,
also stands the entrance to a huge motel, ~~large enough for~~
~~conventioneers.~~ If it is no uglier than any other vast
motel, it is certainly no prettier, and the only homage
the Pilgrims get is that it is called an Inn. ~~I would~~
~~call it a super-inn.~~ ^{AS} For it has ^{is as} a parking lot large as
^{a football field} asphalt acres, ~~all~~ homage to the Pilgrims.

No more than this, no matter how I press and force my
mind, is what I remember of how I spent my twenty-fourth
day. I went out, I walked across the town, I brooded on
the geology of our shores, loaned my imagination to the
Pilgrims, and laughed at the Provincetown Inn, ^{then} ~~laughed at~~
~~the solemnity of my country about making a buck--we would~~
~~sell caviar with hot dogs if it would make a buck! Then~~

I suppose I must have walked on home. The gloom in which I lay in the grasp of my sofa was timeless. I had spent many hours ⁱⁿ these twenty-four days staring at the wall, but what I do recollect, what I cannot ignore, is that I got into my Porsche in the evening and drove up Commercial Street, all the way very slowly, as if afraid that this night I might run into a child--the evening was foggy--and I did not stop until I came to The Widow's Walk, by far the best restaurant open to us in winter for all this stretch of Cape. There, not far from the Provincetown Inn, is a dark-stained pine-panelled room whose foundations were gently slapped ^{by} the rising of the tide (for one of the charms of Provincetown I have neglected to pass along is that not only my own house--her house!--but most of the buildings on the bay side of Commercial Street were kin to ships, which at high high tide ^{came} ~~which came once each moon--~~ ^{are} ~~when~~ the bulkheads on which they rested ~~could be~~ half submerged by the sea.)

It was such a tide tonight. The waters rose ^{the sea} languorously as if we were in the tropics, but I knew it was cold. Behind the good windows of this dark room, the fire in its wide hearth was worthy of a post card, ~~(New-England-cheer!)~~ and my wooden chair was full of approaching winter, inasmuch

as it was a copy of the ^{kind} sort they used in study halls a hundred years ago, a large, round platter of oak ^{that lifted} ~~lifting~~ on its hinges to enable you to sit down, after which it ensconced itself under your right elbow to serve as a ~~private~~ table for your drink.

The Widow's Walk might as well have been created ~~by~~ ^{liked to} design for me. On lonely Fall evenings, I could entertain the illusion that I was some modern tycoon-pirate of prodigious wealth who kept the place ~~entire~~ for his amusement-- the large restaurant at the other end never even entered by me, but the small bar of this panelled lounge ^{complete} with its barmaid--all for myself. Secretly, I must have believed that no one else had a right to enter. By November, the illusion was not difficult to protect. On quiet weekday nights, most of the diners, good senior Wasps from Brewster and Dennis and Orleans, out for a smack of excitement, found their thrills in the sheer audacity of daring to drive all ^{of the} ~~the way~~ ^{Or forty miles} to Provincetown itself. The echo of summer kept our evil reputation intact. These fine Scotch studies in silver--which is to say each Wasp professor emeritus and ^{retired} corporate executive ~~retired to golf~~--did not look to tarry in a bar. They headed for the Dining Room. Besides, one look at me in my dungaree jacket and ^{the} ~~a true~~ sneer on my

~~free~~ was enough to steer them to the food. "No, dear," their wives would say, "let's have our drinks at the table. We're starved!"

"Yeah, baby," I would murmur to myself, "starved."
~~Particularly on~~ ^{Over} these twenty-four days, the Lounge at The Widow's Walk ^{had become} was my castle keep. I would sit by the window, study the fire, and watch the changes in the tide, feeling after four bourbons, ten cigarettes, and a dozen crackers with cheese (my dinner!) that I was, at least, a wounded Lord living by the sea.

The compensation ^{for} ~~of~~ misery, self-pity, and despair, is that fed enough drinks, the powers of imagination return with force. No matter that they are lopsided under such auspices, they return. In this room, my drinks were well stoked by a submissive bar girl doubtless terrified of me although I never said anything more provocative than "Another bourbon, please." Yet, since she worked in a bar, ~~and there is a guild of knowledge among those who have, I~~ ^I understood her fear. I had worked in a bar myself for many years. I could respect her conviction that I was dangerous. That was apparent in the concentration of my good manners ~~themselves~~. In the days when I used to be a bartender, I had watched over a few customers ~~such~~ like myself. They

never bothered you until they did. Then the room could get smashed for too little.

I did not see myself as belonging to such a category. But how could I say that the waitress's dire expectation did not serve me well? I received no more attention than I wanted and every bit I might need. The manager, a young and pleasant fellow, much set on maintaining the tone of the establishment, had now known me for more than a few years, and so long as I had been with ^{accompanied by} my rich wife considered me a rare example of local gentry no matter how obstreperous Patty Lareine might get on drink: Wealth is worth that much! Now that I was by myself, he greeted me when I came in, said goodbye when I went out, and had obviously made the proprietorial decision to leave me strictly alone. As a corollary, few visitors were steered into the Lounge. Night after night, I could get drunk in the manner I chose.

Not until now have I been ready to confess that I am a writer. From Day One, however, no new writing had been done, not in more than three weeks. To see one's situation as ironic is, we may agree, no joy, but irony becomes a dungeon when the circle adds a circle. The cigarettes I gave ^{15 c. 1000} up ^{at such cost} so many times and with such expense to my ability to write,

had, on this last return to the domain of nicotine--it is no less than a domain--cut off all of my ability to come forth with even one new paragraph. In order not to smoke, I had had to learn to write all over again. Now that I could manage such a feat, the return to cigarettes seemed to have tamped out every literary spark. Or was it the departure of Patty Lareine?

These days I would take my notebook with me to The Widow's Walk and when drunk enough, would succeed in adding a line or two to paragraphs I had set down in less desperate hours. On those random occasions, therefore, when visitors were actually sharing a pre-dinner drink in the same public room with me, my small sounds of appreciation at some felicity of syntax, or my bored grunts before a phrase that now seemed as dead as an old drinking friend's repetitions, must have sounded strange and animal to others, as unsettling (given the panelled gentility of this Lounge) as cries made by a hound absolutely indifferent to any nearby human presence.

Can I claim I was not playing to the house when I would frown over a drunken note I could hardly read, and then chuckle in pleasure as soon as these alcoholic squiggles

metamorphosed into a legible text. "There," I would mutter to myself, "studies!"

I had just made out part of a title, a bona fide title, sufficiently resonant for a book: In Our Wild--Studies among the Sane by Timothy Madden.

Now, an exegesis commenced on my name. In Our Wild--Studies among the Sane by Mac Madden? By Tim Mac Madden? By Two-Mac Madden? I began to giggle. My waitress, poor over-alerted mouse, was able to flick a look at me only by ~~getting~~ ^{setting} herself resolutely in profile.

Yet I was giggling truly. Old jokes about my name were returning. I felt one rush of love for my father. Ah, the sweet sorrow of loving a parent. It is as pure as the taste of a sourball when you are five. Douglas "Doug" Madden--Big Mac to his friends and his only child, myself, ^{to} Little Mac, ^{or} ^{than} to-some Mac-Mac, hence Two-Mac and Toomey and back to Tim. Following this morphology of ^{my} name through the coils of booze, naturally I giggled. Each change of name had been an event in my life--if I could only recover ^{the} such events.

In my heart I was now trying to launch a first set of phrases for the initial essay. (What a title! In Our Wild--Studies among the Sane by ^{Tim} Mac Madden.) I might

speaking of the Irish and the reason they drink so much.
The Irish presumably,
Could it be the testosterone? They probably had more
than other men, my father for certain, and it made them
unmanageable. Maybe the hormone demanded to be dissolved
in drink.

I sat with my pencil poised, my sip of bourbon near
to scorching my tongue. I was not ready to swallow. This
title was the ~~most~~ ^{about all} that had come to me since Day One. I
could merely ponder the waves ~~the waves~~ ^{the Lumber Room} outside my window
here on this chill November night had become equal in some
manner to the waves in my mind. My thoughts came to a
halt and I felt myself ~~all but reduced to~~ the disappointment
of profound drunken vision: Just as you waddle up to the
true relations of the cosmos, your vocabulary blurs, ~~yes, slightly~~
~~just as irreparably as bones short of calcium grow too~~
~~soft to support your weight.~~

It was then I grew aware that I was no longer alone
in my realm of The Widow's Walk. A blonde remarkably like
Patty Lareine was sitting with her escort not ten feet away.
If I had had no other clue to the occasional but nonetheless
profound submersions of my conscious state, it was that she
had entered with her bucko, a nicely-tailored country-tweed-

and-flannels, silver-winged pompadour, suntanned lawyer-type fellow, ^(yes, the lady had her) sat down with this shiek, and, since they now had drinks in front of them, must have been talking (and in unabashed voices, hers, at least) for a considerable period. Five minutes? Ten minutes? I realized that they had sized me up, and for whatever reason, had the confidence, call it the gall, to ignore me. Whether this insularity derived from some not easily visible proficiency the man might call upon in the martial arts--Tweeds-and-Flannels looked more like a tennis player than a Black Belt--or whether they were so wealthy a couple that nothing unpleasant ever walked up to them in the way of strangers (unless it was burglary of the mansion) or whether they were exhibiting simple insensitivity to the charged torso, head and limbs sitting so near to them, I do not know, but the woman, at least, was talking loudly, and as if I did not exist. What an insult at this beleaguered hour!

Then, I understood. From their conversation I could soon divine that they were Californians, just as loose and innocent in comportment as tourists from New Jersey visiting a bar in Munich. What could they know of how they were insulting? ^{degrading me?}

Then, as my attention went through those ponderous

maneuvers of which only a human in deep depression can speak--the brain lurches like an elephant backed into his stall--I climbed at last out of the dungeon of my massive self-absorption to take a look ^{at} of them, and thereby came to realize that their indifference to me was neither arrogance, confidence, nor innocence, but to the contrary, ^{was} theatrical to the hilt. A set of poses. The man was highly keyed to the likelihood that a glowering presence such as ^{mine} myself was hardly to be ignored as a source of real trouble, and the woman, true to my premise that blondes believe it obscene not to be able to comport themselves as angels or bitches--each option ^{must be} is equally available--was stampeding along. She ^{wished} wanted to provoke me. She wanted to test her beau's courage. No mean surrogate was this lady for my own Patty Lareine.

But let me describe the woman. It's worth the ^{look} excursion. She must have been ^{fifty} ten years older than my wife, and so not that far from fifty, but what a splendid approach! There used to be a porny star named Jennifer Welles who had the same ^{appearance} look. She had large, well-turned, promiscuous breasts--one nipple tilted to the east, one stared out to the west, a deep navel, a woman's round belly, a sweet buoyant spread of buttocks--and dark pubic hair. That was what encouraged the

prurience to stir in those who bought a ticket to watch Jennifer Welles. Any lady who chooses to become a blonde is truly blonde.

Now, the face of my new neighbor, like the porny star, Jennifer Welles, was undeniably appealing. She had a charming upturned nose and a full pout on the mouth, as spoiled and imperious as the breath of sex. Her nostrils flared, her fingernails--the Liberation could go screw itself!--were scandalously well-manicured with a silver varnish to catch the blue-silver toning beneath her eyes. What a piece! An anachronism. ^{most complacent} The ~~worst~~ kind of West Coast money. ~~Two generations of holding it, I calculated.~~ ^{it was sure must certainly} Santa Barbara? La Jolla? Pasadena? Wherever ^{she came} from an enclave of golfers. ^{There,} Immaculately groomed ^{to such places} blondes remained as quintessential as mustard on pastrami. ^{come} Corporate California had moved right into my ~~intent-to~~ flush-a-few-demons-and reconstitute my psyche.

I can hardly describe what an outrage this seemed. As well paste a swastika outside the office of the United Jewish Appeal. This blonde reminded me so directly of Patty Lareine that I felt obliged to strike. Do what? I could hardly say. At the least, gore their mood.

So I listened. This was one immaculately dressed

full-bodied blonde who liked to drink. She could take them back to back. Scotch, of course. Chivas Regal. "Chivvies," she called them. "Miss," she told the waitress, "give me another Chivvies. Lots of diamonds." That was her word for ice, ha, ha.

"Of course, you're bored with me," she said to her man in a loud and most self-certain voice, as if she could measure to the drop just how much sex she was sitting upon. A powerhouse. There are voices that resonate into one's ~~guarded preserves~~ ^{secret strings} like tuning forks. Hers was one. It is crude to say, but one would do much for such a voice. There was always the hope that its warm moist little relative below might offer ^{something of} the same vibrations for your preserves.

Patty Lareine had such a voice. She could be diabolical with her lip around a Very Dry Martini (which, of course, count on it, she would insist on calling a Marty Seco.) "It was gin," she'd say in all the husky enthusiasm of Patty's crazy-bitch hot-to-trot larynx, "it was gin as done the old lady in. Yes, asshole," oh, and she would include you most tenderly in this jeer, as if, by God, even you, asshole, could feel all right if you were being kept around her. But then, Patty Lareine belonged to another kind of wealth, strictly derivative. Her second husband, ~~Weeks~~ ^{Weeks}

Wardley Hilby III (whom once she most certainly tried to convince me to murder) was old Tampa money and she drilled him good but not between the eyes, rather up his financial fundament thanks to her divorce lawyer, a whiz-bomb (who, *I used to assume (was probably no saying)* I can tell you to my pain, was massaging the back wall of her belly every night, *for a time*) but then one cannot expect less of a dedicated divorce lawyer. It pays off in presenting the witness.) Although Patty Lareine was trim to bursting in her build, and in those days, peppy as a spice jar, he modulated the moxie of her personality down to more *delicate* flavors. *herbs.* By the aid of intense coaching (he was one of the first to use a video camera for rehearsal) he showed her how to be tremulous on the stand and thereby turn the judgemental eye into--forgive me!--one fat old judge just melting away. Before they were done, her married peccadillos (and her husband had witnesses) came out as the maidenly provenances of a desperate, beleaguered, and much abused fine lady. Each ex-lover appearing as witness against her was depicted as one more unhappy attempt to cure the heart that her husband had shattered. Patty may have begun life as one good high school cheerleader, just a little old redneck from a small *North Carolina* down-home Mississippi town, but *by the time she was ready* ~~maybe it was those midnight~~ bangs—her lawyer and her grew equal to Lunt and Fontaine—to divorce Wardley (and marry me) she had developed a few social graces. Hell, her lawyer and she grew equal to Lunt and Fontaine

in the manner they could pass a bowl of soup back and forth on the witness stand. One scion of old Gulf Coast Florida money was certainly divested of a share of his principal. That was how Patty came to belong to wealth.

The more I listened to the lady in The Widow's Walk, however, the more I could discern that she was of other ilk. *she had* Patty's wits were true wit--that was all *to stand between her* and the crass and crude. This new blonde lady now transforming my evening, might be short on wit, but then she had small need for it. Her manner came with her money. If all else was right, ~~the most ecstatic experience you might have~~ *the ecstatic experience of having her meet you at the hotel* ~~with this immaculate presentation would be for her to meet~~ *room door attired in* ~~you wearing~~ *(no more than white elbow-length gloves. (And high heels*

"Go ahead, say you're bored," I now heard clearly.

"It's natural. It's to be expected when an attractive man and woman ~~each standing on their own feet~~ decide to go on a trip. To be thrown together all these days creates pressure, and soon there's the fear of disenchantment. ~~Tell me if I'm not right. Tell me if I'm wrong.~~

It was obvious that her interest in his reply was less than her own pleasure in commanding the center of the court, less, indeed, than her interest in letting me know (and letting him fear such knowledge) that not only were they not

married, but by all estimate, on a quick and limited fling. It could wrap itself up on any turn. Where would she be then but free and looking for the next stud? Taken as a beast on the hoof, Tweed-and-Flannels shouldn't be too hard to replace for a one-night stand. [The thought of possessing this lady for a long evening gave me--who always saw the animal in himself as hound or boar--the unmistakable apprehension that there was not much to be said for the psychology of the fish taking a lure. In bartending days, I would immediately have set out to woo this blonde with a little body language. The trap would probably have been sprung before I knew I was game.] For this lady had all the promise of ^{a body language to suggest} attractive blondes who drink--her own body language suggested that you would be given one absolutely thorough-going first-night fuck--only later would difficulties arise. But ^{the} first night would be on the house. That is, the present boyfriend could pay for it.

Was there some unseen loss of blood from Patty Lareine's decampment, and more than I know?
Did this come from the blows of marriage to Patty Lareine, of the unseen loss of blood from her decampment?--whatever, I felt weak. I did not know if I was up to the lure: There, is the psychology of the fish! It worries whether it is worthy. Give me a drunken mind every time.

No, I'm not bored, Tweeds-and-Flannels was telling her now

in the lowest voice, not bored at all, his voice droning into her ear like the white music you put on the audio system to dull your synapses into sleep. ^{I decided,} Yes, he must be a lawyer. There was something in the confidential moderation of his manner. He was addressing the Bench on a point of law, helping the judge not to blow the case. Soothing!

Her text, however, was more obstreperous! "No, no, no," she said, giving a light shake to her ice cubes, "it was my idea we come here. Your negotiations take you to Boston, I said, ^{well-then,} ~~well,~~ ^{also} my whim takes me along. Do you mind? Of course you didn't. ^{don't} Daddy is mad about brand new mama. Et cetera," she said, ^{pausing for a sip of the Chivaris, to her point} ~~in a full voice.~~ "But, darling, I have this vice. I can't bear contentment. The moment I put the word to myself, everything says, 'Goodbye, my dear!'" Moreover, I'm an avid map-reader as you have learned to your pain, Lonnie. Call it the fault of the map. They say women can't read directions. ~~But~~ I can. At Kansas City, way back in--wait, it comes to me--in 1976--I was the only Gerry Ford woman out of our delegation who could read a map well enough to drive from the hotel to his headquarters.

"So, there, was your mistake. Showing me a map of Boston

and environs. When you hear that tone in my voice, when
I say 'Darling, I'd like to see a map of this State,' beware.
It means my toes are itching. Lonnie, ever since I was in
the fifth grade and we started geography studies,"--she
squinted critically at the melting diamonds in her ^{9/10 33} Chivvies--
"I used to ^{stare} look at Cape Cod on ^{the} maps of New England. It
sticks out like a pinkie. You know how children are about
pinkies? That's their little finger, the one close to them.
So I wanted to see the tip of Cape Cod."

I must say I still didn't like her friend. ~~How~~ ^{He}
had that much-massaged look of the man whose money makes
money while he sleeps. Not at all, not at all, he was telling
her, laying his salad oil on her stirred-up little sorrows,
^{we both} I wanted to come here ^{too}, it's truly all right, and more of
such, and more of such.

"No, ~~you had no choice~~, Lonnie, I gave you no choice.
I was a tyrant about it. I said, 'I want to go to this place,
Provincetown.' I wouldn't allow you to demur. So here we are.
It's a whim on top of a whim, and you're bored stiff. You
want to drive back to Boston tonight. This place is deserted,
right?"

At this point, make no mistake about it--she looked
at me full out: full of welcome, if I took it up, full of

scorn in the event I did not reply.

I spoke. I said to her, "That's what you get for trusting a map."

It must have worked. For my next recollection is of sitting with them. I may as well confess that my memory is damnable. What I recall I see clearly--sometimes!--but often I cannot connect the events of a night. So my next recollection is of sitting with them. I must have been invited over. I must, indeed, have been good company. Even he was laughing. Leonard Pangborn was his name, Lonnie Pangborn, a good family name in Republican California, doubtless--and hers was not Jennifer Welles but Jessica Pond. Pond and Pangborn--can you understand my animosity now? They had the patina that comes off a TV screen from characters in a soap opera.

Actually, I began to entertain her considerably. I think it is because I had not spoken to anyone for days. Now, depression or no, some buried good humor in me ^{seemed to be} must have been well rested. I began to relate a few stories about the Cape and my timing was vigorous. I ^{must have been} probably came on as energetic as a convict on a one-day pass outside the walls, but then I was ^{so well} on my way to understanding Pond ^{getting along with} ~~so well~~ that it came near to lifting me out of my doldrums. For one thing, I soon ^{drawn to} divined that she was hooked on substantial property. Fine

mansions on good green lawns with high wrought-iron gates gave her the same glow a real estate agent derives from bringing the right client to the right house. Of course, I soon figured it out. To the money she was born with, Jessica had added her own pile. Back in California, she was exactly that, a successful country real estate agent.

What a disappointment Provincetown must have been to her. We offer our indigenous architecture, but it is funky: old fish-shed with wooden-stairway-on-the-outside Cape Cod saltbox. We sell room-space to tourists. One hundred rented rooms can end up having one hundred outside stairways. Provincetown, to anyone looking for gracious living, is no more uncluttered than twenty telephone poles at a crossroads.

Maybe she was deceived by the delicacy of our site on the map. ^{The} Oh, the joy to see that fine filigree tip of the Cape curl around itself like the toe of a medieval slipper! Doubtless, she pictured swards of lawn. ^{But when} When she arrived she saw honky-tonk shops boarded up and a one-way main street so narrow that if a truck was parked at the curb, you had to hold your breath and hope ^{nothing} you didn't scrape your rented sedan as you went on through.

Naturally, she asked me about the ^{most} imposing house ^{in the town} our town can point to. ^{It sits on a hill, it's a five story chateau -} It sits on a hill by itself looking the only one in town and is ^{ruined} about

in high wrought-iron. It is far removed from its gate. I couldn't say who lived there now, or whether he owned or rented. I had heard the name and forgot. It is not easy to explain to strangers, but in the winter, people choose to burrow down in Provincetown. Getting to know new arrivals is no simpler than travelling from island to island. Besides, none of my acquaintances, dressed as we were for winter (dungarees, boots, and parkas) would ever get past a gate. I assumed that the present Siegneur of our one imposing house had to be some kind of rich gink. So I drew on the rich man I knew best (who happened, indeed, to be Patty Lareine's ex-husband from Tampa) and I moved him all the way north to Provincetown and loaned him the chateau. I did not wish to lose momentum with Miss Jessica.

"Oh, that place belongs," I said, "to Meeks Wardley Hilby the Third. He lives all alone there." I paused. "I used to know him. We went to Exeter at the same time."

"Oh," said Jessica, "do you think we could pay him a visit?"

"He's not there now. He rarely stays in town any longer."

"Too bad," she said.

"You wouldn't like him," I told her. "He's a very

odd fellow. At Exeter he used to drive all the deans crazy by twisting the dress code. We had to wear jackets and ties to class, but old Wardley would get himself up like a prince of the Salvation Army."

There must have been some promise in my voice for she began to laugh happily, but I remember that even as I began to tell her more, I had the strongest feeling I should not go on--just as irrational as an unaccountable smell of smoke--do you know, I sometimes think we are all of us equal to broadcasting stations and some stories should not be put on the air. Let us put it that I had an unmistakable injunction not to continue (which I knew I would ignore--that much is to be said for an attractive blonde!) and at that moment, even as I looked for the next words, an image came to me across the years, bright as a coin from the mint, of Meeks Wardley Hilby, III, of Wardley, gangling along in his chinos, his patent leather pumps and the old dinner jacket which he wore every day to class (to the consternation of half the faculty) his satin lapels faded and scuffed, his purple socks and heliotrope bow-tie standing out like neon signs in Vegas.

"God," I said to Jessica, "we used to call him 'goon-child.'"

"You have to tell me all about him," she said.
"Please."

"I don't know," I replied. "The story has its sordid touches."

"Oh, do tell us," said Pangborn.

I hardly needed encouragement. "Attribute it to the father," I said. "There has to be a powerful influence coming from the father. He's dead now. Meeks Wardley Hilby the Second."

"How do you tell them apart?" asked Pangborn.

"Well, they always called the father Meeks and the son Wardley. There was no confusion."

"Ah," he said. "Were they at all alike?"

"Not much. Meeks was a sportsman and Wardley was Wardley. In

"I'm not certain," I said, "how much this affected the way Wardley was brought up, but I can tell you that in childhood, the nurses used to tie his hands to the bed on Meeks's orders. It was calculated to put a stop to Wardley's onanism." I looked at her as if to say, "This is the detail I was afraid of." She gave a small smile which I took to mean, "It's a cold night and we're by the fire. Tell your tale."

I did. I worked at it with great care, and gave them a full account of the adolescence of Meeks Wardley Hilby the Third, never stopping to chide myself for ^{this} an outrageous change of venue. After all, I was moving Hilby's boyhood from ^{the palace} a mansion on the Gulf Coast near Tampa ^{to the} to our cold northern estate here on the hill, but then this was only Pond and Pangborn I was telling it to. What would they ^{cave} care, I told myself, where it took place?

So I went on. Meeks's wife, Wardley's mother, was sickly, and Meeks had a mistress. ^{His mother} The wife died when Wardley was in his first year at Exeter, and the father soon married the mistress. Neither of them ever liked Wardley, and ^{he liked them} ~~he~~ ^{no more,} ~~they kept a door locked~~ hated them. Since there was one locked door on the third

floor of their house that was always kept locked, Wardley
decided was
knew that must be the room to get into. Not, however, until

enough to find he was kicked out of Exeter in his last year was he ever home *long*
when his father and his new wife *the* were away *for a night* at the same time.
Now, he had the
On that occasion he took his opportunity. He was not brave,

but there came an evening when he worked himself up sufficiently
to inch along an exterior molding of the mansion's wall three
stories up from the ground, then in through the window.

"I love this," said Jessica. "What was in the room?"

He discovered, I told her, an old-fashioned large view
camera with a black cloth mounted on a heavy tripod in one
corner, and on a library table, *in* five red vellum scrapbooks,
It was
1 a special pornographic collection. The five scrapbooks
large scrap
contained photographs of Meeks making love to his mistress.

was
"The one who *is* now the wife?" asked Pangborn.

I nodded. As described by the son, the *first* pictures must
have *first* been taken in the year Wardley was born. Then,
each successive volume in the scrapbooks showed the man and *father* the
mistress woman getting older. A year or two after the death of Wardley's
mother, not long after the new marriage, another man appeared
in the photos. *was* "He *is* the manager of the estate," I said, *Wardley*
told me that he
"and dined with the family every day."

At this point, ^{Louise} ~~Jessica~~ ^{his} clapped her hands together. ^{"Indeed"}
Now, ~~I went on~~, ^(if later) the photographs showed the manager making
love to the wife while the father sat five feet away reading
a newspaper. The lovers would adopt different positions
^{but} while Meeks kept reading the paper.

"Who was the photographer?" Jessica asked.

"Wardley ^{said} ~~told me~~ it was the butler."

"What a house!" Jessica exclaimed. "Only in New Eng-
land could this occur." ^{We all laughed a good deal at that.}

I did not add that the butler seduced Wardley at the age
of fourteen. ^{Nor did I offer Wardley's}
~~I could not have kept myself from offering Ward-~~
~~ley's~~ statement on the matter: "I've spent the rest of my
life trying to regain property rights to my rectum," and ~~it~~
^{I probably a line} seemed to me there was the finest line of propriety to tread
with Jessica. I had not found it yet, so I was cautious.
"At nineteen," I said, "Wardley got married. ~~In part~~, I think
it was to confound his father, ~~for~~ Meeks was a confirmed anti-
Semite, and the bride was a Jewish girl. She also happened
to have a large nose."

By the way they began ^{enjoyed this, I} ~~to laugh despite themselves~~, I
could see Pond and Pangborn were so naturally and intrinsically
anti-Semitic that I had ^{a few} ~~regrets for beginning this~~, but no
helping it now--I also had the ruthlessness of the story-teller,

and the next detail was crucial. "This nose," I said, "as Wardley described it, curled over her upper lip until she ~~looked like she was~~ ^{looked as if she were} breathing the fumes of her mouth. For some reason, maybe because he was a gourmet, this was indescribably carnal to Wardley."

"Oh, I hope it turned out all right for ~~both of~~ them." said Jessica.

"Well, not exactly," I said. "Wardley's wife had been ^{well} brought up ~~by her parents to honor restraint~~. So, woe to Wardley when she discovered that he ^{too,} also had a pornography collection. She destroyed it. Then she added ^{make it worse.} ~~to Wardley's~~ ^{She} store of private furies."

~~"I love that," said Jessica. "Private furies."~~

~~"Thank you—by managing~~ ^{to manage} ~~to mollify Meeks.~~ ^{the father.} After five years of marriage, she succeeded in pleasing Meeks enough for the old man to give a dinner party for his son and daughter-in-law. Wardley got very drunk, and ^{later that night,} on going to bed, brained his wife with a candlestick. ^{happened to die from the blow} She died."

"Oh, no," said Jessica. "It all happened in that house on the hill?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"What," asked Pangborn, "was the legal upshot?"

"Well, believe it if you will, they did not use insanity

for a defense."

"Second degree manslaughter?" asked Pangborn.

"Exactly."

"He must have received some time, ~~in jail.~~"

Exeter together, but had been in the same prison.
"He did.", I was not about to mention that ~~we had been~~ *not only had we gone*
~~in the same jail~~ at the same time. *in the pic."*

"This sounds like the father's ~~doing to me,~~" said Lonnie.

"I think you're right."

"You're right." I admitted.

"Of course."
"Yes, with a plea of insanity, the boy's lawyer would
~~have had to bring~~ *brought* the five vellum scrapbooks into court."

Not to be out-done, I reminded him, "There was also the
stepmother to protect."

"Understood."

"Naturally," he said, and locked his fingers together
and flexed them outward. "So," he ~~added,~~ *said,* "Wardley took the
fall. What was it worth to him?"

"Two million dollars a year," *(answered, "Put in a")* I said. "In trust for
every year he served, plus a split with his stepmother on the
estate."

"You know for a fact that"

"And they paid it over to him?" Lonnie asked.

Jessica shook her head. "I don't see such people honor-
their ing an agreement."

paid"
I shrugged. "Neeks died," I told them, *"no cause Wardley*
had pitched the scrap books. Two Neeks died
was still incarcerated, and the stepmother promptly married

-10-

the estate manager. I suppose they considered trying to overthrow the will, but it never came to that. Wardley had filched all ~~the~~ ^{the} of Meeks's scrapbooks. Believe me, they kept the bargain. Meeks Wardley Hilby the Third came out of jail a wealthy man."

Jessica said, "I love how you tell a story."

Pangborn nodded. "Priceless," he said.

She was pleased. The trip to this strange place ^{seemed to have} ~~had~~ come to a few good minutes after all. "Does Wardley," she asked,

"live in the house right now?"

I was hesitating what to say to this when Leonard Pangborn
replied, "Of course not," ~~said Leonard~~ "Our new friend here made it all up."

Leonard
"Well, Mr. Pangborn," I said, "remind me to hire you ^{if I need a lawyer} ~~some day~~."

"Did you make it up?" she asked.

I was not about to give a small smile and say "Some of it." Instead I said, "Yes. Every last drop," and emptied my drink. Leonard, doubtless, had already made ^{his} inquiries about who owned the ^{estate} ~~wealthiest house in town~~.

"How did you know?" she asked him.

"The magician," he replied, "does not explain his tricks."

My next recollection is that I was alone again. They had gone into the dining room. I found slips of paper in my

pocket next morning.

On one of them I had written, "Is our inability to ^{could} have a complete orgasm due to the possibility it might set off a murderous paroxysm?" I hope I was thinking of Hilby.

There were other notes. I remember drinking, and writing, and watching the water recede from the bulkhead as the tide went out. Some observations I would rip up. The sound of paper as it was being torn set off reverberations in me. I began to wonder if the cry of human tissue when ~~snipped by surgeons~~ might be kin to the tiny shriek you hear from the paper. I began to chortle to myself. I was thinking that surgeons had to be the happiest people on earth. "To cut up people and get paid for it, that's happiness," ^{I told myself} again. It made me wish Jessica Pond was next to me in the lounge ^{howl} again. She might have given a glad shriek at such a remark ^{the thought}. Our eyes could have locked a little afterward.

It comes back to me that I then wrote a longer note to myself which I also found in my pockets next day. For some reason, I gave it a title: RECOGNITION. "The recognition of the possibility of greatness in myself has always ^{been} been greeted by unseemly hysteria in my heart. For it is followed by desire to murder the nearest unworthy." Then I had underlined the ^{next} final sentence: "It is better to keep

a modest notion of oneself!"

The more, however, that I read this note, the more I seemed to install myself into that impregnable hauteur which is, perhaps, the most satisfying aspect of solitary drinking. The knowledge that Jessica Pond and Leonard Pangborn were sitting at a table not a hundred feet away, oblivious to what might be their considerable peril, had an intoxicating effect upon me, and I began to contemplate--I must say it was with no serious passion, rather as one more variety of amusing myself through another night--how easy it would be to do away with them. Consider it! After twenty-four days without Patty Lareine, this is the sort of man I had become!

Here was my reasoning: A clandestine couple, each of whom is obviously well-placed in whatever world they inhabit in California, decide to go to Boston together. They are discreet about their mutual plans. Perhaps they tell an intimate or two, perhaps no one, but since they only drive off to Provincetown on a whim, and in a rented car, the perpetrator need only--should the deed be done--drive their car one hundred and twenty miles back to Boston, leave it on the street, and, assuming the bodies are well-buried, it would be weeks, if ever, before any concern for the man and woman as

-13-

missing persons might stir newspaper publicity in these parts. By then, would anyone at The Widow's Walk remember their faces? Even in that event, the police would have to assume, given the location of the car, that they returned to Boston, and met their end there. I dwelt in the logic of this fine scenario, enjoyed my drink a little more, enjoyed the power I possessed over them by thinking ~~these~~ ^{these} thoughts *such as* ^{these} and there. . . it is precisely there. . . I lost the rest of ^{the} my evening. In the morning, I would no longer be able to put it together to satisfy myself.

What I can't recollect is whether or not I began to drink again with Pond and Pangborn. It is as likely, I should think, that I boozed by myself all night until closing, got into my car and went home. If I did, I would have gone directly to sleep. Although that, by evidence of what I found when I awakened, was not possible.

I also have another scenario which is certainly clearer than a dream, although I could have dreamt it. It is that Patty Lareine returned and we had a terrible quarrel. I see her mouth. Yet I do not recollect a word. Could it have been a dream?

Then I also have the clearest impression that Jessica and Leonard did indeed join me after they ate, and I invited

them to my home (to Patty Lareine's home). We sat in the living room while I ^{the} told Jessica about Hell-Town. Half the houses here in town, I informed her, were no more than old sheds, either old fish-sheds or brothel cribs. There had been a time ^{over a} some hundred years ago when whaling ended and Hell-Town's sheds were put on rafts and floated across the harbor onto the beach at Provincetown, a good float near to two miles. The man and woman listened to me with attention. I seem to remember that. Then we took a trip in a car, but if it was my Porsche, I could not have taken both of them. Perhaps we went in two cars.

I also remember returning home alone. The dog was in terror of me. He is a big Labrador, but he crept away as I came near. I sat down at the edge of my bed and wrote one more note before I lay down. That I recall. I dozed off sitting up and staring at the notebook. Then I woke up in a few seconds (or was it an hour) and saw the same legend: "Despair is the emotion we feel at the death of beings within us."

That was my last thought before I went to sleep. Yet none of these scenarios, nor very little of them can be true--they must be dreams--because when I woke in the morning, I had a tattoo on my arm that had not been there the night before.

2.

I have much to tell about the next day but it did not begin with any great rush to arise. The truth is that I stayed in bed for a long time and did not trust my eyes to the light. In that self-imposed darkness, I tried to decide upon what I could remember of the night before.

The procedure was not strange to me. It did not matter how much I drank. I could always get my car home. I had returned my car safely on nights when others who had swallowed as much would have been slumbering at the bottom of the sea. I would enter the house, reach my bed, and come to in the morning with my brain feeling as if it had been split by an axe. I remembered nothing. Yet, if that proved the only symptom, and I knew no other uneasiness than the ~~unfair measure of~~ debauch I had put upon my liver,

-4-

it was all right. Others would tell me later what I had done. If I felt no dread, then I could have done nothing too terrible. Short-term amnesia is not the worst affliction if you have an Irish flair for the sauce.

Since Patty Lareine had left, however, I was encountering new phenomena, and they were curious. Did drink have me chasing for the root of the wound? I can only say that my memory would be clear to me in the morning, but shattered, that is to say, in pieces. Each fragment was sharp enough, yet like puzzles that have been thrown together, not all the pieces seemed to come out of the same box. That is equal, I suppose, to saying that my dreams were now as intelligible and reasonable as my memory, or my memory was as untrustworthy as my dreams. In either event, I could not tell them apart. It is a frightful state. You wake up in pure confusion over what you might or might not have done. That is like entering a labyrinth of caves. Somewhere along the way, the fine long thread that is supposed to lead you back has been broken. Now at each turning it is possible to be certain one has come this way, or, equally, you have never been here before.

I speak of this because I awoke on Day Twenty-Five and lay nearly still for an hour before I chose to open my eyes.

I was feeling dread with an intimacy I had not known since I came out of prison. There were mornings in the penitentiary when you got up from sleep with the knowledge that somebody bad--far beyond your own measure of how to be bad--was looking for you. ~~These~~ ^{Those} were the worst mornings in prison.

Now, I had the conviction that something would happen to me before the day was done, and in this anticipation was my dread. Yet with it all, I had one surprise, lying there with a ferocious headache, trying behind closed eyes to keep my memory in view--it was like ^{following} ~~a movie~~ film with numerous jumps and breaks--a weight of apprehension lying in my stomach dire as lead, I still had an erection, an honest-to-God all-out ram of an erection. I wanted to screw Jessica Pond.

I would be reminded of this little fact in the days ahead. But let us take it in order. When your mind is a book where pages are missing--no, worse, two books, each with ^{its own} ~~their~~ gaps, well, order becomes as close a virtue as clean floors to a monastery. So I say only that it was because of this erection that I was saved the shock of opening my eyes on my tattoo, but remembered it instead. (Although at this instant, I could picture neither the parlor nor the face of the tattoo artist.) Somewhere I had registered the fact. With all my distress, it was still curious. How many facets

memory could utilize! To remember that an act had been undertaken (although one could visualize none of it) was like reading about someone in a newspaper. So and so embezzled \$80000, The headline is all one perceives; the fact, however, is registered. So I was noting this fact about myself. ^{Tim} Mac Madden had a tattoo. I knew it with my eyes closed. The erection reminded me of it.

In prison, I had always resisted ^{acquiring} taking one on. I had felt like enough of a con. All the same, you cannot ^{give} put in ^{-three} ^{-to} a couple of years in the slammer without picking up a considerable amount of tattoo culture. So I had heard about the rush. One man in four or five received a real rush of sexual excitement while the needle was being pricked into him. I also recollected how horny I had been for Ms. Pond. Had she been about while the artist was doing my watermark? Or, ^{Could} might she have been waiting in my car? Had we given the goodbye to Lonnie Pangborn?

I opened my eyes. The tattoo was crusty, and sticky-- some kind of glorified bandaid had come loose during the night. Still, I could read it. LAUREL, it said, LAUREL, in a curley-cue script of blue ink within a small red heart. Let no one say I had special taste when it came to engravings.

My humor broke like a rotten egg. Patty Lareine had

also seen this tattoo. Last night! Abruptly I had the clearest vision of her. She was shrieking at me in our living room. ~~Had she come back on some quick ravaging trip? I seem to recall that she wanted white fur and a pair of favorite see-through panties. "Yeah, asshole, that's what I want, and what are you going to do about it?" And she put out her tongue at me. If she had been wearing nothing beneath her skirt, she would have doubtless mooned her behind.~~

Then she saw the mark. "Laurel? Friend, you got ~~con-~~
~~summate-gall!~~ Are you daring to inflict Laurel on me again?"
As soon put a time bomb under her bed.

Yes, but how much of this had actually happened? It was obvious to me that I could conceive of conversations as easily as I could live them. Was I not a writer after all? Patty Lareine had disappeared twenty-five days ago with a black stud of her choice, a tall, sullen, beautifully-put-together dude who had been hanging around through the summer, ^{ready to capitalize on that} ~~Patty Lareine liked her summer parties--we had had one just about every night. She loved the records of Sonny Stitt. I did too. She played them, however, all the time. It was her proud claim that one night on the Gulf Coast she had succeeded in making it with Sonny in an anteroom of the bandstand while two of the boys in the group cheered her on.~~

After that, she claimed, he always had a beautiful white girl coming right out of his saxophone. "That's why Sonny is special," she would tell the world when drunk enough, "he's got blonde juices in his black."

~~Yes, she had that~~ carnal affinity toward black men which lives in the heart of certain blonde ladies like lightning and thunder. Or, for all I know, ~~it~~ smolders in the heart like oily rags behind a barn door. Whatever she felt, there was no mistaking the results. Once a year, give a season or two, she would have a fling with Mr. Black. Some big black. He could be heavy, or he could be as quick as a basketball player, but he was always big. The size put them out of my physical reach--I think it delighted her contempt for me that I was not man enough under such circumstances to load my pistol and go do a down-home chase-off. "Just like your dad would in ^{North Carolina} Mississippi?" I asked. "You bet!" she'd reply with all the sassy, spiteful, untrammelled mouth of an eighteen-year-old in cutoffs at some Dr. Pepper gas station. God, she was unafraid of me. I was terrified I would indeed get my gun, but never to chase Mr. Black. He was just appropriating what I, too, would grab if I could fill his jock-strap and sweat properly in his black logic. No, I was afraid I would get my pistol and never leave the house before

emptying a magazine into her all-superior fuck-you face.

Still! Why did I dare to inflict ^{the name on} Laurel upon my wife?

I knew she was the one lady Patty would never forgive. I

was with Laurel, after all, when I met Patty, except that

her name was not Laurel but Madeleine, Madeleine Falco.

Patty had insisted on calling her Laurel ~~on~~ the day they met.

I learned later that "Laurel" was short for Lorelei. ~~Patty~~

did not like Madeleine Falco. Had I taken on the tattoo ^{to} ~~in~~
^{punish Patty on her return?} order ~~to irritate~~ Patty? Had she truly been in the house?

Or was I living with some fragment of last night's dream?

It occurred to me that if my wife had indeed come to
visit, and then departed, some evidence must remain. Patty ~~Laurel~~

always left half-consumed objects behind her. Her lipstick
must be on our glasses. It was enough to ^{get me dressed and} ~~get on a shirt and~~

~~pants, and take me~~ down the stairs, but in the living room

there were no traces of her. The ashtrays were clean. I

seem to remember wiping them last evening. Since she

had almost certainly not been back, why was I now twice

certain our conversation had taken place? Of what benefit

were clues, if one's mind was stimulated to believe the

opposite of the evidence? It came upon me then that the

only true test of the strength, the veritable muscle-tone so to speak, of one's sanity, was the ability to bear question upon question with not an answer in sight.

It is good I had such a perception for I soon needed it. In the kitchen, during the night, the dog had been ill. The treasures of his ^{belly} stomach and ~~bowels~~ befouled the linoleum. Worse, the jacket I had been wearing last night was hung on a chair, but crusted with blood. I felt of my nostrils. I suffered from nosebleeds. Yet the passage seemed clear. Now the dread with which I had awakened took a turn. A whistle of fear stirred in my lungs when I inhaled.

How could I ever clean the kitchen? I turned around, went back through the house, and out the door. It was not until I reached the street and felt the damp air of November pass through my shirt that I realized I was still in my slippers. No great matter. I took five strides across Commercial Street and peered into the windows of my Porsche. (Her Porsche.) The passenger seat ^{was} ~~appeared to be~~ covered with blood.

What a curious logic to these matters! ^{*} ~~Now I did not~~ feel frightened any longer but exhilarated as if none of this had anything to do with me. The rush from the tattoo came back.

^{*} I had a startling lack of reaction, But then the worst hangovers are always like that—they are simply full of the most unaccountable spaces. So, I did not

I was also feeling very cold. I returned inside and brewed myself a cup of coffee. The dog, ashamed of the mess he had made, blundered about in every danger of compounding it, until I let him out.

My good mood (which I treasured for its rarity the way a patient in terminal illness is grateful for an hour without pain) lasted all the while I was clearing up after the hound. With my hangover, there was gagging aplenty, but also the most thoroughgoing and satisfying expiation for the sins of my drinking. I might be only half-Catholic, and that all but untutored, since Big Mac never went near a church and Julia, my mother (half-Protestant, half-Jewish—*which is one reason* ~~my mother (half-Jewish, half-Protestant)~~ *I did not like anti-Semitism 1945*) was prone to steer me to so many different cathedrals, synagogues, Quaker meeting houses and lectures at Ethical Culture that she was never much of a religious guide. *therefore,* I couldn't claim to see myself as a Catholic. Yet I did. Give me a hangover, put me on my knees cleaning dog-poop, and I would feel virtuous. (*almost managed to forget* Indeed, I had just about forgotten how much blood had been spilled over the right seat of the car.) Then the phone rang. It was Regency, Alvin ^{Luther} Philip Regency, our ^{Acting} new Chief of Police, or rather, his secretary, asking me to wait until he came on the line, long enough to strip me of much good mood.

"Hello, Tim," he said, "you okay?"

"I'm fine. I'm hung over, but I'm fine."

"That's nice. That's good. I woke up this morning feeling ~~a little~~ concerned about you." He was going to be a modern Chief of Police, that was for certain.

"No," I told him, "I'm all right."

He paused. "Tim, would you drop in ~~some time~~ this afternoon?"

My father always told me that when in doubt, assume a confrontation will ~~be unpleasant~~. ^{is brewing.} Next, get it over with as quickly, ~~as possible~~. So I said, "Why don't I come over this morning?"

"It's lunch time now," he said reprovingly. ~~He thought~~ ~~little of acquaintances who did not know the time of day.~~

"Well, lunch," I said. "That's all right."

"I'm having a cup of Java with one of the Selectmen. Make it after."

"Fine."

"Tim?"

"Yeah."

"Are you okay?"

"I think I am."

"Well, ^{will} ~~will~~ you clean your car?"

"Oh, Christ, I had a terrible nosebleed last night."

"Yes, well, some of your neighbors ought to belong to the Good Snoopers' Society. The way they phoned it in to me, I figured you lopped somebody's arm off."

"I resent that. Why don't you come over and pick out a sample? You can check my blood type."

"Hey, give me a break." He laughed. He had a real cop's laugh. A high-pitched soprano whinny that had nothing to do with the rest of him. His face, I can tell you, might as well have been made of granite.

"All right," I said, "it's funny. But how would you like to be a grown man with nosebleeds?"

"Oh," he said, "I would take good care of myself. After ten shots of bourbon, I would be punctilious about drinking a glass of water." Punctilious had just made his morning. He gave ^{his} a big whinny again and signed off.

I cleaned my car. That did not feel nearly so ^{42 inside of} good ^(unhazardous) as the dog poop. Nor was my stomach taking the coffee well. I did not know whether to be agitated at the effrontery and/or paranoia of my neighbors--which ones?--or to live with the possibility that I had gotten sufficiently unhinged to break one or another blonde lady's nose. Or worse. How did you lop off an arm?

The difficulty is that my sardonic side which had been

designed, presumably, to carry me through most of a bad day, was, when all is said, not a true side, but only a facet--one stop on the roulette wheel. There are thirty-seven others. Nor was ^{anything} ~~all that was~~ running loose in me.

now put to rest by my increasing conviction that the blood on this seat ^{did} ~~could~~ not come from ^{anyone's} ~~anybody's~~ nose. It was ^{abundant} ~~much too thick~~. ^{So I was soon} Besides, I was revolted by the task.

Blood like any implecable force of nature insists on speaking. It is always with the same message. "All that lives," I now heard, "clamors to live again." ~~So I can't say how~~ ~~fine a job I did on the seat. I hardly cared. The good~~ Catholic who scrubbed the floor was no longer with me. Maybe he, too, had only one number on the roulette.

I will spare you such details as the rinsing of the cloth and the ^{trips} ~~going back and forth~~ with pails of water. I had ~~intensely~~ friendly conversations about nosebleeds with two neighbors who passed while I was on the task, and that was enough, by the time I finished, to walk to the Police Station. Truth, if I brought the car, Regency might be tempted to impound it.

There had been mornings over the two years I had been in prison where I used to wake up in the middle of the night with no sense of where I was. That would not be un-

unusual but for the fact that of course I knew exactly where I was, down to my cell-block and cell number, yet I would not accept it. The given was not permitted to be given. I would lie in bed and make plans to take a girl to lunch or decide to ~~drive out to the Island and~~ rent a cat-boat for a sail. It did no good to tell myself that I was not at home but within a cell in a medium security prison in ~~New York State, no~~ ^{Florida}, I saw such facts as part of the dream, and thereby at quite a remove from me. I could get off ~~and away~~ on my plans for the day, if only the dream that I was in prison would not persist--"Man," I would say to myself, "shake these cobwebs." Sometimes it would take all of a morning for me to get back into the real day. Only then could I recognize that I would not be able to take the girl to lunch.

Something kin to this was being perpetrated on me. now. I had a tattoo I could not account for, strange blood in my car, a good dog who was frightened of me, a missing ~~wife~~ whom I might or might not have seen late last night, and an ongoing, nicely simmering tumescence for a middle-aged blonde real estate lady from California, yet all I could think of as I took my walk to the center of town was that Alvin ^{Luther} Philip Regency ought to have a reasonably

-56-

serious purpose for interrupting my day, ~~or I would be~~
~~obliged to tell him that a writer's working hours were to~~
~~be respected.~~

Now, the fact that I had done no writing in twenty-five days was not something I bothered to take into account. Rather, like those mornings in prison when I could not enter my day, so was I now like an empty pocket pulled out, and as much without myself as an actor who leaves his wife, his children, his debts, his mistakes, and even his ego in order to step into a role.

In fact, I was
I was now observing the manifest of *the new* my personality that walked into Regency's office in the basement of Town Hall. *Or* I came through the door--it was my first visit here--
I did my best to give
like a reporter, giving off the impression that the Police Chief's clothes, expression, office furniture, and the words he spoke were all of equal import *to me*, as equal as the phrases that would go into a feature story of eight good paragraphs of approximately equal length. I entered, as I say, in the full concentration of such a role, and thereby noted like a good journalist that he was not accustomed to his new office. Not yet. His personal photographs, framed testimonials, professional licenses, paperweights and memorabilia might all be laid out or tacked to the walls, and two file

cabinets could flank his desk much like rectangular columns at the gates of an ancient temple, ^{and} while he might sit erect in his chair like the military man he used to be, his close-to-the-scalp crewcut marking him as an old Green Beret, but still it stood out: He was not at home in his office. ^{Of But to} course, who would be at home with him? He had features that ^{Would ask} ^{to use a jack-hammer on} (a sculptor would have had to cut sharply into the stone, all promontories, ledges and overhangs. In town, his nicknames abounded--Rock-face, Target Shoot, Glint-eye--or, leave it to the old Portuguese fishermen: Twinkletoes. The townspeople were obviously not ready to buy him yet. He may have been ^{Acting} Chief of Police for six months, but the shadows of his predecessor hung over the office. There was the trouble. The last Chief, around for ten years, had been a local Portuguese who studied law at night and moved up to the Attorney General's Office of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Memories of the last Chief--considering it was Provincetown, an unsentimental place--were now well-spoken.

I didn't know Regency well. In the old days, if he had come to my bar, I ^{would} have been certain, doubtless, that I could read him on the spot. He was ^{almost} not large enough to play professional football, ^{and} but there was no mistaking the competitive gleam in his eye: God, the spirit of competition,

and crazy mayhem had come together. Regency, ^{looked like} ~~with sixty~~
~~more good pounds added to his native hundred and seventy,~~
would have been one large Christian athlete who hated to
lose. So the fair name of his predecessor had to be a
living rebuke to him.

I offer this much of a portrait because ^{in truth,} ~~my first~~
impression, that Regency was an easy man to comprehend,
turned out not to be true. In fact, I could ^{not figure him} ~~never make him~~
out. Just as I couldn't always say hello to my day, so
Regency had trouble fitting into ^{the} ~~his~~ personality, ^{one knew him by} I will
provide some details by and by.

Now he ~~looked at me~~ pushed his chair straight back
with ~~that air of~~ military rectitude ~~which grimaces within~~
before the presence of a needless curve, and came out from
behind his desk to draw up a chair near me. Then he stared
thoughtfully into my eyes. Like a General. His early career
~~as a~~ ^{the} Green Beret must not have satisfied enough; after Viet
Nam he served ^{had} ~~as a~~ State Trooper ^{Brownie} and ~~had only come over to~~
~~up to a twice-certified prick if somewhere along~~
~~our police force after years in Yarmouth Barracks. So his~~
~~face and career biography could be twice certified: Prick.~~
^{He would have added}
^{the way he had not been implanted with the idea that}

^{also}
~~Yet he also had some idea that~~ compassion belonged to
^{the} ~~A~~ working police officer's presence. That kept all one's
preconceptions vibrating. The first thing he said, for

instance, was "How is Patty Lareine? Have you heard from her?"

"No," I said. ^{Of course, by small} But ~~with~~ this one remark, he wiped out ^{hand-held stance} my role as a journalist.

"I wouldn't get into it," he said, "but I swear I saw her last night."

"Where?"

"At the West End. Near the breakwater."

That was not far from The Widow's Walk. "It's interesting," I said, "to know ^{hear} she's back in town, but I know nothing of that." I lit a cigarette. My pulse had gone off on a race.

"It was just a glimpse of a blonde lady at the end range of my highbeams. Three hundred yards, probably. I could be wrong." His manner said he was right. ~~He had the eyes of an expert-sharpshooter. You could not see the soul in them for the circle.~~

Now he offered me a cheroot, and when I refused, lit one himself, ^{exhaled} ~~Maybe he wanted to look like Clint Eastwood.~~ Not a hope.

He ~~did~~, however, exhale the smoke with ~~macho~~ ^{macho} panache enough to have done it again for a TV commercial.

"Your wife," he said, "is one damned attractive lady."

"Thank you."

On one of our drunken evenings this August past, in a week when we had in-the-water-at-dawn parties every night (~~the latest version of~~ Mister Black already casing my home) we had made the acquaintance of Regency one evening. Via a complaint ^{about the noise} ~~One of the neighbors put in a for Christ's-~~ ~~sakes call to the cops.~~ Alvin responded personally. I am sure he had heard of our parties.

Patty charmed him to the puttees. She told everyone--drunks, freaks, male and female models, half-nudes and premature Halloween types in costume that she was turning down the stereo in Chief Regency's honor. Then she jibed at the sense of duty that restrained his hand from taking a glass. "Alvin ^{Luther} ~~Philip~~ Regency," she said. "That's a hell of a name. You got to live up to it, boy."

He grinned like a Congressional Medal of Honor winner being commemoratorially kissed by Elizabeth Taylor.

"How did you ever get a name like Alvin ^{Luther} ~~Philip~~ in Massachusetts? That's an ^{a Minnesota} ~~Oklahoma~~ name," she said.

"Well," he said, "my paternal grandfather is from ^{Minnesota} ~~Oklahoma~~."

"What did I tell you? Don't argue with Patty Larcene." She promptly invited him to the party we would be giving the

following night. He came after duty. ^{At the end,} ~~Not long after,~~
he thanked me at the door and said he had had a fine time.

We had a conversation that night. He said he still kept his house in Barnstable and (Barnstable being fifty miles away) I asked if he didn't feel a bit out of place working here in all the melee of the summer frenzy.

(Provincetown is the only town I know where you can ask such a question of the ^{Police} ~~Chief of Police~~.)

"No," he said, "I asked for this job. I wanted it."

~~I try to go where the trouble is brightest.~~

"Why?" I asked. *I'd heard rumors he was a narc.*
"Brightest?"

He cut that off. "Well, they call Provincetown the Wild West of the East," he said, and gave his whinny.

After that, when we had a party, he'd drop in for a few minutes. If it were continuing from one night through to the next, we'd see him on successive evenings. If it was after duty, he would have a drink, talk quietly to a couple of people and leave. Just once did he give a clue--it was only after Labor Day--that he could booze like a real trooper. At the door he kissed Patty Lareine and then shook hands formally with me, his big mitt taking pleasure in the clumsiness of it: I ~~swear~~ ^{had the idea he was acting like} Patty Lareine delighted in him because he ~~was in our house--in our house alone--such a hick.~~ ^{more of a hick than he was.} Then

he said to me, "I worry about you."

"Why?" I did not like his eyes. ~~By now I knew he had~~
~~grown up in Vermont,~~ and he had the kind of warmth, when
liking you, that reminds one most certainly of granite when
it ^{has been} heated by the sun--the warmth is truly there, the
rock likes you--but the eyes were two steel bolts drilled
into the rock. "People have told me," he said, "that you are ^{have}
~~a good deal of potential,~~
~~an extraordinary person.~~"

Nobody would phrase things that way in Provincetown.

"Yes, I fuck up with the best," I told him.

"I get the feeling," he remarked, "that you ^{can} ~~see both~~
^{stand up} ~~sides of the~~ question when the trouble is brightest."

"Brightest?"

"~~When the sequence gets near enough so that it all~~
slows down." Now his eyes at last showed light.

"Right," I said.

"Right. You know what I'm talking about. Damn right
I'm right." And he walked out. If he had been the kind to
weave, I would have seen it then.

He was ^{drinking} ~~much~~ more put together when he drank at the VFW
bar. I even saw him get in an arm wrestling match with
Barrels Costa who got his name by flipping barrels of fish
up from the hold to the deck, and at low tide, from the deck

up to the wharf. When it came to arm wrestling, Barrels could defeat every ^{fisherman} Portuguese in town, but Regency, to stake a claim, took Barrels on one night and was respected for not hiding behind his uniform. Barrels won, but ~~he~~ had to work long enough to get a taste of the bitterness of old age, and Regency smoldered. ~~Afterward~~ I guess he wasn't in the habit of losing.

~~On such nights, when women were not around, he put~~
~~more salt on his speech.~~ "Madden, you are a fuckup," he
told me. ^{that night, "You are"} ~~"I used to think you were sloughing me off. Now~~
~~I see it. "You are a damn waste."~~

The next morning, however, as I was going ^{down the street} to get the newspaper, he stopped his squad car and said, "I hope I wasn't out of line last night."

"Forget it." He irritated me. I was beginning to ^{see} ~~foresee~~ the end result: a big-breasted mother with an enormous phallus.

Now, in his office, I said to him, "If the only reason you invited me here was to say you saw Patty Lareine, I wish you had told me on the phone."

"I want to talk to you."

"I'm not good at taking advice from well-intentioned friends."

read some," He said the
"Maybe I want to ask your advice."

~~"I can't believe you said that,"~~ I murmured.

He laughed. ~~"I know a lot but I don't know everything~~
~~I don't, for instance,"~~ and he said this next with pride
he could not conceal, as if the true heft of a man, the
brand mark itself, was in the strength it took to maintain *this*
sort of ~~one's~~ ignorance? "I don't know women very well."

are coming
"If you ~~come~~ *(to me for pointers,* it is obvious you
don't."

"Mac, let's get drunk one night soon."

"Sure."

~~"Maybe tomorrow night."~~ "Whether you know it or not,
you and me are the only ~~two~~ philosophers in ~~this~~ town."

(Sole Hint)
"Alvin, that makes you the ~~first~~ the right wing has ~~ever~~
produced" *in years.*"

"Hey, let's not get testy before the ~~first~~ bullets
are fired." He started to show me to the door. "Come on,"
he said, "I'll walk you to your car."

"I didn't bring it."

your heap?
"Were you afraid I'd impound it?" *(That gave him the*
sanction to whinny all the way down the corridor and out
to the street.

There, just before we parted, he said, "Do you still

^{that}
have your marijuana patch in Truro?"

"How do you know about ^{it?} that?"

He looked disgusted. "Man, ^{it's} ~~it's~~ ^{where's the} ~~a~~ ^{poorly} kept secret?
~~At your party,~~ everybody talks about how good your home-
grown ^{is.} I sampled some myself." ^{why,}

~~"In front of others?"~~

"No way. Patty Laraine dropped a couple of rolled-ones
in my pocket. Just before I left. Your stuff is about as
good as I used to get in Nam." He nodded. "See, I don't
care whether you're a Left Winger or a Right Winger, I don't
care what kind of fucking wing you fly when it comes to ~~smoking~~
^{on} ~~smoking~~ pot. I love the stuff. And I will tell you. Con-
servatives aren't right in every last item of our inventory.
They miss ^{the point here,} ~~a stitch when it comes to pot.~~ They think that ~~the~~
^{marijuana} ~~stuff~~ ^{that} destroys souls, but I don't believe it ~~does~~ -- I believe
the Lord gets in and wrestles the devil right there."

"Hey," I said, "if you ever stop talking, we might have
a conversation."

^{"One night soon, let's}

~~"Tomorrow night I don't work. Let's get drunk."~~

"All right," I said

^(had placed)
"In the meantime, if I ~~had~~ my stash out in a marijuana
patch in Truro. . ." He paused.

"I don't keep a stash there," I said.

-88-

"I'm not saying you do. I don't want to know. I'm just saying if I did ^{leave} ~~keep~~ something there, I would contemplate getting it out. ' ~~Seen.~~ " "

"Why?"

"I can't tell you everything."

"^{I just want to tickle my stick?}
~~"Shit, you can't tell me. You're a friend or you're a policeman."~~

He took a good pause before he replied. "Look," he said, "I've been a State Trooper. You know that. ^{And I} ~~I've been~~ ^{know them} ~~one of the best.~~ Most of those guys are all right. They're not high on humor and they would never be your kind, but they're all right."

I nodded. I waited. I thought he would go on. When he didn't, I said, "They are not always nice about marijuana."

"They hate it," he said. "Keep your nose clean."

He gave me a whale of a buffet on the back and disappeared down into the basement offices of Town Hall.

I found it hard to believe that our State Troopers who considered it part of their job-description to be lazy in fall, winter, and spring so that they would be gung-ho for a prodigious three months of suffering through summer traffic and its associated madness on Cape Cod were now, in November,

going to come pouring out of ^{Yarmouth} their barracks in order to
search Down-Cape through every ^{Patty} little field of marijuana
in Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, and Truro. Still they
might be bored. They might also know about my plot. Some-
times I thought there were as many narcs as dope-heads on
the Cape. Certainly in Provincetown the trade in dope in-
formation, disinformation, deals, and double-crosses had

to be the fourth largest industry, ^{the polyester day-} right behind tourism,
^{tourists, the commercial} fishing, and the congeries of gay ^{enterprise,} commerce.

If ^{the State Troopers} they knew about my field, and the proper question
^{was} might be--how could they not?--there ^{maybe} was no reason to assume they
^{we're also well-disposed toward} some State Troopers would in general be fond of my wife and
^{One could doubt that.} myself. For one thing, our summer parties were too famous.

Patty Lareine had large vices--madness of the heart and
serious disloyalty being two I could name on the instant--
but she also had the nice virtue of not being a snob. It
might be said that she could hardly afford to be, given her
redneck commencements, but who did that ever inhibit? If, ^{after the}

^{tricky} she had stayed in Tampa, or made ^a the daring move to Palm
^{had} Beach, she would have ^{that how} to play by the tactics her ambitious
predecessors had perfected: slice, snip, soft-claw and
tenderize her way into marrying even higher respectability.

^{Game with high stakes for the ego that} that was the only interesting game a rich divorcee could play.
^{a rich and notorious divorcee could play}

on the Gold Coast, which might offer high stakes for the
ego. An interesting life, if those are your talents.

Of course!
I never pretended to understand Patty. She may even
have been in love with me. It is hard to find a clearer
explanation. I am a great believer in Ockham's Razor which
states that the simplest explanation ^{to} that accounts for the
facts is bound to be the correct explanation. Since I was
no more than her chauffeur ^{in the year before we got} ~~at the time her live-in white~~
~~married~~ ^{married} substitute that year for Mr. Black⁷ and since I had crapped
out on her (those were her words) for deciding I did not
care ~~to try~~ to murder her husband after all; since I was ^{also}
an ex-con who could certainly assist her up no marble
stairways in no mansions in Palm Beach, it was never clear
to me why she would desire my medium-attractive presence
in marriage unless, for a little while, she did feel a
salubrious melting of the glitter chips in her heart, I don't
know. We had something in bed for a ^{time} while, but that can be
taken for granted. Why else would a woman ^{marry down} ~~get married under~~
^{so far?} ~~such uneven circumstances?~~ Later, when it all got bad, I
began to wonder if her true passion was to ^{show a man} ~~take a man and~~
~~the abyss beneath his vanity, Devil's work,~~
~~divest him of his pants.~~

No matter. Once we got to Provincetown, my ^{only} point is
that she proved no snob. You couldn't move to Provincetown

if you were a snob, ^{not if} and social advancement was your goal. Some year I would like a sociologist to crack his teeth on the ^{unique class system} impenetrability of our local society. The Town, as ^{probably have enjoyed explaining} I would have explained to Jessica Pond if I had had the chance. ~~Sometimes I liked being discursive in bars, [was]~~
^{Was} once, a hundred and fifty years ago, a port for whalers. Cape Cod Yankee captains made up our establishment, and they brought in Portuguese ^{from the Azores} fishermen to man the boats. Then the Yankees and Portuguese intermarried (just as Scotch-Irish and Indians, Carolina cavaliers and slave women, Jews and Protestants were wont to do). By now, half the Portuguese had Yankee names like Cook and Snow, and, by whatever name, owned the town. In winter, the Portuguese dominated just about all of it, fishing fleet, Board of Selectmen, St. Peter's Church, the lower ranks of the police force, and most of the teachers and students in the grade school and high school. In summer, the Portuguese also owned nine-tenths of the rooming houses and more than half of the bars and cabarets. Yet they were a down-in-the-grease up-to-the-elbows gear-box of an establishment. They kept to themselves, and enjoyed no high houses on any hills. The richest ^{Portuguese} in town might, for all you knew, be living next to one of the poorest, and but for the new coat of paint, you could not tell the

houses apart. No Portuguese son I heard of went to any great university. Maybe they were all too respectful of the wrath of the sea.

So if you wanted to look for some little splash of money, you waited for summer when enclaves of psychoanalysts ^{in company with} plus art-oriented well-to-do members of the liberal establishment ^{to be flanked by} came up from New York with a wide panorama of gay society plus the narcs and dope dealers, and half of Greenwich Village and Soho. Painters, presumptive painters, motorcycle gangs, fuckups, hippies, beatniks and their children came in, plus tens of thousands of tourists a day driving in from every state of the Union to see ^{for a few hours} what Provincetown looked like, because there it was--on the extremity of the map. People who ~~drive to unfamiliar places must~~ have a tropism for the end of the road.

In such a stew, where the people ^{town folk} who looked the poorest were the only establishment we had, and the grandest houses in town with one or two exceptions were beach cottages, ^(but one) medium beach cottages, in a resort where there were no mansions, no fine hotels, no boulevards!--you could cry out loud in the middle of summer if you got stuck ^{downtown} on one of our only two long streets ^{resort} (the rest were connecting alleys)--in a place where our greatest avenue was a pier, and no pleasure yacht with deep draft could

come in
advance with confidence at low tide; in a place where the
measure of your dress was the logo on your T-shirt, *how can you*
~~would~~ *yourself* advance themselves socially. *one* So you didn't give large
parties to strike a note. You gave them--if you were Patty
Lareine--because one hundred interesting-looking, which is
to say, bizarre strangers in her summer living room were the
minimum she needed to offset the biles and jamborees of her
heart. Patty Lareine had read about five books in her life,
but one of them was The Great Gatsby. Guess how she saw
herself! Just as *bewitching* ~~downhome and sincere~~ as Gatsby, himself.
When the parties went on long enough, she would, if the moon
were late and full, get out her old cheerleader's bugle and
there in the night blow a Retreat to the moon--don't try to
tell her it was the wrong hour for Retreat.

No, the State Troopers would not like us. They were *as*
as Airline pilots stingy bastards and never was so much spent on parties where
so little was accomplished. ~~So few important people came.~~
Such waste would irritate State Troopers. Besides--*for* in the
last ~~few~~ *few* summers--cocaine was sitting on our table in an
open bowl, and Patty Lareine, who liked to work the door,
hand on hip, next to whoever was serving as bouncer (almost
always some local lad built like two) was never the lady
not to take a chance on ~~welcoming~~ a new face. Everybody
crashed our portal, Narcos sniffed as much
of our coke as any other *inflamed septum*
I can't pretend *however that* I was privately cool
about that open bowl. Patty Lareine and I
fought over putting it on display. Patty, I

a little more than she recognized, and I now hated the stuff. One of the worst years of my life ~~(which had)~~ had been spent buying and selling snow. I took my trip to the crashed our portal. Narcs sniffed as much of our coke as ~~penitentiary for a cocaine bust,~~ any other inflamed septum.

~~No~~ So, State Troopers would not like me much. Yet to think of them arrayed in spiritual vengeance against my little marijuana plot was hard to believe this cold November afternoon. In the frenzy of summer, yes. The summer before this, in all the frantic August madness of a tip that a raid was near, I ran out to Truro in the heat of the day (when it's considered gross to harvest your crop--spiritually disruptive to the plant) and chopped it down and spent an irrational night (what with having to explain my absence from a number of ^{parties} places) wrapping the fresh-fallen stalks in newspaper, and storing them. It was none of it done well, and so I didn't ^{trust} believe Regency's warm regard for the quality of ^{that year-old product} of my pet (maybe Patty Lareine had slipped him a couple of Thai nicely rolled and told him they were home-grown). All the same, my latest crop, harvested just this last September did have a flavor, call it a psychic distinction. Although it smelled a hint rank from the Truro woods and bogs, still I ^{believe} thought it offered something of the mist endemic to our shore. You can smoke a thousand sticks and never know what I'm talking about, but I did grow marijuana with a fine edge. If one wished to entertain the illusion that one could commune

with the dead, or at least put up with the possibility ^{that}
they ^{might be} were whispering to you, then my pot was fine. It was
as spooky as any stuff I ever smoked. That I attribute to
many factors, not least of which is that the Truro forests
are haunted. Years ago--it is now more than a decade--a young
^{Portuguese} Portuguese in Provincetown killed four girls, dismembered
their bodies and buried them in several graves in those low
woods. I was always immensely aware of ^{the dead} those girls and their
numb mutilated accusing presence. I remember that when I
harvested my crop this year, and it ^{I was} was again, in a great
hurry--for a hurricane (which later wandered out to sea)
was expected to strike us, indeed, the gusts were gale-force--
on a hot, overcast, wind-inflamed mid-September day while a
fearful surf was smashing on ^{our} the bulkhead back in Province-
town, and townspeople were racing around to nail up storm
windows, I was instead sweating like a swamp rat among the
frenzy of the bugs in the Truro woods eight miles away. How
psychic were those bugs biting at me in near hysteria from
the air of vengeance all about.

I remember I sliced the stem of each plant with a cere-
monial patience, trying to feel the instant when life passed
up the knife into my arm and the plant was cut down to the
half-life of its future, a spirit whose existence now depended

~~relationships with Hell-Town.~~ It has to be understood that
Patty Lareine believed she had psychic powers, which, speak
of Ockham's Razor, gives all the explanation one ^{may} ~~could~~
^{need} ~~desire~~ for why she chose Provincetown over Palm Beach in-
asmuch as the spiral of our shore and the curve of our sea
contained, she claimed, every resonance to which she was
sensitive. Once in her cups, she said to me, "I've always
been a swinger. When I was just a cheerleader in high school,
I knew I was going to swing. I thought it would be a damn
shame if I didn't get to fuck half the football team."

"Which half?" I asked.

"The Offense."

That was rote between us. It soothed the waters. She
could give her large laugh, and I might offer two slightly
widened lips.

"Why is your smile so evil?" she would ask.

"Maybe you should have fucked the other half."

She loved that. "Oh, Timmy Mac, you are nice at times."
She took a deep puff of Hurricane. Nowhere did the ravages
of her hunger (for what I cannot name--I wish I could) show
so vividly as when she drew in smoke. Then her lips curled,
her teeth showed, the smoke seethed--like a strong tide
going through a narrow gate. "Yeah, ^{she said, "I} I commenced as a swinger,

on communion with whatever manifest of human life: evil, wicked, contemplative, comic, sensual, inspired, or plain disruptive, was ready to smoke it. I tried, in effect, to meditate while I performed the act of harvest but (it may have been the rabid panic of the bugs) or the ^{bodiful immanence} nearness of the hurricane) ~~(that bodiful immanence)~~ I rushed the job. Despite myself, I began to slash at ^{the} those roots, and gathered it all in too quickly. In compensation, I cured them with care, converting a large closet in our cellar, never used before, to an impromptu drying room, and in the dry/dark air (I ^{had} ~~set up~~ lay in bowls of baking soda to keep the product dry) the Mary-Jane was provided ^a some real chance to cure over the next few weeks. After I stripped its leaves and buds, however, and packed them in small glass coffee jars with red rubber pressure-washers (I detested sani-wrap or plastic bags for stuff so fine as this) and actually began to smoke it, I found that something of the hour of its violent harvest was in each poke. Patty and I had fights to strike new notes of ugliness--we ^{would} ~~seemed to~~ pass from bouts of detestation ~~to~~ to blood-rage in the throat.

Moreover, that crop of marijuana (which I took to calling Hurricane Head) began to have exaggerated effects ^{bring} ~~on~~ ^{down} Patty's ^{head}

but so soon as I got married, ^{the first time} I decided to be a witch.
I been one ever since. Through ^{all this time} three marriages. What are
you going to do about ^{it?} ~~that?~~

"Pray," I said.

^{told me,} That broke her up. "I'm going to blow my bugle," she
~~said.~~ "There's a real moon, ~~and I'm going to play it a few~~
~~notes~~ tonight."

"You'll wake up all of Hell-Town."

"That's the idea. Don't let those motherfuckers sleep.
That-way ^{so} they wake up too powerful. ^{I have to keep them down.}"

~~"Then, you got to quell them."~~

~~"Yeah, that takes a lot of time."~~

"You sound like a good witch."

"Well, honey, I am a white witch. Blondes are."

"You're a ^{no} ~~hell of a~~ blonde. Your pussy ~~hair~~ says
~~you're not.~~ ^{you're brunette.}"

"That's carnal taint. ~~That's why it's dark.~~ My
pussy hair was bright as gold until I went out and scorched
it with the football team."

If she were always like that, we could have kept
drinking forever. But another toke put her on the promontory
of Hurricane Head. Hell-Town began to stir.

Let me not pretend I was immune to her ^{occult} claims. I had

never been able to make a philosophical peace with the notion of spirits, nor come to any conclusion. That you might die but still remain alive in some vale of our atmosphere seemed no more absurd to me than the notion that every part of your person ceased to exist after death. Indeed, given all the niscellany of human response, I was ready to assume that some who died remained near, and others went far away, or were altogether extinct.

Hell-Town, however, was a phenomenon. When you smoked Hurricane Head, it became a presence. Over a hundred and fifty years ago when whaling was still active in these waters, a whore-town sprung up on the other arm of Provincetown Harbor, where now was nothing but a long deserted spit of sand. When whaling ended, Hell-Town's warehouses and brothel cribs had been put on rafts and floated across the bay. Half the old houses in Provincetown had sheds attached to them. So while much of what was most crazy in our moods on Hurricane Head may have come to us compliments of Patty Lareine, part of the manifestation emanated, I think, from our house itself. Half of our holding of sills, studs, joists, walls and roof had been ferried over from Hell-Town more than a century ago, and thereby made us a most material part of that vanished place. Something of a perished Klondike of whores, smugglers, and whalers with wages hot in their pockets, lived in our walls. There had even been unspeakable cut-throats who, on moonless nights, would set a beach fire on the back shore to encourage a sailing vessel to believe it was rounding a light. Thereby, the ship might come about for

^{too soon} port and run aground on a shoal. Whereupon, ^{those} the pirates-
would plunder the foundering vessel. Patty Lareine claimed
she could hear the ^{cries} ~~outraged screams~~ ^{the} of those sailors who were
slaughtered trying to fight off the ^{marauder's} pirates' long boats.
What a Biblical ^{scene} place Hell-Town must have ~~been~~ ^{of} of catamites
and sodomites and whores passing ^{the} their infections of the
ages on to ^{pirates} marauders with blood in their beard. Provincetown,
then, was just far enough away to be able to keep up ^{the} its
Yankee proprieties of ~~sailing captains~~, widows' walks, and
white churches. What an intermingling of the spirits, there-
fore, when the whaling ended and the shacks in Hell-Town
were floated over to us.

^{of that} Something ^{was added to} vigorous ~~as~~ rut itself ~~came into~~ our marriage
^{during} the first year we lived in our house. The bawdy force of ^{from} ~~of~~
one-night stands ^{of} ~~for~~ ^{more than} whores and seamen ~~one hundred years~~
dead was in our walls, and ~~coursing through us~~. I would,
as I say, not enter into disputes about the real or unreal
possibility of that--I ^{carnal} can only say our ^{lusts} life together did
not suffer. In truth, it thrived on the ^{lusts} appreciation of our
unseen audience. It is nice when a marriage ^{may} can feel like
an orgy each night without having to ^{pay} come up with the toll,
that is, having to look on the face of the neighbor who
screwed your wife.

If the wisest rule of economy, however, is that you
can't cheat life, it may ^{as well} unfortunately be true that the
most vigorous law of the spirit is: ^{Do not} don't exploit death. ⁵
~~I do not know--sometimes it seems to me, we paid prodigiously~~
~~for the pleasures of that first year.~~ In any event, ^{to live} now
that Patty Larcine was gone, I had ^{with} no ^{unsam} doubt most mornings
of the presence of ^{much of} the population of Hell-Town. For if my
wife was not with me, her much-vaunted sensitivity ^{now} seemed
to be on loan to my psyche. One reason I could not open
my eyes in the morning was for the voices I heard. Let
no one say that a century-old New England whore does not
snicker on a cold November dawn. Misery is supportable when
~~it wards off terror,~~ and there were nights when the dog and
I slept together like children huddling before a fire that
is out. Once in a while I would smoke Hurricane Head by
myself, but the results lacked clarity, ^{Of course, such a} a curious ^{can be} remark ^{be understood unless}
less ^{unless} marijuana is your guide. Respect its limits, I believed,
and you would probably find the answer to your questions.
I was convinced it was the only nostrum to take along when
sailing the seas of ^{an} year-own obsession--you could even come
back with answers to questions twenty years old.

Now, however, ^{however} living alone, the Hurricane Head ^{stirred} did
not provide me with thoughts, but impulses. Or would it be
no thoughts. ^{Desires arose instead that}

I did not care to name. Serpents were laboring up from the murk. So, for the last ten days, I had not gone near my own reefer.

Can this explain why I reacted with such reluctance to so generous a piece of advice from my Chief of Police?

While I did, so soon as I returned home, get into my car and drive out to the highway and there took the direction to Truro, I was still not at all certain that I would actually move my cache of Hurricane Head. I hated to disturb it. On the other hand, I most certainly did not want to be busted.

What a nose Regency had for my habits! I could not even say why I had chosen to keep the stash so near my marijuana field, but I had. Twenty glass coffee jars filled with carefully harvested crop were packed into a steel foot-locker varnished and oiled against rust. That had all been placed in a hole in the ground beneath a most distinctive tree two hundred yards down an overgrown trail from a humped sandy road in the forest. It was one lane wide. (If you met a car, you sometimes had to back up a quarter of a mile before finding space for the other to get by.)

Yes, among all the hollows of the Truro woods to choose, I had nonetheless hid my stash near the stubble of my garden-size plot. That had to be the worst place to keep one's private store. Any hunter blundering through on the same trail (as they did a few times a year) might recognize the character of the agriculture practiced there, and so devote a little effort to examining the environs. I only kept an inch of soil and

some much tamped-down moss over the rock that ^{closed} the burrow where I kept the foot-locker.

Yet the site of the ^{stash} was important to me. I wanted the product to ^{keep} rest near its home. In prison, when the food we ate was shipped, ^{had been to us} out of the entrails of the largest food corporations in America, there was never a bite which did not come out of a plastic wrapping, cardboard package, or ^a can. ^{Taking into account} Considering the trip from the farm to the processing factory, and on to us, ^{through} most of the food must have ^{voyaged} travelled on average two thousand miles. So I saw a panacea to the world's ills: ^{Let no one look to sup on} No one should ever sup on food grown farther away from one's home than the distance one could carry it unwrapped on one's back, in a day's walk. An interesting idea. I soon ceased to look for ways to implement it. But it left me fierce about respecting the origins of my marijuana. Like wine that mellows in the shade of the vineyards where it grew, so would my Mary-Jane ^{be stored close to} sit near the earth out of which it sprouted.

I felt dread, therefore, at shifting the stash, and it belonged to the dread with which I ^{was close} awakened this morning. Truth, I needed to leave everything as it was. ^{had awakened} And, shaking ^{No one the less} my head in confirmation of just such a thought, for I was most certainly talking to myself, I took a turn at that point

off the highway onto the country road that (by way of a crossroads or two) would lead eventually to my sandy lane in the middle of the forest. ^{Driving slowly, mind fading & began to realize how much} Communicating in such fashion with myself, I realized that I had been calling upon great gifts of balance to walk through this day. How else account for my aplomb--all considered!--during the dialogue with Alvin Philip? ^{everything} After all, where had the tattoo come from?

At that moment, I ^{was obliged} had to pull the car over. ^{Where had the} I still ^{tattoos come from?} knew nothing! This thought ^{might as well have come upon} came upon me as if the problem ^{we for the first time, with no warning} had never been confronted before, and suddenly I was near to being, ^{as} ill as the dog.

I can tell you that by the time I was able to ^{move} put forward again, it was ~~my car in gear again, I moved forward~~ with the absurd caution a poor driver brings to his wheel after a near collision. I crawled.

That way I passed through the back roads of Truro on this chill afternoon--would the sun never appear again?--and I studied ^{the} the yellow lichen on tree trunks as if they had ^{their yellow spores} much to tell me, and stared at blue mailboxes out on the road as though they were security itself, even halted by a green-bronze sign at a cross-road ^(to read the raised metal letters) commemorating a local soldier who had died. I passed many a hedge in front of many a gray-shingled salt-box with white crushed-shell walks

still offering their whiff of the sea. In the woods, the wind was strong on this afternoon, and whenever I stopped the car, its murmur came to me like a high surf washing over the treetops. Then I was out of the woods again and drove ~~up and down~~ ^{land up} over abrupt little hills and passed by moors and quaking bogs and kettle bowls. I came to a well I recognized by the side of the road, and ~~got out~~ ^{stopped} and peered into its bottom where a green moss I knew, would gleam back at me. Soon I was in the woods again, and the paved road was gone. Now I had to drive in low gear, scratching the side of the Porsche on thickets and briars but the hump in the middle was high enough so that I did not dare to ride the ruts.

Then I was not certain I would get through. Rivulets crossed the road, and in several places I had to ford shallow pools under a tunnel of leaves where the trees grew together overhead. On sunless afternoons, I had always liked to drive through the mournful modest lay of these Truro hills and woods. Provincetown, even in winter, could seem active as a mining town in comparison to ~~these~~ ^{such} sparse offerings. Up on ~~a~~ ^{any of these modest summits} summit of a Truro hill, if there was a high wind like today, one could stand beside a pond and watch the sea water in the distance become a mill-run of light and whitecaps

while the color of the pond at one's feet remained a dark and dirty bronze. All the palette of the woods seemed to accommodate itself between. I liked the dull green of the dune grass and the pale gold of the weeds, and in that late autumn panorama when the beef's blood and burnt orange was out of the leaves, the colors came down to gray and green and brown, but with what a play between, for my eye used to find a dance of hues still left here between the field grays and the dove gray, the lilac gray and the smoke gray, the bracken brown and the acorn brown, fox brown and dun, mouse gray and meadow-lark gray and the bottle green of the moss, and sphagnum moss and fir green, holly green and the sea water green on the horizon. My eye used to dart from the lichen on the tree to the heather in a field, in and out of the pond weeds and red maples (no longer red but wet-bark brown) and the scent of pitch pine and twist of scrub oak were in the still of the forest with the wind in the leaves overhead coming again and again in the high sound of the surf: "All that has lived clamors to live again," was the sound of the surf.

So I parked my car at the summit in the woods where I could look from the pond to the sea, and tried to calm myself in the loveliness of these familiar colors but my

heart was pounding now. ~~so~~ I drove on and finally stopped at a familiar turn-off on ^{this} sand road and tried to recover that immaculate sense of being alone which these woods had given me before, but ^{now} I could not. People had been here in the last few days.

So soon as I ^{stepped onto} turned into my trail, half-hidden by shrubs from the road, such a sense became more keen. I did ^{half} not stop to look for traces, but doubtless some were there. There are subtleties to a stale presence that only the woods can reflect, and as I walked the hundred steps from the road to my stashing box, I was sweating again as I had on that hot September afternoon when the advance of the hurricane hung over us all.

I went by the marijuana field and the stubble had been beaten to the ground by rain. Some shame at the haste with which I had cut the stems ^{this September} left me now as uneasy as one feels on encountering an ill-used friend, and so I came to a stop as if to pay my respects, and indeed my little plot had the air of a cemetery ground. But I could hardly pause, a panic was too much on me, so I went further down the trail past the clearing in and out of thicket and stunted pine and there up another few steps was the most curious tree of all. A dwarf pine poked up from the crest of a small

ridge of sand that had obtruded from the loam of these woods, a fearfully twisted little force of a tree, its roots clinging to the uncertain sandy rise, its limbs ^{contorted} ~~twisted~~ together to one side, and trammelled down before the wind, only, at the last, to thrust up to the sky like arms in prayer. That was my tree, and at the foot of it, under the roots where the sand ended and the forest floor recommenced, was a small cave not large enough to hold a ^{young} ~~modest~~ bear, and my door to this burrow was a rock with its moss, many times raised and patted back into place. Now, I saw it was much disturbed, the edges as raw as a dirty bandage pushed up on end by the swelling of the wound. I removed the stone and felt into the hole where ^{in front of} ~~the foot-locker~~ ~~should have~~ been, but there was only a space, and then, my fingers scraping and searching into this soft loam like field-mice at the edge of food, I felt something, no, it could not be flesh or hair or some moist sponge, I didn't know what, but my hands, fiercer than myself, cleared the debris enough to pull forward a plastic garbage bag through which I poked and saw enough at once to give one frightful moan, pure as the vertigo of a long fall itself. I was looking at the back of a head. The color of its hair, despite all the stains of earth, was blonde. Then I tried to see the face,

-55-

but when, to my horror, the head rolled in the bag without resistance--severed!--I knew I could not go on to search the features, no, I pushed back the bag and then the rock with hardly an attempt to replace the moss, and flew from those woods to my car, driving down the hump-backed road with speed to compensate for the caution with which I came in. And it was only after I was back in my house and deep in a chair trying to calm my shivering with bourbon neat that it came down upon me in all the burning woe of one wall of flame falling upon another that I did not even know whether it was the head of Patty Lareine or Jessica Pond who lay in that grave. Of course, I also did not know whether I should be afraid of myself, or another, and that, so soon as night was on me and I tried to sleep, became a terror which quickly passed beyond all notions of measure.

3.

The voices came to me at dawn. I listened to Hell-Town in the hour ~~became~~ between waking and sleep.

"Oh, Tim," the voices said, "you've burned your candle ~~at~~ both ends: the balls and the brain, prick and tongue, your bung-hole and your mouth. Is any tallow left in your wick? As if the wicked could tell."

They said, "Oh, Tim, don't lick ^{between the legs} the ~~cunts~~ of whores. You come too fast ^{when} tasting the old sperm whale. Give to us the dying salts. Give us back the ^{scum of all} ~~bucks~~ and the ~~the bucks~~ ^{scum of those who lost}. Goodbye, sweet friend, you kiss too-much. I curse your house. I curse your house."

Let me speak of the little I could comprehend. Horror films do not prepare us, after all, for the hours ^{searching for} that are lost in obtaining ^{one} clear thought. After waking from nightmares and sleeping in terror, I ^{climbed} arrived ^{at last onto} at no more than one conclusion. Assuming I was no part

of this deed--and how could I be certain of that?--I still had to ask: who was? It must be someone who knew my marijuana patch. That spoke directly of my wife-- unless it was her hair I touched in the burrow. So I had my conclusion: I must go back to the woods and look again. But the moment returned, to remain as fixed in my memory ^{however} (as the flash of light that is followed by the thunder of pain when your shoulder is pulled out of its socket, ^{was} the remembered glimpse of that dirtied blonde hair) I knew I could not go back. I was a jelly. I preferred ^{suppurations} to molder in the last juices of cowardice.

Is it evident why I do not care to describe my night? Nor why each logical step cost so much? Now I understood ^{how} why the laboratory rat develops his psychosis in a maze. There are shocks at too many of the turnings. What if it were Jessica who was there? ^{Would I know then that I had done it?}

On the other hand--and I could have driven a hundred miles in the time it took me to go back to this alternative-- if Pond and Pangborn had returned to Boston, or were ^{by now even} back ⁱⁿ from Santa Barbara, or back wherever their fling would chuck them--then, ^{it had to be Patty's head,} again, ~~Patty was dead.~~ That brought on a wholly unmanageable sorrow. Sorrow, I fear, and a surge of nasty vindications, ^{which was} ~~they were~~ only choked off by the onset of a new fear. Who could have killed Patty but Mr.

Black? If that were true, how safe was I?

Do you feel a hint uncool around strange black dudes? Try such a thought in the night when you have come to the conclusion that the dude may be looking for you. Every wave that slapped on the shore, every gull who stirred, was an invader: I could hear windows raised and doors forced.

It was degrading. I had never seen myself as a hero. My father--with the best will in the world--had taken care of that. But I had usually been able to picture myself as not entirely un-macho. I could stand up for my friends; I could close a wound and keep the festering to myself. I tried to hold my own. Yet now, each time my mind was clear enough to bring forth a new thought, ^{pain} ~~fear~~ soiled me. I was like a puppy in a strange house. ~~We are Americans~~ ~~we run for daylight--but I was~~ shivering in the cellar. I began to fear my friends.

It had to be someone who knew the tree. That much was demanded by logic. In the false dawn, therefore, contemplating my friends, I knew that as I met them on the street, and in their house, in the day or two to come, I would distrust the look in their eye. I was like a man sliding down a slope of ice who finds a pinnacle to grasp,

but so soon as he embraces it, the projection breaks loose. I saw that if I could not decide the first question which was--put it!--was I the killer?--then I could ^{not stop} ~~only~~ ^{the} ~~continue~~ to slide, and madness would wait at the rim.

As ~~the~~ dawn came up, however, and I had to listen to the solicitations of Hell-Town--why did ^{these voices} ~~they~~ always call most loudly between waking and sleep as if waking and sleep were a century apart?--I became aware at last of the chirks and cronks of the gulls, their gabble loud enough to chase the larva of the night. But, saying larva to myself now offered in the midst of all this, the miniscule pleasure that one word from Latin had come back to me. ^{Yes} ~~Yes~~, you larva, you ghosts! They taught Latin well at Exeter.

I clung to this thought. In prison, when one was at ~~serious~~ ^{another} odds with ~~a~~ convict, and fear became as heavy as the leaden breath of eternity itself, then the smallest pleasure to reach your heart in such a state was, I learned, as valuable as a rope cast down into the abyss. Concentrate on the pleasure, whatever it was, and you could lash yourself to the ledge. So, in this hour, I tried to embrace matters that were far away, and thought of Exeter and Latin, and by such a means proceeded--not so much to calm myself

as--to insulate the dread, and thereby managed to keep thinking about the little furnished room in a boarding house west of Tenth Avenue on Forty-Fifth Street where my father now lived at the age of seventy. By the aid of such concentration, I could see again the piece of paper he had tacked ^{above} upon his mirror and read again the words he had printed carefully on ^{the} ~~that~~ paper. They said: "Inter faeces et urinam nascimur," and beneath this, my father, with a flourish, had inscribed the name of the author: St. Odon of Cluny. My father's nickname (which I like to present in this context) still remained Big Mac in defiance of all Macdonald hamburgers.

"Well, what do you want with that?" I asked Big Mac ^{said to} when I first saw the note on the mirror even as I ^{must have been} ~~was~~ asking him again in memory now.

"It's a reminder," my father replied.

"You never told me you knew Latin."

"Parochial school," he said. "They tried to ^{teach} ~~give~~ us, ~~some~~. Only the droppings stuck."

"And how did you get this?"

"From a priest I know. Father Steve. He's ^{usually} ~~always~~ in trouble with the Cardinal," remarked Big Mac in an agreeable tone, as if that were the ^{first} ~~first and only~~ virtue

~~to ask of~~
~~you could count on~~ in a priest.

Well, I knew enough Latin to translate. "Inter faeces et urinam nascimur"--"between piss and shit are we born." Even culture came to my father on the edge of a longshoreman's hook.

But now the phone was ringing on the table by my bed, and I was ready even as I picked it up to find that it was my father. We had not called ~~one another~~ ^{each other} in a good long while, yet I assumed it would be his voice. I had the faculty to think of a ~~person~~ ^{person} even as ~~they were~~ ^(he or she was) picking up the phone to give me a call; this happened often enough not to surprise me any longer, although on this morning, I took it as a sign.

"Hello, Tim?"

"Well, Dougy," I said. "Let us speak of the devil."

"Yeah," he said. That told me how hung over he was. His "yeah" could offer you the devastated landscapes of the brain after sixty years of drinking. (This is on the assumption he started when he was eleven.)

"Tim," he said, "I'm in Hyannis."

"What are you doing on the Cape? I thought you hate to travel."

"I been here three days. Frankie Freeload retired up

here. Did I tell you?"

"No," I said. "How is he?"

"He passed away. I've been at his wake."

For my father, the death of an old friend would prove as awesome as a cliff by the side of your house crumbling into the sea.

"Well," I said, "why don't you come over to Provincetown?"

"I've been thinking of that."

"Do you have a car?"

"I can rent one," he said.

"No, I'll drive down and pick you up."

There was a long pause, but I could not tell if he were thinking of himself or of me. Then he said, "Let's wait a day or so. There's some loose ends here with the widow."

"All right," I said, "you come when you're ready." I thought I had offered no sign of my miserable condition, but Big Mac asked, "Are you all right?"

"My wife isn't here. She took off. That's okay."

There was a long pause. He said, "Yeah. I'll see you." And he hung up.

He had, however, given me some of the means to rise

from my bed and go about the day.

Speak of hangovers, I was like a man on the edge of an epileptic attack. If I watched each move, and never stubbed my toe nor took a misstep, if I did not turn my head too suddenly, nor make any motion not prepared in advance, then I might be able to carry myself through the hours without a seizure. Here, it was not the convulsions of my body but the caterwaulings of my mind that I kept away by the singularity of my thoughts, which is to say I could only ^{allow myself} think of particular matters and no others.

Since my immediate problems were as untouchable as a raw wound--even my tattoo began to throb if my mind cast a glance in the ~~wrong~~ ^{right} direction, ~~so I also discovered that~~ ^{so in compensation I} to reminisce about my father was, on this morning, a palliative. I did not have to think pleasant thoughts, I could even dwell on old pains, but they were virtually agreeable to contemplate so long as they adhered to the past, ~~Yes, old regrets could serve as counterbalance to~~ ^{So, yes, old regrets could serve as counterbalance to} ~~the weight of my breath whenever I was obliged to come back~~ ^{keep me from slipping back} to where I found myself now.

For instance, I thought again of Meeks Wardley Hilby, III, and even though ~~he was Patty Larcene's second~~

husband, ^{had been} and there was ^{literally} literally a month in my life ^{as in Tampa} when I awakened each morning with the problem set before me: how were Patty and I to murder him successfully?-- still that recollection caused no pain now, indeed, it aided my concentration for two good reasons ^{that} and served me like panniers ^{carried} accompanying me on either side for balance. One was that I most certainly did not kill Wardley, even came to discover that there was no very determined assassin in me--not the worst thought to have on this morning! The other was that I was not thinking at this point of Hilby as I knew him in Tampa with Patty, ^{Mr.} but on the contrary, was remembering our curious bond at Exeter, and that had much to do with my father, indeed it brought back the best day I suppose I ever spent with

^{Big Mac,}
~~Edna.~~

^{it will come as no surprise}

Meeks Wardley Hilby, III, ^{happened to be the only} inmate I knew in prison who had also been in my class in Exeter. ^{But} what always impressed me most about such a connection was not the penitentiary itself ^{however} ~~although he~~ ^{but the fact} was doubtless the only man in the entire prison system who had been in my class at Exeter} but no, the fact that ~~stuck and never failed to fascinate me~~ was that we were both kicked out of school on the same morning a month

before graduation, and prior to that, I hardly knew him. Hilby had been a wimp and I had been a fair jock. He had gone to Exeter for four years like ^{his father} Meeks before him, and I put in one fall and spring as a Post Graduate on athletic scholarship after senior year at high school in Long Island. ^(My mother wanted me to go on to Harvard) I had been trying to bring my promise as a Wide Receiver to an Exeter team that could not pass.

(Have you ever seen Eastern prep schools play football?) We walked together out of the Headmaster's Office the day we got the boot, and Meeks Wardley Hilby, III, was crying. * I was sad. Even now, recalling the moment, I can feel the sadness in my limbs. I had been caught smoking marijuana (which was no small matter twenty years ago.) The Headmaster was truly shocked--and Hilby's case was worse. It was hard to believe, considering how slack he looked, but he had attempted to rape a town girl he took out on a petting date. I didn't hear about it then. Nobody concerned wished to speak (and the girl's parents were soon bought off) but Hilby gave me the story ^{eleven} ~~seven~~ years later. In prison, there was all the time to tell one's tale.

So, on this morning in Provincetown, when I wished to keep myself apart from all that might be upon me now,

* The scuffed satin on the lapels of his dinner jacket, and the heliotrope bowtie were like a costume to wear to one's

it was, as I say, ^{even} agreeable to return ~~even~~ to the dolorous day I left Exeter. I remember it was a beautiful afternoon in May when I ^{twenty years ago} said goodbye to the school forever. I packed my gear into two duffle bags, dumped them and myself on a bus, and my father (whom I had already phoned-- I could not bear to call my mother) took the shuttle to meet me in Boston. We got drunk. I would love him for that night alone. My father (as you may have gathered from our conversation on the phone) was ^{not often} never a man to do any more talking than the exigencies of communication would require, but he could soothe you by his silence. He was six-three and at that time, in his fiftieth year, he weighed two-eighty. Forty of it he could have done without. It stood in front of him like a bumper on an amusement park car that bumps other cars, and he breathed heavily. With his premature white hair, boiled red face, and blue eyes, he looked like the biggest, shrewdest, and most corrupt old detective in town, but in fact he hated cops. His older brother, whom he never liked, lived and died on the police force.

This afternoon, as we stood side by side at an Irish bar (which stretched out so far into the interior darkness that it was long enough, my father commented, for the dogs