

to have a track) he put down his fourth drink--taken, like the first three, in shot glasses--and said, "Marijuana, huh?"

I nodded.

"How could you get caught?"

He meant: How could you be so dumb as to get caught by a bunch of Wasps? I knew his opinion of their wits. "What's wrong with certain people," he stated once in an argument with my mother, "is that they expect God to buy His clothes in the same store they do." So I always reacted to Wasps through his eyes. Big Mac saw them as well-knit, silver-haired, gray-suited, and forever speaking in such swell accents that they had to believe God was using them to display His decency.

"Well," I told him, "I got careless. Maybe I was laughing too hard." And I described the morning of the night I was caught. I had been in a sailing race on a lake near Exeter whose name I can no longer remember (the wages of pot!) and we were still. They almost called the race off. I knew nothing about sailing, but my roommate did, and had me crewing for an old history teacher who certainly managed to fit my father's idea of a Wasp. He was a good skipper, probably the best in school, and so

contemptuous of his competition that he even took on an ignoramus like myself. In the race, however, we had light winds and bad luck. The wind would die, breathe us forward on a zephyr, then die again. At last we stood by the mast, our empty spinnaker hanging in the bow, and watched a boat creep ahead of us. At ^{its} the helm was an old lady. She was much closer to land than we were, and had gambled that while there would not be wind anywhere this morning she might count on a touch of current licking the lake-shore ^{as it moved toward a stream.} She crept from three boat-lengths back to eight ahead, while we, now down to second place, five hundred yards further out from land, never moved at all. She had outfoxed our old fox.

After a while, it grew boring and I began to banter with my roommate. The skipper stood it as long as he could, but the inert spinnaker finally did him in. He wheeled on me and in his best ^{master's} ~~Exeter~~ voice said, "I wouldn't talk so much if I were you. It spills ^{whatever} the wind ^{we've got} out of the sails."

After I had told this story, my father and I laughed so hard ~~that~~ we had to clutch one another and whirl about for balance.

"Yeah," Big Mac said, "with people like that, it's ~~got to be~~ a relief to get caught."

That took away my need to tell him how I had come back to my room in a riot of laughter and no uncertain fury. What retorts I had swallowed. One year at Exeter had obviously not been enough for me to learn the customs of the people who ran the works. (Oh, the English have airs in their nose and the Irish sprout hairs in their toes!)

"I'll try to explain it to your mother," Big Mac said.

"I appreciate that." I knew he and she had probably not spoken in a year, but I could not face her. She would never understand. From the time I was eleven until I turned thirteen (and was outdoors every evening) she managed to sit beside me long enough each night to read one poem from Louis Untermeyer's Treasury of Great Poems. To her credit (and Untermeyer's) I did not hate poetry when I was done. All the more reason I could not tell her now.

I was at this point in recollection ^{and} (listening to my father repeat through each drink to come: "It spills the ^{whatever} wind ^{we've got} out of the sails,"--for like many a good drinker before him, he was not above using the same remark for a different glass) ^{when} but now the telephone began to ring for a second time this morning, and I picked up the receiver with no sense ~~now~~ of any good omen.

It proved to be the proprietor of The Widow's Walk.

"Mr. Madden," he said, "I hate to bother you, but I couldn't help noticing the other night, ~~since it was so~~ quiet ~~here~~, that you seemed to know the couple who sat in the lounge while you were there."

"Oh, yes," I said, "we had a nice drink together. Where were they from--the West, wasn't it?"

"During dinner," he replied, "they told me they were from California."

"Yes, I have some recollection of that," I said.

"The only reason I ask is that their car is still in our parking lot."

"Isn't that odd," I ~~said~~ ^{told him}. "Are you certain it's their car?"

"Well," he answered, "the vehicle is locked, so I can't be certain, but I do think it's theirs. I happened to notice it when they came in."

"Isn't that odd," I repeated. My tattoo had begun to smart so fiercely, I could wonder if the artist who put LAUREL on my arm was a resident of Hell-Town.

"Frankly," he said, "I was hoping you might know where they are." Pause. "But I guess you don't."

"No," I said, "I don't."

"The name on his ^{the man's} credit card is Leonard Pangborn.
If they don't ^{pick up the car} show up in another day or two, I suppose
I could check with VISA."

"I would think you could."

"You didn't get the lady's name, did you?"

"She did tell me, but, you know, I'm just darned if
I can remember it now. May I give you a ring if I do?
I do remember, Pangborn was certainly his name."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Madden, to disturb your morning, but
it's just so peculiar."

Count on it. After this call, I could not recover
my concentration. Every thought went rushing to ~~the in-~~
~~jection. Go back to~~ the woods. Find out! But this
loosed an unmanageable panic. I was like a man who is
told he has a mortal illness, ^{yet can cure it by jumping off} ~~but the cure is to jump off~~
a fifty-foot cliff into the water. "No," he says, "I'll
stay in bed. I'd rather die." What was ^{is} he protecting?
What was I? Yet the panic carried everything before it.
It was as if I had been told in my sleep that the worst
malignancies of Hell-Town were gathered beneath my tree
in the Truro woods. If I went back, would they enter me?
Was that my logic?

Sitting beside the telephone with ^a ~~this~~ panic as

palpable as physical distress itself--my nostrils were colder than my feet, and my lungs burned. I began the work, and it was equal to labor, of recomposing myself. How many mornings had I gone from a quarrel over breakfast with ~~Patty Lareine~~ into my small room on the top floor where I could look out on the harbor and try to write, yet each morning I had learned how to separate ~~out~~ and it was much like straining inedibles from a soup--all the wreckage of my life which was not fit to write about that day. So I had habits of concentration gained first in prison and gained again from learning to do my work each morning ^(upsetting the faces with) no matter how difficult ^{(my wife--I} could keep my mind on a course. If the seas before me now pitched ^(uncontrollably well) more than any I had tried, well, I still had a means. I knew, if nothing else, ^(that I must try) to think at this point ~~of~~ ^(which had no) to think of my father, and not ask questions I could not answer. "Do not ^(attempt) try to recall what you cannot recall," was a rule I had long kept. Memory was much like potency. To ^(seek) attempt to remember what ^(one) you could not bring back--no matter how urgent the need--was like trying to call ^(for) on an erection when a girl was wide open before you, but your cock--that perverse cur!--was resolutely, obdurately, finally, refusing to stir. You had to give up. I would recall, or I would

palpable as physical distress itself--my nostrils were colder than my feet, and my lungs burned. I began the work, and it was equal to labor, of recomposing myself. How many mornings had I gone from a quarrel over breakfast with ~~Patty-Laraine~~ into my small room on the top floor where I could look out on the harbor and try to write, yet each morning I had learned how to separate ~~out~~ and it was much like straining inedibles from a soup--all the wreckage of my life which was not fit to write about that day. So I had habits of concentration gained first in prison and gained again from learning to do my work each morning ^{upsetting the faces with} no matter how ~~difficult~~ my wife--I could keep my mind on a course. If the seas before me now pitched ^{uncontrollably, well} more than any I had ~~tried~~, well, I still had a ^{that I must try} means. I knew, if nothing else, ^{which had no} to think at this point of ~~to think of~~ my father, and not ask questions ~~I could not~~ answer. "Do not try ^{attempt} to recall what you cannot recall," was a rule I had long kept. Memory was much like potency. To ^{seek} attempt to remember what ^{one} you could not bring back--no matter how urgent the need--was like trying to call ^{for} on an erection when a girl was wide open before you, but your cock--that perverse cur!--was resolutely, obdurately, finally, refusing to stir. You had to give up. I would recall, or I would

not recall, what happened two nights ago--I would have to wait for that--but in the interim ^{I had} try to build a wall around my panic. Every recollection of my father ^{Q14} was like a good stone laid down properly.

So I went back to such thoughts, and knew the beginning of that peace which comes from contemplating the love, no matter how pinched, that one holds for a parent. Since I had poured myself a drink as the one legitimate sedative I could call upon this morning, and had gone to my querencia, that study on the third and top floor where I used to work looking out on the bay, so did I go back to the legend of ^{Doug "Big Mac" Madley} Big-Mac and meditate on its great cost to him, and to my mother, ^{to} and me. Because for all his height and bulk we never had enough of him. A good deal of my father, I can tell you, was lost before he ever met my mother. That much knowledge ^{had already} I gained in childhood listening to the talk of his old friends.

I remember that they used to come out to our house in Long Island to visit him for an afternoon before they all went over to his bar, and since they were longshoremen and former longshoremen like himself, and almost as large, my mother's modest living room would look, so soon as they all stood up, like an overloaded boat ready to capsize.

How much I liked those occasions. I would already have heard, over and over, the story of my father's great hour.

Years later I was told by a lawyer that if separate accounts given by two witnesses agree in every detail, you are listening to a lie. In that case, my father's legend must have had ^{a good deal of} much truth in it. All the versions varied. They could, however, agree this much: On a day back in the late '30s, at a time when the Italians were driving the Irish out of the leadership in the ^{longshoremen's union} ~~ILWU~~, my father--one of the leaders ^(in the ILA--) ~~was~~ parking his car on a side street in Greenwich Village when a man darted out of a doorway and took six shots at him with a .45. (I also heard it was a .38.) How many struck him, I do not know. It is hard to believe, but most of the stories said six, and I could count four gunshot wounds on his torso when he showered.

He was renowned in those days for his strength. A strong man among longshoremen ^{had to be} ~~was~~ a phenomenon of strength, but he must have been as powerful as a Kodiak bear on this occasion because he looked at his assailant and took a step forward. The gunman (whose .45, I assume, was now empty) ^{saw} ~~said~~ that his victim did not drop. So he began to run. I find it hard to believe, but my father chased him. For six blocks along Seventh Avenue in Greenwich Village he

ran after his assailant (some say eight blocks, some say five, some say four) but it took all of ^a some such distance before Dougy recognized that he could not catch him and came to a stop. Only then did he see ~~that~~ blood ~~was~~ ^{realize that} oozing from his shoes, and he was dizzy. He turned around just before the street began to ^{turn around} revolve on him and saw that he was outside the emergency entrance of St. Vincent's Hospital. So he knew he was in bad shape. He hated doctors and he hated hospitals, but he was going in.

The attendant at the desk must have decided the new arrival was a drunk. A huge distraught man with a considerable amount of blood on his clothing was teetering over the table.

"Please sit down," said the orderly. "Wait your turn."

While my father normally did no more than nod or frown as friends told the story, here he would sometimes speak up himself. When I was a child, the look of absolute murderous certainty that still came into his eyes was so thrilling to my keyed-up young interior that once or twice I wet my pants a drop. (Although before such manly company, I kept the secret to myself.)

My father, in telling it, would seize an imaginary

orderly by the shirt, his arm extended stiffly, his fingers clutching the collar as if his strength might be all but expired, yet what remained was enough to throw ^{this} any specimen of unfeeling humanity ^{through} against a wall.

"Take care of me," Dougy Madden said in a low deadly voice in my mother's living room. "I'm hurt."

He was. They kept him in St. Vincent's for three months. When he came out, he was done with the union. I don't know whether lying in bed for so long a time took away a part of his massive nerve, or whether the Irish leaders had lost. Maybe, by now, his mind was in another place, that far-off place, full of unspoken sorrow, where he lived for the rest of his life. In that sense, he retired before I was born. Maybe he was mourning no more than his lost strength, for he was a physical prodigy no longer, merely a barrel of a man. In any event, he borrowed money from his relatives, opened a bar on the Sunrise Highway forty miles out on the South Shore, and for twenty years was the proprietor of a place that did not prosper and did not fail.

Most bars, given this description, figure to be managed with economy, since they are usually empty. My father, however, had a bar that was like himself, large,

full of generosity, and only half-managed, even if Big Mac did look like the bartender out of whom the mold was made.

He was there for twenty years in his white apron and his premature white hair, his blue eyes ^{measuring} the drinkers when they got obstreperous, and his skin so red from the steady inflow of drink--"It's my only medicine," he would tell my mother--that he looked an angrier man than he was, fierce as a lobster making one last lunge out of the boiling pot.

He got a fair daily crowd, a good ^{Saturday} ~~weekend~~ crowd, albeit beer-drinkers, and a heavy summer crowd, full of ~~weekend~~ lovers out on Long Island and fishermen going or coming. He would have been a prosperous man, but he drank a bit of the profits, gave more back across the bar, sent scuds of them across on free drinks to the farthest reaches of the room, let people run up a tab so large they could have paid the funeral expenses of their fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts, and he loaned money at no interest and didn't always get it back, and gave it away, and gambled it away, so as the Irish say (or is it the Jews?) "It was a living."

Everyone loved him but my mother. She came to love

him less over the years. I used to wonder how they ever got married and finally decided that she had to be a virgin when they met. I would suspect that their short and most loving affair (for long after they were divorced, my mother's voice would still become tremulous when she spoke of their first weeks together) was stimulated not only by how different they were ~~broken by bullets, he~~ ^{because} still had to be the most powerful man she had ever known -- but ^{defy} ~~she~~ was also a liberal and wished to ~~flout~~ the prejudices of her parents against the Irish, the working classes, and the smell of beer in bars. So they married. She was a small, modest, pleasant-looking woman, a school teacher from a nice town in Connecticut, as small as he was large, and she had nice manners and was a lady to him. I think she always remained a lady to him, and while he would never admit that his own great secret prejudice was just for that, for the high elegant splendor of a lady's hand in a long glove (and would, if anything, have wished for more of that) nonetheless, he adored her. He was terribly impressed that he had married such a woman. Alas, they remained a sad couple. To use his expression, neither could ^{shift} ~~change~~ the other ~~more than~~ a cunt-hair to the left. If not for my presence, they would soon have foundered in

frustration and boredom. I was there, however, and their marriage lasted until I was fifteen.

Maybe it would have gone all the way, but my mother made one error. She won a fundamental argument with my father and got him to move from our floor-through apartment above his bar to a town called Atlantic Lanes, and that was a quiet catastrophe. The shift proved equal, doubtless, to the shock his grandfather took on leaving Ireland. The one major concession ^{given} ~~made~~ to my mother was the one he should never have ^{agreed to,} ~~given in on.~~ Dougy distrusted Atlantic Lanes on sight. Although it sounds, I know, like a bowling

alley, the developers bestowed the name on their brand new town because we were no more than two miles from the ocean, and our streets had been designed to show a few bends. (Lanes.) The shape of our twisting roads came from draftsmen laying it out on drawing paper with French curves. Since the land was as flat as a parking lot, our S-turns served no purpose I could see except to make it easier ^{not} to ^{have}

^{to} look at your neighbor's ranch house which was exactly like your own ^{back} house. It's a joke, but Dougy could not find his way home when drunk. It was no joke. Something was leached out of all of us who grew up there. I cannot name it, although in the eyes of my father, we kids were awfully

civilized. We didn't hang out on a street corner--no right angles in Atlantic Lanes--we didn't run in gangs (we had best friends instead) and once when I was having a fist fight, my disputant said in the middle of it, "Okay, I quit." We stopped and shook hands. My mother was not displeased that (1) I won, since she had learned over the years only that would make my father happy and (2) I had acted like a gentleman. I had shaken hands nicely. My father was intrigued. It was truly the suburbs. That dramatized it for Big Mac. You could get into a fight and say "I quit," and the winner would not celebrate by banging your head on the pavement. "Boy, where I grew up," he told me (it happened to be Forty-Eighth Street west of Tenth Avenue) "you never quit. You might just as well say 'I die!'"

Once, a few years before the end of their marriage, I overheard my mother and father in the living room on a rare night when he was home from the bar. I was trying not to listen, ~~but~~, in fact was staying away, ^{by} doing my homework in the kitchen. When, on these rare occasions, they would find themselves together, they could sit for hours without speaking, and their mutual gloom often got so intense that even the sound on the TV seemed to

quaver. On this night, however, they may have been close, for I heard my mother say in a gentle voice, "Douglas, you never say that you love me."

That was true enough. For years I had hardly ever seen him give her a kiss and then only on the rarest occasion like a miser pulling out the one ducat he will spend this year. My poor mother. She was so affectionate she would kiss me all the time. (Out of his sight.) She never wanted him to think my habits were unmanly.

"Not once, Douglas," she now repeated, "do you ever say you love me."

He did not reply for a minute, but then he said--in an Irish street voice--it was his declaration of love--
"I'm here, ain't I?"

Of course, he was famous among his friends for such an ascetic view. In longshoreman days, he had earned another legend for the number of women he could attract and the ^{powerful number of times} times he could do it in a night. All the same, it was his manly pride that he was never obliged to kiss the girl. Who knows what ice-room of the heart ^{my skinny Irish} his mother ^{grandmother} raised him in? He never kissed. Once, not long after I was kicked out of Exeter, I went out drinking with him and his oldest buddies, and he was meat for the roast on

this matter of a kiss. His friends might be gnarled and scarred and half-toothless, and dirty-minded in the bargain, and since they were in their fifties and I was twenty, they looked ancient to me, but, God, they were filthy-minded. When they talked, they rolled around in sex like it was stuck to their pants.

My father was, by then, not only divorced from my mother, but had, in the general waste that followed, lost his bar. He lived in a rented room, had a lady friend once in a while, worked at a barroom for wages, and saw a lot of old friends.

Every one of these old friends, I soon discovered, had a quirk, and the rule of the game was to kick your old buddy on the quirk. Some were ^{tight with a dollar,} ~~stringy~~, some had ^{like} ~~such as~~ foolish habits ~~such as~~ betting long shots, one of them always threw up when he was drunk--"I have a sensitive stomach," he would complain; "Yeah, we have sensitive noses," they would reply--my father always got it about kissing.

"Oh, Dougy," his old friend Dynamite Heffernon would say, "Last night I was with a nineteen year old who had the juiciest, sweetest, plumpest, loveliest mouth you ever saw. Could she kiss! Oh, the moist

breath of her fine lips. Do you have any idea of what you're missing?"

"Yeah, Dougy," another would cry out, "give it a try. Break down. Give the broad a kiss!"

My father would sit there, ~~dull-eyed, baleful~~. It was the game, and he would suffer it, but his thin lips showed no pleasure.

Francis Frelagh, a.k.a. Frankie Freeload, took his swipes at the ball. "I had one widow with a tongue last week," he told us. "She put that tongue in my ears, down my mout', she licked my t'roat. If I let her, she would have swiped my nostrils."

At the look of disgust on my father's face, they laughed like choir boys, high-pitched and shrill, Irish tenors kicking Dougy Madden's quirk.

He took it all. When they were done, he shook his head. He did not like to be performed on while I was there--that was the measure of his fallen state--so he said, "I think you're ^{all} full of shit. None of you has been laid in the last ten years." When they whooped at his anger, he stuck out his palm. ^{"I'll give you"} ~~"All right,"~~ he said, ^{"Let's say"} ~~"I'll give you"~~ the benefit of the doubt. Maybe you ~~do~~ know a couple of girls. ^{And they} ~~All right.~~ They like to kiss. Maybe

they even go down on you ^{All night} ~~a little, huh?~~ That's been known to happen. ^{Only} Just ask yourself. The broad is taking care of you now, but whose joint did she cop last night? Where else was her mouth ^{than?} ~~on its travels?~~ Ask yourself that, you cocksuckers. Cause if she's able to kiss you, she can eat dog turds."

This speech put his old gang in heaven. "I wonder who's kissing her now," they would croon in Dougy's ear.

He never smiled. He knew he was right. It was his logic. I knew. I had grown up with it.

This was as much, however, as I could go on thinking about my father before the itch of my tattoo began to distract me out of measure. By a look at the clock I saw it was ^{nearly} ~~already~~ afternoon ~~for just so long had I been~~ ^{sketching} ~~thinking of my father!~~ and I stood up with the thought of taking a walk ~~outside~~, but had to sit down again ^{before} ~~the weight of a fear that rose in me from no more than~~ ^{sudden} ~~the thought of stepping through the door.~~ ^(came upon) ~~outside~~ ^{beneath}

Yet, now I felt a whole decomposition of myself, a veritable descent from man to dog, ~~if I were to continue~~ ^{by cowering} ~~to cower~~ here. So I put on a jacket and allowing ~~not~~ ^{other} ~~no~~ another thought, was through the house and into our damp November air with the jaunty sense that I had just

performed a near heroic act. Such are the warps of *pure flunk,*
~~fear~~. It is a low comedy.

Once on the street, however, I began to comprehend
my
~~A~~ reason, at least, for the new fear. Before me, ~~not~~ ^{well} a mile
away, was the Provincetown Monument, a tower of stone, ^{and not unlike} the
two hundred feet high, ^{copied from} the Tower of Uffizi
in Florence, ^{It was} and the first sight ^{of our town from} ~~for every eye on the road~~
~~and at sea~~ ^{or} as one approached our harbor. It sat on a
good hill back of the Town Wharf, ^{indeed} and so much in the middle
of our existence that one saw it every day, ~~indeed~~ ^{built by man} there
was no way not to. Nothing else was of such height until
you got to Boston.

Of course, a native never needed to recognize it
was there, indeed, I probably had not looked at it for a
hundred days, but on this morning, so soon as I turned to
walk toward the center of town, my tattoo, ^{like a meter to} already much
mark ~~the pulsations of my anxiety~~
~~agitated, now seemed to crawl over my skin with a near to,~~
~~intolerable irritation, a meter to mark the pulsations of my~~
~~anxiety, and so if, normally, I looked at our monument without~~
~~seeing it, now I did.~~ ^(most certainly did) It was the same vertical tower that
I had tried to climb on ^a ~~one~~ drunken night almost twenty
years ago, and ^{indeed I} ~~came so near~~ ^{to the summit} as to reach the overhang of
the parapet not thirty feet ^{below} ~~from the summit~~. I had gone

up the vertical, taking handholds and footholds in the ^{where I found them}
~~mortar between the granite blocks, enough for my finger-~~ ^{at least 10}
tips and my toes, ^{It was a} ~~although it was a climb that would awaken~~ ^{to}
me in the middle of the night for a ^{many} ~~year~~ ^{years} after, since in
more than one place I had to lift myself by the strength
of my arms alone, and in the worst places ^{I ran into} ~~there might~~
^{wide as two} ~~be ledges thick as your finger~~ ^{my} for the toes, but nothing
for ^{my} ~~the hands~~--I could only mount with my palms flat against
the wall--it is incredible, but I was drunk enough to keep
going up until I came to the overhang.

Now, I have talked to rock-climbers since, and one
or two have even looked at the monument with me, and
when asked if they could manage the overhang, said, "A
piece of cake," and meant it. One even explained the
technique he would use although I hardly understood. I
was no rock-climber myself. That night was the only hour
in my life when I lived on a wall near to two hundred feet
from the ground, but it came to so poor an end that I never
had the moxie to try again.

For I locked myself up, as they say, in the overhang.
It seems I should have trusted the holds I had, and leaned
out backward until I got a hand on a parapet--it was only
a small overhang!--but I could not figure how to surmount

it, and so I pressed instead against one of the small
arches just beneath, my back on one supporting column,
the soles of my feet on the other, and there I remained, ^{my}
^{body stuffed in that position} just under the parapet, until my strength began to go
and, after a while, I knew I would fall. Let me say I
thought it was not possible, given the position I was in,
to descend, and I was right. It is easier, I was told
later, to go up a wall than to go down if you do not have
a rope. There I perched, then there I clung, there I
~~waited for inspiration while my strength and all the~~
collected valor of the spirits I had drunk and the pot
I had smoked began to wane, and then the spirits were gone,
and I was sober, and ~~chilled~~, and so frightened that I
began to shout and soon, I suppose, to scream, and, to
cut ^{such} each recollection to its shortest, was rescued by the
Volunteer Fire Department in the middle of the night by
the ~~person of~~ a huge fisherman in a bosun's swing (no
less a person than Barrels himself) who was let down on a
rope from the balcony above (having gone up the stairway
within the tower) and he was able to grasp me finally ^{while} and
they hauled both of us up, but by then I was like a cat
trapped for six days in a tree--I had smelled my death--
and they say I fought him off, even tried to bite him when

he came near. I suspect it is true, for in the morning I had a huge knot on the side of my head where he gave me one bang against the rock to chasten ^{some of} ~~all~~ that lividity.

Well, I was also ready to take the bus that morning, and packed my suitcase and was going to leave Provincetown forever when some friends came by and treated me like a figure of valor. It seemed I was not looked upon as a fool. So I stayed, and came to realize why Provincetown might be the place for me, since no one ever thought I had done anything crazy or even particularly bizarre. We all had extraordinary stuff to get out of us, that was all. Do it the way you could.

Still, I kept that bag beneath my bed for all of the winter months I stayed that year, and I do not think there was an hour when I was not ready to decamp--one jeer at the wrong time would have been enough. It was, after all, the first time in my life I had to recognize I was not automatically sane.

Of course, I had some idea of what could be at the core of it. Years later, reading Jones' biography of Freud, I came across a reference ^{Freud} ~~he~~ made to "an attack of unruly latent homosexual panic in myself," and had to set the book down ^{so} ~~just~~ suddenly was I overcome with thinking

of the night I tried to scale the monument. Now, my tattoo throbbed. Was that "unruly panic" with me still?

Yes, was it not true that every place renowned for its colony of homosexuals invariably has such a monument? I thought of the men and boys who cruised the obelisk in Central Park, and the invitations with phallic measurements listed ^{by} next to each telephone number ^{that was} inscribed on the partitions of the public toilets at the foot of Washington Monument. What ~~calling~~ in me had I been attempting to extirpate on that lunatic climb? In Our Wild--Studies among the Sane by Timothy Madden.

There was one other man in town who could call himself my mate for he, too, had attempted to go up the Provincetown Monument. Like me, he had failed to solve the overhang and been rescued by the volunteer firemen, although this time (there are limits to symmetry) Barrels was not on the rescue rope.

His attempt took place ^{only} four years ago, but such are the number of freak-outs and flare-outs who bob in the churn of the great washing machine that is Provincetown in summer--all going out with the suds to sea--that no one remembers anything. My father's legend has been walking along with his life, but here, by the time Hank

Nissen made his attempt, all had forgotten mine--too many people pass through!--and sometimes I think Nissen was the only one who remembered that I had also tried.

I regretted, however, that our exploits were ~~wed~~^{the guy}.
~~Regretted even more that they were~~ privately wed, for I could not bear ~~him~~. Will it help to explain that his nickname was Spider? Spider Nissen. Henry Nissen a.k.a. Hank Nissen, a.k.a. Spider Nissen, and the last clung to him like a bad smell. He had a touch of the hyena for that matter--the same we-eat-tainted-meat-together intimacy that burns out of a hyena's eyes behind the bars of his cage ~~when he stares at you~~. So Spider Nissen would look at me and give ~~his~~ giggle as if we had both had a girl together, and each took turns sitting on her head.

He bothered me prodigiously. I do not know if it were our mingled glory and shame on that monument wall, but I could not ~~say hello to~~^{see} him in the street without having my mood altered for the day. I knew as much physical

uneasiness around him as if he had a knife in his pocket ~~and could use it below your ribs, or would knowingly sell~~^{to} ~~you~~ ^{and indeed he did} ~~pot ravaged with paraquat because he needed the bread~~^{keep a knife. For that matter, he was the type to knowingly sell}

to score for coke. A bad man, yet through the winter, winter after winter, one of my twenty friends in town.

In winter we paid a toll not unlike living in Alaska--
a friend was someone ~~you~~^{to} could pass an hour with against
the Great Ice-Man of the North. In the silence of our
winter, ~~acquaintances~~^{dull}, drunks, wretches, and bores could
be elevated to a species thought of as friend. Much as
I disliked the Spider, we were near, we ~~shared~~^{had} an hour
no one else could comprehend, even if our hour was ~~six~~^{six}
teen years apart.

Besides, he was a writer. In winter, we needed each
other if only to be critical of our contemporaries together.
One night we would look for the faults in McGuane, next
came DeLillo. Robert Stone and Harry Crews were saved for
special occasions. Our rage against the ~~success-of-peers~~^{talent of those who}
~~made the marrow of many an evening, even if we may not~~
~~have liked each other's writing.~~^{we're our age and successful} I suspected he didn't
value ~~mine~~^{my writing}, ~~for he never spoke of it.~~
like his. My lips were sealed, however. He was my dirty,
treacherous, raunchy neighbor-friend. Besides, one had
to admire ~~by~~ half his mind. He was trying to launch a
series of novels around a private detective who never left
his room, a paraplegic in a wheelchair, who managed to
solve all crimes set before him through his computer.
He would tap into giant networks, put knots in the CIA's

internal communications, mess with the Russians, but Spider's man also took care of intimate deeds by peering into private computers. He'd locate the murderers through their shopping lists. Spider's protagonist was a true spider. Once I told him: "We've evolved from invertebrates to vertebrates. You'll take us on to the cerebrates." Saying that, I saw heads with tendrils *substituting torso and* for limbs and body, but his eyes glittered as if I had made a direct hit in a video arcade.

I may as well describe his appearance--it was by now obvious to me that I was on my way to his house. He was tall and thin with very long limbs and long thin dirty blond hair that was *near to* blue-green from dirt even as his faded blue denims were *almost* a dirty yellow from grease. He had a long nose that went nowhere--that is to say it had no climax, merely ended with two functioning nostrils and a non-descript tip. He had a wide, flat, crab-like mouth and dirty gray eyes. *And* the ceilings in his house were too low for him. The exposed beams were only eight feet from the floor--another fish shed from Hell-Town!--and so the place consisted of four rooms up a narrow Cape Cod stairway over four rooms below, all small, all reeking of some sad dank aroma, of cabbage, the faded scent of

wine, diabetic sweat--I think his girl had diabetes--
and old bones, an old dog, spoiled mayonnaise. It was
like the poverty of an old lady's room.

But then in winter we huddled in our houses as if
we belonged to the century behind us. His house was on ^{one of}
~~the~~ a narrow lane, ^{sitting there} between our two long streets and you could
not even see it until you made your entrance through a
gate in a high hedge, and then the door was on you, there
was no yard, just the hedge encircling the house. On
the ground floor, as you looked through each window, you
saw nothing but that hedge.

I remember wondering on my walk why I was visiting
him now, and soon recalled that the last time I had been
at his house, he had cut a plug from a melon, poured in
vodka and later served it to all of us with hash cookies.
There had been something in the way he cut the melon--a
high surgical precision in the turning of the blade that
excited me to the joys of using a knife much as a man who
is eating with a highly refined gusto can inspire ^{your} a taste
for the same food.

So it was that walking along the street, contemplating
the monument and my tattoo, I thought not only of Spider
Nissen but of the frightful scream he gave on the night

of a seance ^{over} a month ago and the rare event that ensued ⁶
~~for~~ Patty Lareine had a most uncharacteristic fit of
hysterics immediately afterward ~~and~~ ^{and} with no more than
that, this recollection of how he used a knife, and
the sudden but immaculate certainty (which came to me like
an angel's gift) that he could tell me how I received
my tattoo, I was now possessed of the conviction that it
was ^{Spider's} his knife and his hand that severed a blonde head from
its neck.

All this at once, ~~and~~ ^{so} great was the fear I had
been living in, that I felt relief. The most intolerable
pressure in my head now released itself. It is agony
to live without a clue ^{when you are} in peril whose depth cannot be
measured. Now, I had a premise ^{to observe} to observe. It was ^{my}
friend Spider. I am afraid after every bad remark I
have just made about him, ^{that} I had still been generous enough
to take him along on more than one trip to the marijuana
patch. ^{Our} A winter loneliness ~~kin to Alaska~~ is, as I say,
the source of half our actions.

Nissen's woman, Beth, opened the door to my rap on
the knocker. I mentioned earlier that there was no effective
snobbery in Provincetown, and none there was, but you
could find a good many people to be offended on the reverse

side. For instance, most of my winter friends never locked their door when they were home. You did not ring or rap. You walked in on people. If the door was locked, it meant only one thing--your friends were screwing. Some of my friends, for that matter, liked to make love with the door unlocked. If you came in, ~~on them~~, there was the option to watch, or, given the phase of the moon, to join. There is not that much to do in Provincetown in the winter.

Patty Lareine, however, considered this trashy. I never came close to understanding her mores, since I think she would have cohabited with an elephant--but only to win a bet, a ^{very} large bet. Where she came from, white trash were always wandering around in one another's bedding.

^{So} ~~In contrast~~, while my good wife could consider ^{many} ~~just~~ about ^a ~~any~~ proposal, ^{some} ~~A~~ touch of class had to accompany it.

This Provincetown ^{custom} ~~habit~~ of one smelly joining two sleazos under dingy-gone blankets was revolting to her. They ^{could} ~~would~~ go for it because they came from good middle-class homes and were, ^{trying} ~~trying~~, as Patty Lareine once put it, "to get vengeance on their folks for giving them cancer!"

~~But~~ Patty was having no part of that. Her body was her proud possession. She loved nude beach parties on the

back shore and enjoyed standing (with her brown snatch limned in honey-gold by the sun) a foot away from the eyes of some ^{potential} ~~sex~~ lover on the sand who was eating a hot dog, one eye on the red meat covered with mustard coming up to his lips, the other on the copse between her thighs.

She could cavort bare-ass in the sea, her arms around two other naked women, her mean, pinching Southern fingers tweaking their nipples--nipple-pinching, tit-grabbing, ass-slapping being good girl sports in the waterholes she used to know, the ^{splash-rope} ~~rope~~ hanging ~~down~~ from the big limb of the old tree up on the bluff. ~~Splash,~~ and ~~nip them with your fingers as you came up~~

She also liked to walk in ~~all carnal fulsomeness~~ about our house, ~~which is to say,~~ in her high heels and nothing else, and it grated on her most sensitive tissues when some old parka with a man inside would fling our door open to ask, "Tim at home?"

"You dumb stupid low crude son of a bitch," she would say, "did you ever hear of knocking?"

So a law was imposed on our friends: Ring the bell before you come in. And we--meaning ~~three quarters~~ her--enforced it. Naturally, ~~we then chose to knock on other people's doors.~~ ^{make your kno-ck} We were looked down on vastly for being

so uptight, but as I indicated, reverse snobbery occupied ~~the heights of~~ our town in winter.

Therefore, I made a point of knocking on Spider's door, ~~it was habit by now~~ and nodded at his woman, Beth, when she let me in. She rarely spoke and then in a small voice. There was a submission in her so slavish to every one of Nissen's whims, that even the most gung-ho ~~militant~~ women in town gave up on her. The irony is that Beth supported Nissen's household, indeed, it was her little ^{and had been given by} house bought with money from ~~her~~ well-to-do parents (corporation types, I was told, from Wisconsin), ^{but} Spider held the saltbox as his ^{piece} ~~feif~~. The fact that it was her money that bought his Honda 1200CC, his Trinitron TV, his Sony video camera, his Betamax recorder, and his Apple computer seemed only to strengthen his power. Her poor sense of worth was kept dimly alive by surrendering funds to him: she was one of those quiet, pale, soft-spoken, furtive, ^{young} dun-colored women with eyeglasses ^{and} whose passion--whatever it was--can be comprehended only from without, that is, one had to feel how much life had been stripped away from her to measure the force it took. There are spiritless cowards who look like weeds, and are of no more interest to me than to anyone else, but

I always had the impression, even as Beth and I bobbed our heads and gave shy smiles to each other that she had deliberately dismantled every small charm that could have attached itself to her. *She looked like a weed. Yet she* Can I put it another way?

good
If I had learned that ~~she not only~~ wrote poetry, but *(what little she would have)* on reading it, discovered she was cruel as a ghetto rapist in the brutality of her concepts, quick as an acrobat in her metaphors, and ready to slay your heart with an occasional vein of feeling as tender as the stem of honey-suckle on a child's mouth, *still, I was only sure* well, I would have been surprised, but not dumbfounded. Often she seemed to me like a weed that had been fed on radium.

Let me warn you, however, that *her* ~~their~~ sex life *with Spider* ~~was~~ no mystery to any friend--was sordid, even for us. Somewhere along the way, ~~in the last couple of years~~, Nissen had hurt his back and now had a serious slipped disc. Every few months he would have to take to the floor for a few weeks, do his writing there, his eating ~~on the floor~~ as well, and his fornicating. I think the worse his back began to treat him, the more he was at it, which had to make his spine worse. First he ground the meat and then the bones, and finally the tripe and offal of their attraction for each other as if *during the length of his incarceration* ~~the incarceration of this stretch on~~

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the floor--speak of flattening time!--he had to keep
plucking ^{the} that one banjo string left to him until either
his back would break, his mind would go screaming into
outer space, or she would slit her wrists. He used to make
video tapes of them fucking. Maybe so many as ^{a dozen} ~~twenty~~ of
us had been shown them. She would sit among us like a nun,
~~and~~ silently, while he demonstrated slipped-disc techniques.
They consisted mainly of Spider on his back while she (and
he was proud of her ^{bone-slender} ~~skinny-boy-like~~ body when it undulated
on him) did all sorts of turns. They usually ended with
her mouth clamped on his joystick and the crimp in his
back vibrating like a dog's tail as he gave it all to the
video camera, coming at last in a flash, one spasm, no more,
last thread of the last viable semen in a man who for want
of other diversion had been fucking all day. It was awful
to watch. He used to urinate on her, ^{also} ~~there~~ for us to see
on the TV screen. He had grown a wispy light-brown
beard and a D'Artagnan mustache which he would tweak like
a villain while he hosed her down. You may ask why I
watched, and I can tell you: I knew the great vaults of
heaven were for the angels, but there were other conduits
in the sky, and underground railways for the demons, ~~and~~
~~and I always thought of Hell-Town as a relay on this under-~~

ground for the messages of whores and ~~orges~~ ^{orgasms} and cut-throats ~~one hundred years~~ dead. I used to feel as if the Nissen house (although the owner's name was hers, White, Beth Dietrich White) was one more station on the line. So I stayed to watch, not knowing if I was an acolyte or a spy, until at last his back, thank God, got a little better over the months, and he eased off from all that insane crossed-wires short-circuit ^{video} fucking. Of course, in compensation, he now wrote long detailed descriptions of ^{how he used} urinating on Beth while they lay side by side and ~~talked--his dialogue crackled!~~ and he would lay this on you and you would read it and discuss the merits. It was the ultimate literary workshop.

I could have endured him, this Spider, this monster, who shared with me the feat of climbing ^{seven-eighths of} ~~five-sixths of~~ the way up the stone phallus of the highest monument between here and Washington D.C. if only he had believed in God, or the Devil, or both, if he had been a soul in torment, or wished to murder the Lord, or had kissed the Devil beneath his tail and was now a slave. I could have put up with heresy, fallacy, perjury, antinomianism, Arianism, emanatism, Gnosticism, Manicheanism, even Monophysitism or Catharism, but not this damned atheist who believed in

spirits that came in electronic streams. I think his theological view came to this: there might have been a god once, but now, for whatever reason, It was gone, and had left us a cosmic warehouse where we could rattle around and poke our fingers into the goods, tap into all the systems. Yes, he was in the vanguard of the cerebrates.

On this day, as I came in, their living room was dark, the shades were drawn. Spider and two other men, whose faces at first I could not see, were watching the Patriots try to score from the ten yard line. It had to be Sunday, a sign of how far I was removed from all about me. I had not even known. On any other Sunday in November, I would have made my bets after much consideration, and would have been esconced here from the kickoff since, I confess, ^{no matter how} that much-as I disliked Nissen, and did not take to watching TV for hours ^{was much as} since it leached me out as thoroughly as a dose of salts, still, if you were going to, there was no place for watching television like Nissen's small parlor. The odor of stale socks and old spills of beer blended with the subtle scents of video equipment--scorched wires, plastic boxes. I could feel as if I were in a cave out there on the edge of the future civilization--one with the new cavemen of the cerebrates, anticipating

the millenia to come. If Sunday afternoons were spent in the deep if much depressed peace of dissipating time, still the seasons could go by and I would know a dull happiness watching the patriots, the Celtics, the Bruins and then, in April, the Red Sox. By May, the atmosphere changed. Our winter was over, the summer was in our minds, and Nissen's living room would no longer seem like a cave so much as an unaired den. Now, however, was the beginning of hibernation, and if this had given promise of becoming a winter like the others, I would enjoy (in a sort of gloom) bringing many a six-pack or quart of bourbon as my contribution to the cave, and would have flopped without another thought on one of his two couches or three broken down stuffed chairs--all of this crammed into a living room not twelve by sixteen!--stretched out my brogans on his rug to make myself one with all the colors in the room, the once-dark-brown of the walls, carpet, and furniture, having by now faded, darkened, been bleached by spills and turned by stains into the ubiquitous colorless color of them all, which was neither ash-gray nor washed-out purple nor dulled-down green nor a wan brown, but the mixture of them all. Who cared about the color? The TV screen was our altar of light, and all of us watched it with an

occasional grunt or a sip of our beer.

I cannot tell you how soothing this felt to me now. To someone living like myself these days, it was honest relief to sit among Spider's guests, two dudes I could do without on better occasions, but today they were company, Pete the Polack, our bookie who had a last name no one including himself would pronounce twice in the exact same way, Peter Petrarciewicz may be the spelling, and I disliked him for being ^{an} unfair son of a bitch full of greed since he put a vigorish of 20% on all losing bets instead of the 10% you could get from the Boston books-- "Make a phone call to Boston," he would say, knowing his clients could get no credit there--and besides, he shifted the line against you if he ^{had a choice} knew which way you'd bet, a big surly kid with a sour face, an all-purpose ethnic: you ^{taken him for} would have believed ~~he was~~ Italian, Irish, Polish, Hungarian, German, or Ukrainian if that was what you were told. He disliked me as well. I was one of the few who could get credit in Boston, ~~and did.~~

That Pete the Polack was here today could only mean that Nissen had bet a lot on the Patriots. It was disquieting. Nissen might be unsentimental enough to piss on his slave woman, but he'd lick the shoelaces of any

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athlete god-like enough to play for the Patriots. His
paraplegic detective might be able to penetrate CIA com-
puters and roll up friend or foe with equal panache, but
Nissen was so metaphysical about his allegiance to the
Pats that Pete could make ^{his team} them a six-point favorite
on a day when I only had to lay three in Boston. How
many times the Spider had been trapped in the middle. I
assumed the bet today was so large Pete was here to collect
if he won, and after five minutes I knew I was right; the
Spider soon began to shout at the set. Before long I was
even convinced he must have bet at least the value of
his motorcycle on the game, and Pete was here to wheel it
away if Nissen lost.

~~It is also~~ ^{stating} ~~This much is worth knowing about Pete~~ ^{that he was} ~~he inspired~~

~~(Anxiety in Nissen and that ought to serve me well. More-
over, Pete knew the location of my stash, and I did)~~

~~That he did know for certain I could not swear.~~

~~Certainly, I had never taken him near, but Nissen could
perfectly capable of letting~~

~~have told him. Pete would let Spider run up his losses
in return for promises--"Carry me another week and I'll
take you out to where Madden keeps his product." The
stash had to be worth a couple of thousand dollars and
Nissen knew it: ^{would not be above} ~~he was perfectly capable of offering it~~~~

as collateral. ~~When the time came, he'd bring it in for Pete, or give away its location.~~

The other man in the room I hardly knew. You would have cast him for a greaser. He had tattoos of eagles and mermaids all over his arms, and straight black hair, a low brow, a dented nose, a mustache, and a couple of missing teeth. Everybody called him Stoodie because he used, when an adolescent, to steal nothing but Studebakers all up and down the Cape. That was the legend, and it was untrue-- he stole all kinds of cars--but they called him Stoodie because it was a Studebaker he had been busted on. Now, he collected on losing bets for Pete, and, as I had heard, was a machinist and metal worker (all learned in the pen at Walpole) good enough to change the serial numbers on the engine blocks of ~~the~~ cars other people had stolen. However, he, I assumed, would not know my small part of the Truro woods.

I mention this because like John Foster Dulles who-- whatever his sins--gave us the phrase, I was going through an agonizing reappraisal. I liked to look upon myself as a writer ~~who was~~ searching for a somewhat larger view of man. It did not please me to reduce everyone I encountered to the ranks of those who knew and those who

might keep /
did not know where Timothy Madden kept his stash.

Now, however, my mind was nothing but this list.

Nissen knew, and by extension, Beth knew. Patty knew.

Mr. Black knew. ~~For all I knew, I had taken~~ Maybe Jessica and Mr. Pangborn ~~knew~~ there.

~~At the least,~~ ~~Regency~~ ~~had~~ ~~to~~ ~~have~~ ~~a~~ ~~clear~~ ~~notion.~~ ~~Then~~ I could

~~think of others. I could even add my father.~~ I concluded the list by thinking of my father. He had

He had made unsuccessful attempts over the years to cut out drinking by the substitution of marijuana. Once, over a year ago, on the last visit to Patty and me, I had taken him out to my clearing and tried to get him interested in the crop. I figured if he saw the plants, he might respect them as much as hops. So, yes, add my father to the list.

But that was like urinating on Beth. Abruptly, I recognized the monstrousness of my new mental preoccupation. Everybody came out as items on a computer list. Was I becoming a cerebrate? Yet so much had this activity taken me over that my head if ~~seen from within~~ ^{that I felt} was exactly like a computer trembling on its foundations, because I kept kicking my father's name on and off the list. Give me, in preference, a storm at sea.

I watched the football game for as long as I could. At last, ^{oh} there was a time-out in the middle of the second

quarter, and with neither team moving the ball, Nissen went to the refrigerator for beers. I followed.

There was only one way to treat him and that was ^{no} ~~resolutely~~ without ceremony. Since he could show ~~videos~~ of his wife and himself in a confetti of electronic dots, or ask you in the middle of biting a sandwich if you were constipated, I had no compunctions about injuring him with a quick question, ^{therefore} ~~so~~ I said, ~~even as he was popping the top of his can.~~ "Spider, remember the seance?"

"You forget it, man," he said. "I can't."

"It was weird."

"It was pure horrendous." He sloshed his beer around a missing molar in his mouth, gulped the fluid, and added, "Listen, ^{can} ~~man,~~ let you and your wife go for that shit. I ^{won't} ~~can't~~. It's too disruptive."

"What did you see?"

"Same thing your wife saw. ^{!"} ~~That's what I'd say.~~"

"Well, I'm asking you."

"Hey, don't lay it on me. Everything's all right, right?"

"Couldn't be better."

"Sure," he said.

"So why don't you tell me?"

"I don't want to get into that place again."

"Listen," I said, "you got to keep yourself pure today. You have a big bet."

"So?"

"I'm asking a favor. Keep yourself pure ^{with your buddies} and your team will cover the bet."

"Don't give me that mystical sauce. It went out with LSD. I don't have to fucking keep myself pure by telling you what you want to hear. That's desperate betting, man, that's degenerate. I pick the Patriots on their merits."

"You need my help today," I said, looking into his eyes as if I wouldn't relent.

"You're crazy," he said. "How many hundred thousand people betting on this game, two million probably, and I got to get myself pure with you--that keeps the result where I want it? Madden, every one of you potheads is tipped. Get yourself a little coke." He slammed the refrigerator door. He was ready to go back to the game.

"You're wrong," I said. "You and me can help them ^{am able to} to cover if I can ^{alongside of yours} put my mind right where yours is."

"I get no input whatsoever from you."

"Well," I said, "I hate to bring it up. But you

and me have one thing in common that two million other bettors don't have."

"All right." He tried to cut me off.

"We've been one special place together."

As I said this, the most peculiar phenomenon occurred. I had never told it to anyone, not even quite to myself, but in the hour I was trapped beneath the overhang, the most terrible odor oozed out to me from--I do not know if it was the rocks or my own sweat--but a dreadful odor of corruption came up nonetheless, the way perhaps a battlefield of many dead would smell, or was it?--and this was my fear--the nearness of the devil waiting to receive me, so terrible a smell indeed that once I was down on the ground, it remained the ^{worst} true fear *in days to come!* until I told myself, and for all I know, this is true also, that I was sniffing no more than some old guano of the gulls magnified by my own terror to the stench of a Satanic beast. But now, even as I said what should have remained unsaid, "We've been ~~en~~ one special place together," so did a whiff of the ^{that} ~~same~~ incredible odor come off of Nissen, and I think we both knew that the same experience ^{been equal for both of us.} had indeed come to us.

"All right," he said, "~~you take care of me today.~~"

"What did you see," I asked again, "at the seance?"

I could feel how he was on the edge of telling me, and had the good sense not to push ~~him~~ further. I could feel the truth coming forth ^{even as} ~~by the way~~ his tongue picked at his lips.

^{During} ~~In~~ the seance, we had been six of us about a round ^{oak} table, our hands flattened out on the surface, our thumbs touching our thumbs, and the little finger of each hand in contact with the ^{little} ~~finger~~ of the person to our left and to our right. We were trying to get the table to tap.

Let me not even speak now of our purpose, but in that darkened room by the back shore (for we were all at a rich friend's ^{home} ~~house~~ in Truro and the ocean waves were tolling on the back shore not two hundred yards away) it

seemed to me that with each question asked, the table ~~was actually coming closer to some small quiver~~ quivered a little more. ~~It was not a light table, yet I~~

~~thought it was actually preparing to move when, just~~

^{When, right} then, ~~all~~ of our senses were shattered by Nissen's fearful scream, and having brought this much of it back for myself, I must have ^{returned} ~~wrapped~~ the memory ^{to} ~~about~~ him as well for now he said, "I saw her dead. I saw your wife dead and with her head cut off. The next fucking moment, she saw it too. We were ~~both~~ looking at it together."

In this instant, the smell that came off him was
overpowering, and I could feel ^{a reverberation of} again every lost re-
verberation of ^{the} that fear in which I lived for an hour
beneath the overhang, and ^{so} knew ^{as well} that ^{I had no}
choice. ^{No choice?} No matter how I would ^{might like} try to banish the impulse, ^{I had}
I must go back to the tree on the sandy ridge and ^{discover} see
^{whose head} who was in the burrow below.

Yet, even in ^{this} the moment of balance over such a
precipice, I saw a look of incredible spite come into
Nissen's face and he reached over and squeezed my right
arm beneath the shoulder with fingers that dug in like
five spikes.

^{As} When I winced, he laughed. "Yeah," he said, "you
got a tattoo. Harpo told the truth."

"How does Harpo know?" I asked.

"How does he know? Man, you are so fucking spaced
out on that pot of yours that you need your wife. She
better come back." He snorted as if some grains of coke
were leaking out of his nose. "Hey," he said, "yeah," he
said, "I'm pure. Now, you get yourself pure."

"How does Harpo know?" I repeated. Harpo was a
friend of Nissen's and raced motorcycles with him.

"Well, mate," said Spider, "he gave you the fucking

tattoo, himself.

Sven "Harpo" Veriakis. He was a short blond Greek-Norwegian on his father's side, Portuguese and Italian by his mother, and built like a fire-plug. He had been something like the third shortest man ever to play in the NFL (even if he only lasted for a season.) Now Harpo had moved to Wellfleet, and one didn't see him often, but he had conducted our seance, that I recalled. "What did he say?" I asked.

"Who knows," said Nissen, "I never can figure out what he's saying. He's a space cadet like you."

~~It had been a mistake to get Spider to confess the reason for his scream. Now he seemed as full of energy as he must have been on the night he went up the monument wall.~~ Cries came out of the living room then, and imprecations. The Patriots had just scored again. Spider whooped and led me back.

In the intermission at half-time, while we were watching the commercials, Stoodie began to talk. I had never heard him say as much before.

"I like to lie awake at night and listen to the sounds in the street," he said to Beth. "There's a lot of significance then. You must provide yourself with the proper framing of mind, and that makes it all pregnant

with space. Pregnant with grace," he amended, and
nodded, and nipped on his beer. I was remembering some-
thing I had heard about Stoodie. He used to hang his
wife by the ankles from hooks he had put in a ceiling
beam. *Then he would caress her. In his fashion*

"I admire the natural situation of the Cape," he
now said to Beth. "I will take an Indian Summer over all.
Strolling among ^{our} these dunes, I have had the privilege
of seeing another someone, a male or female person on
another dune ^{as} ~~so~~ much as half a mile away, but the glow
of the sun is on them. They are ^{feeling} as full of love for all
this golden goodness as ^{we} you are in ^{our} ~~your~~ own feelings.
That's God's blessing right there. No escaping it.
Beauty inexorable." He halted. "I mean beauty exalted."

It was here I made the decision to add Stoodie to
my list.

4.

I did not learn that afternoon who won the game for I left Nissen's house in the third quarter and drove the fifteen miles ^{to} ~~into~~ Wellfleet to see Harpo who lived in a loft over a dry-goods store on one of the off-roads. I say off-road but then no street in Wellfleet ever seemed to bear relation to any other as if on founding day some two hundred and more years ago, five sailors, each swigging ~~from~~ his own keg of rum, had meandered out from the bay-shore along the streams and around the bogs, and ~~the people who were following~~ ^{followed} ~~marked~~ ^{to mark} the twists of each road by the vagaries of their ^{each} promenade. As a result, no one I knew in Provincetown could ever find anyone in Wellfleet, and indeed we did not try often. Wellfleet was by now a proper town and none of us ever saw a Yankee there who did not have a nose long enough to serve as a rifle barrel siting you

in his mean nostrils' cross-hairs. Some of us, therefore, used to ask Harpo how he could ever have left Provincetown for Wellfleet and he replied, "I didn't like the warp. The warp was getting to me. I had to move."

So a few ^{began} ~~tried~~ to call him Warpo. Since he had, however, a tangle of curly blond hair over a face as rubbery as the great comedian (albeit considerably more scarred: after pro football, he played semi-pro without a helmet) Harpo it remained.

In any event, he was named for the harpoon, not Harpo Marx. Harpo Veriakis was famous for saying, "That's a beautiful girl over there. I wish I was man enough to harpoon her." So, ^{some called him} ~~he came to the name only after Poon for~~ and Poon-tang, some still called him Harpoon. I mention ~~all~~ this as a way of indicating how hard it was to locate his place. On the Cape in winter, nothing ever came right to the point.

Well, I found his turning, and he was in, which made two surprises, and I still did not believe he had pricked the tattoo into me since I did not ~~for one thing~~ even know that he practiced such an art--I was going by Spider's word--and besides I could not understand how

I would ever have found his place in the dark while drunk, but once I climbed the outside stairs to his loft, my doubts were gone. He looked up from feeding his cats (he lived with five such pets in lieu of one beautiful girl) and the first thing he said was, "Is your arm infected?"

"It's itching."

He didn't say another word to me until he finished spooning out the rest of the can, although he spoke to a couple of the creatures who were rubbing around his ankles like connubial little fur-pieces, but soon as he was done with that, he washed his hands, removed my bandage, got out a plastic bottle of some disinfectant, and laved it over my upper bicep. "It won't infect too much," he said, "and that's good. I was worried. I don't like to use the needles when the atmosphere is screwing me up. That's conducive to infection."

"Everything was off?" I asked.

"You were shit-face."

"All right. I drink and I get shit-face. What's new about that?"

"Mac, you wanted to pick a fight with me."

"I must have been crazy." (He was strong enough to

lift a car by its rear end.) "I didn't really try to pick a fight with you?" I asked.

"Well, you were showing off."

"Did I have a woman with me?"

"I don't know. She might have been downstairs in the car. You kept yelling out the window."

"What did I say?"

"You kept yelling out the window: 'You're going to lose your bet.'"

"Did you hear anyone answer?"

One of the virtues of the people I live among is that none of us ^{is} ~~are~~ ever surprised by a friend's inability to remember a vivid hour.

"There was a lot of wind," said Harpo. "If it was a woman, she was laughing like a banshee."

"But you think there was a woman in my car?"

"I don't know," he said sepulchrally. "Sometimes ^(I hear lots of sounds.) the woods get to laughing at me." He put away the bottle of disinfectant and shook his head. "Mac, I begged you not to get a tattoo. ^{was going} The ~~presence of~~ ^{fearsome} everything around ~~was in the worst~~ shape. Before you walked in, I almost went on the roof. If there had been lightning, I would ^{have} had to."

¶ Some would argue that Harpo was psychic and some that he was punchy from playing without a helmet, and I always expected that he was both, and each reinforced the other. For that matter, he had been in Viet Nam, and his best buddy, so went the story, had blown up on a landmine twenty yards from Harpo. "It deranged me," was what he ~~said~~. ^{told a few.} Now, he lived in the heavens, and the words of angels and demons were major events to him. Several times a year, when the clans that threatened existence massed among the cloudbanks like medieval armies, and lightning came with great rain, Harpo would climb up on the ridgepole of his roof and dare the forces above. "If they know I'm standing there, ^{they think} I can exorcize them, ^B but it makes me cry like a baby. I'm scared to do it. It's the woods. They're awesome, Mac."

"I thought you only went up on the roof when it's raining."

"Never follow a law to its absolute," he said hoarsely.

I could ^{rarely} never be certain what he was talking about. He had a deep and hollow voice with such groundswells of ^{echo} ~~reverberation~~ (as if his head were still ringing from collisions you could never bear) that he would ask

~~you~~ for a cigarette and the request itself would sound
gnomic. He could also make the most extraordinary con-
fessions when he hardly knew you. He spoke of himself
not so much as a person ^{as an instrument of the elements} as an element ^{those} that ought to be
scientifically recorded. In this, he was like all athletes
^{talk about} who speak of themselves in the third person. ~~("Yes, it is")~~
^{agreed} ~~is my considered opinion that~~ Hugo Blacktower is worth
one million dollars playing center in the NBA," says
Hugo Blacktower.) So Harpo ^{could make} speaking in the first person
^{nearly} ~~could make it~~ equal to the third person. "Your wife is
most attractive," he said at one of our summer parties,
"but she makes me afraid. I could never get it up with
her. I respect you for being able to." Extraordinary
stuff came out of him like a roll of the dice. Now, he
said, "I hope you harvested your crop in good time before
the hurricane."

"I just did get it in."

"Beware of its use. The day of the hurricane, I
stood on the ridgepole for three hours. That was why the
hurricane didn't come."

"You held it off?"

"Yes." There were terrible forces that day, and I
know it's going to fuck me up. I had to take a vow."

"To do what?"

"To listen to them," he said with gloom.

"But you held off the hurricane?"

"To a degree. Ultimately, I cannot say."

"Ultimately."

Anyone else would have thought I was mocking him by my next question. He knew I was not. "Are the Patriots," I asked, "going to win today?"

"Yes."

"Is this your professional opinion?"

He shook his head. ^{"It is my impression."} "I heard it on the wind."

^{"How often is"} "Is the wind ever mistaken?"

"In ordinary matters, one time in five."

"And extraordinary matters?"

"One time in a thousand. It ^{fixes} concentrates on the problem then." Now ~~he~~ grasped my wrist. "Why," Harpo asked, as if we had not already spoken of this, "did you cut down your marijuana just before the storm?"

"Who told you?"

"Patty Lareine."

"What did you say to her?" I asked. He was like a child. If he was ready to tell, he would tell all.

"I said she should warn you," he ^{replied} said in his gravest voice, "It would have been better to lose your crop than cut it down so suddenly."

"What did she say?"

"She said you wouldn't listen. I believed her. That is why I didn't take offense when you came here two nights ago and were shit-face. I figured you'd been smoking your ^{own} stuff. Your stuff has evil in it." He said this word as if evil were a high tension wire fallen to the ground and now writhing in sparks.

"~~Why~~ ^{Did} I come here?" I asked, "~~Was it~~" for a tattoo?"

"No." He shook his head vehemently. "People don't know I ^{am able to} ~~can~~ do that. I only work for people I honor." He stared at me somberly. "I honor you," Harpo now said, "because you are man enough to fuck your wife. Beautiful women ~~like her~~ make me timid."

~~I could only ignore this.~~ "You are saying," I replied, "that I didn't come here for a tattoo?"

"No," he repeated. "I would have shown you the door."



"Then what did I want?"

"You asked for a seance. You said you wanted to ~~see~~ ^{find out} why your wife became hysterical during the last seance."

"And you wouldn't help me?"

"Oh, no," he said, "There could not have been a worse night ~~for it.~~"

"So you said no?"

"I said no. ~~That was when~~ ^{Then} you got shit-face. You said I was ~~yellow~~ and a phony. Terrible things. Then you saw my kit. My needles were out on the table. So you said you wanted a tattoo. 'I'm not leaving empty-handed,' you said."

"And you agreed?"

"Not at first. I told you that a tattoo must be respected. But you kept going to the window and shouting, 'Just a minute.' I thought you were talking to them, except it could have been a person. Then you started to cry."

"Oh, shit," I said.



"You told me that if you couldn't have the seance, I had to give you the tattoo. 'I owe it to her,' you said. 'I wronged her. I must carry her name.'" He nodded. "I understood that. You were asking for a penance. So I said I would do it. Then you ran to the window and yelled,

'You're going to lose your bet.' That provoked me. ^{I doubted} Just your sincerity. But you didn't seem to know I was angry when I was getting real provoked, you turned around from the window and said, 'Give me the name I whispered to you at the window and said, 'Put on the same name I gave you for the last seance.'"

^{Truro} "Didn't I say at the seance)"
"Didn't I say then that I wanted to get in touch with

a person named Mary Oakwood--one of my mother's cousins?"

"You did ^{offer} the name of ^{your} that cousin, aloud. But that was only for your wife to hear, ^{Then you got me alone and} Harpo told me. ^{Said:} "Then you took me aside. 'The real name, ^I you said, is Laurel. Just think of Laurel, and don't tell Patty.'"

"That's all I told you?"

"No. You also said, 'Laurel is dead.' I asked you, and you said, 'I want to reach her, and she is dead.'"

"I couldn't have said that," I told him now. "I think I wanted

to find out where she is. I used to love her."

"^{if you knew she was alive, then}
 "Then you were trying to take advantage of a seance."

"I suppose I was."

"That's ^{is} the explanation for the chaos, and the ~~hys-~~
^{beginning your}
 teria." He sighed. "Two nights ago, I was just starting
 the tattoo, and you said: 'I can't fuck you over--the
 girl's real name is not Laurel, ^{it's} but Madeleine.' That fouled
 me up very bad. I try to register the forces that ~~are~~
^{around me,}
 present just as I put in the first needle. That is basic
 protection for all. You injured my concentration. Then, ^{next minute}
^{by the way,} you said, 'I changed my mind. Make it Laurel.' ^{after all,} You messed
 up your own tattoo. Two times you messed it up."

"I'm sorry."

^(as if to)
 I was silent in respect for his words. Then I asked:

"What else did I say?"

"Nothing else. You fell asleep while ~~I was doing the~~
^(with the tattoo)
 tattoo. When I was done, you woke up. Then you went down-
 stairs, got into your car, and drove off."

"Did you come down with me?"

"No."

"Did you look out the window?"

^{did not}
 "I didn't. But I think there ^{were} were people with

you. Because once you ^{were} got outside, you started to get
 very loud. ^{I believe I heard} I could hear a man and a woman trying to
 quiet you. Then you all drove off."

"In my Porsche?"

Harpo knew the sound of motors. "It was your car, ^{only,}"

"How did I get two people into one bucket seat?"

He shrugged.

I was about to go ^{leave} when he said, "The girl you call
 Laurel ^{may be} is still alive."

"Are you certain?"

"It feels like she is. ~~I think she's~~ on the Cape.
 She's damaged, but she's not dead."

"Well, if you ~~are getting~~ it from the wind, it's ^{that's}
 four to one you're right."

Outside it was dark, and the highway back to Province-
 town was being scourged by the last dead leaves ^{to cross} crossing
 the hardtop from one part of the forest to the other. The
 wind was in a fury, as if indeed my poor jest had dis-
 pleased it, and gusts that could have knocked over a sail-
 boat slammed against the side of the car.

Once, a couple of years ago, I had been to another seance.
 A friend of Harpo's had been killed in an auto crash on
 this same highway and Harpo had ^{come together} invited with myself two men and

a woman I did not know, and we sat in a dimly lit circle around a small end table with thin legs. Our palms were on the table, our extended fingers touched. Then ^{Harpo} the table was ^{its} given instructions by Harpo. He spoke to ^{the table} it as if there were no question that his voice was heard, and he told ^{it} the table to tilt up on one side and then come down, thereby tapping the floor once for yes. If ^{the table} it wished to say no, it would have to rise and fall twice for two taps. "Do you understand me?" Harpo asked.

The table went up on two legs with the same obedience a trained dog will give to the command to beg. Then it tapped the floor. We ^{proceeded} went on from there. Harpo ^{expounded} instructed it in a simple code. One tap would be for the letter A, two for B, and on up to twenty-six taps for Z. After that, ~~he asked questions to which the table could spell~~ he began to ask questions. ~~out its answers~~

Since he had to be certain that he was talking to the friend who had been killed the week before the seance, he ^{began} by inquiring, "Are you there?" asked, "Is that you, Fred?" and the table, after a pause, tapped once. To verify this, Harpo asked, "What is the first letter of your name?" The table, well-domiciled, ^{slowly to indicate} at once gave six taps for the letter F.

We went on. That intimate event had also ^{took} taken place on a November night. We had sat, about in Harpo's small Wellfleet loft, ^{not} never leaving the table from nine in the evening until

two in the morning, ^{and we were} all but Harpo, ^(for) strangers to each other. Naturally, there was time to observe every likelihood of a trick, ^{yes} but I could see none. Our knees were all visible, ^{too lightly} and our hands rested too lightly on the surface, for anyone ^{We sat so closely that one} to tip the table by himself. One could not fail to detect a physical exertion in the others. No, the table tipped in response to ^{our} questions, and as naturally as water being poured ^{that was} from one glass to another. It was ^{did} not ^{seem} spooky. Rather, it was tedious. It took a long time to spell each word.

^{does it feel} "How is it," Harpo asked, "where you are?"

Seven taps came back. We had a G. A pause, and a new series of slow taps began, the table tilting two of its legs a clear foot off the floor, but slowly, rising slowly like one-half of a drawbridge, and then, as leisurely, descending for the tap. The next sequence took eighteen taps and several minutes. We now had an R. That made GR. . .

"Great?" asked Harpo.

The table tapped twice: "No!"

^{"I'm sorry,"}

"I-apologize," said Harpo. "Continue."

Now we received fifteen taps. We had a G, an R, and an O.

It was only when we arrived at G,R,O,O,V that Harpo said "Groovy?" and the table replied with a single tap.

"Fred, is it really groovy?" asked Harpo.

Again, the table went up, again it came down. It was not unlike conversing with a computer.

So we continued for five hours and heard a ^{bit of} little small talk about Fred's new state on the other side. No information came to us that would shake the foundations of eschatology or of karma. It was only past two in the morning, driving home through a wind like this, that I realized how a common end-table, in defiance of many laws of physics, had ^{been} become able to rise and fall hundreds of times in order to send a word or two across a divide whose gulf I could no longer measure. It was then, alone on the highway, that the hair stiffened on the back of my neck, and I knew I had been presented an ^{erie and} incomp^{re}hensible ^{evening} ~~unbelievable scene~~, and whatever had made it possible was ^{doubtless} still present in the air around me. I was alone with it on a wind-swept highway not far from the depths of the sea, ^{no}, I had never felt as alone in my life, and the awe I had hardly experienced while it was indeed happening was now with me on

the road. During ~~cur-seance~~^{IR}, the tapping of the table ^{during the} had come to seem nearly as comfortable and commonplace ^{become} as a night lost at playing solitaire--that may have been what bothered me the most. It had seemed so natural. Next day, however, I was as apathetic as if my liver had been flung against a cement wall, indeed, was left in such depression ~~for a week~~ that I had not gone again to a seance until the night in Truro when we embarked on our fiasco. I was now the first to believe that one could communicate with the dead. It was just that I could not afford the funds it required.

^{Seance} ~~Arriving~~^{at} I came back to my house, I started a fire, poured a drink, and was just beginning to search for ^{a few recollections} some reason to have gone out to Wellfleet with two other people in one small Porsche to ask Harpo for a seance, when there was a thump on the door-knocker, or so I would swear, ~~I heard~~, and the door blew open.

I do not know what entered, nor whether it left when I bolted the door, but I heard ^{that clapper} it as a summons. I had a sniff again of the intolerable odor of corruption I ^{had} breathed beneath the overhang, and could have cried out at the inexorable logic of ^{this} the demand. For upon me--or was it out of me?--with all the weight of a decree I could

not refuse, came the bidding to ^{go back} ~~return~~ to that wood in Truro midway between Wellfleet and here, and ^{return} go down the roads I knew so well to the trail that led to my twisted pine and the burrow beneath.

I ^{hell off} ~~resisted~~ for as long as I could. I finished my drink and made another, and knew that whether it took an hour or three days, whether I finally went forward sober or became so drunk I could live in flames, that I ^{must} ~~would~~ indeed go out, no matter my fear, and search the burrow. There ^{could} ~~would~~ be no release until I did, and ~~the dimensions of my panic would finally not matter.~~ That force which went into the tapping of the table had now seized me--by my entrails and my heart. I had no choice. With every hour and every drink, as if I were incarcerated in a room whose four walls were ^{coming in} ~~compressing~~ upon me, so ^{would} ~~my~~ thoughts ^{now} ~~would~~ converge and no hour ^{prove} ~~could~~ be worse than the middle of the night ^{ahead} ~~lying in bed.~~

I knew. Once before I had ^{felt} ~~arrived at just this~~ conviction that I was lost in the grip of an imperative larger than myself, and that was in the week twenty years ago ^f ~~and was it worse, worse even, than now?~~ when I walked each day to the Monument and with cold oil in my lungs and sick worms in my belly, stared up at the climb and saw

with a gloom equal to losing all reason itself, that the ascent could be done, ~~or at least, attempted.~~ As high as I could follow it, going upward ^{handhold by handhold,} ~~foot by foot,~~ ^{jagged-like irregularities} were indentations in the mortar and small spaces between ~~the granite blocks, resting one above the other, like,~~ ~~hand-holds on a wall.~~ It could be done, and I could do it, and I stared so hard at the base that--can you believe me?--I never contemplated the overhang.

I did not want to go near that tower. I had no idea, not then, why I must climb it, although I did know ~~how~~ ^{those old} ~~(knew at least that if I did not make the attempt something worse than the panic in which I lived would befall me.~~ If I learned nothing else from ^{when} ~~the seizures of terror in the middle of the night with which I would sit bolt upright in bed, I gained--could I term it that?--some small measure of compassion for all who are afflicted by the compulsion to go out and do what is absolutely not to be done--whether it is the seduction of little boys or the rape of adolescent girls--but I knew the nightmare that blazes beneath the stupefaction of those who can never dare to come near to themselves or disaster will ensue. So that week when I had to wrestle with that strange, external will to keep ^{that seemed} ~~external to myself, trying to convince it that I did not have to climb the monument, impossible~~ ^{I also learned}~~

nights when I learned about the varieties of human insulation. For to keep from encountering ^{that} the fiend who ^{dwells} lives in the sweet kundalini of our spine, so do we take on our booze, our pot, our coke, our nicotine, our tranks and sleeping pills, our habits and our churches, our prejudices and our bigotries, our ideology, our stupidity itself--that most vital of the insulations!--and I encountered nearly all of them ⁱⁿ on the week before I tried to climb the Monument and conquer the unmanageable in myself. Then, with a brain inflamed by speed, and ~~stupefied in the burn-out of all other drugs~~, tilted one way by pot, and the other by drink, squealing within like an unborn child in terror of suffocation before it finds the light, feeling as murderous as a Samurai, I tackled that wall, and found, no matter how absurd my trapped conclusions, that I was better afterward, if by no more than the absence of terror in sleep.

So it had been worth it. I knew that must be true now. I had to go back and stare upon the face that once had lived on a blonde head. And if I did not know whether the death I would ^{stare upon} ~~contemplate~~ had come from my hands or belonged to another, will you ever comprehend me if I say ^{that} such knowledge, while crucial to my self-preservation--

was I in danger of the law or of all that was outside
the law?--was still not what called me there so much as
the bare impulse to go: that came from the deepest sign
~~I could recognize--~~ ^{understood--} the importance of the journey could
~~be recognized~~
only be equalled by the dread of doing it.

I will spare you the hours when I went back and
forth in my will. I can only say that it was near to mid-
night when I had conquered my terror sufficiently to begin
the voyage in my mind, ^{and so was ready} to leave the house, enter the car,
and set out ^{in imagination} over the wind-whipped reaches of a highway
^{wind-whipped} whose ~~dead~~ leaves at this hour ^{were at this hour like an} would be like an invasion
^{on a} onslaught of the spirits, and with each detail of the journey fore-
seen in advance, ~~like those hand-holds, indeed, up the~~
~~wall,~~ in this aesthetic work of composing the trip in my
^{thoughts} ~~mind~~ before it was ever undertaken, I found at the center
of my terror, the calm of composition itself. So I was ^{finally}
armed to set out, and was at the door and ready to step
into the ^{real} air of the night when the knock resounded again,
and just so powerfully as a hammer upon my tomb.

Some interruptions are too profound to disturb your
composure. One's limbs do not have to shake as one en-
counters the hangman. I pulled the bolt and drew open
the door.

Regency stepped in. For the first moment, seeing the strain upon his face and the bright light of anger in his eyes, I had the idea he was there to arrest me. He stood in the foyer and stared at the furniture in the living room and shook his head from side to side ^{but for} so long that I comprehended at last he ^{was} ~~might be doing no~~ more than revolving his neck against the grind of his ^{own} tension.

"I'm not here for a drink, buddy," he said at last.

"Well, you can have one."

"Later. We talk first." He poked the light of his angry eyes into mine, and then in surprise--for I do not think he had ever seen me showing such resolve--he looked away. He could not know for what I had just prepared.

"Are you," I asked, "working on Sunday?"

"You haven't been down to the West End today, have you?"

I shook my head.

"You don't know what's going on?"

"No."

^{"Every cop in town was}

~~"There was a police convention at The Widow's Walk.~~

Every cop in town." He looked past me. "Do you mind if I sit down?"

I did. I didn't. I made some gesture to indicate as much.

He sat down.

"Look, Madden," he said, "I know you lead a very busy life, but maybe you can recall receiving a phone call this morning from Merwyn Finney."

"The proprietor of The Widow's Walk?"

"You eat there all the time but you don't know his name?"

~~Regency was being awfully surly.~~

"Hey," I said, "don't break my chops for too little."

~~"I'm sorry,"~~ he said. "Why don't you sit down too?"

"Because I'm about to go out."

"Finney called about a car, right?"

"Is it still there?"

"You told Merwyn Finney," Alvin Philip ^{Luther} now said, "that you couldn't remember the name of the woman who was with Pangborn."

"I still can't. Is it important?"

"Probably not. Unless she's his wife."

"I don't think she was."

"Well, good. You're a shrewd judge of people."

"I'm not smart enough to guess what's going on now."

"Oh, I could tell you," he said, "but I don't want to slant your opinion." *He looked into my eyes again, "why*

~~"Maybe I'm weighing my words as it is."~~

L
"What's your make on Pangborn?"

"Corporate lawyer. Sharp. On a tour with a blonde lady."

"Anything wrong with him?"

"Just not likeable."

"Why?"

"Cause I wanted to get somewhere with Jessica and he was in the way." I stopped. There was much to be said for Regency *as a cop.* Pressure came off him and it was constant. Soon, you made a mistake. "Oh," I said, "that's her name. It just came to me. Jessica."

He wrote it down. "Her last name?"

"Still *X* blank. She may never have told me."

"What was she like?"

"Society lady. Southern California society, I'd say. No real class. Just money."

"But you liked her?"

the closet
"I had the feeling that ~~in the closet~~, she'd carry on in *approve of* on like a porny star." I said this to shock him. It succeeded more than I expected. *9* "I don't ~~like~~ *approve of* pornies,"

he said. "I don't go to them. I wouldn't mind slaughtering five or ten of those porny stars, though."

"That's what I like about law enforcement," I ^{answered.} said.

"Put a killer in uniform and he can't kill any more."

He cocked his head. "Cheap hippie philosophy," he ^{said,} told me.

"You could never stand up to a discussion," I told him. "Your brain is full of mine fields."

"Maybe so," he said slyly, and winked. "Let's move back to Pangborn. Would you say he was unstable?"

"Not particularly. I'm tempted to say not at all."

"Don't."

"Don't?"

"Did he impress you in any way as a swish?"

"He might wash his hands after making love, but, no, I would not call him a swish."

"Was he in love with Jessica?"

"I'd say he liked her for what she could offer, and was getting ^{a little fatigued,} ~~tired of her.~~ She may have been too much ^{of a} woman for him."

"You don't think he was in love with her uncontrollably?"

I was about to say "Not my impression," when I decided

to ask, "What do you mean by uncontrollably?"

"I'd say it's loving somebody to the point where you're not in command of your actions."

Somewhere in my mind, a mean calculation came forth. I said, "Alvin, what are you leading to? Did Pangborn kill her?"

"I don't know," said Regency. "Nobody has seen her."

"Well, where is he?"

"Merwyn Finney called up this afternoon and asked if the car could be removed. I told him we'd have to put a warning on the windshield first. This afternoon, I was making a turn around town and thought I'd take a look at *the job.* ~~It didn't~~ *it didn't* look right to me. Sometimes you see an empty car that's all wrong. So I tried the trunk. It was *unlocked.* ~~open.~~ Pangborn was in there."

"Was he murdered?"

"Interesting you say that," said Regency. "No, my friend, he was a suicide."

"How?"

"He put himself in the trunk and closed it. *Then* ~~I think~~ *he left it unlocked because it's the kind of trunk you can open from the inside if you don't lock it. Maybe he wanted to get out if he changed his mind. But then*

he laid himself under a blanket, stuck a pistol in his mouth, and pulled the trigger."

"Let's have a drink," I said.

"Yeah."

His eyes were fixed with fury. "Very strange business," he said.

I could not help myself. A.N. Regency had his powers. "Are you sure it's suicide?" I asked, although I could see no advantage to myself in the question.

Worse. Our eyes met clearly ~~then, and~~ with that *lack of concealment which is palpable? Both people are* lack of reservation that suggests you are both remembering the same ^{sight} thing. I was seeing blood on the passenger seat of my car.

He kept the silence until ~~my look must have grown~~ vague before he said, "There's no doubt it's suicide.

The powder marks are all over his mouth and palate. Unless someone drugged him first"--Regency took out his notebook *and set down a few words* and wrote ~~in it~~ *with* "but I don't see how you can ram a gun into someone's mouth, shoot them, and then rearrange a body without betraying yourself ^{with} on the blood spill. The dispersal of blood on the floor and side of the trunk is wholly consistent with such a suicide." He nodded. "But I don't," he said, "have a high opinion of your acumen.

You read Pangborn all wrong."

"I certainly didn't see him as a suicide."

"~~Forget~~"

"~~Worse~~ than that. He's a degenerate faggot. Madden,
you don't even have a clue who's ^{really} in the closet."

Now he looked about the living room as if to count
the closets and classify the furniture. Nor was it com-
fortable to see the place through his eyes. ~~Living there,~~

~~I hardly noticed what was about me any longer, but in~~
~~truth it must have been odd to him.~~ Most of the furniture

had been chosen by Patty and her taste, ~~when unguided~~ was
flouney and full of ~~a rogue missile, half Tampa Beach money (which is worse~~

white ~~than Palm Beach money) although both are full of white~~

furniture and splashy warm-ups in the cushions and the

draperies and the throw rugs, loads of flowers on the

fabrics, many barstools all in puffy leatherette--pink,

living there ~~lemon-lime, orange and ivory for her boudoir and her drawing room~~

~~drawing room and I was a bartender--I could work very well~~

~~for long hours every day in many a pastel and/or neon~~

~~decor, but this was too much of~~ *quite* a candy-stripe for Province-

town in winter. Will it give some idea of my state if I

admit that most days my mood did not rise to the differences

between the hues in Nissen's house and mine?

Regency studied our furniture. "Degenerate faggot"

was still smoking on his lips.

I could not leave it there. "What makes you so certain Pangborn is homosexual?"

"I wouldn't call him that. I'd say he's gay." How the word offended him. "They ought to spell it 'Karposi's Syndrome.'" He drew ^{a letter} ~~an envelope~~ from his pocket. "Call themselves gay and go around infecting one another systematically. They're laying in a plague."

"Well, all right," I said. "Count your plagues. I'll count mine." He was that opinionated it would have given me combative pleasure to argue--nuclear pollution for your side, herpes for mine--but not now.

^{what's in this envelope,} "Look at ~~this letter~~," he said. "Is Pangborn gay or is he gay?" ^{Just read it!}

"Are you certain he wrote it?"

"I checked the handwriting against his address book.

^{about a month ago, 7/1's}
He wrote the letter all right. ^{dated. He wrote it but he never sent it, then I guess} He didn't finish it, but ^{he made the mistake of re-reading it. That's enough to} then I guess he made the mistake of reading it and got so depressed he put the barrel right in his throat and ^{your} blew it out."

"Who was he writing to?"

^{get} "Oh, you know faggots. They're so intimate with each other, ^{have to} they don't even bother with names. Just talk soul to

soul. Maybe, at the end, they'll use the ~~friend's~~ name. That's so the flower who gets it will know the dirt is in the right pot." He went off on his whinny.

I read the letter. It was in strong purple-blue ink, on a firm round hand:

"I've just dipped into your volume of verses. I know so little about the fullest appreciation of poetry and classical music, but I know what I like. I like symphonies to rise up from the private parts and join the one who has caused the awakening. I like Sibelius and Schubert and Saint Saens and all the other esses, yes, yes, yes. I know I like your poems because I'm tempted to write *you back, and* ~~this letter in verse form and to use high~~ ~~flown terms and to meet with what I read,~~ ~~play with it, yes, dear, play with it, and~~ ~~love it, love it, to distraction, does that~~ make you twitch, bitch? I know you hate my vulgar side, but let us never forget, Lonnie's a guttersnipe and had to ~~rise through law~~ *stretch a little* school at night in order to marry his chain store heiress. Who's bringing the chains?

"I liked your poem 'Spent' because it made me feel for you. There you were, tight as a *tick,* *as* always, nervous about yourself, locked up so terribly, well, you were, ^{*during time,*} ~~incarcerated,~~ after all, and I was out in Nam patrolling the China Sea. Do you know the sunsets there? You speak so beautifully of the rainbow that comes before your eyes after you are 'Spent' but I lived those rainbows. How vividly your lines

Space -
and - a - half
+ narrow margin
here

bring to mind the lush sex-ridden months
I spent in Saigon, yes, sweetheart, spent.
You write about those heavies surrounding
you and tell ^{types} the reader ~~of your poems~~. 'I
feel they have furnaces inside, well-stoked
fires glowing through their hides, heating
the summer air.' Well, kiddo, that's not
true only for your heavy criminal types.
~~Because I can~~ ^{have had} have the same thoughts about
many a sailor I know. Many a fire I've
warmed my hands and face by. You almost
cracked up denying yourself what you want,
but then you're a gentleman. Of sorts.
But I sought ~~out~~ and I found, and I seduced
indiscriminately, playing the male slut, ^{I did}
feeding like a clown's pig from the over-
sized bottle with the long rubber nipple.
No crack-ups for Lonnie, thank you. He's
wise enough to ^{get} ~~make~~ the most of his queer ^{out}
blood.

"How much you missed in those China seas.
I remember black-eyed Carmine coming to the
quonset hut door near Danang and calling
softly, 'Lonnie, baby, come on out!' I re-
member the tall thin blond lad from Beau-
mont, Texas, who brought me his letters to
his wife. She was leaving him and I had to
read the letter, I was his ensor, and how he
lingered at the edge of Officer's Country as
it grew dark, and I love the way he kept
talking about the chicken ranch until I just
reached over and fondled him and he spread
out and relaxed, and lovey, he wasn't about
to ask for anything more for his chicken

ranch until the next night when he'd prowl about Officer's Country until it was dark again and I who was hungry could satisfy his hunger. And I remember the lovely lad from Ypsilanti named Thorne and the taste of love-impregnated sherry within his lips, those lovely eyes, the quietness of him and the tender, halting poor sixth-grade grammar of the sweet letter he handed me the day I was leaving the ship and he came up on the bridge to give it to me.

"Or the signalman from Marion, Illinois, who sent me his first amorous advance in semaphore, not knowing I could keep up with the great speed at which he sent it: 'Hey, honey, how about you and me in my boat to-night?' And my answer, 'What time, honey?' I can still see the look of surprise on his face. And the glorious scent of him--sweat and Aqua Velva.

"How much your poem brings back. Those were the glory days. No legal briefs. No scions of society--don't take it personally--to suck up to. Just Admirals and grunts. What a pity you've never known a Marine. Or a Green Beret. They're green, sweetie, but don't fire until you see the pink of their privates! I haven't had the leisure to think of these things in ages, but now I will. Your poems bring it back. I think of the Chief Hospital Corpsman I met in the Blue Elephant on Saigon Boulevard and later I

remember the room I took him to in some
half-gutted hotel and the glorious gushing
forth of him until he caught me to drink *a little himself*
be cause he had to also to slake the great thirst his pouring
out had given him. And how he looked for
my name in my hat so he could see me again
though I didn't want that and told him so.
Burying my nose in his sack and the frenzied
smell of it knocking all sense out of my
head all over again.

"Yes, they had fires in them that warmed
the sensuous air. Legions of great, begging,
dripping pricks, angry red as the wattles of
a turkey gobbler, lovely, lovely glorious
days, while you languished in Reading Gaol,
poor Wardley, fighting a nervous collapse
because you wouldn't do what your heart cried
out for you to do.

"Maybe I'd better read no more of your
fine poems. You see how mean they make me.
Never reject a friend as dear as me, or watch
out, you'll lose me forever. But then, you
have!! This time it's not a boy from the Air
Force just in for the weekend from Paris,
nor am I being oh so discreet with a gay church-
man who's awfully hot to be indiscreet, no, I
have the surprise of all time, Wardley. I'm
with a blonde lady. Do you think me awfully
drunk? I am.

"Never fear. This woman looks as feminine
as Lana Turner, but maybe she ain't, not
altogether. Maybe she's had a sex change.
Do you believe it? One of our mutual friends

(had the crust to say)
saw her with me, and ~~said~~ she was so gorgeous she had to be a lie. Has she once been a he, they asked. Well, bad news for all of you, I said, she hasn't. It's an honest-to-god real woman, fuck-face! That's what I said to our mutual friend. In fact, it's the first woman I've had since I got to marry my heiress with her dime-store chains. So I know chains. I've been in them for years. Let me tell you, Wardley, it's heaven ~~now~~ to be out of them. It's as carnal with this woman as it used to be on Saigon Boulevard, pure carnal rut-copulating-fucking-sucking heaven for a faggot--should I say ex-faggot?--like me. What intoxication to cross the great divide. Wardley, I'm a man to this woman. Baby, it has kicked off personal energies you wouldn't believe. High is high, but I am maniacally high. If someone tried to take my blonde lady away, I would kill.

*She says
there
has
never
been
a better*

blonde beauty
"See what I mean? High! But why get you upset? You've been down this road with P.L., haven't you, Wardley? You've lived with your Lorelei too. Well, no hard feelings. Ex-roommates of the heart we may be, but let us remain dear old friends. This is God's gift to women, your own Lonnie.

"P.S. Have you ever seen the commercial for the electric razor named _____. I leave *the name* a blank because I can't tell you which one, I represent them, after all. But you know which one. Look for it on TV. There's a

21 year old boy--Mr. Body!--shaving himself and looking as pleased as concupiscence-in-cream all the while he's doing it. Know the secret? He told me. He thinks of this electric razor as looking like a nice fat cock. He thinks of his boyfriend rubbing that fat pretty penis all over his face. The ad men are slain by how wonderful this commercial turns out. Oh, well, I'm high on hetero, and I have to say goodbye to all that.

"P.P.S. I know the 21 year old well. Believe it or not, he's the son of my blonde lady. In fact, I'm the boyfriend he's thinking of. Don't you think he's a little jealous now of Mom and me?

"P.P.P.S. All this is top secret ultra-confidential."

I handed the letter back ~~to him~~. I think we each made an effort not to look into one another's eyes, but they met nonetheless. Truth, they caromed off each other like magnets bearing the same pole. Homosexuality was sitting ~~there~~ between Regency and me as palpably as the sweat you can breathe when violence is next to two people.

"'Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord,'" said Regency. He put the letter back in his breast pocket and breathed heavily. "I'd like to kill those faggots," he said. "Every last one of them."

"Have another drink."

"There is corruption in this letter," he said, patting his breast, "that leaves a taste no drink is going to wash."

"I'm not the one to give the speech," I said, "but have you ever asked yourself whether you should be Chief of Police?"

"Why say that?" he asked. At once, all of him was on guard.

"You ought to know. You've been here. In summer, this town has a huge homosexual contingent. So long as the Portuguese ^{desire} ~~want~~ their money, you will have to accept their habits."

"It may interest you to know I'm not the ^{Acting} Police Chief any more."

"As of when?"

"As of this afternoon, when I read that letter. Look, I'm just a country boy. Know what I know of Saigon Boulevard? Two whores ^{a night garden} ~~on~~ two nights, that's all."

"Come on."

"I saw a lot of fine men get killed. I don't know any Green Berets with pink privates. It's good Pangborn is dead. I'd have done it myself."

You could believe him. The air was this side of

~~the gap from lightning.~~
~~the sizzle static electricity can make just before it~~
~~leaps the gap.~~

"Did you resign formally?" I asked.

He put out his hands as if to hold the question off.

"I don't want to get into it. I was never ^{supposed to become} really Chief
of Police. The Portugee under me is actually running the
~~job.~~
~~thing.~~"

"What are you saying? Your ^{title} job is a cover?"

He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose.

As he did so, he wagged his head up and down. That was
his way of telling me yes. What a hick. He had to be
from the Drug Enforcement Agency.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good. I knew we could have a conversation. Let's
have one soon. Get drunk and talk."

"All right."

~~"Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord."~~

~~"Do you feel near the Throne?"~~

"I want to serve God," he said. "What people don't
comprehend is that if you want to serve, you have to
grow balls big enough to take on His attributes. That
includes the heavy responsibility of exercising vengeance."

"We'll talk," I said.

"Good." He stood up to leave. "Do you have a clue who this guy Wardley could be?"

"I assume it's an old lover. Some rich uptight country squire."

"I like your acumen. Ha, ha. Ha, ha. Say, I heard that name somewhere. It's too unusual to forget. ~~In this~~ ^{the name} house, I believe. Somebody said Wardley just in passing. Could it have been your wife?"

"Ask her."

^(P.L.," he said, "P.L. for Patty Lane")
"When I see her, I will ask her." He took out his notebook and wrote down an item. "Where," he said, "do you think this Jessica lady is?"

"Maybe she went back to California."

"We're checking that now."

He put his arm around my shoulder as if to console me for I knew not what, and we walked together through the living room to the door. Given my height, I never have to think of myself as a small man, but he was certainly larger. The letter, may I say, was still with us.

Now at the door he turned and said, "I have a regards for you. It's from my wife."

"Do I know your wife's name?"

* What is the first maxim of the streets? If you want to die with a slug in your back, fool around with a cop's wife. What did Regency know of her past?

"It's Madeleine."

"Oh," I said. "Madeleine Falco?"

"The same."

*
"Yes," I said, "once in a while she used to take

a drink in a place where I did some bartending. Many years ago. But I do remember her. What a lovely girl she was, what a fine lady."

"Thank you," he said. "We have two lovely children."

"That's a surprise," I said. "I didn't know. . . you have had children." It had been a near-miss. I had been about to say, "I didn't know Madeleine could have children."

fishing out his wallet
"Oh, yes," he said, "here's a picture of us."

I looked at Regency and at Madeleine--it was certainly my Madeleine ^{ten} eight years older than the last time I saw her--and with two tow-headed boys who looked a little like him and not at all like her.

"Very nice," I said. "Tell Madeleine hello."

"Sayonara," said Regency, and took off.

I could not begin to go
Now, ~~there was no question of going out to the Truro~~

~~woods. I would have to wait for hours, or, until tomorrow--~~
~~assuming I could make it through the night. I would have to~~
~~bring myself up to such concentration all over again,~~
~~to concentrate myself all over again upon the need to~~
(At this hour)
~~determine the identity of that dead woman, and now I could.~~

not. My mind was yawning like a wind, ~~that twists out~~
~~of the pits of distraction itself.~~ I did not know whether
to think ^{about} ~~first~~ of Lonnie Pangborn or of Meeks Wardley,
~~Hilby, III, or of Jessica, or of Madeleine.~~ Then, ^{it came down on} I sat
^{me, and with all the} ~~down in the full sorrow we know~~ ^{of} when thinking of a woman
^{one has} ~~we have loved, and the love is gone, and it should never~~
have been lost.

I brooded upon Madeleine. ~~How can I pretend that I~~
~~felt no great uneasiness over what Regency might know of~~
~~her past.~~ ^{? After all, what is} But that was small to the woe I felt at ~~seeing~~
her again.

Same II ~~Still~~ ^{What is} the first maxim of the streets? If
you want to die with a slug in your back, fool around with
a cop's wife. Sitting there, I shivered, but agreeably.

Perhaps it was an hour later that I went to the top
floor, and in my study unlocked a file drawer, ~~I never went~~
~~near any longer,~~ and out of a pile of old manuscript found
the pages I was looking for and read them again. They
were written more ^{or most twelve} ~~than ten~~ years ago--was I twenty-seven
when I did them?--and done very ^{much} ~~rash~~ in the style of the
cocky young man I tried to be then, but that was all right,
~~was~~. If you no longer are one man, but only a collection
of fragments, each with its own manner, the act of looking

back on any writing that was done when one was full of identity (even phony identity) can put you together for a little while, and ~~it~~ ^{re-reading} did while I was reading these pages. So soon, however, as I concluded, I was bathed in an old woe. For I had made the mistake of showing these ~~pages~~ ^{the manuscript} to Madeleine years ago, and ~~they~~ ^{it} helped to break us up:

The best description of a pussy I ever came across was in a piece by John Updike called: One's Neighbor's Wife.

"Each hair is precious and individual, serving a distinct role in the array: blonde to invisibility where the thigh and abdomen join, dark to opacity where the tender labia ask protection, hearty and ruddy as a for-ester's beard beneath the swell of the belly, dark and sparse as the whiskers of a Machiavel where the perineum sneaks backward to the anus. My pussy alters by the time of day and according to the mesh of underpants. It has its satellites: this whimsical line of hairs that ascend to my navel and into my tan, the kisses of fur in the inside of my thighs, the lambent fuzz that ornaments the cleavage of my fundament. Amber, ebony, auburn, bay, chestnut, cinnamon, hazel, fawn, snuff, henna, bronze, platinum, peach, ash, flame and field mouse; these are but a few of the colors my pussy is."

It is a beautiful description of a forest, and makes me ponder the mysteries of scale.

Späer - and
a-half-
& indent hairs

Somebody once wrote ^{that} about Cezanne that he shifted the ^{perception of the orders} ~~orders~~ of magnitude in his portraits and still lifes and landscapes ~~until a white towel on a table was like the blue-shadowed snows in the ravines of a mountain, and the treatment of a patch of skin on the face was no more and no less~~ ^{became} mysterious than a desert valley. An interesting idea. I always saw more in Cezanne after that, just as I know, I had never ^{studied} ~~looked~~ ^{realized} ~~at a pussy properly until I read Updike.~~ For that alone, John would be one of my favorite writers.

They say Updike used to be a painter, and you can see it in his style. Nobody looks at surfaces so ^{clearly} ~~well~~ as he does, and he uses adjectives with more discrimination than ^{who's} ~~anybody~~ ^{anyone} writing in the English language today. Hemingway said not to use them, and Hemingway was right. The adjective is the author's opinion of what's going on, no more. If I wrote, "a strong man came into the room," that only means he is strong in relation to me. Unless I've established myself for the reader, I might be the only fellow in the bar ^{who is} ~~physically modest enough to be~~ impressed by ^{the guy} ~~who just came in.~~ It is better to say: "A man entered. He was holding a walking stick, and for some reason, he now broke it in two like a twig." Of course, this takes more ^{quick} ~~time to tell.~~ So adjectives bring on ~~efficient,~~ tell-you-how-to-live writing. Advertising feeds itself this way. "A super-efficient, silent,

sensuous five-speed shift." Put twenty/
five adjectives before the noun and no one
will know you are describing a turd. The
adjectives are the cruise.

Therefore, let it be underlined. Updike
is one of the few writers who ^{can} enhance ^{his} the
work ~~by his use of~~ adjectives rather than his
abuse of it. He has a rare talent. Yet he
irks me. He is one of the best, but he irks
me. Even his description of a pussy. It
could as easily be a tree. (The velveteen
of moss in the ingathered crotch of my limbs,
the investiture of algae on the terraces of
my bark, etc.) Just once I would like to
have him ~~tell me about the inside of a cunt.~~

Right now, for instance, I am driving my ^{through} rented
Buick. Or is it a Dodge or a Mercury? The
rented wheel may be in my hands, but I have
not observed its trademark. I am nonetheless
squarely on the road this car was designed
for ~~an Interstate--the one we're on happens~~
~~to be in North Carolina--~~ but I am thinking
of neither car nor road: my mind is a veritable
funnel of concentration pondering the
difference between Updike's description of a
pussy and a real cunt, that is, the one I am
thinking of at this instant. It belongs to
Madeleine Falco and since she is sitting next
to me, I need only reach over with my right
hand to feel the objective correlative on my
fingertips. My thoughts will be one with my
~~sensate extensions.~~ Still, I would rather
remain in the simpler state of a writer in

revery. Being nothing if not competitive--
as which unheralded writer is not?--I am
trying to put the manifest of her cunt into
well-chosen words, ^{and so} ~~that is~~ implant a small
standard of prose on the great beachhead of
Therefore, I will literature. ~~So, I would~~ not dwell on her
pussy hair. It is black, so black against
the cemetery-white of her skin that my bowels
and balls resound against one another like
cymbals ~~each time~~ ^{whenever} her bush is displayed.
But then she loves to display it. She has
a little pink mouth where her lips part that
is startling to see, a little mouth within
the larger one (like Governor Nelson Rockefeller)
and it is a true flower that pants in the dew
of her heats. When aroused, however, Madeleine's
cunt seems to grow right out of her buttocks,
and this little mouth always remains pink no
matter how wide she spreads her thighs,
whereas the outer meat of her vagina--the
larger mouth--reveals a sullen grease-works,
and the perineum (which we boys out on Long
Island used to call the Taint--taint vagina,
taint anus--ho, ho) is a gleaming plantation.
You don't know whether to eat her, devour her,
revere her, or root about. I used to whisper,
"Don't move, don't move, I'll kill you, I'm
about to come." How her cooze would pullulate
in reply.

So soon as I was inside of Madeleine, the
other girl she ^{usually} was, the dear brunette on my
arm as I walked her down the street, ceased
to exist. Her belly and her womb became all

of her--all that fatty, saponaceous, sebaceous, unctious, unguinous quiver of lubricious worldly delights. Let me not claim I can do without adjectives when it comes to meditating on ~~her~~ ^{the} cunt. Fucking her, I would be afloat with all the belly dancers and dark-haired harlots of the world--their lust, their greed, their purchase on the swarthier ambitions of the cosmos, all now in me. God knows through which designs of karma was my come pulled by her belly. Her cunt was more real to me than her face.

Still, I ought to describe Madeleine.

The difficulty is that I may not be able to. As I drive the car down that ^{superhighway} Interstate which is the keel and essence of our great American ennui, I do not trust the phrases I make in my head. Sex with Madeleine is ^{sweeter and} ~~hectic~~ and ^{deeper and therefore} usually wilder than is my wont with most women--it could be said we have a hot nut for each other, but--cosmic! The universe speaking to me? The words I would write about her start to sound more like Henry Miller than myself. I am in the pit of young writers. I cannot describe an experience in my own language, I have neither found nor forged a style. I am derivative! Gloom descends on our car.

After she read this much, Madeleine said, "How could you write such things about me?" and wept in a way I could

not bear.

"It's only writing," I said. "It's not what I feel about you. I'm not a good enough writer to say what I really feel." I hated her, however, for making me confront such a possibility, and, worse, disavow my writing. But then we were in trouble at any event. She had read those pages ^(just a week) not long before we decided to get into a crazy half-^{quicker} ~~half-swapping sort of~~ orgy (I know no better way to describe it) that I convinced Madeleine into attending with me, and the use of the word attend must come from my Exeter French since we had to drive all the way from New York to North Carolina to get there, and didn't know the people. All we had was an ad I had picked up in SCREW magazine with a post office box for an address:

Single space
& indent

"Young but mature white couple, male partner a gynecologist, are seeking reasonable interchanges. Also interfaces. No water sports, golden showers, S&M or B&D. Send photograph and SASE. You must be married."

I answered the letter without telling Madeleine, and sent a photo of us nicely dressed and standing on the street. Their Polaroid came back. They were in bathing suits. The man was tall and half-bald with a long sad nose, knobby knees, a small pot-belly, and a sallow look.

Madeleine said on looking at the picture, "He

must have the longest prick ^{in Christendom.} ~~you ever saw.~~"

"Why do you say that?"

"There's no other explanation for him."

The wife was young and wearing a flouncy bathing suit. She looked saucy. On an impulse I said, "Let's visit."

Madeleine nodded. She had large dark eyes that were luminous and full of tragic knowledge--her family were not without rank in the Mafia and had left a few curses on her head when she left home (which was Queens) for Manhattan. She wore those wounds of departure like a velvet cloak. She had gravity, and so through all of our first year ^{when a lot} ~~we were~~ ^(in love), I would go through great pains to make her laugh, even trying to walk on my hands around our furnished room. A moment of merriment from her gave a bouquet to my mood that could last for hours. It was why I had fallen in love. She had a tender marrow ^{within} ~~to her depths~~ ^{found within} that I knew ~~in~~ no other woman.

But we were too close. She ^{had} ~~had~~ ^{begun} to pall on me. How harsh and Irish I must have come to seem to her. ^{After we'd} ~~We'd~~ been together for two years, ^{we} ~~we~~ were in the season when one marries or one parts. ^{Now} ~~we~~ talked about dating other people. I cheated on her from time to time

and she had all the night for choosing to do the same to me since I worked the bar four times a week from five to five, and much love can be made in twelve hours.

Therefore, when she nodded ^{her agreement to the trip down South,} I needed no more ^{confirmation} conversation to proceed. One of her gifts was to be able to convey it all by one wry, humorous dip of ^{the} her head. "Now tell me the bad news," she said.

So we went to North Carolina. We assured each other that we would probably not like the other couple and get out fast. Then we could enjoy an extra night or two on the drive back. "We'll stop in Chincoteague," I said to her. "We'll try to sneak up on a Chincoteague pony," and I explained how they were the last wild horses, just about, east of the Mississippi.

"Chincoteague," she said. "I would like that." She had a rich husky voice whose timbre would resonate in my chest and she let me rock on every syllable in Chincoteague. Thereby, we laid salve on each other against the harsh incision we had just made on the nature of the ^{our} ~~future~~ true flesh. And went.

^{first} That was where I met Patty Lareine. ^(This was long before she met Wally) She turned out to be the wife of Big Stoop (as she called him) and ~~he~~ ^{Big Stoop} turned out to be 1) possessor of a truly long dick, and 2) a liar,

for he told us at first that he was

2) ~~claimed to be the most successful gynecologist in the~~
Before long we found out he
 county. ~~He was lying. He was a chiropractor.~~ He was also
 a prodigious lover of pussy. Could you conceive of how deep
 he dived into Madeleine's treasure chest?

In the adjoining bedroom (for he was hygienic about
 these wife-swapping sports--no threesies or foursies!) Patty
 Erleen--who had not yet renamed herself Patty Lareine--and I
 began our own weekend. I may yet bring myself to describe it,
 but for now, suffice it to say, I thought of her on the ride
 back to New York, and Madeleine and I never went to Chin-

(in those days, it was my first attempt to live
 coteague. Nor was I smoking. ~~I had gone through the rapid~~
the seduction. So I had gone through some quick rises and
~~ascent and fearful free-falls of the ego, passing through~~

two days and a night of mate-switching (Big Stoop never
 knew Madeleine and I were not married--although, truth to
 tell, for the damage it did, we were) and never a cigarette
 for the moments I felt impaled--that was the word for
 hearing my woman give voice to pleasure (and how Madeleine
 could moan) while another man was in her. No ego is the
 same after hearing one's woman give the same ongoing cry
 of eternal pleasure to a strange new (very long) dick.

"It is better to be a masochist than a faggot," I said
 to myself more than once on those two days, but then
 I spent hours that had their own glory for me, since
 the doctor's wife, formerly his nurse, this

(Nineteen year old)
Patty Earleen had a body as pneumatic as a model in Playboy *now*
standing put before you all too unbelievably in life, and we had
one hot high school push-on romance, that is, I kept pushing
her ^{on} to put her mouth in places she swore it had never
gone before, which ^{kept} put us in each other's pits, we had
such hooks for each other, so mean and intimate and ongoing
and nasty and super-pleasureful (as Californians say) for
being nasty. God, Patty Earleen ^{Earleen} was nice, you could fuck
her till you died. Even now, ^{eleven} twelve years later, I was
close to that first night ^{again} once more, and did not want to ^{be}
as if to think so well of Patty would betray Madeleine
^{once more,}
^{again.}

Instead, came the memory of the long return of
Madeleine Falco and myself to New York. It was a very long
return. We quarreled, and Madeleine shrieked at me
(which was most out of character for her) when I went too
fast around some turns, and finally--I blame it on keeping
my senses on cold turkey without cigarettes--I lost the
car on an unexpectedly sharp turn. ^{Once again, it} It was a big boat of
a Dodge, or a Buick or a Mercury--^{can remember?} who could tell? They
all acted like sponge rubber on a hard curve, and we
squeaked and squeegeed over a hundred yards of hardtop
before we slammed into a tree.

My body felt equal to the car that had just gone through the wreck. Part was crunched, part was stretched, and a fearful racket like a trailing muffler knocked inside my ears. Without, a silence. One of those country silences where the unrest of insects vibrates through the fields.

Madeleine was in worse shape. She never told me, but I learned that she was injured in her womb. And, indeed, there was a frightful scar on her belly when she came out of the hospital.

We lasted for another year, cutting ourselves away from one another over the months that followed. We got into cocaine. It filled the rift. Then the habit froze, and the rock of our relation was cracked by the habit, and the rift was larger. It was after we broke up that I got busted for selling cocaine.

Now I sat in my study in my home in Provincetown sipping my bourbon neat. Could it be that these pains of the past in conjunction with a little bourbon was proving a sedative for three days of shocks and starts and turns and absolute dislocations of all I understood? Sitting in that armchair, I began to feel sleep coming on like a blessing. The murmur of what was gone rose over me, an infusion, and the colors of the past grew deeper than the present.