

world, ^{that} ~~truth~~, I could hardly control ~~it~~. (It was the year of my parents' divorce.) I started to go to a boxing gym near my father's bar. It was inevitable, being Dougy Madden's son, that I should ^{have to} sign up for the Golden Gloves.

A Jewish boy I knew at Exeter told me that the year before he turned thirteen was the worst in his life. He spent it getting ready for his Bar Mitzvah, and never knew if on a given night he could fall asleep, or would be wide awake reciting the speech he soon had to give in the synagogue to two hundred friends of his family.

That wasn't as bad, I suggested to him, as your first night in the Gloves. "For one thing," I said, "you walk in half naked and nobody has prepared you for that. Five hundred people are there. Some of them don't like you. They're for the other guy. They're very critical when they stare at you. Then you see your opponent. He looks ^{like dynamite,} ~~meaner~~ than you ever looked ~~in the mirror.~~"

^{what made?}
"Why did you do it?" my friend asked.

I told him the truth. "I wanted to make my father happy."

For a boy with ^{such} a good conscience, however, ^{purpose, I had, all the same a} ~~I didn't sleep~~

~~on the night before the Golden Gloves, and I had a nervous~~

^{nervous} stomach in the dressing room. (I was sharing it with fifteen other fighters.) They, like me, were to be

in the blue corner. Separated by a partition was another dressing room with fifteen contenders from the red corner. Every ten minutes or so, one of us, ^{Fighters} would go out to the auditorium and another would come back. There is nothing like the danger of humiliation to build fast alliances. We didn't know each other, but we kept wishing each guy luck. Devoutly. Every ten minutes, as I say, one kid would go out, and soon ^{after} ^(previous) ^{return} the kid before him would come in. He would be ecstatic if he won, and in misery if he lost, but at least it was over. One kid was carried in, and they sent for an ambulance. He had been knocked out by a black puncher with a big rep. In that minute, I considered forfeiting my match. Only the thought of my father sitting in the first row kept me from speaking up. "OK, dad," I said to myself, "my death is for you."

Once the fight started, I discovered that boxing, like other cultures, takes years to acquire, and I immediately ^{to} ³ I lost the little culture I had. I was so scared I never stopped throwing punches. ^{My opponent who was fat and black} The fighter in with me was just as frightened and never stopped either. At the bell, neither of us could move. My heart felt ready to explode. By the second round, we could not do a thing. We stood still, we glowered, we ^{used} ~~blocked punches~~ with our heads ^{to block punches}.

because we were too tired to duck--it cost less to get hit than to move. We must have looked like longshoremen too drunk to fight. Both of us were bleeding from the nose and I could smell his blood. I learned on this night that blood has a scent as intimate as body odor. It was an horrendous round. When I got to my corner, I felt equal to an overraced engine whose parts were ready to seize.

"You got to do better or we don't win," said the trainer. He was a friend of my father's.

When I could catch my voice, I said as formally as I could--you would have thought I was already in prep school--"If you want to terminate the fight, I will abide by that."

The look in his eye, however, told me that he would repeat my remark for the rest of his life.

"Kid, just go beat the shit out of him," my trainer said.

The bell rang. He gave me my mouthpiece and a shove toward the center of the ring.

Now, I fought with desperation. I had to eat the entrails of my remark. My father was yelling so ^{shouting so loudly} I even thought I was going to win. Boom! I ran into a bomb. The side of my head could just as well have stopped the full swing of a baseball bat. I ^{suppose that} know I careened around the ring because

only
I saw the other boxer in jump cuts ~~like in a film~~. I was in one place, then I was at the next place.

New adrenalin must have been shaken loose by the punch. My legs were *shocked* full of life. I began to circle and to jab. I ran and I ducked and I jabbed (which is what I should have done from the beginning.) At last I could recognize: my opponent knew less about boxing than me! Just as I was measuring him for a hook (since I had now discovered that he lowered his right each time I feinted with my left to the belly) why, the bell rang. Fight was over. They lifted his hand.

Afterward, when the well-wishers were gone and I was sitting alone with my father in a coffee shop, a second wave of pain just commencing, Big Mac muttered, "You should have won."

"I thought I did. Everybody says I did."

"That's friends." He shook his head. "You lost it in the last round."

No, now that it was over, and I had lost, I thought I had won. "Everybody said it was beautiful the way I took that punch and kept moving."

"Friends." He said it in so lugubrious a voice that you would have thought it was friends, not drink, that was

the bane of the Irish.

I never felt more argumentative with my father. There is no surliness like sitting around, half dislodged in every vale of your mind, torso, and limbs, your organs hot and full of lead, your heart loaded with consternation that maybe you did lose the fight, ^{(your friends) was stolen} they said you should have ^{from you.} won. So I said out of my own puffed mouth, and I probably never sounded cockier to him, "My mistake was that I didn't dance. I should have come out fast at the bell and stuck him. I should have gone (Stick! Stick! Slide," I said, moving my hands, "and circled away. Then back with the jab, dance out of range, circle and dance, stick him! Stick him!" I nodded at this fine war plan. "When he was ready, I could have dropped the bum."

My father's face was without expression. "Do you remember Frank Costello?" he asked.

"Of-course."

"Big-man."

"Top of the mob," I said with admiration.

"One night Frank Costello was sitting in a night club with his blonde, a nice blonde broad, and who's at the table ^{he's also got} with him but Rocky Marciano, Tony Canzoneri, and Willy Pep. ^{orchestra} It's a guinea party," my father said. "The band is playing."

So Frank says to Pep, 'Hey, Willy, I want you to dance with Gloria.' That makes Pep nervous. Who wants to dance with the big man's girl? What if she likes him? 'Hey, Mr. Costello,' says Willy Pep, 'you know I'm not a very good dancer.' 'Not what I heard,' says Frank. 'Why don't you get out there and move. You'll be very good.' So Pep gets up and trots Gloria around the floor at arm's length, and when he comes back, Costello tells the same thing to Canzoneri, and Tony takes Gloria out. Then it's Rocky's turn. Marciano believes he's big enough in his own right to call Costello by his first name, so he says, 'Mr. Frank, I'm a heavyweight. We heavyweights are not much on a ballroom floor.' 'Go do some footwork,' says Costello. What do you know, Rocky steps out too, and Gloria takes the occasion to whisper in his ear, 'Rocky, do me a favor. See if you can get Uncle Frank to take a turn with me.'

"Well, when the number is over, Rocky leads her back. He's feeling better and the others got their nerve up too. They start to rib the big man, very careful, you understand, just a little tasteful chaffing. 'Hey, Mr. Costello,' they say, 'Mr. C., come on, why don't you give your lady a dance.'

"Will you," Gloria asks, 'please!'

"It's your turn, Mr. Frank," they say.

"Costello," my father told me, ^{"says to them:} ~~"just moves his head a~~
~~cunt hair to the left. Then he says,~~ 'Tough guys don't dance.'

Now my father had about five such remarks and he never
^{dropped!} used them on you until he died. "Inter faeces et urinam nascimur"
^{became} was the last and the unhappiest, even as "Don't talk--you'll
spill the wind out of the sails" was always the best of them
^{happened!} ~~for me,~~ but through my adolescence, it ^{used to be!} became: "Tough guys
don't dance."

At sixteen, a half-Mick from Long Island, I did not know
about Zen masters and koans, ^{their} but if I had, I would have said
^{I didn't understand it, but} ~~the~~ his remark was a koan since it stayed with me, and the older
^{could live in} I became, the more meaning I drew from it, until now, sitting
on a beach at Eastham, looking out at the surf that came to
me at the end of the three thousand mile ride of the waves,
I thought again of the wonders of erosion that Patty Lareine
had worked on my character. The wells of self-pity rose
~~in me~~ predictably, and I thought it was time to stop
thinking of my koan unless I could bring a new thought
to the circle.

Surely my father had meant something finer than that

232

you held your ground when there was trouble, something finer that doubtless he could not or would not express, but it was there ~~in the foundation of~~ his code. It could be no less than a vow. Did I miss the elusive principle on which his philosophy ^{must} ~~would~~ crystalize?

It was then I saw a man ^{approaching} ~~coming toward me~~ on the beach. The closer he came, the nearer I ^{came} ~~moved~~ to recognizing him, and with that, ^{many of} ~~my~~ preoccupations with myself began to fade.

He was a tall man ^{but} ~~not at all~~ menacing in appearance. In truth, he was plump, and soon in danger of looking like a pear, for he would have had, even if slim, a pot belly, and not much in the way of shoulders. Moreover, walking on the sand, his gait was comic. He was well-dressed in a three-piece pin-stripe charcoal-gray flannel suit with a white collar on a striped shirt, a club tie, a small red handkerchief in his breast pocket, and a camel's hair coat folded on his arm. To avoid scuffing his brown loafers, he was carrying them in his hand, and so walking with his feet in argyle socks on the cold November sand. That gave him the prancing, skittery gait of a show-horse stepping over wet cobblestones.

"How are you, Tim?" the man now said to me.

"Wardley!" I was twice stupefied. Once, because he had put on so much weight--he had been slim when I saw him

last in divorce court--and again that we should meet on this beach at Eastham I had not visited in five years.

Wardley leaned over and stuck out his hand in the general direction of where I was sitting.

"Tim," he said, "you were a perfect son of a bitch in the way you acted, but I want you to know, I don't sit on bad feelings. Life, as one's friends constantly admonish us, is too short for that."

I shook his hand. If he was willing, I did not see how I could refuse. After all, his wife had run across me dead broke in a bar in Tampa--it was the first time she had seen me in close to five years--had given me a job as their chauffeur, had taken me to her bed under his nose, thereby resuming the romantic possibilities we had begun on our night in North Carolina, and had then motivated me to the point where I certainly tried to think up a fail-safe method to kill him. That failing to spark, I certainly did testify against him in the trial, taking the stand to swear--and some of it happened to be true--that he had solicited me to testify against her for a very good sum. I had added that he had proposed I take Patty Lareine to a house in Key West that he was prepared to raid with a detective and a photographer. That was not legally true. He had merely mused over such a possibility. I also said that he had asked me to seduce her in the first place with precisely the aim of becoming a witness for him, and that was successful perjury. It is possible my testimony

did as much for Patty Lareine as ^{the} her lawyer with his video coaching, and Wardley's lawyers certainly treated me like a star witness for ^{and} they did their best to ^{point} have me come out ^{on the bench} on the stand like an ex-con and a bum. Yet, ^{as you would expect but how could I keep} how could I not have had any kind of good conscience about my role? ^{through all of that gig} Throughout my days as a chauffeur in his home, Wardley had always treated me as an Exeter classmate down on his luck. It had been no way ~~for me~~ to treat him back.

"Yes," he now said, "I was hurt for a little while, but Meeks always said to me: 'Wardley, extirpate self-pity. It's ~~the~~ one emotion this family can't afford.' I hope they're ^{the tar-pits} double-dipping Meeks now in a ~~kettle~~ of brimstone, but that's ^{neither} ~~not~~ here nor there. One must take one's advice where one can find it."

He had the damndest voice. I will come to describe it in a moment, but for now his face was over me. Like many ungainly people, he had a habit when speaking to someone who was seated, of leaning forward from the waist and putting his mug into the airspace around your own, so that you were always uneasy you'd get ^{receive the} a dew of ^{his} (patrician spit, ~~on you~~). With ~~all~~ the light of sun and sand on his face, he ~~still~~ looked, particularly at this short distance, like a dollop of oatmeal. He would have been oafish in appearance

if he weren't so neat, for his ^{thin} dark hair was straight, and his features, left to themselves, were lumpy, lacking in strength, and sullen, but his ^{the} eyes were startling. They were as luminous as William Buckley Jr.'s, and had the ^{the} curious same gift of goggling themselves up into a blaze at a passing remark as if the devil had just rammed thumb and ^a fingernail up Wardley's track.

So his eyes provided a good deal of life to his unprepossessing appearance. Indeed they did their best to own you. He had the disconcerting habit of staring into your face as if you were the first soul he had ever found remotely like his own.

Then there was his voice. My father would hate it. God certainly used Wardley's ^{patrician} voice to display his decency. Whatever Wardley lacked in any other way was made up by ^{for} the timbre of his diphthongs. ^{A snob would turn to} His accent had to be as libidinous ^{cream before those patrician diphthongs} as enhancing to a snob as Elvis Presley's gift to whip up a little raunch for a redneck.

If I have taken a while to describe ^{my old classmate} him, it is because I was still in shock. I had long been a believer in the far reach of coincidence, indeed, I thought ^{went so far as to think one} it was to be ^{must always be ready for it} awaited when extraordinary or evil events occurred, a bizarre ^{but} notion ^{forceful} that I hope yet to explain. That Wardley, however,

should choose to appear on this beach in ^{now, well, I} an hour when
~~(so much was, if not at stake, then at peril - well, I~~
~~could~~ ^{at first} might have been happier ^{with a rational explanation.}

"It's incredible that you're here," I said, ^{despite myself.}

He nodded. "I have absolute faith in chance meetings.

If I had a saint, her name would be Serendipity."

"You act as if you're glad to see me."

He considered this, his eyes intent on mine. "Do you know," he said, "everything considered, I think I am."

"Wardley, you have a ^{good} ~~large~~ nature. Please sit down."

He complied, which was a relief. Now, I did not have to look constantly into his eyes. His thigh, however, which had ballooned up as much as the rest of him, rested against mine, a large soft amiable physical object. The truth is that if one had a vocation in that direction, one could have grabbed him, etc. His flesh had the kind of ^{nubile} ~~passivity~~ that begged to be abused. In prison, I remembered now, they used to call him "the Duke of Windsor." I used to hear ~~more than a few~~ cons say of Wardley: "Oh, the Duke of Windsor. He's got an asshole as big as a bucket."

"You don't look well," Wardley now murmured.

I let this pass, and took my turn to ask, "How long have you been in these parts?" I could have meant this Marconi

-23-

beach, Eastham, the Cape, New England, or for that matter, all of New York and Philadelphia too, but he just waved his hand. "Let's talk," he said, "about vital matters."

"That's easier."

"That's easier, Mac, you're right. I've always said, in fact I used to say it to Patty Lareine: 'Tim ~~Madden~~ ^{instinctive} has an instructive gift for good manners. ^{Just like} Like you, he tells it as it is. But he puts the best face on ^(the matter) it.' I was trying to smuggle a clue, of course, into her head. How I tried to give her a notion of how to behave." He laughed. It was with the great pleasure exhibited by people who have spent their lives laughing aloud when they are by themselves, and so if there was much loneliness in it, there was also extraordinary individuality as if he didn't care how much ^{was} he revealed of the most godawful sinks and traps in his ~~psychic~~ plumbing. The liberty of being absolutely himself was worth ~~all~~ the rest.

When he had finished this laugh, and I had begun to wonder what was amusing him so, he said, "Since you, me, and Patty have been down this road before, let me make it brief. What would you think of doing her in?"

He said it with a gleam, as if proposing the theft of the Kohinoor diamond.

"Total?"

"Of course."

"You don't take long to get to the point."

"That's the other piece of advice I received from my father. He told me, 'The more important the matter, the quicker you must broach it. Otherwise, the importance itself will weigh on you. Then you'll never get it proposed.'"

"Maybe your father was right."

"Of course." ~~I always take advice from people I detest.~~
~~That is, if they inspire me with a touch of awe.~~

He was obviously leaving the option to pursue ^{this} suggestion entirely to me.

"I'm inclined to ask," I said. "How much ^{?"} ~~is it worth?~~

^{"How much do}
~~"It's a question of what you want."~~

"Patty Lareine used to promise me the moon," I said.

"Just get rid of that awful faggot," she'd say, 'and you'll have half of all I'll be worth.'" I said this to be as rude ^{to him} as I could. His compliment about my good manners had irritated me ^(It was so blatant in its stroking) as blatant stroking. ^{(So I said this now to see if his} wounds had dried. I'm not so certain they had. He blinked rapidly, as if keeping a few emotional paces ahead of any ^{loose} tears, and then said, "Well, I'm ^{I wonder if} certain she now has equally agreeable things to say about you."

I began to laugh. I had to. He ~~had touched my~~
(when we were done)
~~quick.~~ I had always assumed that, Patty Lareine would be
to me than to Wardley
kinder ~~to me in the end~~ but that might be a large
supposition.

"Are you in her will?" he asked.

"I have no idea."

"Do you hate her enough to do the job?"

"Five times over."

I said it without pause. Talking on the beach gave a
great freedom to say anything. But then the number came back.
to me. Had I uttered a true sentiment, or was it merely a
repetition
recognition of the noxious idea that Madeleine Falco Regency's
husband was *ejaculated* five times a night *inside temple* on that altar. I
once
had ~~adored~~. Like a boxer, I only seemed to ache hours after
the ugly exchanges had taken place.

"I've heard," Wardley said, "that Patty treated you
badly."

"Well," I said, "you could use the word."

"~~Yes~~. You look whipped. I don't *believe* think you could per-
form the deed."

"I'm sure you're right."

"I don't want to be."

"Why don't you commit it?" I asked.

"Tim, you'll never believe me."

"Tell me anyway. Maybe I can ^{find} discover the truth by comparing ^{the} your lies."

"That's a good remark."

"It's not mine. It's Leon Trotsky's."

"Oh. It's ~~nearly~~ worthy of Ronald Firbank."

"Where is Patty Lareine now?" I asked.

"She's around. You can count on that."

"How do you know?"

"Because she and I are vying both of us for the same piece of property."

"Are you trying to slay her, or defeat her in a business deal?"

"Whichever comes first," he said with a droll flash of the whites of his eyes. ^{Could he be} Yes, ~~it was~~ certain. ~~He was~~ trying to emulate William ^R Buckley, Jr. [?]

"But you would rather see her dead?" I persisted.

"Not by my own hand."

"Why ~~not~~?"

"You simply won't believe me. I want her to look into the eyes of her killer and have it all wrong. I don't want her to see me as the last thing in her life and say, 'Oh, well, it's just Wardley going in for pay-back.' That's

too easy. It'll give her peace. She'll know who to haunt so soon as she gets her stuff together in the next place. And I'm not hard to find. ^{Believe me,} So I prefer her to die in a state ^{have done} of profound confusion. 'How could Tim do it?' she'll ask herself. 'Did I underestimate him?'

"You're marvelous."

"Well," he said, "I knew you wouldn't believe me. But you ~~can hardly~~ ^{comprehend} be the first to comprehend me, considering the gap in our background."

He had turned around sufficiently so that his eyes were looking into mine again. On top of it all, his breath was not too fragrant..

"But if you scotch her ~~I said,~~ ^{said,} in this real estate deal," I deal, she'll know it's you paying her back."

"Yes, she will. ^{I want} I like that. In life, I want ^{my living} the ^{desire} ~~enemies~~ enemy to see my expression. I want them to know every living breath they take that, ^{yes} yes, it's Wardley who did this to them. Death is different. Send them out in confusion, I say."

I would ~~hardly~~ ^{less} have been inclined to take him seriously ^{if} ~~if I did not know~~ of what he was capable. ^{is in} In prison, he had ~~not~~ paid to have ^{had} a man killed who was ^{threatening} bothering him. I ~~had been~~ ^{was} present when he bought the killer's services, and he had ^{all that} not sounded ~~too different on that day~~ ^{from} than he did now. Convicts

would laugh at him, but not to his face.

"Tell me about the real estate deal," I said.

"Since your wife and I have an eye on the same place, I'm not certain I should tell you. One never knows when Patty Lareine will come back and wrap her arms around you."

"Yes," I said. "I could be vulnerable," and wondered how ^{Patty} she would reek of ^{Acting} former Police Chief Regency.

"So I shouldn't tell you." He paused, then ^{he} said, "On impulse, however, I will."

^{now} Now I had to look into those abominably large searching goggle eyes. "I don't want to roil your feelings, Tim, but I'm not certain you've truly understood Patty Lareine. She pretends that she couldn't care less what ^{the world} society thinks of her, but I will tell you that she's ^{really} the stuff from which ^{the world's} society flagships are made. It's just that she's too proud to work her way up the ^{daily rungs} social ladder. So she pretends no interest."

I was thinking of the first gathering to which I had taken Patty Lareine when we came to Provincetown five years ago. Some friends of mine brought their wine skins out to the dunes for a party, and the women contributed tea-cakes and Acapulco Gold, Jamaica Prime, and even a few Thai sticks. We had a moon blast. Patty had actually been nervous

before it began--I was to learn that she was always nervous before a party--which might have been hard to comprehend considering how good she was at giving them, but then Dylan Thomas, they say, used to throw up just before going out to give an unforgettable poetry reading. So had Patty taken them for a great ride on this first party, and before the end, even ^{pent} ~~showed her moon to the moon~~, while ~~bending~~ ^{a bugle} over to play her ~~trumpet~~ between her legs. Yes, she had been the life of that party and many another.

^{All the same} Yet I knew what he meant. On ^{many a} ~~all those~~ nights, back of ~~all~~ the brass, was the wistful note of a ^{an} ~~fine~~ artist ~~reduced to~~ painting ashtrays for Christmas gifts. So I did not ignore what he said, indeed, I considered whether he ^{could} ~~might~~ be right. Her unrest at living in Provincetown ^{had} ~~and~~ become prodigious of late.

^{secret} "The ~~vital~~ clue to Patty Lareine," Wardley said, "is that she sees herself as a sinner. Hopelessly lost. No return. Habits too strong. What ^{can you} ~~do you~~ do next?"

^{herself} "Drink yourself to death."

^{she is} "Only, if ~~you're~~ a fool. I would say the practical ^{for Patty Lareine} ~~answer~~ ^{to} is to build great works ~~for~~ the devil."

His wait was portentous as if to allow endless space for this to sink in. "I've kept my eye on her," he said.

"There is little she has done in ^{the last} (five years I haven't heard about."

"You have friends in town?"

He made another ^a vague gesture with his hands.

Of course he did. With half the winter population on welfare, he would not have to pay ^{a great deal} much for information.

"I've ~~also~~ kept in touch," he said, "with real estate agents. Haunted the tip of the Cape in my own way. Provincetown impresses me. It's the most beautiful ^{attractive} fishing village on the Eastern seaboard, and if not for the Portuguese, bless them, it would have been ruined long ago."

"Are you saying Patty Lareine wants to ^{get into real estate?} ~~ruin it?~~"

"Not at all. She wants to pull off a coup. She has her eye on a fabulous house on a hill in the West End."

^{think I} "I know the place you mean."

"Of course you do. Don't I know that! Those people you had drinks with at The Widow's Walk were my surrogates, ^{They were planning to step into the agent's office} buyers! ~~Planning to move in on the agent~~ next day to get that house you were ^{already} kind enough to put me in, ⁱⁿ in-advance."

He whistled. "Provincetown is haunted. I'm convinced of it. How else could you come up with my name [?] ~~at such a time?~~"

"It is remarkable."

"It's directly spooky."

I nodded. My scalp felt alert. ^{Did} Was Patty Lareine ^{tune} selecting her orchestra out of Hell-Town ^{while blowing} every time she ^J blow her trumpet at the moon?

"Do you realize," said Wardley, "that poor Lonnie Pangborn got up ^{that night} in the middle of dinner with ^{his} that blonde lallapalooza, of his, and phoned me [?] in Tampa? He was ^{half-convinced} convinced I was double-dealing. How else ^{could} could you attack me ^{my message} to that house? Either that, or Patty Lareine had gotten on to me and was telling everyone. How, he asked, could he keep a low profile and pretend to be a purchaser ^{as a purchaser} if my name was being bruited about?"

"Well, chalk one up," I said.

"That always happens with master plans," said Wardley. "Better the plan, the more you ^{may} can count on it. Something altogether unforeseen will ^{enter to} come in and bend the works. When I know you better, I'll tell you the real story of how Jack Kennedy got killed. It was supposed to be a miss! What a set of accidents ^{that was}! that was. The CIA didn't know Auntie's hole from appetite that day."

"You wanted to buy the estate in order to keep Patty Lareine from getting it?"

"Exactly."

"What would you have done with it?"

"I would have taken great pleasure in hiring a caretaker ^{to watch over its empty floriss.} and leaving it empty. (Calculated to put dry rot into every one of Patty Lareine's apertures."

^{"But what can}
"What could she do with it if she ^{gets} got it?"

He held up a white plump hand. "This is just my speculation."

"Yes."

"Well," Newport is Newport, and you can leave it on the shelf. Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket are no ^{better} more than real estate now. The Hamptons are a disaster! Lefrak City is more attractive on Sunday."

"Provincetown is jammed worse than all of them."

^{"Yes, in summer it's hopeless, but then}

"Yes, but so is St. Tropez. The point is, Provincetown has natural beauty. The others are nature's culls. And in ^{the off-season} ^{winter and spring} the winter, nothing is superior to little old P-town. I suspect that Patty Lareine wanted to ^{start a} build a huge beautiful chic hotel right there on that estate. Done properly, it could, in a few years, have more cachet than anything around. In winter, ^{sweep} once in, it would sweep all before it. That's how Patty is thinking, I reckon. And, ^{she would make} she would make, with the proper assistants, a fabulous hotelier. Tim, whether I'm right or wrong, I know this. She's got her heart set on ^{the} that place." He sighed. "Now that Lonnie's packed it

in, and the blonde has disappeared, I've got to find a representative in a hurry or go speak for myself. That will kick the price ~~all the~~ way up."

I began to laugh. "You've convinced me," I said.

"You'd rather screw Patty on the real estate than kill her."

a piece of
"You bet." *He made his point or laughing as well.* He also laughed. *I didn't know what to believe in his story. It sounded ~~at~~ wrong to me.*
We watched the waves for a while.

"I adored Patty Lareine," he said, ~~to me~~. "I don't want to bring out the crying towel, but for a little while, she made me feel like a man. I always say that if you're AC-DC, it's important to have power in both lines."

I smiled.

"Well, it was no laughing matter ~~for me~~. All my life, I would remind you, I've been trying to regain property rights to my rectum."

"Given up?"

"I'm the only one who would care what the answer is by now."

those
"Back in my chauffeuring days, Patty Lareine used to *harangue* on how! tell me that we *definitely* had to off you, Wardley. That there was going to be no peace until you were dead. She said if we didn't kill you, you would certainly kill us. She said she'd known some pretty evil types in her day, but

you . were the most vindictive person she had ever met.

You had, she said, ^{so much} ~~all~~ the time to plot and scheme."

"Did you believe her?"

"Not ^{really} ~~altogether~~. I kept thinking of the day we got kicked out of school together."

"Is that why you didn't try to ~~kill~~ ^{terminate} me? I always wondered. Because, you know, I didn't suspect you. ^{a thing} I always trusted you."

"Wardley, you have to see my situation. I was broke. I had a police record and couldn't work ^{any good places} as a bartender, and the wealthiest woman I ever knew, acted as if she was mad about me, and promised me all the drugs and booze and toys that money could buy. I did get pretty serious about how I was going to total you. Psyched myself up. But I just couldn't get that heavy shit to flush. Know why?"

"Of course not. I'm asking."

"Because, Wardley, I kept thinking of the time you got your moxie together and inched out along that third story ledge to get into your father's room. ^{It moved me, You were} I kept thinking of ^{one} the wimp who got his nerve up, and ~~so~~ I finally had to call it off. You can choose not to believe me."

He laughed, and then he laughed again. The sound of his humor as it cawed through his bends brought a flight

of seagulls near, much as if he were the lead bird crying out, "Here's food, here's food."

"That's marvelous," he said. "Patty Lareine's plans gone gerflooeey because you didn't have the heart to kill the little boy on the ledge. Well, I've enjoyed this talk and am delighted that as old classmates we are finally getting to know one another, well. ~~So~~ let me fill you in on what a

liar I used to be. I never inched out along that ledge. *I made up the tale.* ~~I made that up.~~ Everybody had to have *a* ~~their~~ war *story* ~~stories~~ in prison, so that became mine. I wanted people to recognize that I was too desperate to fool around with. But seats *the*

~~are not my style.~~ The truth is that I gained entry to my father's *private* ~~pornographic~~ library by way of the butler--who was also the photographer, remember? He just took out his key and let me in. And all for no more than *the* ~~A~~ promise that I would unbutton his fly--old-fashioned buttons, not zippers, for the butler!--and go gooey-gooey on his *private* ~~wattles~~. Which I did. I always pay my debts. Paris is worth a Mass!"

With that, he stood up, lifted his shoes on high as if he were the Statue of Liberty, and started off. When he was ten feet away, he turned around and said, "Who knows when Patty Lareine *may* ~~will~~ pop in on you? If you get

the impulse, off her. Her head, if we have to put a figure on it, must be worth two million and change." Then he lowered the arm that was carrying the shoes, and pranced off on stiff cold feet.

He was not out of earshot before I told myself that if I could find the blonde head that had disappeared, that very blonde who might once have been Patty Lareine or Jessica Pond, but who, after a few more days, could certainly, without thorough examination, be presented as the remains of Patty Lareine, I might be the lucky inheritor of a high-powered scam. Tricky as hell, but worth two million.

Then I told myself: Anyone who is capable of thinking this way is capable of homicide.

Then I told myself: Thought is cheap. The best guide to my innocence is that the idea of such a scam hardly stirs me.

I waited until Meeks Wardley Hilby III was a distance down the beach before I went back to my Porsche, and left the Marconi Station for the drive to Provincetown.

On the way home, I learned a little more about the tarnished nature, on occasion, of coincidence.

It seemed to me that I was being followed. I could not swear to this because I could not locate a car behind

me. I would speed up ~~and slow down~~ but no familiar vehicle came rushing ^{along} ~~us~~ to keep me in sight. Even as I might ^{could sometimes} sense, however, who was on the telephone before I picked it up, so now I could not relinquish the conviction that there ~~had to be~~ ^{was} somebody on my tail. They might be keeping a good distance, but they were following. Had a beeper been put on my Porsche?

I turned right down a side road for a hundred yards and parked. ^{No other car} Nothing came along. I got out of ~~the car~~ and looked in the front trunk, and at the motor in the rear. Under the back bumper, I found a small black box, half the size of a package of cigarettes, held in place by a magnet.

^{The black box} It made no noise and offered no ticking. It felt inert in my hand. I could not be certain what it was. ^{I replaced it} I put it, ^{therefore,} back on the bumper, ^{where I had found it} ~~where I had found it~~. ^{It} turned onto Route 6 and drove for another mile. Then I parked at the summit of a long straightaway. There was a pair of field glasses in the side pocket ~~that I kept~~ ^{with them} for watching gulls and now I scanned the highway ^{as far} ~~back as I could follow it~~, perhaps a mile. There, at the end of the useful range of these binoculars, was a brown van also parked on the shoulder. Had they stopped when I

did? Were they waiting for me to start up again? I kept driving until I came to Pamet Road in Truro which went east from the highway for a mile, then north for a mile, then back west to join the four-lane, and three-quarters of the way around I stopped at a place ^{turn} where I could see much of the southern arm of Pamet Road, ^{across the Pamet} and ^{River valley and} again the brown vehicle was visible, and had halted. I had seen this closed brown van before, I knew it!

Now, I parked my car by a house and stepped back into the woods. ^{Whoever was} They ^{waited} waited in the van another ten minutes, but then, ~~as I expected~~ concluded that I must be visiting someone, so they drove up and looked at the house before which my Porsche was parked, then went ^{turned around to go} back in the direction from which they came. I listened to their motor which was not hard to follow. Our roads are empty in winter. It was the only sound in the valley of the Pamet Road.

-And, ^{Yes} yes, again they stopped, perhaps three hundred yards away. They would wait for me to ^(start up again) go on. The beeper would tell them when I began to move.

I was inclined, what with all natural sense of outrage, to throw their gadget right into the woods--or, better, leave it on some parked car and ^{oblig} allow my followers to wait on Pamet Road for the rest of the night. But I

was too furious for that. It offended me that the exceptional meeting of Wardley and myself, ^{on Marconi beach} came down to no more than ^{using a beeper} his ability to use such a device to follow my Porsche. ^{Apparently the first precept to recollect} The first precept, apparently, to pick up

here was that not all coincidences were diabolical or divine. ^{I was back with the common people!}

^{After all} Besides, it had not been Wardley I saw behind the wheel of the van, but Spider Nissen, and Stoodie was in ^{bucket} the jump seat beside him. Wardley was doubtless reading Ronald Firbank in some country inn with a ~~little~~ CB radio at his side waiting for Spider and Stoodie to send ^{the} a word.

Yes, I would keep the beeper, I told myself, ^{good} and maybe I could use it to ^{purpose} when the opportunity arose.

That, however, was only a small satisfaction considering how much unrest ^{this} that little machine aroused in my blood, but I could now recognize that the more events ^{came to impinge} impinged on me, the closer I could come to the first cause.

6.

I was angry, I was curious, I was thirsty from ~~this series~~ ^{these} of highway maneuvers, and it occurred to me I had not gone to a bar since the night ^{at} of The Widow's Walk. So soon as I returned to Provincetown, therefore, I parked my car near the town wharf. We have good bars in the center of town: The Bay State (which we call The Brig), The Poop Deck, and The Fish and Bait ^(unofficially) (renamed unoffically The Bucket of Blood to honor the number of fights that take place in there) good bars, but you would not call them great for they have none of the working

class panache that bartenders like my father bring to a place. Still, they are dark, and just dirty enough to make you comfortable, ~~and have no neon lighting.~~ One can hunker down to drinking as comfortably as an unborn babe in a good, dependable womb. ^{Few} No fluorescent tubes will be overhead and the old jukebox is too feeble to blast your ears. In summer, of course, a bar like The Brig would be more crowded than a New York subway in rush hour, and the story is told--I believe it--that one summer some PR men at Budweiser or Schaeffer or one of those warm-urine brews decided to run a contest for the bar-and-restaurant that sold the most beer in the state of Massachusetts. Well, ~~they found that~~ a place in Provincetown called The Bay State showed the greatest volume of beer sales for the month. So, on a weekday morning in August, some high executives ~~came down~~ ^{flew over, accompanied by} in their summer lightweight suits with a television crew to film the presentation of the award, expecting no doubt to drop in on one of those lobster cum fish-and-chip places, large as an armory, that you can find around Hyannis, and instead encountered our dark funky Brig which ^{with} had no customers rich enough to buy ^{anything better} more ^{but} than beer, and two hundred ^{beer-drinkers} such souls packed in standing up. Maybe The Brig was the length of

a boxcar from the front door to the stinking garbage cans in the rear, and for food, you could get a submarine with ham and cheese or linguica sausage. The TV cameras rolled and the freaks stood up and said, "Yeah, that's the beer. Stinks. What you got that red light on your TV camera for? I'm talking too much, right? Stop! Right?"

Well, in winter it was still crowded, but you could sit down and take a taste of the marrow of the mood of what was coming down in the town that day. A lot of commercial fishing boats would return by afternoon and the crews would be drinking. The carpenters and the dope dealers and the narcs and some of the handymen for summer cottages, and unwed young mothers on Fridays with their welfare checks, and others generally scuffling for bread or looking for a friend to buy them a glass were also downing our good urine. I knew most of these people in varying degree and would speak of them if they figured in what was happening to me now since they were all most individual no matter how they looked alike, but in winter, as I say, we looked alike. We were sallow, and everybody dressed in army surplus clothes.

Let one story suffice. I live in a Portuguese town, after all, and have none of them in my story but Stoodie who is a disgrace to the Portuguese. One afternoon in winter

when The Brig was unnaturally empty, a Portuguese fisherman about eighty years old was sitting at the bar. He was as bent over and twisted from seventy years of work as a cypress growing out of a boulder on a rocky coast. Into the bar walked another fisherman as arthritic as himself. They had grown up together, played football together, graduated from high school together, worked on fishing boats together, got drunk together, probably seduced each other's wives, and now at eighty didn't like each other any more than when they used to have fist fights in recess. The first, nonetheless, got off his stool, stood up, and bellowed across the bar in a voice as hoarse as the March wind at sea, "I thought you was dead." The other stopped, glared back, and out of a larynx that ~~was still~~ as shrill as a gull, replied, "Dead? I'll go to your funeral." They had a beer together. It was merely another exercise in dispelling the spirits. The Portuguese know to bark when they speak.

We imitate them. In other places, they measure the acid rain, or the index of ^{air} pollution, or the amount of dioxin in the soil. Here, where we have no industries but fishing, and room renting, and no farming, ~~so~~ the air and sand is clean, but it is a rare day when you cannot feel the weight of spirits in a bar, and when I walked in, I

could feel everybody's awareness of me. I might just as well have been a spill of ink in a pool. How many sleepless nights and wraiths of Hell-Town were in the larvae about me, not to speak of the flashes I was having of a blonde head in a dark plastic bag. I was as welcome, at first, as a sullen log on a slow smoldering fire.

All the same, each bar, like each hearth, had, as I observed through working a few, something like the same ~~hittles~~ quirks in their habits. The log that smokes up one fireplace gets another ablaze, and the mixture of my depression, my good store of adrenalin at being followed, plus the company of manic anxious haunts I doubtless carried in my hair soon put The Brig into a roaring mood. People who had been expiring at their own tables got up and moved to others. Dudes and their old ladies who had hardly been speaking, began to feel the rosy itch. And I, who in this hour, may have been closeted with horror more than anyone there-- winters in Provincetown can be named by whose year it is for that--took credit to myself for such kindling, although I did no more than nod to a face in my path, and take up an insular position by the bar.

Pete the Polack was the first to approach and we had a short conversation that came near to twisting my neck

on its bearings. "Hey," he began, "I been talking to your wife."

"Today?"

He took a while replying. My dry throat had a little difficulty managing to ask the question, and by then he was in the middle of slugging down his beer. Besides, his mind had already disconnected as well. That happened often in The Brig. People would start conversations, and their brains, particularly on beer and speed, would veer off like waterbugs.

"Today," said Pete, "no. Couple of days ago."

"When?"

He waved his hand. "Couple of days." He could as well have said, "A couple of weeks ago." I had noticed that winter people kept constant intervals for time. Something could have happened two weeks ago, or two nights ago, but if it was your habit to say, "five days ago," then that was how you would remember it. So I pushed him no further. Instead, I returned to the topic.

"What did Patty want to talk to you about?"

"Oh, yeah. Hey. She wants me to look after the big house on the hill in the West End."

"The one she's thinking of buying?"

"That's what she said."

"Wants you to look after it?"

"Well, me and my brother."

It made sense. The brother was a good carpenter.

In effect, Pete was saying that his brother would take care of the place, and Patty had asked Pete to contact him.

I knew it was stupid, but I had to ask. "Can you remember if you talked to her before or after the Patriots game?"

"Oh, yeah, that game." He nodded profoundly. The speed was taking him somewhere deep. He pondered--whatever it was--the game, the date, the money in his back pocket, then he shook his head. "About two days ago."

"Yeah," I said, "figures."

Beth Nissen slipped up to us. She was drunk, which was rare for her, and she was animated, which was even more unusual.

"What did you do to Spider?" she asked me.

"Hey, honey," Pete said, "^{old}hassles is ^{old}hassles. I got to move on." He bent over, kissed her sweater about where her nipple ought to have been, and took his beer down the road to a table.

"Is Spider truly hassled?" I asked, ~~now~~

"Who knows?" Her eyes turned starry. "Spider is crazy."

"Well, we all are," I said.

"Don't you believe that you and I are crazy in a special way?" she said.

"How?"

"We've never fucked each other."

That was par for winter. I made a point of laughing and put my arm around her waist and her pale eyes stared *out* at me from behind her eyeglasses with a far-gone electric glow.

"Spider lost his knife," said Beth, "and claims you stole it." She giggled as if Spider without his knife was like another man without his pants. "He lost his motorcycle too," she said. "Did you tell him the Patriots were going to win?"

"At half-time."

"Well, they ^{*did*} won," said Beth. "But at half-time, he *decided to* reversed his bet with ~~Dete~~. Said he was going against you. Now, he says it's your fault he lost his motorcycle."

"Tell Spider to stick it up his exhaust pipe."

She giggled as if I were the fount of all novel humor. "In the Midwest," she said, "we used to say 'giggie.' I'll send a letter to my parents and tell them

their daughter can no longer distinguish her ^{pussy} ~~sin-hole~~ from her giggie." She hiccuped. "I'm not going to tell Spider anything," she said. "He's in a terrible mood. After all, why not?" she asked. "The worst are supposed to-be filled with ^a passionate intensity,' right?" She gave me an outright lewd look. "Thank God," she said.

"How's Stoodie?" I asked.

"Oh," she said, "watch out for Stoodie."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh," she said, "I tell everybody to watch out for Stoodie."

I could not decide whether it was my vision of the burrow that connected every word I heard to my own situation, or whether there was indeed a fever in the air. No matter that no one but myself, and--I must pray--somebody else knew what had been buried in my marijuana patch, still the thought seemed to shriek out of every cry for beer from every random table, and I supposed the spirits were tugging at the sodden beer-drenched sponge of whatever collective mind was here.

Beth saw my look wander away from her. "Is Patty Lareine really split?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I hear she's been around."

"I think she is. Bolo is back in town."

"You saw him?" Bolo was Mr. Black, although indeed his name was Green. Joseph "Bolo" Green. He got ^{the name} Bolo ^{LOW} the first day he walked into a bar here. "There are bad niggers," he announced to a table of ten of us, "but I am baaaaad," and everybody was silent for a moment as if paying respects to the dead he had left behind--we are the Wild West of the East!--but Patty Lareine began to laugh and said, "Stop waving your bolo. Nobody is going to steal your black." By the look of pure happiness in his eye, I could see that the next Mr. Black had just been anointed.

"Yes," said Beth bringing me back to her--I, too, had a mind that could veer like a waterbug--"Bolo is certainly back in town. He was in and out of The Brig ten minutes ago."

"Did you talk to him?"

~~"Yes."~~ He propositioned me."

I would have been certain she was lying, if she had not looked so happy.

Now, the bartender was signalling as well. He pointed to the phone behind his service sink.

My extra-sensory attainments failed me on this occasion. I thought I might ^{was going to} hear Patty's voice, but it

was Harpo, instead.

"Mac," he said, "I've been trying to get you. ^{Something} Things've ^{is} been very heavy on my mind."

"Sure," I said.

~~"No, it's uncool," he said.~~ "I had to force myself to call you."

"Why?"

"Because I betrayed you." ^{Now,} his voice sounded un-
^{separately} naturally hoarse, even for him.

"How could you do that?"

"I lost my nerve and I betrayed you. I want to warn you."

Harpo's speech had a metallic anxiety. He sounded as if he were speaking out of a mechanical diaphragm, ~~or maybe~~
~~the phone was off.~~ I tried to decide what he might be on,
^{must have been} but there were many chemicals on his brain.

"All right, warn me," I said.

"It's Laurel."

^{The} "My tattoo?"

^{women} "The name. Laurel. I called up Police Chief Regency and told him," ^{about her and the tattoo.}

^{I decided,} ~~If Patty Larcine had ever referred to Madeleine as~~
~~Laurel, when with Regency, then Harpo did not bring good news.~~
^{That would have no significance for Regency,}
^{as Laurel when in his company.}

~~Heaps~~ ~~there~~
But how would he be aware of such connections?

"Great!"

"All right," I said, "Alvin now knows I have a tattoo, on my arm that says Laurel. Where's the treachery?"

"I was trying to turn you in." I told him that ^{Laurel was} the woman ^{for you} downstairs. ^{wait} waiting (in the car when I gave you the needles had to be Laurel."

"^{But why think the} how do you know her name is Laurel?" I almost added, ~~forgot~~

"It's Jessica."

I could hardly hear his reply. The noise in the bar was mounting.

"You called her ^{that} Laurel," he said.

"I did?"

"That's what you shouted. 'I'm going to win this bet, Laurel.'"

"I ^{must have} probably said Lonnie. I was yelling to a man."

"No, it was Laurel. I heard the name. ~~and~~ Laurel is dead."

"Who told you?"

^{That's why I called the Chief.} "It came to me. I was up on the roof, and I heard it. I knew I shouldn't have given you the tattoo. People ^{can} do terrible things after a tattoo. ^{It's enough to} ~~It gets them started.~~"

^{else} "What did you tell Regency?"

^{I think} "I said I thought you killed Laurel." He began to cry.

^{believe} "How could you do that?" I asked.

"Because I was convinced. " I saw Laurel dead. *When I stood*
last night I It was *on the horizon.*
She said you might have done it, ~~Very clear,~~ I stood up on the roof and saw her. ~~So I~~
decided you did it." I could hear him blowing his nose at
the other end of the phone. "I wrestled with my conscience.
and then I called Regency and told him. It was the wrong
thing to do. I should have spoken to you first."

"What did Regency say?"
a bureaucrat. And an asshole!
"He's an asshole. *(He said he wanted to take it under*
consideration. Mac, I don't trust him."

"Yeah," I said, *"it seems to be me that you trust."*
"After I called him, I realized you didn't do anything.
the sound of I could tell by my voice when I told him. *wasn't it* It didn't sound
right. ~~to me.~~

"I'm happy to hear that."

"But she's dead. ~~I know that.~~ *Laurel's dead. I saw her*

"Who do you think killed her, Harpo?"

His breathing got heavy. Over the wire, I could feel
his senses rattling. *may not* "I don't have the right to say *who killed*
her," he added, "but I think I know ~~now told me.~~ "It's a private matter."

"It's Nissen," I said.

"I hate Spider's knife," said Harpo. "A vicious in-
strument." With that, he hung up.

A hand was tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around

to stare into Bolo's golden-brown eyes blazing into mine with all the light of a lion. He was deep black in color, purple-black like an African, so his eyes were disconcertingly golden. I had known from the moment I first saw him that he ~~was going to be no good news for my marriage.~~ had to be the worst news possible for me and Patty Lareine.

I was right. There had been three earlier models, but Mr. Green proved to be the definitive Mr. Black. After all, ~~Patty Lareine~~ she had never left me before.

The worst was that ^{now} I could not feel ^{any} hatred for him, nor even ^{some} rage at my drear and cuckolded state. The proof was that he could come up to me while I was on the phone as if he had not gone off with my wife a month ago, even lay his hand on me, and I could turn and look at him and nod.

Of course, I might as well have been ^{lifted} transported from the summit of one peak to the next, I had none of the bother of going down ~~through~~ the scree to the canyon floor and up the other ridge, no, I had ^{gone directly} flown from a number of remarks by Harpo (each capable of blasting me off my mind) to the lights in Bolo's eyes, and by now I might as well have been stuffed with novocaine just so far did I feel removed from this over-abundance of stimulations--yes, it had all caught up, and I was one candidate who could call himself Mr. Marble

Eyes, totally zonked and zombied by the quick turns of
the race course in ~~my~~ ^{except that} life this evening, but at this moment,
Mr. Green put his hand on my shoulder again and ~~this time~~
dug his fingers in--viciously, I tell you--and said, "Where
the fuck is Patty Lareine?" all of his adrenalin passing
into ~~mine~~ ^{me}. With that, I woke up, and shook off his hand with
an equally violent move, and replied, "Get your rotten lunch
hooks off me," words that came right out of an old high
school fracas. But for the first time, I was not afraid
of him. I didn't care if we went out to the street and had
a fight. The thought of being knocked cold was an anodyne
gear as nepenthe.

Let me say there was little doubt in my mind what he
could do to me. If you have ever been a ~~bartender~~ in an
interesting ~~New York bar~~ ^{penthouse}, you come to know that there are
blacks and blacks, and a few you never mess with. Mr. Green
was not on that high shelf or I would have been dead. ~~That~~
~~category would have been left no choice.~~ But he could fit
on the second level: mess with him under few circumstances.
Now, his eyes glared into mine, and I looked back, and the
light in the room turned red between us--I mean it literally--
I do not know if his ^{on} rage meeting mine was so intense that
the nerves which reflect color to ^{the} ~~our~~ brain were strained

by the voltage passed through, or if all the firebrands of Hell-Town raced toward us, but I had to stand in the considerable wrath of all that had happened to him over his last twenty-five years (from the first cuff in ^{the} his cradle ~~a dirty blanket on the floor, no doubt~~) and he stood in the maniacal disproportion of all that had been happening to me.

I think it was dazzling to both of us to endure in such ^a hellish red light. Indeed, we stood there looking at ~~one~~ ^{each} ~~another~~ for so long that I had time to remember the sad tale

of his life ^{as} for he told it to Patty Lareine and me on the night we met: ^{it was} now he lost his boxing career. He ~~had even~~ ^{his tale as well} been a performing artist ~~as he told it and worked our strings~~

If it strains your belief that I could think of ^{such a} his story while the steam of his madness was scalding my eyes, well, I can hardly believe it myself. Maybe I was not as brave as I pretended and clung to his ^{tail like} story ~~is~~ a talisman in the hope it would ^{mollify} render his rage ~~inert~~. One cannot strike a man who is filled with compassion for you.

This was ^{the} his story: He was a ~~ghetto kid~~, illegitimate, ~~of course--it goes without saying--~~ and his mother claimed he wasn't hers, because ~~they~~ ^{beat} messed up the name tags in the hospital. She used to beat him every day. When he got older, he ~~knocked out~~ everybody he faced in the Golden Gloves.

He was in line to make the U.S. team for the Pan-American games. He went down to Georgia to look for his father. Never found him. Went into a white bar dead drunk. By ~~law~~, ^{they} they were supposed to serve him but wouldn't. He was too drunk. They called the State Troopers. Two came in, and asked him to leave. "I don't have to," he said, and waved his money. "I earned this and I can pay my way and ^{it's the law} you can't stop me from buying a drink."

"Yes, I can," said the State Trooper.

"You got no alternative," he informed them. "Serve me, or piss on you."

One of ~~them~~ ^{the troopers} hit him so hard with a billy club that he began to lose the Pan-American games right there. But he didn't know it yet. Just felt ^a great happiness. Because this Georgia cop had given him a total shot on the ~~side~~ ^{back} of the head, and he was bleeding as if he had been butchered, but he wasn't shook. In fact, he was wide awake and proceeded to injure ~~the cop~~ ^{both cops} until it took the entire bar to subdue him, and they brought him in restraints to the jail house. Among other things, his skull was fractured, and he could box no more.

That was the sad tale he told. He was rueful and related it as an example of ~~his~~ stupidity, not his valor

(although it had the opposite effect on Patty) and when we came to know him better, he proved to be a funny man. He used to do imitations of black whores in order to make us laugh. We saw a lot of Mr. Green, and I ^{would} ~~used to~~ lend him money.

Will it give you some idea of how close I felt to annihilation, and how comfortable was ^{this} ~~the~~ idea (after all the rat-scurrying ~~ing~~ of keeping myself alive) that I could now recognize that he ^{Bolo} ~~had~~ ^{not} ~~treated me~~ ^{so badly as} ~~no worse than~~ I had treated Wardley. The remains of my rage began to fade and a peace came in to replace it. I do not know of what ^{Mr. Green} ~~Bolo~~ was thinking, but even as my anger departed, so did his, ^{each of us had} ~~as if we had each~~ taken separate routes down the mountain ^{but} ~~and~~ arrived below at the same time. "Well," I said, making my offering to the silence, "what do you say, motherfucker?"

"I never had a mother to fuck," he replied, and ^{Sadly} ~~Sadly~~, he held out his hand for five. Sadly, I tapped it.

"I don't know where Patty Lareine is," I said.

"You aren't looking for her?" ~~he said.~~

"No."

"I'm looking for her, and I can't find her."

"When did she leave you?"

He frowned. ^{put it on} ~~We did it~~ ^{for} together, three weeks. Then

she got restless. Then she took off."

"Where were you together?"

"In Tampa."

"Did you see her ex-husband?"

"Wardley, is that the guy?"

I nodded.

"We saw him. He took us out to dinner one night.

(Went to see)
Then she saw him alone. That was cool. He was no threat.

I figured she was hitting him *or* for something *good.* But the next day she took off." He looked like he was about to cry.

"She treated me *decent.* good. She was the only bitch ever treated me that *decent.* good." He looked very sad. "I just ran out of

things to talk to her about." *Used them up. His eyes*

"No more whore jokes?"

"Used them up." *all* His eyes studied mine. "You know where she is? I got to find her."

"She may be around here."

"She is. She came up with Wardley."

"How do you know?"

"A guy called me. *The guy* *Patty Larcine* *call me.* He said she asked him to. She wanted me to know. She was *in P-town* up here with Wardley. She missed me, the fellow said."

"Who was the fellow?"

"He didn't give his name. He gave it, but there's nobody here by that name. I knew it was no good when he gave it. He was talking with a handkerchief ^{over} on the phone."

"What was the name?"

"Healey. Austin Healey."

A mote of town lore came back. A couple of years ago, a few of us, tired of the sound of Stoodie, began among ourselves to call him Austin Healey. That went on for a little while. But Stoodie did not know the name. Besides, he would not have the wit to throw out such a name. It had to be Spider. Bolo knew Spider, so Spider would use a handkerchief.

"This Healey said ^{Patty L.} she was at the Provincetown Inn," Bolo said. "Shit, she wasn't nowhere near a place like that."

"When did you get back?"

"Three days ago."

"When did she leave you?"

"One week ago, about."

"Seven days for sure?"

"Eight. I ~~ve~~ counted them."

Yes, he was counting his days. I was counting mine.

"I could kill her," he said, "for leaving me."

"There's no man she won't leave," I said. "She comes from a narrow background. It's all sin to her."

"I'm just as narrow as she is," he said, "and I'm going to take a big hit on something when I see her." He looked at me from an angle as if to say, "You can hustle others ~~if you want~~, but, baby, ^{get it} ~~be~~ trustworthy with me."

Then he put his doubts away. He would tell me. "Austin Healey said Patty Lareine was seeing you ^{again,} ~~here~~. When I heard that, I figured I would have to treat you to a ^{welcome,} ~~treat-~~ment." He paused to let me ^{feel the weight} ~~imibe the value~~ of the thought.

"But I knew I couldn't do that to you."

"Why couldn't you ^{?"} ~~do that to me?~~"

"Because you treated me like a gentleman."

He measured the truth of this and seemed to agree with himself. "Moreover," he said, "Patty Lareine didn't like you any more."

"Probably not."

"She said you trapped her into marriage."

I began to laugh.

"What are you laughing about, honkie?"

"My. Green, there's an old Jewish saying: 'a life, a wife!'"

He, too, began to laugh.

We went on long enough to draw attention to ourselves. History was being made in The Brig tonight, ~~at~~ the cuckold and the black lover were having a big time together.

"Joseph, I'll see you around," I said to Bolo Green.

"Keep the peace."

I had to take a long walk. More had come into my head than I could put in order.

But on the street, a voice came into my ear. It was Bolo's voice telling one of his whore stories. Indeed, the words were engraved in my mind. He had been so good a mimic that you could see the whore as he spoke. There she was, big, black, lantern-jawed, henna-haired, scarlet and carmine in makeup. "The lady at the desk, she says to me," said Bolo in his best whore's voice, aquiver with its double imitation, "the lady say, 'why do none of you girls take protections against getting pregnant?' and she don't have to wait for no answer, she say, 'It's because you girls are emotionally dependent. You wish to be victimized further.' She a welfare lady, got glasses, she ugly as a turkey's asshole. I say to her, 'Cunt, you foolish. No ho will take protection, We don't need it. Ten men shoot up my pussy in a night. What you think is going on down there

with the seed? Man is macho, you turkey. They chew each other up in my pussy. Shit, not one of them would have anything but trouble if he try to knock me up all by himself. I got a mean egg. But if they start to compete with each other! Man, they dead. Their seed gets massacred up. You think I want to be victimized. Sew your mouth. It flaps like an old cunt.' That's what I tell her, only not out loud. Aloud I say, 'Yeah. I guess so. Dependents.'"

I remembered Patty Lareine's laughter when Mr. Green finished. She began to love him in that moment. He was not only beautiful and a stud, but he could entertain. So I lived with the story twice: once for its merits, and again because it brought back the instant when I lost her.

It was drizzling, and I was walking down Commercial Street with my hands in my pockets and my head ^{so} withdrawn into my parka hood that I did not become aware ^{was} of the car following me until I ~~could no longer ignore~~ the pool of headlights ^{on my} ~~on my flank.~~ ^{flank could no longer be ignored} I turned. The car was a police cruiser and there was one man in it. He opened the door, ^{he said} ~~for me to get~~ in, Regency, at my service.

We had not driven fifty feet ^{be sure} when he began to talk.

"Got a make on your woman, Jessica," he said.

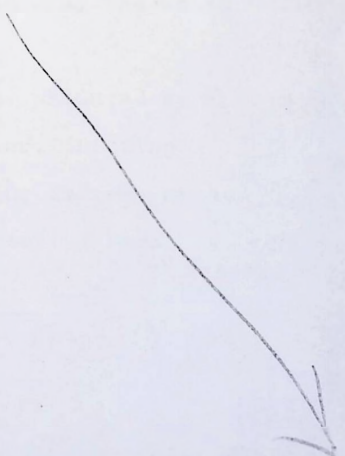
He pointed to a piece of paper on the front seat ~~be-~~
^{told me} ~~tween us.~~ "Take a look," he ^{over} ~~said~~ and handed me a pencil flashlight that he drew from his breast pocket.

I studied a photostat of a photograph sent by wire. It was Jessica clearly enough. "I'd say that's her."

"Well, we don't need you to ^{inform} ~~tell~~ us, pal. There's no doubt. The waitress and the proprietor at The Widow's Walk have both confirmed."

"Good work," I said. "How did you track her down?"

"No big deal. We contacted Pangborn's office in Santa Barbara and there were a couple of blondes he associated with socially and/or business-wise. We were



looking into that when her son called. He knew she was in Provincetown with Pangborn--as you might guess from Don Lon's little billet doux."

"You're speaking of the son who was Lonnie's lover?"

"Correct," said Regency. "The kid with the cordless razor." He opened his window and hawked a throaty yield.

"I think I'll never watch a commercial again."

"You may ^{not} recover."

"Now, here, Madden, is where the soup starts to stick to the spoon. It seems her name ^{isn't} ~~is not~~ Jessica."

"What is the real name?"

"Laurel Oakwode." It's a fancy spelling. W-O-D-E for 'wood.'"

that ended with Dissent's scream; "Harpo, tell
Now a clear recollection came back to me of saying ^{the seance} ~~Harpo at that aborted seance~~ "Tell everybody we're trying to reach ^{Hardwood} ~~a woman named~~ Mary Oakwood who's my mother's cousin.

But, Harpo, ~~that's not true.~~ Between you and me, the woman ^{I really} ~~we~~ want to talk to is Laurel."

This was ^{not} ~~one~~ coincidence which could be produced by a no beeper. Despite myself, I began to shiver. Sitting ^{beside Regency} right next to him in the police car, cruising fifteen miles an hour down the ~~West End of~~ Commercial Street, I began to shiver visibly.

"~~hey~~, you need a drink," said Alvin ^{Luther} Philip.

"It's all right," I said.

"Maybe you'd be in better shape," he suggested,
"if the tattoo wasn't on your arm." ^{didn't say 'Laurel'.}

"Do you want to stop the car?"

"No objection at all."

^{It was} We had come to the end of Commercial Street. ^{we had come} It was
^{where} to the place ~~at which~~ the Pilgrims once landed. ^{but in the drizzle} He ~~parked~~.

~~where the breakwater extended for a mile across the marshes~~
~~to the last spit of the Cape on the other end. On moonlit~~
~~nights, that could be a romantic view, but in this drizzle,~~
I could see nothing.

"Okay," he said, "~~you can~~ get out."

My panic had subsided. The thought of walking nearly ^{two and a}
^{half} three miles home with no more than ^{this} our amputated ^{encounter} conversation
for company encouraged me to take a chance.

"I don't know what point you're trying to make," I
said, "but it's no big deal to me. I got shit-face and drove
out to see Harpo, and had him put on a tattoo. Maybe Jessica
told me that her name is Laurel, but I don't remember."

"Was she with you?"

I had to make a decision. "Harpo says she was."

"You're saying you can't remember?"

"Not clearly."

"So you could have knocked her off, and forgotten it?"

"Are you accusing me?"

"Let us say I am working on the outline of the first scenario. In my way, I'm a writer too." He could not restrain himself. The wild stallion gave his great neigh and whinny.

"I don't like the way you're talking."

"Hey, pal," said Regency, "kidding is kidding, but get your ass off my pillow. I could take you in right now."

"On what? There's no crime. The lady might be on her way back to Santa Barbara. You're not about to hurt your record with a false arrest."

"Let me rephrase myself," he said. "I could take you in right now as a suspect in the possible murder of Leonard Pangborn."

"You said it ^{was} ~~was~~ a suicide."

"~~So I thought.~~"

"~~I thought it was.~~ But the forensics have taken a look. They came in on a special from Boston at ^{our} ~~my~~ request. The super-coroners, they like to be called, but my private tag for them is: the super-coronaries." Once again, he laughed at his own joke. "They mess up your heartbeat considerably with what they find."

"What did they ^{all} say?"

"I'll tell you. It's going to be no secret very soon. He may have killed himself, but if he did, who drove the car?"

"You told me that he got into the trunk and closed the lid on himself before he fired the shot."

"Yes, ^{but} the bloodstains on the floor of the trunk have a shirred movement as if they had ^{just} ~~just~~ ^{begun} started to coagulate ^{but then} when the car was driven from wherever the event ^{occurred} took place back to The Widow's Walk."

"Wouldn't the staff at the restaurant have heard such ^{the} return?"
movements?"

"Not if it was three in the morning ^{They weren't around} and they were sound asleep. ^{they were off} So far as they know, no movement in the car. Still, ^{look, the car had to be} it must have been moved. The patterns of the blood show that it was." He shrugged, as if professionally uneasy at the pleasure he took in expatiating on this. "What it comes down to, Madden, ^{is that somebody} are two possibilities. One: Some-
^{this vehicle} body drove the car back to The Widow's Walk after ^{Lonnie} he committed suicide."

"Could Jessica have done that?"

"Yes, Laurel Oakwode certainly could. Let me ask: Did you bang her?"

"I believe I did."

He whistled. "God, is your head a mess. You can't even remember something like that."

"What bothers me is that I think I did it in front of Lonnie Pangborn."

"I hate to quote a nigger, but Cassius Clay said it: You ain't as dumb as you look."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't let my praise ^{nigger} melt in your mouth." He lit a cigar and puffed on it like ^{it was} ~~he was one big fellow and could~~ smoke a Bangalore Torpedo ~~if you asked him.~~ "Madden, you have just given me your scenario. One: you bang Jessica in front of Lonnie. Two: you wipe your cock and walk off. Three: Jessica comforts Lonnie. Four: He starts to ^{complain} ~~cry~~. 'Us faggots are not built for such competition.' He hides in the trunk. ^{Bang! He's left her a gift--his body.} ~~Doom! She's got the body.~~ These gay people can be spiteful. Well, she's a respectable cunt and doesn't want the publicity. So she drives back to The Widow's Walk, leaves the car, and starts home to Santa Barbara." He nodded his head. "It holds up beautifully if, one: You can find where she slept that night, although I'll tell you in advance to save part of your lawyers' fees ^{that} ~~because~~ you can always claim she walked back to your house and slept in tears on your

sofa. Unless you gave her your bed," He opened his window and threw the cigar away. "Two: She must, when she shows up, ^{be alive, and} somewhere, corroborate your story. ~~Three:~~ ^{come back to us} You have to pray she doesn't show up ^{(as a corpse in these dunes and woods."}

"You've done ^{some} more thinking on this, ^{or} ~~than I have.~~"

I had hoped to stroke him, ^{but} ~~he~~ merely nodded. "The inability to approach a personal problem logically is no sign of innocence," he said. "Here, ^{and} let me give you another scenario. You, she, ^(Pangborn) and him go out to Wellfleet in your car. On the way back, Lonnie can't stand losing her, so he waves his pistol at you. You stop the car, ^{and} go berserk, wrestle his shooter away, ~~from him~~. In the fracas, she gets shot. Mortally. ^{You leave her in the woods, and} You drive him to his car, make him get into the trunk--he's as limp as a worm by now, ^{drive away} and then you tuck him ^{is a} ~~up~~ ^{quiet place, open the trunk} lay the barrel in his throat, say sweetly, 'I'll never hurt you, Lonnie, this is ^{only} fun and games. This is how I get my little kinks out. Kiss the barrel for me, Lonnie.' Then you pull the trigger, do a little wiping, and leave his finger on it. Next, you drive the car back to The Widow's Walk, ^{got} stroll back to your car, ^{go out to the woods again and} I assume it's near, dispose of her body. Son, you do it all except you forget to wipe your front seat. As my wife says, 'Nobody's perfect.' Neither

am I. I let you get away with blood on the front seat.

I'm a hick and trust my friends. Yes," he said, "you better hope and pray her body doesn't show up, ~~or it's Battle Stations on the second scenario.~~ And I'll be the first one after you, because I bought the nose bleed."

"Well," I said, "why don't you take me in now?"

"~~You can~~ Figure it out."

"You have no case." *If she was shot in my car, her blood would be all over his clothing.*

"Maybe you're right. Let's have a drink."

Nothing could have been more unsatisfactory. The last thing I wanted was to drink with him. But he started up the car, began to whistle Stardust, and took off in a spray of road-sand and rubber.

I thought we'd go to a bar kept by the Veterans of Foreign Wars for it was his favorite place to have a few, but instead he turned in at Town Hall and walked me down to the basement corridor to his office where he pointed to a chair and took out a bottle of bourbon. I assumed we had gone to his office because he had ~~an on-off switch to a~~ *recording equipment* ~~tape recorder concealed~~ in his desk, and wished to use it.

"I thought I'd show you the amenities of this place," *Regan* he said, "before you have to use the jail."

"Can we talk about something else?"

He grinned. "Name your topic."

"Where's my wife?"

"I was hoping ^{tell} you could ~~help~~ ["] me ~~on that~~."

"I talked to the fellow she ran off with. ~~He said~~
She left him eight days ago. I believe his story."

Regency said, "That checks."

"^{with what?}
~~What does?~~"

"According to Laurel Oakwode's son--his name, by the way, is also Leonard, but they call him Sonny, Sonny Oakwode--
Patty Lareine was in Santa Barbara seven nights ago."

"I didn't know that."

"Yes, she was there with this fellow Wardley."

I had never known exactly what was meant by the remark:

I could not part my lips. Now I knew.

"Good bourbon?"

I gave one mute nod.

"Yes, she was in Santa Barbara with Wardley and they
had dinner with Laurel Oakwode and Leonard Pangborn at his ^{Lonnie's}
beach club. All four of them at one table. Sonny joined
them later for coffee."

I still couldn't speak.

"Want to know what they talked about?"

"Yis."

"I need some input from you a little later."

I nodded.

"Good. According to what I get from Sonny. . ."

Here, he stopped to remark, "By the way, on the phone Sonny doesn't sound like a cocksucker. Do you think Pangborn was lying in that letter?"

I drew a question mark with my finger.
"Who knows?"

"But Pangborn didn't seem gay to you?"

I shook my head.

"I can't believe how much of life," he said, "is in the closet. God, you or ~~he~~ ^I could be queer."

"Whatever you say, dear," I lisped.

He took that as a big laugh and ~~chortled up and down a few steeplechase jumps.~~ I was glad to get my voice out under any auspices. Being speechless is a shock one does much to get out of.

We each took a sip of bourbon.

"Want some pot?" asked Regency.

"No."

"Mind if I smoke?"

"Aren't you afraid of being caught in your office?"

"By whom? I'm trying to put a suspect at his ease, that's all." Now, he did take out a stick of pot, and he

did light it.

"Beautiful," I said.

"Yeah." He exhaled. "There's a joke in every toke."

"Yessir."

"Madden, what I heard from Sonny is that Pangborn and Laurel were to fly to Boston, drive to P-town and pretend to be tourists in love with the Paramessides estate."

"Is that the name of it?"

"Yeah. Some Greek fronting for Arabs bought it a few years ago. Now Wardley wanted to buy it for Patty. *That's what they talked about at dinner.*"

He took another toke.

"They were talking of getting married again," *he said.*

"Immense." I think I was contact-high from the smoke.

"Do you know why she wanted the place?" asked Regency.

"Why did she want it?" asked Regency.

"I never knew she did."

"According to Sonny, she'd had her eye on the estate for *a* years. She *wanted* Wardley to buy it for her the way Richard Burton used to buy Elizabeth Taylor a diamond."

"Isn't this news"

"This news is not upsetting to you?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

(re-married, you say?)
"That Patty Lareine and Wardley plan to get married."

"Why would it be upsetting?"

your "Haven't you and Patty Lareine been putting
your ~~ingers~~ ^{singers} in the jam together?"
~~jam?~~

If we had been boxers, I would have said to myself,
"This is the first punch he has to acknowledge." He blinked,
and an aura of spacey rage came off him. That's the only
way I can describe it--as if the cosmos had been poked and
now was cranking up ~~for~~ an electric storm.

"Hey, hey," he said, "I'll ^{no} tell you what, buster. You
don't ^{no} ask me any questions about your wife, and I won't ask
you ~~any~~ about mine."

The stick of marijuana was burning close to his knuckles.
"I think I will have ^{a toke,} ~~some of that,~~" I said.

"Nothing to hide ~~from me,~~ eh?"

"No more ~~to hide~~ than you."

He handed me the roach with ~~its~~ ember and I took a
pull *from the ember.*

"Okay," he said, "tell me what you and Wardley talked
about this afternoon."

"How ^{do} ~~did~~ you know we met?"

"Can you begin to conceive how many informants I have
in this town? This phone," he bragged, tapping it, "is a
marketplace."

"What do you sell?" I asked, "marijuana?"

"I sell the deletion of names from rap sheets
for one thing," he said. "I sell the quashing of petty
indictments. Madden, go fuck yourself, and when you come
all over your jockey shorts, get right down here with the
real folks and tell your friend Alvin what Wardley said
to you on the beach today."

^{"Suppose}
"And ~~is~~ I don't?"

~~"Let's not get into that. What you and me will go~~
^{"It will}
~~through could~~ be worse than a society divorce in Tampa."

"You figure you can beat me in a pissing contest?"

^{"I}
"Yes. ~~He~~ work harder."

I found that I wanted to tell him. Not because I was
afraid (you are too far gone, the marijuana was telling me,
to fear any man) but because I was curious. I wanted to
know what he would make of it. "Wardley," I said, "told
me ~~clearly~~ that he and Patty Lareine were in a ~~boxer's~~
^{to buy}
competition with one another over the house."

Regency whistled. ~~"It's clear,"~~ he said, "Wardley
is planning to doublecross Patty Lareine or you." He
weighed options at a great rate in his mind like a com-
puter going zippity-click-dick-pick, and said, "Maybe
he wants both of you."

"He has cause."

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"When we were all back in Tamoa years ago, Patty Lareine wanted me to off him."

"You don't say."

"What are you coy about?" I asked. "Didn't she ^{ever} tell you?"

He had his weak spot. No question. He wasn't certain how to deal with this. "It's not clear what you're referring to," he said at last.

"Pass," I said.

That was a mistake. He picked up momentum immediately. "What else did you and Wardley talk about?"

I didn't know whether to tell him or not. It had occurred to me that Wardley might have tape recorded our conversation on the beach. Cleverly edited, it could leave me looking as up-for-sale as Nissen. "Wardley was concerned," I said, "that Pangborn was dead, and he was curious why Jessica had disappeared. He kept saying that now he would have to bid on the house directly and that was going to drive up the price."

"Did he indicate where Patty Lareine might be?"

"He wanted me to try to find her."

"What did he offer?"

"Money."

"How much?"

Why protect Wardley? I was wondering. Was it my vestigial family prejudice against talking to cops? Then I thought of the beeper. "Two million," I said.

"Did you believe him?"

"No."

"Was it an offer to kill her?"

"Yes."

"Will you testify to that?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm not sure he was serious. In any event, I didn't agree. As I found out in Tampa, when it comes to contracting for a hit, I'm a wet firecracker."

"Where can I find Wardley?"

I smiled. "Why don't you ask a couple of your informants?"

"Which ones?"

"The ones in the brown van."

He nodded as if I had made a good move in a chess game. "I'll tell you what," he said, "they don't know. He just meets them here and there."

"What is he driving?"

"He ^{talks} talked to them by CB radio. Then he ^{meets} met them. He

just walks up to them. Then he walks away."

"You believe that?"

"Well, I haven't shaken them so hard ^{that} their teeth rattle."

"Why not?"

"You get a bad reputation bruising your informants."

Besides, I believe them."

"Maybe you're not ^{concerned} ~~hungry~~ enough to find out where
Patty is."

He made an elaborate to-do about showing his cool. He took the roach and pinched it out with his thumb, rolled it into a small ball of paper and popped it into his throat. No evidence, said his smile. "I'm not hungry," he said. "Your wife will show up intact."

"Are you positive? I'm not."

"We have to wait," he said mildly.

I wondered how much he was lying about, and how deep ^{Nothing came off him but a hint of the gold,} were the lies. I took another sip of the bourbon. It did not go with the marijuana.

He seemed to like the combination, however. He took out another stick and lit it. "Murders are damnable," he said. "Once in a while you get a case that leaves its roots in you."

I had no idea what he was up to. I took the marijuana

he offered and pulled in some smoke, handed it back.

"There was one case," he said, "of a good-looking bachelor who could charm ^{would pick up a girl and get her on} some working girl (to go to a one-night stand with him. He would make love to her, and then

he would convince her to ^{spread her legs while he took Polaroids} take Polaroids with her legs apart.

^{Then} ~~Next~~, he would kill her. ~~Pop!~~ ^{Next, he'd take} with a silencer. Take.

^{After which} another photograph. Before and after. Then he would decamp,

leaving the girl in the bed ~~and the car outside their motel~~

~~room. The vehicle was always rented under a phony name.~~

~~I figure he used to rent two cars and stash the second one~~

~~near the motel so that he could drive away from the first car.~~

You know how he got caught? He used to put ~~all~~ his photographs into an album. Neatly! A page for each lady. His

^{so she} mother who was a jealous watchdog ^{broke} the lock on the album. When she saw the contents, she fainted, but ^{when} when

she came to, she called the authorities."

"Why do you tell me this story?"

"Because it turns me on. I'm a law enforcement officer and it turns me on. Every good psychiatrist has a touch of the psycho within, and you can't be a good cop without sitting on a kettle of potential monstrosities in yourself.

Does my story turn you on?"

^{"I don't know. You didn't tell it well enough."}
~~"I can't tell. You told it poorly."~~

"Ho, ho, wouldn't a good DA love to get you on the witness stand."

"I want to go now," I said.

"Can I drive you?"

"Thank you. I'll walk."

"I didn't mean to upset you."

"You didn't."

"I have to tell you. ^{That guy with the Polaroids} ~~The guy~~ interested me. There's something in the nitty-gritty of photography that he ^{is} ~~was~~ close to."

"I'm sure," I said.

"Sayonara," said Regency.

On the street, I began to shiver all over again. Most of it was simple relief. For the last hour I might as well have been touching every word I uttered. They had all had to be put into position. It was natural to feel relief at getting out of his office. But I hated his intelligence. The story he told had turned me on. One tickle down at the core.

What had he been trying to communicate? I recollected nude Polaroids I had taken of Madeleine years ago and ^{Patty} Lareine not so long ago. They were hidden in my study like fish nibbling on the reef, and I felt a ^{sure} ~~mean~~ sense of possession

at the very thought of their existence. It was as if I still held the key to some dungeons. I began to ^{ask myself} ponder again--was it for the first time in two days?--^{was I} whether I ~~was~~ the bloody dispatcher?

I cannot describe how much revulsion came to me then. I was physically ill. The marijuana magnified the spasms of my throat until they were near to orgasmic in the power of their pulse. Up from my esophagus came bile and bourbon and whatever little food had been in me, and I bent over a fence and left this misery on a neighbor's lawn. One could hope the rain would absolve me.

Yes, I had been like a man half-crushed beneath a rock who by the most extraordinary ^{exertion} exercise against the pain ^{has just} had managed to extricate his body, ^{Now,} only to feel the weight ^{topples} turn over on him again.

~~Now,~~ I knew why I had thrown up. I had to go back to the burrow. "Oh, no," I whispered to myself, "it's empty!" But ^{now,} I did not know. Some instinct in myself, powerful as ~~the voices of~~ Hell-Town, told me to go back. If the killer, as we would have it, always returns to the scene of the crime, then some switch ^{may} ~~must~~ have been thrown at the source, ~~of my motives,~~ for I was convinced that the only way I could demonstrate to myself for another night (and my sleep,

dear as air itself, depended on it) that I was not guilty
of slaughter, ^{to go} was by going back. If I did not return, I
was guilty. Such was the logic, and it grew so powerful
that by the time I ^{reached my} returned home it was to get the keys to
my Porsche, no more, while I began to prepare, as I had
before, all the mental concomitants of this trip: the
highway, the country road, the hump-backed sand road--and
I saw in advance the puddles that would be ^{forming} formed in its
hollows ^{with} by this rain, ^{then} the trail, the moss-covered stone by
the burrow. I even saw, by way of my imagination, a ~~green~~
plastic bag in the hole revealed by my flashlight. It was
as far as I went in my thoughts before I repeated them.
And ^{then} prepared as well as I could make myself, was about to
depart, when I felt the dog licking my fingers. It was ^{his} the
first sign of affection ~~from him~~ ^{four} in five days. So I took
him along. Practical reasons came to me with the flat thrust
of his big tongue on my palm: He could certainly be of use.
For if there was nothing in the burrow, who was to say that
nothing was buried nearby? His nose could bring ^{us} it to us.

Yet I confess that the aesthetic keen (and there was ^{it}
~~one~~) of contemplating my journey was grossly interrupted by
^{damp reek} the practical virtues of the dog and his damp reek. I had
^{so as sailed my tender stomach}
^{however}
that I had a second impulse not to take him, but he was already in

the car, ~~and~~ as solemn as a soldier going to the front, one big black Labrador. (His name, by the way, was Stunts, bestowed on him because he was too dumb to learn any.)

We set out. ~~He~~^I sat beside me in the passenger bucket seat, his nose pointed to the window, and with equal solemnity, we drove. It was only when I was more than halfway along ~~the four-lane~~ to the turnoff in Truro that I remembered the beeper, and ~~the~~^{still} thought that I was being followed stirred a rage in me. I pulled the car over to the ~~shoulder~~^{highway}, parked, removed the little box, and laid it in a shallow trench at the foot of the mileage marker. Then we went on.

I see no need to describe the rest of the drive. It ~~became as hesitant~~ took as long as the ones before, and the closer I came over the last sandy road, the more ~~reluctant~~^{less of my foot I gave to} became my foot on the pedal, until I began to stall out, first once, then twice. The last was in a puddle and I had a fear, intimate as the passing of a ghost, that I could ~~never~~^{not} start the car again. During colonial times, there had been a gallows at a clearing in these woods, and through ~~a~~^{the} drizzle, every overhanging branch might ~~as well~~^{looked to} have had a man dangling from it. I do not know who was more deranged by the effort, the dog or myself. He whimpered steadily in a dying plaint as if his paw were caught in a trap.

I blundered down the trail holding a flashlight, and the mist was so heavy, my face felt washed in froth. The dog kept his shoulder against my thigh ~~in what might~~ as well have been an embrace until the last few yards before we reached the twisted dwarf pine, whereupon he began to run ahead of my flashlight, his voice now raised in a mixture of elation and fright, as if like a ^{us} human he could call upon two deep and divided halves of himself. Indeed he never sounded more human than ^{with} ~~as~~ his throat ^{coming} ~~came~~ forth in these moans of pleasure and wheezes of panic. I had to hold him back or he would have scraped the moss from the stone at the burrow.

Yet when I drew the rock away, he gave a little moan. It was equal to the sound I ^{might} ~~could~~ have made, for I did not wish to look, and then I ~~did~~ ^{with} ~~I~~ could bear it no longer. The flashlight revealed a black and slimy plastic bag over which bugs crawled, and in a lathering of my own sweat and with fingers that shook as if they were being ^{touching} ~~whipped~~ by spirits, I invaded the domain of the burrow--~~for~~ so it felt!--reached in, pulled out the bag. It was heavier than expected. I will spare you how long it took me to untie the knot, but I did not dare to rip my way inside as if ^{the} rivulets ~~from Hell-Town itself~~ might well forth from such a tear.

At last the knot came apart. I lifted the flashlight and looked at the face of my wife. A pistol might as well have fired through the fabric of a thousand nights of sleep. *My wife bore a look of consternation on her face, and wore* ~~The face of my wife bore~~ a red jungle at the base of her neck. I took one look, could ^{not} take ^{another} no more, closed the bag. I knew in that instant I had a soul. I felt it turn in my heart ~~and chest~~ even as my fingers retied the knot at the top of the bag.

I stood up to leave then, swaying on one foot, then the other. I did not know if I could move, *Nor could I decide* ~~nor whether I~~ *whether to* ~~should take her with me or let her rest in this foul place,~~ *was I obliged to* ~~but as that~~ *this* swoon of my will continued, the dog ceased whimpering, stirred about, and began to push his head and shoulders into the burrow, pushed much further, and, on an instant, all of his movements reversed and he came out backward, dragging the end of a green plastic bag in his mouth. ~~It was the one I had touched before.~~ It had a rip in it. Now I saw the face of Jessica Pond. I could not call her Laurel Oakwode.

Will it sound strange to you that I picked up both heads and carried them back to the car? One bag was in each hand, and I laid them in the trunk with care not to confound whatever veils of death still adhered--how poor a

shroud is a plastic bag! The dog walked with me like a mourner and the trees on either side of the trail offered silence. The sound of the Porsche motor starting up was as loud as an explosion in that pall.

We drove out. Since I did not know what I was doing, nor why, will it make any more sense to you that I stopped to get the beeper, and when I did, Stoodie and Nissen came up to attack.

Later, when I could puzzle it through, I realized that they had been following ~~me~~ until I detached their instrument. Then they had waited, then had driven up and found no car, no house, but only the sound of ~~a~~ the beeper tantalizing them from a location they could not quite determine. So they parked off the road and waited for my return.

I only saw them coming after I stood up in the trench by the milestone marker with the beeper in my hand, but by then they were moving ^{toward} ~~down on~~ ^{me} ~~in~~ a run. I remember thinking that they were ^{wanted} ~~there~~ to recover what I had stolen from the burrow--that is ^{the} ~~an~~ indication of the ^{where my mind had gone,} ~~bewilderment of my head.~~ There is this to be said for madness: ^{Your blood!} ~~You can pass from~~ one transcendental moment to another ^{the next without fear} ~~with blood that is~~ void of fear. I think now that I consider it, they ^{were there} ~~came~~ ~~down on me~~ in all the rage and frustration of waiting for

their beeper through all the damp and rain of thirty fucked-up minutes and were ready to waste me for no more than ~~such a~~ ^{my} mis-use of their technique.

They came down on the dog and me by the side of the road and Nissen had a knife in his hand and Stoodie a tire iron. The animal and I had never been bound in that compact of dog and man that vows you will die together, but he was with me then.

I could not name the strength that came to us. I had the heads of two blonde ladies to guard in the trunk of my car. Those heads, if I were found with them, had to be worth two hundred years of incarceration, and that gave strength to fight. The curse of the two women may have given more. For in the exaltation of such lunacy as I knew then, I was transporting my ladies from a foul grave to a finer one.

Whatever, ^{my} ~~my~~ rage was near to maniacal. ~~It had~~ ^{It had} ~~and I did~~ ^{itself} not understand had been packed like gunpowder over these last five days into my head and limbs. The sight of ^{Spider and Stoodie} them coming to menace us was ^(as good as cocking a trigger) ~~sharp as a fuse~~. (I remember the dog stood at attention beside me, his fur stiff like steel nails and then it all happened and was over for him. I do not know if it took ten or twenty seconds, but

the dog sprung at Nissen and caught Spider's face ^{and throat} in his jaws. He also caught the point of Spider's knife in his heart, and died on top of Spider who shrieked and ran away, holding his face. Stoodie and I took longer.

He circled, looking to swing his iron, and I kept the ^{away} ~~distance of the circle~~ ready to hurl my beeper--it was my beeper now--at his head, but ^{that} ~~it~~ was no better than a small rock in its weight.

Rage or no, I wasn't in shape to fight. My heart was burning already, and I could never match the tire iron. I had to catch him one perfect right shot to the jaw--my left would never be good enough--and for that I had to wait until he swung the iron. There is no other course when fighting a tire iron but to get the other man to commit himself. You can only strike after the weapon goes by. Stoodie knew this. He lashed the iron back and forth and committed himself to no full swings. He would wait. Let the other man come undone from the tension. Stoodie waited, and we circled, and I could hear my breathing louder than his. Then I hurled the beeper and it struck him on the head. I threw my right after it, but only caught his nose, not his chin, and he brought the iron down on my left arm. He was off-balance, so it was not with whole force, but my arm

was dead and I was in such pain I barely ducked his swing. Now he lashed the air again as the blood from his nose went into his mouth, and bones in his face, it came to him, were broken.

He swung again. I ducked, grabbed two handfuls of roadside pebbles and threw them in his face, Blinded, he took one huge swing down on me, and I skipped to the side and threw my right as hard as I ever hit anything, a thunderbolt went down my arm, and he and his iron fell beside one another. Then I made the mistake of kicking him in the head, ~~which~~ ^{That} broke my big toe. Be it said for the new pain that it kept me from beating on his skull with the tire iron. Picking that up, I hobbled instead down the road to the van. Spider was leaning against it, his head in his hands, moaning, and I knew the joys of going berserk. With the tire iron I smashed in his windows, his headlights, his tail-lights, and then, ~~still~~ not content, tried to pry one of the doors off the hinges, but failing that, sprung the hinge at least.

Spider watched, and said to me at last, "Hey, man, have a heart. I need medical attention."

"What do you mean I stole your knife," I answered him.

"Somebody did. I got a new one that's no fucking good."

"It's in my dog."

"I'm sorry, man. I got nothing against your dog."

It was as fractured as that. I left him by the van, walked carefully around Stoodie who was stirring, so that I would not turn the iron on him, knelt by Stunts who had died ^{near} ~~by~~ the Porsche, his favorite chariot, and managed with my good arm to get him into the front seat.

Then I drove home.

Shall I tell you the virtues of such a war? I held myself together long enough to take both plastic bags down to ~~my~~ ^{the} basement where I laid them in a carton. (I have not yet spoken of this but their odor in another twenty-four hours would be a disaster.) Then I dug a grave in my yard for the dog and buried him, doing it all with one good arm and one good foot--the ground in this mist was soft--and then I took a shower and went to bed. If not for the war by the side of the road, I could never have slept and would have been in a mental home by morning. As it was, I slumbered as well as any of those who were dead and awoke in the morning to find my father in the house.

7.

I cannot say that either of us ^{was cheered ~~by~~ much} ~~was cheered by~~
 how the other looked. My father was making instant
 coffee, ^{at his first sight of me,} but he put down the jar, ~~at his first sight of~~
 me and whistled, ^{softly.}

I nodded. I had awakened ^{come downstairs} with a swollen foot, a
 left arm I could not raise above my head, and a bucket
 of ice-water inside my chest. Who knows what circles were
 beneath my eyes. ^{Dougy}

^{My father offered} He was, the greater shock, however. There was almost
 no hair left on his head and he had lost a lot of weight.
 High up on his cheeks was a fierce pink flush that re-
 minded me of a fire in a bare and windswept place.

The recognition came over me like a touch of the
 crud itself. He was on chemotherapy.

He must have become accustomed to the ^{quick wipe from} ~~reaction in~~
people's eyes ~~to be followed by the quick wipe off their~~
~~expression of the first aversion,~~ ^{initial} for he said, "Yeah, I
got it."

"Where's it located?"

He ^{made a} ~~made a~~ vague gesture ~~as if~~ to indicate that was
part of his business alone.

"Thanks for sending ^a ~~the~~ telegram," I said.

"Kid, when there's nothing anybody can do about ^{your story} ~~bad~~
news, keep it to yourself."

He looked weak, which is to say he did not look all-
powerful. I ^{couldn't} ~~could not~~ tell, however, if he was in discomfort.

"Are you still on the chemotherapy?" I asked.

"I quit it a couple of days ago. ^{The} ~~To die with~~ nausea
is a disgrace." He walked forward and gave me a little hug,
not too close, as if he felt infectious.

"I heard a joke," he said. "This Jewish family is
waiting in the hospital lobby for the good news or the bad
news. The doctor comes up to them. He's a prosperous son
of a bitch with a peppy voice. He choips like a boid." My
father liked on occasion to remind me, ^{remind} ~~as he used to do~~ my
mother, that the roots were back in Hell's Kitchen and be
damned to you. His snobbery remained unflaggingly inverse,

so he would go a ~~Jersey diphthong~~ out of his way to say "boid" for "bird." Then, he could resume his joke. "'I have,' says the doctor, 'good news and bad news for you. The bad news is that ⁺ your father's disease is incurable. The good news is that it is not cancer.' The family says, 'Thank God.'"

We ~~took the~~ ^{laughed} together. When we were done, he handed me his untouched cup of instant coffee and started to spoon himself out another. "Here we have bad news," he said.

"It's incurable?"

"Tim, who the fuck can say? Sometimes I think I know the moment when I got it. I ~~tell myself~~ ^{close to} ~~if I'm that near~~ ^{the source} ~~to it~~, maybe I can find my cure. I tell you, I hate those pills the doctors push. I hate myself for taking them."

"How do you sleep?"

"I never been a famous sleeper," he said. Then he nodded. "Kid, I can handle anything but the middle of the night." That was quite a speech for him, ~~and so~~ ^{he} cut it off. "What happened to you?" he asked.

I found myself telling him about the fight.

"Where'd you leave the dog?" he asked.

"Buried him in the yard."

"Before you went to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Somebody raised you right."

We stayed in the kitchen all morning. After I made some eggs, we tried the living room for a few minutes, but Patty's furniture was not for an old longshoreman. Soon we were back in the kitchen. Outside it was another gray day, and looking through the window, he shivered.

"What do you like about this godforsaken place?" he said. "It's like the back coast of Ireland in winter."

"No, I love it," I told him.

"Yeah?"

"The first time I came here was after I got kicked out of Exeter. Remember we got drunk?"

"I sure do." It was a pleasure to see him smile.

"Well, in the morning you went back to New York, and I decided to come here for the summer. I'd heard of this ~~place~~ ^{place}. I liked it right off, and then when I was here a week, I went to a dance joint out near the highway one night. There was a good-looking girl that I kept watching, but I didn't go near her. She was with ^{her} a crowd of fellows and dancing. I just kept observing ~~her~~. At closing, I took a shot at it. I went up to her on the dance floor, looked

in her eyes, she looked in mine, and we went out the door together. ^{Screw the dudes} Fuck the fellows she was with. I must have looked capable because they didn't do a thing. So the girl and I crossed the road, went into the woods, lay down, and Dougy, I was in her. I figured it took six minutes from the time I walked up to her till I was in. That impressed me more about myself than anything I'd done till that day."

He enjoyed my story a good deal. His hand reached out in old reflex for his tumbler of bourbon and then he realized it wasn't there. ^{"So this"} "This place is your luck," he said.

"To a degree."

"Are you all right?" he asked. "For a guy who's just beaten up ^{some} a hood who was swinging a tire iron, you look ^{at him, I don't look} too happy. ^{too happy} pretty depressed. Are you afraid he'll return?" What a look of happiness came into my father's eyes at the thought that Stoodie would ^{chance to come back} chance to come back and have to face him. ^{I don't know} "There's a lot to talk about," I said, "but I'm not ^{I'm ready to tell you, ~~yet~~} ready yet."

"Have to do with your wife?"

"Some."

^{"Say"}

"Listen, if I was going to be around for another ten years, I wouldn't ^{express a thought} say a word, but since I won't, I'll tell

you. I believe you married the wrong broad. It should have been Madeleine. She may be a ^{vindictive} guinea, and ~~vindictive~~, but I liked her, ~~anyway~~. She had class. She was subtle."

"Is this your blessing?"

"~~Maybe~~ I kept my mouth shut on too many things for too many years. ^{Maybe} Suppose it started to rot inside. One of the causes of cancer, says the choipy boids, is a harsh environment."

"What do you want to tell me?"

"A guy who marries a rich woman deserves every last thing he gets."

"I thought you liked Patty." They had loved to drink together.

"I liked her guts. If all the other rednecks was as macho as her, they'd be running the world. But I didn't like what she was doing to you. Certain dames ought to wear a T-shirt that says: 'Hang around. I'll make a cock-sucker ^{out} of you.'"

"Thanks."

^{figure of speech}
"Hey, Tim--it's a metaphor. (Nothing personal.)"

"You were always worried about me, weren't you?"

"Well, your mother was ~~so~~ delicate. She spoiled you a lot. Yeah," he said, looking at me out of his ice-blue

eyes, "I worried about you."

"Maybe you didn't have to. I took my three years in the slammer without a fall. They called me Iron Jaw. I wouldn't take cock."

"Good for you. I always wondered."

"Hey, Dougy," I said, "where's the virtue? You think I feel like a man inside most of the time? I don't. What was I protecting? You're an old-line fanatic. You'd put all the faggots in concentration camps including your own son if he ever slipped. Just cause you were lucky enough to be born with tiger's balls."

"Let's have a drink. You're off your feed."

"Should you have a drink?"

He made ^athat vague move with his hands again. "It's an occasion."

I got two glasses and put bourbon in them. He added a considerable amount of water to his. That was enough to tell me he was ill.

"You have me wrong," he said. "Do you think I've been living alone for twenty-five years in a furnished room, that a monk would turn his nose up at, and I do no thinking? I try to keep up. In my day, if you were queer, you were damned. Don't even ask. You were an agent of hell. Now,

they got Gay Liberation. I watch them. There's faggots everywhere."

"Yes, I know," I said.

"Ha, ha," he said, and pointed a finger at me. The early liquor was obviously doing angel's work on his spirits. ~~Okay, the son wins the round on points.~~

"Good at dancing," I said.

"I remember," he said. "Costello, right?"

"Right."

"I'm not sure I know what that means anymore," he said. "Six months ago they told me to stop drinking or I was dead. So I stopped. Now, when I go to sleep, the spirits come out of the woodwork, and make a circle around my bed. Then they make me dance all night." He gave a cough filled with all the hollows of his lungs. It had been an attempt to laugh. "'Tough guys don't dance,' I ~~try~~ to tell them. 'Hey, you bigot,' the spirits tell me back, 'keep dancing.'" He looked into the lights of the bourbon as if the kin of other spirits could be found there, and he sighed. "My illness makes me less of a bigot," he said. "I think about faggots and you know what I believe? For half of them, it's brave. For the wimps, it takes more guts to be queer than not. For the wimps. Otherwise they marry some little mouse who's too timid to be a dyke and they both become psychologists

and raise whiz-kids to play electronic games. Turn queer, I say, if you're a wimp. Have a coming out party. It's the others I condemn. The ones who ought to be men but couldn't show the moxie. You were supposed to be a man, Tim. You came from me. You had advantages."

"I never heard you talk so much before. Not once in my life."

"That's cause you and ^I~~we~~ are strangers."

"Well, you look like a stranger today," I said. It was true. His large head was no longer ^{crowned} ~~anelicinated~~ by his rich white hair, white with the ^{corrupt} ~~splendors~~ of ivory and cream. Now, he just had an enormous bald head. He looked more like a ^P ~~Prussian~~ general than the model of an Irish bartender.

"I want to talk to you now," he said. "I may be acting thick, but it came over me at Frankie Freeload's funeral: Tim is all I got."

I was moved. Sometimes a couple of months would go by, sometimes a half-year, before one of us would call. Still, it seemed all right. I had always hoped so. Now he confirmed it.

"Yes," he said, "I got up early this morning, borrowed the widow's car, and told myself all the way here that this time we speak it out face to face. I don't want to die

without you knowing of my regard for you."

I was embarrassed. Therefore, I leaped on the way he said the widow's car. "Did you have any hanky-panky with Freeload's wife?" I asked.

Not often could I see my father look sheepish. "Not lately," he said.

"How could you? With a friend's wife!"

"For the last ten years, Frankie was pickled in booze. He couldn't find his tool or the pot."

"A friend's wife?" I gave him the family laugh. High tenor.

"It was only once or twice. She needed it. An act of mercy."

I laughed until the tears came. "I wonder who's kissing her now?" I sang. It was wonderful to have your father at his own wake. Suddenly, I felt like crying.

"You're right, kid," he said. "I hope and pray Frankie never knew." He looked at the wall for an instant. "You get older and you begin to feel as if something is wrong. You're in a box and the sides keep coming closer. So you do things you didn't do before."

"How long have you known you were sick?"

"Ever since I went into St. Vincent's forty-five years ago."

"That's quite a while to have cancer and never show it."

"None of the doctors have a feel for the subject," he said. "The way I see the matter, it's a circuit of illness with two switches."

"What are you saying?"

"Two terrible things have to happen before the crud can get its start. The first cocks the trigger, the other fires it. I've been walking around with the trigger cocked for forty-five years."

"Because you couldn't recover from all those ^{hits} shots you took?"

"No. Cause I lost my balls."

"You? What are you talking about?"

"Tim, I stopped, and I felt the blood in my shoes, and there was St. Vincent's in front of me. I should have kept chasing the bastard who did the shooting. But I lost my nerve when I saw St. Vincent's. ^{the hospital} ~~the hospital~~ ^{had already gone} ~~had already gone~~"

"Hell, you went after him for six blocks."

"Not enough. I was built to be that good anyway. The test came when I stopped. I didn't have the nerve to go on and catch him, cause I could have. Something in the scheme of things might have made him trip. I didn't push my luck."

Instead, I stopped. Then I heard a voice clearly in my head. It's the only time I would say that God or someone highly superior was speaking to me. This voice said, 'You're out of gas now, kid. It's your true test. Do it.' But I went into St. Vincent's and grabbed the orderly by the collar and just at the moment when I got tough with that punk in the white jacket was when I felt the first switch get thrown in the cancer."

"What threw the second switch?"

"It never got thrown. It just corroded. The cumulative effects of a harsh environment. Forty-five years of living with no respect for myself."

"You're crazy."

He took a big belt of his watered bourbon. "I wish I was. Then I wouldn't have cancer. I've studied this, I tell you. There's buried statistics if you look for them. Schizophrenics in looney bins only get cancer half as often as the average population. I figure it this way: either your body goes crazy, or your mind. Cancer is the cure for schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is the cure for cancer. Most people don't know how tough it is out there. I was brought up to know. I got no excuse."

I was silent. I stopped arguing with him. It is not

easy to sort out what effect his words were having.

Was I coming to understand for the first time why the warmth he had for me always seemed to cross a glacial field? I may once have been a seed in Douglas Madden's body but only after that body was no longer held by him in high esteem. I was,

to a degree, defective. Agitation had to be stirring in all the old ^{my} wounded emotions, well-buried and long-resigned.

No wonder my father had taken no great joy in me. Intimations came how in years ^{ahead} to come--if I lived--the memory of this conversation might make me shake with rage.

Yet, I also felt compassion for my father. Damnable compassion. He had cast a long shadow across my understanding of him, and ~~in that shadow was his sorrow at what he had not~~ done.

Next, I knew a considerable amount of fear. For now it seemed real to me again that I murdered two women. How many times over these last ^{few} years had I come to the edge of ^{battering} ~~injuring~~ Patty Lareine with bare hands? And each time I resisted ^{that} the impulse had not a sense of oncoming illness settled more firmly into me? Yes, like my father I had been living in a harsh environment. I thought once more of the impulse that had led me ~~to try~~ to climb the tower. Had that been the night when I hoped to keep the first switch

from being thrown?

I knew then that I would confide in my father. I had to talk about the two murders and the plastic bags in the damp cellar of this house. I could hold it in myself no longer.

"How much do you believe," I asked, "in predestination?

"Oh, yeah," he answered, "what kind of predestination? The shift in subject made him ~~look~~ happy. Long years behind a bar had left my father adept at living with questions as wide as the heavenly gates.

"The football spreads," I said. "Can God pick the team that will cover?" ^{"time"} ~~"every team"~~

It was obviously a question that Dougy had lived with for years. He showed that glint in his eye he always reveal ^{was debating} when he debated whether to disclose useful knowledge. Then he nodded. "I figured if God bet the spread, He'd win eighty per cent of the time."

"How do you come up with ~~that~~?" ^{and he says 74} ~~that number?~~

"Well, let's say the night before the game He ~~makes a~~ ^{passes} ~~pass~~ over the ^{places} ~~hotel~~ where the ^{players} ~~teams~~ are sleeping and takes a reading. 'Pittsburgh is up for this game,' He says to Himself. 'The Jets are jangled.' Pittsburgh, He decides, is worth a lot more than three points. So He bets them.

I'd say He's right four times out of five."

^{"But why?"}
"Why four out of five?"

"Because footballs," said my father ominously, "take funny bounces. It is not practical to get better than four out of five. That's good enough. If He wanted to take account of the physics of every bounce, He'd have to do a million times more work in His calculations in order to get up from 80% to 99%. That's not economical. He's got too many other things to work at."

"But why did you settle on four out of five?"

My father took this as a most serious question. "Sometimes," he told me, "a football handicapper can get a great streak going and hits up around 75% against the spread for a month or more. I figure that's because he's got a pipeline for a little while into higher places."

I thought of Harpo. ^{"Can"} "Can't some keep it going longer?"

My father shrugged. "Dubious. ^{These} These pipelines are hard to maintain." He showed no concern at ~~not~~ mixing his metaphor: "It's a high wire act."

"What about a terrible losing streak?"

"Those guys are on the pipeline too. Only the flow is in reverse. Their hunches are 180 degrees wrong."

"Maybe it's just the law of averages."

"The laws of averages," he said ^{with disgust} "has done more to mess up people's minds than any idea I know. It's ^{manure} horseshit. The pipeline is either feeding you or ^(his) tricking you. Greedy people get fucked by the pipeline."

^{"What"} "And if your bets turn out fifty-fifty?"

"Then you're nowhere near the pipeline. You're a computer. Look in the papers. The computer predictions always end up at .500."

"All right," I said, "that's prediction. What ^{I really} ~~can~~ ^{want us to talk} ~~you tell me~~ ^{about} coincidence?"

He looked troubled, and I got up and freshened our drinks. "Put a lot of water in mine," he said.

"Coincidence," I said. "What do you make of it?"

^{"I've been"} "I'm ~~doing~~ ^{all} the talking," he said. "You tell me."

"Well," I said, "I think ^{it's related to} it's like the pipeline. Only it's a network. I believe we receive traces of everyone's thoughts. ^{We're} ~~We may~~ not be aware of it ^{usually} ~~most of the time~~ but we do."

"Wait a minute," ^{saying people are} ~~he said~~ "You're claiming everybody is able to send and receive wireless messages? Telepathy? Without knowing it?"

^{"Whatever you want to call it."} "Exactly."

"Well," he said, "for the sake of argument, why not?"