

~~seent of evening.~~ Was sleep the entrance to a cave?

In the next instant I was plucked back from sleep,
and returned to my situation in this house. What could
I do when even my ^{simplest} metaphors saw the entrance to a cave?
That was ~~one figure of speech~~ not calculated to keep ^{one's} my
mind away from the burrow in the Truro woods.

All the same, I kept sipping at that bourbon, and
a few of the resources within my situation also returned.
~~Could it be that I was~~ ^I beginning to digest the impact of
Mr. Pangborn's suicide? For now it seemed not improbable
to me ~~for was it even likely?~~ ^{could} that Pangborn had to be
the maniac who did it. Certainly the letter could be ^{might} seen as the
anticipation of a crime. "If someone tried to take my
seen as a highly veiled confession.
blonde lady away I would kill." But whom? The new lover or the lady?

This, which represented the rudiments of a good

^{when} ~~ffered~~ a working premise became, once added to the bourbon, a ~~last~~
addition to the sedative I needed, and so I fell at last
into a deep sleep, as bruised about as ^{if I were still} on any night after
~~a day of playing at wide receiver for that Exeter team~~
^{which} ~~that~~ could not throw a pass, and went down to such a depth
in sleep that the voices of Hell-Town were not even with
me when I awakened. Instead, I came back to ^{a clear} the clearest
recollection that ^{three nights ago—yes, for certain—} Jessica and Lonnie and I had stepped
out of The Widow's Walk about the same time, they, from

the Dining Room, I, from the Lounge, and there in the parking lot, had resumed--much against Pangborn's will, and much to her taste--our conversation, and Jessica and I laughed so much and so quickly that it was soon decided we must go to my house for a nightcap.

Then began a discussion about the car. Did we go in two or one? Jessica was for two cars, Lonnie in his rented sedan, and she and I in my Porsche, but he could read ahead, and had no desire to be sent packing ~~by her~~ ~~in the rented car some another hour~~, so he solved it all by getting in the passenger seat of my Porsche whereupon she was obliged to fit herself in and all around him, and managed to do this only by laying her legs across my lap so that I could shift gears only by maneuvering in and around her knees and under her thighs, but then it was only two miles and a little to my house, and once there we talked for a long time about property values in Provincetown and why ^{Patty and my} ~~our~~ old ramble was worth so much when it consisted only of two salt-boxes and two sheds and a tower we had built ourselves for my third floor study, but frontage, I told them, was the factor. We had one hundred feet of bay frontage, ^{the length of} ~~our house was~~ ^{ran} parallel to the shore, rare in our town. "Yes," said Jessica, "that's

wonderful," and I swear her knees parted a little further ~~for me, at least from where I sat across from~~ her.

Now I cannot say whether this was a recollection or a dream, for if it had all the clarity of the real event, the logic seemed to belong to that theatre of sleep where ^{only those} all the impossible actions take place ^{which much} that are too incisive for the day. What I now recalled is that as we sat in my living room and drank, I began to sense the sachet in each of Lonnie's moves. The deeper he got into drink, the less the Bar Association seemed able to shore up his masculine frontage, and I woke up in my chair on this, the third morning after they first disappeared, ready to swear on the stand that ^{the other night} looking at her and at him, ^{in my} ^{we} ^{my} (I developed a prodigious erection--one of those few remembered with excessive pride--and so peremptory was the ^{bonus} ~~sensate~~ command that I made a point of undoing my fly right into the warp and woof of a long, rich--I must say it--pregnant silence. Yes, I took it out and held it up for them like a six year old, or a happy lunatic, and said, "Which of you gets first licks?" a prodigious remark since the evening rather than my phallus could certainly have been blown, but if this

memory is true, she got up from where she was sitting, knelt by me, put her blonde head in my lap and her red mouth on my cock and he gave vent to a sound that was half joy and half agony pure.

Then it seems we were all in my Porsche again, and on a crazy trip to Wellfleet. Once I stopped the car in the woods just before we got to Harpo's house, and made love to her on the front fender, yes, because on this morning ^{awakening} in the third floor study chair, recalling it all, I could still feel the grasp of the walls of her vagina on my monster of an erection. How I had to fuck her! ^{Down with}

Patty Lareine! ^{It was as if Jessica and I} was as if we had been designed in some heavenly shop, part for part, our privates were inseparable, and where ^{Lonnie} was he but watching! He was crying if I remember, and I never felt more of a brute. His misery was as good as blood to my erectile tissue. That was the state of my affections near to four weeks after being deserted by my wife.

Then all three of us were talking again in the car. He said he had to be alone with the woman, he had to talk to her--would I let them talk? In the name of decency, would I let them talk?

"Yes," I said, "but we must have a seance afterward." Why, I did not know. "I'll bet you," I said, "she's still

with me after you talk." And I remember going up the stairs to Harpo, and the tattoo, yes, Harpo was humming as he put in the needles and his good battered face had the expression of a seamstress, and then--no, I could not remember stopping in the Truro woods to show them my patch, but we must have--yes, now I could not see how I ^{would} ~~could~~ fail to do that.

What had happened after? Had I left her alone with him? ~~Would it indicate~~ ^{now} how little my balance on awakening this morning was for love, and how much for self-interest, ^{now} ~~that I was~~ ^{hoping} I had left her with him, and that it was her head--so much for ^{my loyalty to} ~~the heavens of~~ great pussy on marijuana--yes, it was her head I wished to find in the burrow. For if she were there, and now I was convinced it had to be Jessica ^{whose hair I touched in the hole} ~~whose hair I touched in the hole~~, why then I could find other clues. If he had killed her in some motel room and brought her body (or was it only her head) back to my patch, there ought to be tire marks still on the side of the sandy road. I could drive by his car, wherever it was now impounded, and check the tires, yes, I was thinking like a sleuth at last, and all of this as I soon came to realize, was an exercise to drive my psyche up the high vertical wall of my fear until I felt strong enough, yes,

psyched up enough once more to make the trip a second time in my mind in order to make it a first time in reality. Let us save any more of these details. I woke up in the chair at eight in the morning refreshed with all the carnal stimulations of Jessica, and converted the high hard adrenaline of each lustful thought into the will to get out of my morass. And it took all of that day, all of the morning and afternoon. Even though I did not wish to return in the dark, I was obliged to. For long hours that day, my will was silent, and I sat in my chair or I walked on the beach at low tide, and suffered as much as if I had to climb the Monument again. By evening, however, I had gotten myself back once more to the place I had been when Regency knocked at my door almost twenty-four hours ago, and so I got into my Porsche, yes, once again, even thinking that Pangborn might, after disposing of Jessica, have come by my car and painted the front seat with the last of her blood--how would I ever prove that?--and drove out to the woods, parked, went up the trail, and with my heart pounding like a battering ram on a cathedral door, and the perspiration coming off my face like founts of eternal water, I drew in the mist of the night air in Truro, removed the rock, reached in with my arm, and came out with

nothing at all. I cannot tell you how I searched that burrow. I could have burned a hole in the earth with my flashlight, but when the footlocker was removed, all else was out. There was nothing there. The head was gone. Just the footlocker with its jars of marijuana ~~now~~ remained. I fled those woods before the spirits now gathering could surround me.

5.

By the time I reached the highway, however, my panic was gone. If many a night of drinking had brought me on many a bad morning close to committing myself (so little could I recall) ~~what I had done~~ it now seemed to me that since the day ~~which followed the~~ evening at The Widow's Walk, I had not--^{despite} ~~no matter the size of~~ my agitation--been cut off again from my memory. If this were true, then I did not remove ^{that} anyone's blonde head from the burrow. That ~~meant~~ someone else was involved with the deed, ~~besides my-~~ self. It was even likely that the murder had not been my act.

Of course, how could I swear that I stayed in bed each night? On the other hand, no one had ever accused me of walking in my sleep. Like the rustle along the beach which comes with the turning of the tide (if you have ears to hear it) so

did a kind of confidence begin to return to me, a belief, if you could so call it, that I had not lost the last of my luck (just the sort of ^{recovered} faith in ~~oneself~~ that gets a man back to the crap tables.)

In my case, it was the bravado to believe I could return home, stay reasonably sober, and fall asleep. Indeed, I did, which impressed me in the morning as a species of small wonder. Of course, I had gone to bed with a purpose. It was ~~as if I wished~~ to debate ~~within the most elevated~~ stages of my spirit (which is to say in the deepest regions of sleep) whether I should try to see Madeleine or not. The readiness with which I took to my bed, and the force with which I slept, were testimony to that purpose.

By morning, there was no question. On this, the Twenty-Eighth Day of Patty's departure, I would go to see Madeleine. All else could wait. I had breakfast and ~~cleaned~~ emptied the dog's dish, noting that his fear of me had now been replaced by a huge reserve. He had kept his distance this week. Yet before I would allow myself to ponder the withdrawal of his friendship and thereby risk my mood, I picked up the Cape Cod book and found Alvin ^{Luther} Philip Regency's telephone number in the Town of Barnstable.

It was nine o'clock, a good time to call. Regency

had probably driven the fifty miles to Provincetown already, or, failing that, was on the road.

Nor was I wrong. It was Madeleine on the line. I knew she was alone.

"Hello," she said. Yes, she was alone. Her voice was clear. When another person was in the room with her, she always betrayed distraction.

I waited, as if to prepare the occasion. Then I said, "I hear you send regards."

"Tim."

"Yes, it's Tim."

"The man of my life," she said. It was with an edge of mockery I had not heard for years. She could just as well have said, "Aren't you the fellow in the short chapter?" Yes, her voice had echoes.

"How are you?" I asked.

"I'm fine," she said, "but I don't remember sending you regards."

"I have it on good authority you did."

"Yes, it's Tim," she said, "oh, my God!" as if now, second time around, it was reaching her. Yes, Tim--^{on the phone--}after ^{after ten} all these years. "No, baby," she said, "I didn't send you

no regards."

"You're married," I hear."

"Yes."

Now we had a silence. There was a moment when I could feel the impulse mount in her to hang up ^{quietly}, and a ~~drop~~ of perspiration started on my neck. The promise of the day would be smashed if she put the receiver down, yet my instinct was not to speak, ~~first~~.

"Where are you living?" she asked at last.

"You mean you don't know?"

"Hey, friend," she said, "is this Twenty Questions?

I don't know."

"Please, lady, don't be harsh," I ^{answered,} ~~told her.~~

"Fuck off. I'm sitting here putting my head together--" that meant I had interrupted her first ^{take of the} ~~stick of Thai for~~ ~~the day--~~ ^{morning} "and you ring up like you're the fellow from yesterday."

"Wait a minute," I said, "you don't know that I'm living in Provincetown?"

"I don't know anybody there. And from what I hear, I'm not sure that I want to."

"That's right," I said. "Every time the clock chimes, your husband busts another one of your old dealer friends."

"How about that?" she said. "Isn't it awful?"

"How could you marry fuzz?"

"Do you have another dime?"

Try calling collect, "
You can phone me again,

follow." She hung up.

I got into my car.

~~Enough questions had been raised, to keep me up for~~
~~many a night.~~ *9* I had to see her. It was one thing to blow
on the embers of an old romance, it was another to feel
the promise of an answer. I had at that moment an insight
into the root of obsession itself. No wonder we cannot
bear questions whose answers are ~~impossible to determine.~~ *not available.*
They sit in the brain like the great holes that are dug
for the foundations of buildings that never ~~go~~ *went* up. Every-
thing wet, rotten and dead collects in them. Count the
cavities in your teeth by the obsessions that send you back
to drink. No question, therefore, ~~on one matter.~~ I had
to see her.

How quickly I took myself through the landscape.

It was the day for me. Just outside Provincetown, a wan
November sun gave a pale light to the dunes and they looked like
the hills of heaven. The wind blew sand until the ridges
were obscured by an angelic haze of light, and on the
other side of the highway, toward the bay, all the little
white cabins for summer tourists were lined up as neatly as

kennels on a pedigree dog compound. Now, with their windows boarded, they had a mute, somewhat injured look, but then the trees were bare as well and had a hue ^{bore as weathered as} no more colorful than the hide of animals going through a long winter in a land without forage.

I took my chances and drove at a rate that would have put me in jail if a State Trooper had caught ^{my vehicle on radar} me, yet I did not make such fine time after all since it occurred to me in the middle of ~~all~~ ^{high} this speed that Barnstable was a small enough town to notice a man in a Porsche asking directions to Regency's house, and I did not want a neighbor inquiring of ^{Alvin Luther} him this evening who the friend might be who parked his sports car three hundred yards away from the door. In this part of the Cape, the winter people, mean and quick-sighted as birds, orderly as clerks, ^{wrote} down license numbers when they ^{don't} recognize your car. They anticipated interlopers. So I parked in Hyannis and rented an anonymous dun-colored blubber-boat, a Galaxy, or was it an Impala, or a Cutlass--I think a Cutlass, it didn't matter, I was hyper enough to joke about the ubiquity of the ^{one} great American auto with the young airhead behind the Hertz counter. ^I think ^{must have} she thought I was on LSD. She certainly took ^{a time} every precaution on checking my credit card and made me wait through

~~ready-to-slay delay-warps~~
 one of those ten-minute ~~ready-to-murder time-warps~~ before
 she put down the phone and gave the card back. That gave
~~Occasion!~~ ~~me time to think for the first time in a week~~ ^{again} of my
 financial condition. Patty Lareine had emptied our checking
 account when she left, and had cut off my Visa, my Master-
 charge, and my American Express cards, all of which I dis-
 covered in the first week. But husbands of my ilk have
 resources even wives like Patty Lareine cannot eradicate
 entirely, and so my old Diner's Club which I used to renew
 but never use, had been overlooked by her. Now its viability
 was keeping me in food, drink, gas, this rented car, and--
 well, it was near to a month--sooner or later, Patty Lareine
 was going to get a few bills from the outpost. Then, after she
 cut me off, lack of money might become my monster: I didn't
~~I would sell off the furniture~~
 care. Money was the game other people played which I tried
 to avoid by having just enough not to play it. No one ever
 trusts a man who makes such a claim, but do you know?--I believe
 myself.

~~All this is~~
~~I have been~~ making an excursion from the point, but the
 nearer I came to Barnstable, the more my mind was afraid to
 contemplate what I ^{would} ~~could~~ do if Madeleine did not let me in.
 Such uneasiness was, however, soon replaced by the need to
 concentrate on getting there. That was no automatic deed
 in these parts. The environs of Barnstable had ^{in the last decade} ~~become~~
~~nothing~~ but freshly paved roads and newly erected developments slashed

~~the chances could hardly be good that one could hardly~~
go up, ring her bell, and later make it back
to the car without being observed.

through
through the flat scrub pine that covered most of the land
here. Even old timers had often not heard of new streets
two miles from where they lived. So I took the precaution
of stopping at a real estate office in Hyannis where they
had a large, up-to-date map of the county, and thereby
located Alvin Philip's ^{Luther's little lanes} road. As I suspected, it looked,
by the map, to be not more than a hundred yards long, one
of six similar and parallel ^{mini-streets} roads all depending from a trunk
road like six teats on a sow, or, would it be kinder to say,
like one of six cylinders on an in-line engine designed
for the kind of car I was now driving. Dependably, the
short road to his house ended in a nipple the size of an
asphalt turnaround, ^{Around that} about which dead-end circle were set out
five identical highly-modified Cape Cod type wooden houses,
each with a planted pine tree on the lawn, a set of plastic
rain-gutters, asbestos shingles, ^{differently tinted} painted mail boxes, trash-
can bins, tricycles on the grass--I parked just short of
the circle.

^{It would certainly} ^{to be}
~~That had to~~ attract attention if I were seen walking
fifty needless steps to her door. ^{*} ^{it would be worse to}
Yet, I could hardly leave

I leave my car in front of another house and thereby agitate the
owner. What a loneliness hung over this enclave in the
sorry scrub pine woods! ^{I thought of old Indian}
~~It was doubtless why Madeleine had~~
graves that once must have sat on those low
brush-filled lands. Of course, Madeleine would accept

~~consented to live in such a place.~~ She liked a situation whose gloom matched her own worst moods--from that she could rise. But to live in a house like Patty's and fall ^{where one could} below the cheerfulness of the colors--^{wells} not much, for Madeleine, would be worse.

~~I thought of old Indian graves that once must have sat on these low brush-filled lands. My chances might prove as good as even that I could go all the way up and ring her bell, and somewhat later, make it back to my car without being observed, but I doubted it.~~

I pressed the doorbell.

It wasn't until I heard her step ~~in the hall~~ that I dared to be certain she was in. In her turn, she began to tremble so soon as she saw me. The intensity of her disturbance went through me as clearly as if she had spoken. She was delighted, she was furious, but she was not startled. She had put her makeup on, and thereby I knew (for usually she did not do anything to her face until evening) ^{preferring} to "let the fatigues air out") that she was expecting a visitor. Doubtless, it was me.

I received no great greeting, however. "You're a clod," she told ^{scold} me. "I'd expect you to do something like this."

"Madeleine, if you didn't want me to come, you should not have hung up."

"I called you back. There was no answer."

"You discovered my name in the book?"

"I discovered her name." She looked me over. "Being kept doesn't agree with you," *she told me at the end of this examination.*

Madeleine had worked as a hostess for years in a good *New York* bar and restaurant and she did not like to have her poise *nicked,* ~~unhinged~~. Her trembling had most certainly stopped, but her voice was not where she would have *placed* ~~chosen it, to be.~~

"Let me lay the facts of life on you," she said.

"You can stay in my house about five minutes before the neighbors will start phoning each other to find out who you are." She glanced out the window. "Did you walk here?"

"My car is down the road."

"Brilliant. I think you better go right away.

You're just asking directions, right?"

"Who are your neighbors that they inspire such respect?"

"There's a State Trooper's family to the left, and a retired couple ~~to~~ to the right, Mr. and Mrs. Snoop."

"I thought maybe they were *old* friends from the Mafia."

"Well, Madden," she said, "*ten* *may* eight years have gone by, but you still have no class."

"I want to talk to you, and not like this."

"Let's find a hotel room in Boston," she said. It was her good way of ^{telling me to go paddle a few} suggesting I would soon be peddling my papers.

"I'm still in love with you," I said.

She began to cry. "You're such a bad guy," she said.

"You really are rotten."

I wanted to embrace her. I wanted, if the truth be told, to go right back to bed with her, but it was not the hour. That much I had learned in ^{ten} eight years.

"Come on in," she said. "Sit down."

Her living room went with the house. It had a cathedral ceiling, factory-prepared panelling, a rug of some synthetic material, and a lot of furniture that must have come from the shopping mall in Hyannis. There was nothing of herself here. No surprise. She paid great attention to her body, her clothing, her makeup, her voice, and the expressions on her heart-shaped face. She could register with the subtlest turn of her fine mouth every shade of the sardonic, the contemptuous, the mysterious, the tender, and the cognizant, ⁶ that she might need to express. She was her own work of ^{brunette} art. She presented herself as such. But her surroundings ^{were} ^{another matter} ^{Madeline's} always belonged to others. When I first met her, she had

been living in an apartment whose furniture was so drab that I need only describe Nissen's place again. That was cool. She was ^{one} a queen who was independent of her ^{habitat} surroundings. I can tell you that was one good reason I tired of her over a couple of years. You ~~had to do it all yourself~~. An Italian queen was no easier to live with than a Jewish princess.

Now, I said, "Alvin bought all this?"

"Is that your name for him? Alvin?"

"What do you call him?"

"Maybe I call him the winner," she said.

^{"It was the winner that"}
"It was your husband who told me ^{that} you sent regards."

She was hardly quick enough to conceal the news. "I ^{spoke} never uttered your name to him," she said.

I was thinking that could certainly be true. When I knew her, she never talked about anyone ^{before me} in her past. There ~~had been another man before me, she once had indicated, whom she loved very much, but I did not have a clue to his name.~~

"Well," I said, "how did your husband find out about ^{I knew} you?"
"me?"

^{"Keep trying, you'll come up with the answer."}
"Maybe certain questions answer themselves by being asked."

"You think Patty Larcine told him?"

Madeleine shrugged.

"How do you know," I asked, "that Patty Lareine knows him?"

"Oh, he told me ^{how} ~~about the night~~ he met the two of you. Sometimes he tells me a lot. We're lonesome here."

"Then you knew I was in Provincetown?"

~~"Yes, but"~~ I managed to forget it."

"Why are you ^{lonesome} ~~lonely~~?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"You have two sons to take care of. That must keep you hopping."

"What are you talking about?"

My instinct was sound. I ^{did not think} ~~had had no feeling~~ of children ^{lived} in this house. "Your husband," I said, "showed me a photograph of ~~the two of~~ you with two little boys." ~~Said they were yours."~~

"They're his brother's children. I don't have any. You know I can't."

"Why would he lie to me?"

"He's a liar," Madéleine said. "What's the big news? Most cops are."

"You sound as if you don't like him."

"He's a ~~mean~~ cruel overbearing son of a bitch."

"I see."

"But I ~~kind of~~ like him."

"Oh."

She began to laugh at me. Then she began to cry. "Excuse me," she said, and stepped into the bathroom that was off the entrance hall. I went into the living room. There were no prints or paintings, but on one wall there were about thirty framed photographs of Regency in various uniforms. Green Beret, State Trooper, others I did not recognize. He was shaking hands in some of them with political officials and men who looked like bureaucrats and there were two fellows that I would have cast for high FBI men. Sometimes Regency was receiving athletic or memorial cups, and sometimes he was giving them away. In the center was one large framed glossy of Madeleine in a long velvet dress with deep cleavage. She looked beautiful.

On the facing wall was a gun rack. I ^{do} did not know enough ~~to be able~~ ^{might be} to say how fine a collection it was, but there were three shotguns, and about ten rifles. To one side was a glass case with a steel mesh front and within was a pistol rack with two six-shot revolvers and three fat handguns that looked like Magnums to me.

When she still did not come out, I took a quick trip upstairs and passed through the master bedroom and the guest bedroom. There was more shopping mall furniture. It was

all military and neat. The beds were made. That was not quintessentially characteristic of Madeleine.

In the corner of the mirror was tucked a piece of paper. On it was written:

Revenge is a dish which people
of taste eat cold.
--old Italian saying

I assumed ^{her} it was in his handwriting. Most certainly it ~~was not in hers.~~

^Q Then I moved downstairs just before she came out again.

"Are you feeling all right?" I asked.

She nodded. She sat in one of the armchairs. I put myself in the other.

"Hello, Tim," she said.

I didn't know whether to trust her ~~or not~~. How much I needed to talk I was just beginning to realize, but if Madeleine did not prove to be the best person with whom to unburden myself [?] ~~account of the last few days~~, she would almost certainly be the worst.

I said, "Madeleine, I'm still in love with you."

"Next case," she said.

"I want to know ^{did} ^{marry} why you married Regency?"

It was wrong to use his last name. She stiffened as if I had touched her on her marriage itself, but I was ^{the} ~~already~~ weary

of speaking of him as the ^{winner} husband.

"It's your fault," she said. "After all, you didn't have to introduce me to Big Stoop."

Nor did she have to finish the thought. I knew the words she was inclined to say, and ~~held~~ back. However, she could not hold herself. Her voice came forth in a poor imitation of Patty Lareine. She was too angry. The mimicry was strained. "Yessir," said Madeleine, "ever since Big Stoop, I've had a taste for good old boys with mammoth dicks."

"You serving any drinks?" I asked.

"It's time for you to go. I can still pass you off as an insurance salesman."

"Say, you are afraid of Regency."

She was not hard to manipulate when all was said. Her pride had to remain intact. She now said, "It's you he'll be irritated at."

I said nothing. I was trying to calculate ~~what~~ the size of his anger, ~~would be~~. "Do you think he'd be bad?"

"Buster, he's in another league."

"What does that mean?"

"He can be bad."

"I'd hate to watch him cut my head off."

Now, she looked startled. "Did he tell you about that?"

"Yes," I lied.

"Viet Nam?"

I nodded.

"Well," she said, "any man who can behead a ^{Viet Cong} prisoner ^{doubtless} with one stroke of a machete is ^{reckoned} probably not to be trifled with." She was not horrified altogether by such an act. Not altogether. I was remembering the depth of the sense of vengeance in Madeleine. Once or twice, a friend ^{had} of mine ^{over} had insulted her ^{it} in what I deemed a small matter. She never forgave ^{it} them. ~~She never relieved me of her contempt for trying to excuse them.~~ Yes, an execution ^{in Viet Nam} could reach into ^{her} nests of hatred, well-protected from my modest record.

"I gather that you're miserable with Patty Lareine," Madeleine now said.

"Yes."

"She left you a month ago?"

"Yes."

"Do you want her back?"

"I'm afraid I'd ^{of what I'd do.} kill her."

"Well, you chose her." There was a decanter of bourbon on the sideboard, and she now picked it up and came back with two glasses, pouring each of us a half-inch of liquor without water, and no ice. That was a ritual from the past.

"Our morning medicine," we used to call it. As before, so again--she shuddered as she sipped at it.

"How the hell could you pick her over me?" was what Madeleine wanted to say. I could hear the words more clearly than if she had ^{uttered} spoken them.

I ~~knew~~ ^T that was one question she would never ask aloud, and I was grateful. What could I have replied? ^{Would} Could I have said, ^{"Call it"} "It was all a question of Comparative Fellatio, dear heart. You, Madeleine, used to take a cock into your mouth with a sob, or a sweet groan, as if hell were impending over this. It was as beautiful as the Middle Ages. And Patty Lareine was a cheerleader and ready to gobble you up. Albeit with innate skill. It came down to whether you wished your lady to be demure or insatiable. I chose Patty Lareine. She was as insatiable as good old America, and I wanted my country ~~not~~ ^{old} on my cock."

Of course, the ^{old} ~~demure~~ ^{my medieval} lady, ~~left behind~~ had now developed a taste for men who could behead you with a blow.

The greatest virtue of living with Madeleine had been that we could hardly sit in a room together and sip a drink and take a toke without hearing each other's thoughts so clearly ^{seemed to be} we could have been drawing them from the same well. So she ^{much as} might as well have heard ^{my unsaid} the speech. I knew by the mean twist

^{col}
~~which came upon~~ her mouth. When she looked at me again,
Madeleine was full of hatred.

"I didn't tell Al about you," she said.

"Is that what you call him?" I said to hold her off,
"Al?"

"Shut up," she said. "I didn't tell him about you,
because there was no need for it. He burned you right
out of me. Regency is a stud."

No woman had ever flayed me with that word so well
before. Patty Lareine could not have come near. "Yes,"
said Madeleine, "you and me loved each other, but when ^{Mr. Regency}
~~we~~ ^{I began our little courtships}
~~and we got together,~~ he would fuck me five times a night,
and the fifth was as good as the first. ~~What do you think~~
~~I needed after you?~~ On the best day you'll ever have,
you'll never come near Mr. Five. That's what I call him,
you dolt."

Against every intent of my will, there were tears in
my eyes from the pain of this speech ^{gave} upon me. It was equal
to suffering while sand is cleaned out of a wound. Yet ^{at that moment}
^I fell in love with her all over again ~~at that moment~~. Her
words would ^{show me} clarify where I put my feet for the rest of my
life. It also stirred a pride I thought was dead. For I
took a vow that one night before I was done, I would obliterate

her admiration for Mr. Five.

Before I left, however, our conversation took another turn. We sat in silence for a time, and then it was longer than that. Maybe it was half an hour later that the tears began to come out of her eyes and wash ^{away} the mascara, ~~before~~ ~~it~~. After a while, she had to wipe her face.

"Tim, I want you to go," she said.

"All right. I ~~think~~ I'll be back."

"Call me." *Pinch*

"Okay."

She walked me to the door. Then she stopped and said, "There's one thing more I ought to tell you." She nodded to herself. "But if I do," she went on, "then you'll want to stay and talk."

"I promise not to."

"No, you'll break ^{your word} it." She said, "Wait. Wait here," and ^{went} she went to a shopping-mall replica of a colonial knee-hole desk in the living room where she wrote a few words on a note, sealed it, and came back.

"This promise you can keep," she said. "I want you to hold this note until you're better than halfway home. Then, you can open it. Think about it. Don't ^{ring} call me to talk about it. I'm telling you what I know. Don't ask how I know."

"That's six promises," I said.

"Mr. Six," she said, and came close and gave her mouth to me. It was one of the most remarkable kisses I ever had, and yet there was very little passion in it. All the tenderness of her heart, however, and all her pall of rage both passed into me, and I confess that I was stunned by the combination as if a good boxer had just caught me with a startling left hook and a stultifying right which is not the way to describe a kiss, and gives none of the balm it also offered my heart, but I say this to emphasize how rubbery were my legs on the walk past the neighbors' ~~houses~~ down the road to my car.

I kept the six promises and didn't open her note until long after I turned in my rented blubber-^{wagon} cart at Hyannis and got back into my Porsche and drove all the way to Eastham. There I stopped on the highway to peruse her message, and it took three seconds. I didn't phone her, I just read the note again. It said, "My husband is having an affair with your wife. Let's not talk about it unless you're prepared to kill them."

Well, I started up my Porsche again, but it will come as small surprise that I was not able to concentrate on the road, and, coming to a sign for the Marconi Station of the

National Park Service, I turned off Route 6, and drove out to the bluffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. I left my wheels in the space allotted ^{by} to the Park Service, and ^{walked off to} sat ^{top} at the tip of a low dune, passing sand through my hands while I meditated on the Pilgrims and wondered if it might be out in the seas right here that they turned north again to sail up the tip of the Cape and around to Provincetown. What better place ^{than this promontory} ^{the first} than here for Marconi to dare to send wireless messages across the ocean's space? Pondering such large thoughts, ^{concepts} my mind grew empty, and I sighed, and thought of other wireless messages that had gone back and forth between Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais, Elizabeth and Essex, the Czarina and Rasputin, and in our own ^{most} much reduced and more modest way, Madeleine and myself. I sat at the top of this low bluff and passed sand back and forth in my hands and tried to estimate my situation now that I had seen Madeleine. Did it all come down to Alvin ^{Luther} Philip Regency?

It occurred to me that I could just about use a rifle and had hardly any competence with my pistol. For that matter, I had not had a fist-fight in five years. With drinking, and, of late, my smoking, I must have a liver large enough for two. Yet at the thought of facing Regency, I also felt some of the old blood come back. I did not start as a fighter, and I did

not seem to have ended as one, but the years in the middle when I tended bar taught me a few tactics, which knowledge I had doubled in the slammer--I was a compendium of dirty tricks--and then finally, it didn't matter. I had gotten so evil in my last few street fights that they always had to pull me off. Something of my father's blood had passed on to me, and I seemed to have bought his code. Tough guys don't dance.

Tough guys don't dance. On that curious proposition, my memory, like a boat coming around a buoy into harbor again, returned to my adolescence and I could feel myself beginning to think of the year I was sixteen when I tried out for the Golden Gloves. That was far away from where I now found myself with Madeleine's note. Or was it not so far? After all, it was in the Golden Gloves that I had tried for the first time to hurt someone seriously, and sitting here, on the beach at Eastham, I started to smile. For I was able to see myself in the way I used to when I was sixteen, and in those days, I had always pictured myself as tough. I had had, after all, the toughest father on the block. While I knew, even then, that I would never be his equal, still I told myself that I carried enough of him to make my high school football varsity in Sophomore year. That was a feat! And I remember how that winter once football season was over, I used to feel a mean and proud hostility toward the