

"Once," I said, "I was up in
 "After Madeleine and I split, I went up to Fairbanks,
 Alaska, ~~I said,~~ and you could feel it, ~~there~~ ^{there was a} ~~the~~ ^{network,}

"Yes," he said, "that's near magnetic north. What
 were you doing in Fairbanks?"

"A scam. Nothing significant." Actually, I had been ^{gone up}
^{after Madeleine and I had split.}
 on a cocaine run. It was in the month before I got busted
 on a quick trip to Florida ^(two kilos of)
 back in New York ^{(for the same deed. Selling cocaine, I may}
 as well confess, is what had put me in prison, ^{and only the service}
 of a lawyer well-paid for his powers of plea bargaining got it down to ^{the}

"I had a ruckus with a guy in Fairbanks one night," I ^{years}
^{one night} ^(with parole)
 I told him. "He was bad news. In the morning when I woke up,
 I saw his face in my thoughts. His expression was bad. ^{ugly. Then} The
^{as ugly as}
 the phone rang. It was the same fellow. His voice sounded just
^{late that afternoon,}
 like his face. He wanted a meet with me. All day I kept
 running into people I had seen the night before, and now
 their expressions were different, but not once was I sur-
^{by their expression,}
 prised. They looked angrier or happier in just the way I ^{expected}
 had thought ^{them to} they would look. It was close to a dream. ^(as precise as)
^{But now}
 At the end of the day, I met with the heavy. ^{I was no longer up tight}
^{about it. Because as} ^{I could see him clearly}
 so uneasy. As the afternoon went on, he had begun in my
^(and he was looking)
 thoughts to look wasted to me, and sure enough, when I saw ^{met up with}
 him, that's how he was, a bigger coward than me."

My father chuckled.

"I tell you, Dougy," I said, ^{I think} "everybody in Alaska drinks
 so they can shut themselves out from living
 in order not to have to live in everybody else's head."

He nodded. "Northern climes," he said. "Ireland."

Scandinavia. Russia. Drunk like skunks."

"But coincidence," I said, "can happen anywhere. When the stakes are high enough, people get out of their own static. They start coming in on each other. Without even knowing it."

"You're saying that big events create a vacuum?"

"Evil events," I said. "Or extraordinary ones. When they take place, yes, the number of coincidences goes up at an unbelievable rate."

"What kind of evil events?"

"Murder, for one."

He shook his head. "Do you remember the bartender's guide?"

q In my turn, I nodded. When I started
I nodded. When I got my first job as a bartender, he
had given me a schedule. *"Son,"* he had said, "keep this in mind. In New York, on the streets, it's Peeping Toms from 12:00 AM to 1:00 AM, fires from 1:00 to 2:00, stickups 2:00 to 3:00, bar fights 3:00 to 4:00, suicides 4:00 to 5:00, and auto accidents from 5:00 AM to 6:00 AM." I had kept it in my head like a typed schedule. It had proved useful.

"Nothing special about murders," he now said.

"I'm not talking about New York," I told him, "but here."

"You're saying a murder in this place is an extraordinary

event?" I could see him ^{all but} ~~virtually~~ measuring the cold damp of Cape Cod air against the blood and steam of the act. "Yeah," he said, "all right, I'll grant the point." He looked not altogether happy. "What's the purpose of this discussion?"

"I'm tangled up in ~~many~~ coincidences," I said.

"Well, by your line of reasoning you ^{must be} ~~are~~ close to something bad," he said.

"I'm closer than that."

He took ^{the} a pause. "People ~~get hurt?~~" he asked.

"There was a suicide last week," I said. ^{"although the} ~~"But the-~~
^{believe}
man may have been killed. I think I stole his woman the night it happened." I had the most curious thought come to

me next: Because my father had cancer, ^{whatever I told him} ~~I could tell him~~
^{would never touch}
~~anything, and never put it on the air for others.~~ That

might be one of the virtues of his cancer. He could take in messages like a tomb and never send them out again. Was my father now on the other side of the spirits from ^{all of us?} ~~me?~~

^{"There's more to tell than that," I said. "It's no}
^{"Nobody knows it yet," I went on, "but there's more}
^{public knowledge, but two}
~~than that. It's likely one or two other people besides my-~~
~~self also know.~~ ^{this} Two women have been killed in the town in ^{this} ~~the~~ last week."

"My Lord," he said. That was a lot of news, even for

him. "Who ^{did it?} hit them?"

"I don't know. I have a few ideas, but I'm not certain."

"~~Sure of your facts?~~ Have you seen the victims?" ^{Are you sure of your facts?} ^{said no more, we might still}

I hated to reply. So long as I didn't, ^{that we were} ^{this visit} we still clung in some fashion to the premise of this morning's drinking in the kitchen: We could surround our lives with lulling recollections of other boozy meanderings through the uncharted spaces of philosophy, but now by my next remark, we would both be brought up dripping, sober, and on another beach.

I suppose I took so long to ^{reply} answer that my father repeated the question: "Have you seen the victims?"

"Yes," I said. "They're in the cellar."

"Oh, ^{Criminey!} Jesus." His tumbler was empty. I saw his hand go for the bourbon bottle and then withdraw. Instead, he turned his glass upside down. "Tim, did you do it?" he asked.

"No." I couldn't refuse my own liquor. I swallowed what was left in my glass. "I don't think I did," I said, "but I can't be certain."

So we got into it. Bit by bit, detail by detail, I told him more and more of what I could remember of ^{each of these} those six days after the night I went to The Widow's Walk, and when I soon confessed (for confession is indeed how it felt) that Patty Lareine was one of the two women dead, my father

gave one ~~great~~ groan of the sort you might utter if you fell from a window to be impaled on a spike.

Yet, I cannot say he looked terrible. That fierce pink flush which had been restricted to his cheekbones and left the rest of his face ~~unnaturally~~ pale as compared to ^{his} ~~its own~~ once normal red color now spread ⁱⁿ ~~in its~~ flush to his ^{forehead} ~~forehead~~ and chin, ^{that} ~~which~~ provided the illusion he was less ill than before. Indeed, I think he was. No matter his antipathy to cops, he looked so much like one himself-- Captain of the Precinct or Lieutenant of Detectives would have been seized on instantly by any casting director--that willy-nilly he found himself playing the role for a good part of his life. I have to say on the strength of his questions, he was no mean interrogator.

Finally, I came to a halt in my account (although in the telling we passed from morning to afternoon, made a few sandwiches, and drank a little beer.) He said at last, "There are two questions that keep me from seeing straight on this. One, is whether you are innocent or guilty. I find it hard to believe the first, but then you're my son." He stopped and scowled, and said, "I mean I find it hard to believe the second--that you're guilty."

"What you're saying," I told him, "is that I could

have done it. You said it! The reason is: ^{You are} ~~You're~~ capable of murder. In fact, maybe you did pull off one or two in the union days."

Dougy gave no reply to that. Instead, he said, "Good people kill for duty, or for honor. Not for money. A sleazo kills for money. A coked-up greed bag slays for money. But not you. Do you stand to benefit from her will?"

"I have no idea."

"If her will leaves you real money, you're in a load of trouble."

"She may have had no money left. She was always secretive about how much was there. I suspect Patty Larcine made some terrible investments in the last couple of years. We could be broke."

"I sure hope so," he said. Then he laid his frozen blue eyes on me. "The problem is in the manner of those killings. That's my second question. Why? Why would someone decapitate those two women? If you did it, then you and me ^{Time} have to pack it in, I figure. Our seed ^{has} got to be too hideous to continue."

"You speak calmly about such matters."

"That's because I don't believe you're capable of such an atrocity. I mention it only as an option. Set

the record straight."

His monumental sense of always knowing the right thing to do ~~g~~ irritated me in the most peculiar fashion. It was as if we were not speaking of ultimate matters so much as having a family spat. Ideological divergences. Kill the son of a bitch, says Dougy Madden. No, says the son, put him in a home for the mentally ill. I wanted to shake my father.

"I am capable of such atrocities," I said to him.

"I can tell you. I know that. I'm prey to the spirits. If I ever did do it, I was in some kind of coma. I would have been carried to it by the spirits."

Big Mac gave me a look full of distaste. "Half the killers in this world can make that claim. Fuck 'em all, I say. What does it matter if they're telling the truth? They're just a lightning rod for all the shit that other people are putting on the air. So they're too dangerous to have around." He shook his head. "You want to know my real feelings? I'm hoping and praying you didn't do it, because, in fact, I couldn't off you. I couldn't even turn you in."

"You're playing with me. First it's one option, then the other."

"You damn fool," he said, "I'm trying to find my own head."

"Have a drink," I said, and spilled a little more bourbon down my throat.

"Yes," he said, ignoring me, "the second big question takes care of the first. Why would anyone perform a decapitation? All you do is avoid a maximum prison in order to get a maximum mental hospital. You can even bring capital punishment on yourself by the hideousness of the crime--at least if they ^{hang you} ~~have it~~ in this state. So you'd have to be nuts. I don't believe you are."

"Thank you," I said, "but I don't believe the killer is nuts either."

"Why would anybody ^{gone} ~~cut~~ off the head?" he repeated. "There's only one good reason. To entrap you." Now, he beamed like a physicist who has found his hypothesis. "Is the burrow in your marijuana patch large enough to hold an entire body?"

"Not unless the foot locker is removed."

"Could it hold two bodies?"

"Never."

"The decapitation may have been reasoned-out. There are people capable of anything once they decide it gives

them a practical advantage."

"You're saying. . ."

But he was not about to relinquish the fruits of his thinking process to me. "Yeah, I'm saying those heads were cut off so they'd fit your burrow. Somebody wants you to take the fall."

"It's got to be one of two people," I said.

"Probably," he said, "but I can think of a few others." Now, he tapped the table with his middle fingers. "Were the women shot in the head?" he asked. "Can you see from the heads how they were killed?"

"No," I said, "I didn't study them."

"What about their necks?"

"I couldn't look at that."

"So you don't know if it was done by hacksaw, or a knife, or a goddam machete."

"No."

"Don't you think you ought to find out?"

"I can't disturb them any more."

"Tim, it's got to be established. For our own sakes."

I felt ten years old and ready to blubber. "Dad," I said, "I can't look at them. It's my wife, for God's sakes."

He took that in. The heat of the chase had made him

oblivious to much.

"Okay," he said at last, "I'll go down and take a look."

While he was gone I went to the bathroom and threw up. I wish ~~I had~~ I could have wept instead. Now that I was alone, and no longer had the fear of breaking down in front of my father, there were no tears. Instead, I took a shower, put my clothes back on, splashed on some after-shave lotion, and went back to the kitchen. He was there and looking pale. All of the flush was gone. His cuffs were damp and I realized he must have washed up at the cellar sink.

"The one who's not your wife," he said.

"Jessica," I said. "Oakwode. Laurel Oakwode."

"Yeah," he said, "that one. She was decapitated with a sword. Or maybe it was a machete. One big stroke. Patty is a different business. Somebody who didn't know how to do it, sawed her head off with a knife."

"Are you certain?"

"Want to look for yourself?"

"No."

I saw it anyway. I do not know if it was in my imagination or I was given a true glimpse of his sights,

but I saw Jessica's throat. There was a straight slash across and the nearest flesh was bruised by the weight of the blow.

Patty's neck I did not have to visualize. I would not forget a red jungle.

My father opened his hand. The fragment of a spent bullet was in it. "That's from Oakwode," he said. "I can't get the rest without making a mess in your cellar but I've seen stuff like this before. It comes from a .22 with a hollow tip. That's what I'd say. It spreads on contact. In the brain, one .22 can do all the work. Probably with a silencer."

"Fired into her mouth?"

"Yes," he said. "Her lips looked bruised like somebody forced her to open up. You can still see the powder burns on her upper palate where the entrance hole is. Small enough. Just right for a .22. No exit wound. I was able to fish this much out." He pointed to the bullet fragment.

Tough guys don't dance. You had better believe it. Fish this much out. My knees were quivering and I had to put ^{both} ~~one~~ hand ^{9/1035} on the neck of the bottle to get the bourbon to my lips. I found that I was not ready to ask about Patty.

all the same,
He told me ~~what he knew~~, however. "There are no marks, entrance wounds, or bruises on her face and scalp. I would assume she was shot in the heart and died quick."

"What makes you think that?"

"Just a guess. I don't know. It could have been a knife. Her head tells me nothing but who she is." He frowned as if forgetting a most important detail. "No-- it tells me one more thing. You would need a coroner to ^{be sure} specify, but I would ^{guess} estimate that your wife, "--now he could not say Patty Lareine either--"was ^{later} alive ^{for} twenty-four to forty-eight hours ^{longer} than the other woman."

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

"No," he said, "we will never know."

"Why?" I asked.

"Tim," he said, "we have to dispose of these heads." He held up his hand to forestall me. "I know the price," he said.

"We'll never be able to find out who did it," I blurted out.

"We'll determine that, I think. We just won't be able to prove it." The flush was coming back to his ^{face,} cheekbones. "If you want satisfaction, we'll have to ^{look for} find other means."

I let that pass for now.

"Follow my reasoning," he said. "I figure there's more than one executioner. People who use machetes don't fuck with knives."

"People who use machetes don't usually have .22's with special bullets and silencers."

"I have to think about that," he said.

We were silent. I was doing very little thinking myself. A numbness was settling through my limbs as if I had been walking through the November woods for many hours and had stopped to rest.

"Here's what I am clear on," he said. "Somebody chose to use your marijuana stash to hide Jessica's head. That implicates you so deeply ~~that you still aren't sure you~~ ^{Can't say you} didn't do it. Then the head is removed. Why?" He held up both fists as if he were steering a car. "Because somebody has decided to kill Patty. This person wants to be certain both heads will be found there later. He doesn't want you or the first killer going back to destroy the evidence. Or, suppose you panic. You might reveal it to the authorities. Therefore, this second person, he takes the head."

"Or she," I said, "takes the head."

"Or she," said my father, "although I don't know what you mean by that." When I said nothing further--I had spoken

out of impulse--he said, "Yes, I figure two principals. The one who killed Jessica, and the one about to kill Patty. The first puts the head there to implicate you. The second removes it so that both can be put back later. *At which time, or soon after, you will have to)* Then you take the onus for both crimes."

"You're assuming an awful lot," I said.

"When people do these things," my father said, "they *are viewing* believe they *view* (the ~~whole~~ scene clearly even if they're only injecting one more ~~written~~ ingredient into the soup."

"Who's *the* your cook?" I asked.

"Wardley, for one. He could have known Patty was dead all the while he was talking to you. He could have done it, and been setting you up."

"I don't see how."

"He has a low opinion of you. I don't blame him."

to party and he supposed Maybe he heard that Jessica's head was floating around *now* and *from par* you knew where it was. So he asked for Patty's head. He *figured* *instead* thought you'd try to pass Jessica off as Patty. Then he'd have what he wanted--both heads."

"Can you stop repeating that word?"

"Head?"

"Yes." "It's getting to me."

"There's no substitute for it."

"Just use their names," I said.

"Until we find their bodies, it's misleading."

"Just use their names," I repeated.

"Hey," he said. "You're as fancy as your mother."

"I don't care if my great-grandparents cut peat in Irish bogs every stinking day of their lives, I'm, yes, I'm as fancy as my mother."

"Ho, ho," he said, "score one for her side ~~of the~~ family. May she rest in peace." He belched. The bourbon, the beer, and his illness were working on him together.

"Pass the bottle," he said.

"You're assuming too much," I said. "Why wouldn't Wardley know where Jessica was? ~~I'm sure~~ ^{It} Regency did, ^{Wardley} Spider is their go-between,"

"Let's say ~~it's half~~ ^{they're crossing} cooperation and half screwing ^{up a little} each other. It's amazing what people know and don't know in such situations." He rapped the table with his knuckles. "I say Wardley didn't know where Jessica was, and wanted you to bring her to him."

"I think when ~~I was~~ ^{Wardley} talking to him on the beach, he had put them both in the burrow already. Keep to the given. I know ~~that~~ Spider and Stoodie were put on my tail. ^{Wagon} ~~I can't~~ that to catch me when I ~~go~~ ^{went} back to the burrow? Just as

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I'm coming out with the heads? They would have been
~~the dirtiest citizens~~ ^{lowest scumbags} ever to make a citizen's arrest."

That impressed him. My father's brow gave its assent.
"It rings true," he said. "They think you're going to the
burrow, but the beeper tells them you've stopped. So they
wait. After half an hour, maybe, they go up to see what's
what, and discover you've tricked them. They can't even
find the beeper. No wonder they ^{go} were apeshit when you came
back."

"I think we have a case against Wardley," I said.

"For Patty, you ^{have} got the beginning of a real possibility.
But who killed Jessica?"

"Maybe Wardley did that too."

"He would enjoy using a .22 with a silencer. ^{But do you} ~~Be you~~
see Mr. Hilby with a machete?"

"How about Stoodie?"

"Maybe."

"Who are you thinking of?" ^{I asked,}

On how many conversations ~~over the years~~ ^{over the years} across his
bar had my father served ^{(as surrogate private detective,}
acting criminal lawyer, or honorary appeals court judge?
He brought his hand to ^(the corner of) his mouth as if debating whether
to peel ^{the truth} it from his lips like an adhesive plaster and ~~tell~~

~~a little more.~~

Now he removed his hand. "I don't like Regency," he said. "He could be the fellow."

"Do you think he killed Jessica?"

"He could use a high-powered .22 handgun and a machete. He's the only one who could. You told me about his house. He's a weapons freak. He probably has flame-throwers in a cabinet in the basement. He would study how to kill you with everything from a garrote to ^{by pushing} a bamboo spear with poison on its tip right in your path. I have met the type. 'When it comes to weapons,' they say, 'I know them all. I'm a Renaissance man.'"

"Yeah, but you hate cops."

"You bet I do. Only some are less unreliable than the others. This guy's a prairie wolf. A professional soldier who becomes a cop! I read him for a narc all the way. He's no Acting Chief of Police. That's cover. It's got to be. He's a trouble-shooter for the Drug Enforcement, and I'll bet, back at the Agency, they're scared stiff of him. They pee in their pants when he's around."

"I find that hard to believe."

"I know cops better than you do. The top used to come

in my bar and let down ^{his} their hair, and the bottom used to come ^{to the back} for the Captain's payoff. I'd pay the Mafia on Wednesday and the police on Thursday. I know cops. I know their psychology. Why do you think a high-powered gung-ho ~~maniac~~ ^{has been} like Regency is left buried on Cape Cod?"

"It's a big narcotics center."

"Nothing next to Florida. They could really use him there. They're fobbing him off. You have to understand police psychology. ^{No cop likes to work with} You know the street: ~~Never make love to a fellow professional who makes him uneasy,~~ a cop's wife, they say. You think it don't carry over to the Force? ~~Even the toughest cops don't like to work with~~ professionals who leave them uneasy. You can't give orders ^{that are resented} they resent, or you make an enemy of them. A guy with a legal weapon has too many opportunities to shoot you in the back. So when cops have to put up with a crazy, they don't try to fire him. They fob him off. Make him Head of the Universe in Twin Acres, Montana. Pee-Town, Mass. No," he concluded, "I don't like Regency one bit. That's why we're going to dispose of the heads."

I started to argue with him, but he kept cutting me off. ^(Plastic Bags) "If those bodies are found in your cellar," he said, "there is no way out of it for you. You're a sitting duck. And if you try to remove them, it's worse. The moment they

see you getting into your car, they'll follow you."

"I've got to bury my wife."

"No, you don't. I'll do it. I'll take your boat and your fishing gear and two tackle boxes. Do you have an extra anchor on board?"

"No."

"Then I'll use the one that's there. For Patty and Jessica both."

Now it was my turn to say, "Oh, ^{Criminey!} Jesus."

"Hey," said Dougy, "you look at me and see a crude man. I look at you and see a sitting duck."

"I have to go out ~~in the boat~~ with you. It's the least I can do."

"If I ~~go~~ ^{set out alone}, it's just an old gink ~~out~~ fishing. They won't look twice. But you! They'll see you ~~out~~ there. They'll alert the Coast Guard. What's your story when they ~~find the two ladies on board?~~ ^{board complete but for their bodies} 'Oh,' you'll say, 'I didn't ~~do it.~~ I just found them. Voices told me where to look.' 'Yeah, buster,' they'll say, 'you're Joan of Arc. Next case.'" He shook his head. "This, Tim boy, is where you ~~got to~~ firm up. I'll be gone a few hours. Why don't you, in the interim, make a few phone calls?"

"Where?"

"To whom?"

"Try the airport. Maybe you can find out when Jessica arrived."

"She and Lonnie came by car."

"How do you know ^{that was her first night in town? Or his?} they weren't playing a scene for you?"

^{I shrugged. I didn't.} "Lonnie and Jessica weren't trying to set me up." I

shook my head. "They could gain nothing from that."

^{"Don't give out," he said.} "Well, try your own leads," he said. "Find out who the real estate agent is ^{for the house.}"

^{however} Yet when he went down to the cellar, I stayed immobile in my chair, indeed, I would not have moved if he did not call up the cellar stairs, "Tim, I'm ready to row the dinghy out to your boat. So go out for a little walk. I want to get them away from the house."

He saw real people and I saw spirits. All right. He was taking the chances, and the least I could do was walk.

I put on a parka, therefore, and went out the front door and down Commercial Street in the deserted afternoon sunlight, but I could not keep on the street for too long. It was a silent day, quiet as the sunlight that came down in fluted pillars through the gray banks overhead, and I knew there would be a play of brights and shadows on the beach. Just when I was certain I heard the motor starting on our 20-foot Whaler (Patty's boat) I turned into an empty

beach lot and onto the sand ~~not twenty-five yards from~~
Commercial Street and, yes, there on the water, the dinghy
left behind at the mooring, and all but alone in the harbor,
no Coast Guard in sight and only a couple of fishing boats
~~back of the breakwater~~ ^{coming into} approaching the town wharf, was my
father heading the Whaler out to the bay, and I took a
breath and ^{returned} ~~trudged~~ back with my aching foot over the sand.

Back in the house, surprisingly refreshed by this
walk, I decided, by way of Dougy's suggestion, to make ^{those} a
few phone calls. I tried the airport first and had a
piece of good fortune. The girl at the ticket desk was a
drinking friend, and she was on duty. So I could ask if
Jessica Pond or Laurel Oakwode and/or Lonnie Pangborn had
been in or out of Provincetown in the last few weeks. A
few minutes later, she called me back. Jessica Pond had
come in on an afternoon flight fifteen days ago. She left
nine days ago on the first morning plane. The airline
booked her return ticket from Provincetown to Boston to
San Francisco to Santa Barbara. Nobody named Pangborn had
come in or out. However, the girl recalled she had been
at the desk on the morning the Pond passenger left, and
Chief Regency had brought her to the airport. "'Take good
care of this lady,' he told me," said the girl.

"Did he and she look friendly?" I asked.

"Tim, I was too hungover to take a look." She deliberated. "I guess there was a ^{some} little ooie-groovie going on."

Well, that opened the possibilities. If Jessica Pond had been here for a week alone, then flew to Santa Barbara and came back, the question was whether she was working with Pangborn for Wardley, or ^{was she} also working for herself?

I called the real estate agent in town whom I knew best. She could, however, give me no more than the name of the Boston lawyer who represented the Paramessides estate. So far as she knew, the property was not for sale. I called the lawyer's office, however, and gave my name to the girl at the switchboard, ^{I called myself} as Lonnie Oakwode. After two minutes, he came on.

"Mr. Thwaite," I said, "my mother, Mrs. Oakwode, had to go over to Europe to take care of ^{an urgent} a matter, but asked me to contact you in case our assistance is needed."

"Well, I'm glad you called. We've all been standing on tiptoe the last few days. Your mother was supposed to be here with a certified check."

"Yes, I know," I said. "~~There's been a hitch.~~"

"Good. Give her a message for me. ^{I'm a bit concerned} ~~I fear that~~
^{going} ~~that~~ the price is ^{about} to be given an adjustment upward.

Or will be if we don't hear from her. I can't hold the
fort on short rations, ^{you see,} A promise is a promise, but we've
got to have her check. ~~I detest putting this pressure on~~ ^{such}
~~you, but~~ another party put in a bid last week."

"I'll get to her quickly."

"You must. It's always like that. Years go by and
an estate gets ^{back} nothing from the property but penalties and
taxes. Then everybody wants it all at once, ^{and} in the same
business week." He coughed. "~~A hitch, you say?~~"

~~"I promise you, Mr. Thwaite, she'll get back to you."~~

"Hope so. Lovely woman, your mother."

"I'll tell her."

I hung up quickly. I was ^{playing her son} ~~working~~ with much too little ^{background}
to stay on the line any longer.

Still, my first guess had been given some confirmation.
Laurel Oakwode ^{must} ~~might~~ have been planning a coup. What if
she had decided to acquire the property for herself and
^{and/or} hold up Wardley ~~and~~ Patty Lareine?

I posed the question: what would Patty Lareine do
to ^a ~~the~~ woman who tried such a maneuver?

"She would kill," was the unmistakable reply that

came from the center of my mind.

In that case, if Patty Lareine chose to do it with a .22 silencer, why did Regency behead the victim? Was it to leave ~~that~~ ^{the recognizable} part of her on my plot of marijuana? Did Patty Lareine hate me ^{so} ~~that~~ passionately, or did Regency?

He did, I decided. Regency had hinted I should go to the patch.

I got up from the phone with more clarity, more anger, and more sense of purpose than I had felt in a while. Was it possible I could ^{had} ~~show~~ a hint of my father's ^{maxie?} ~~strength~~? I am obliged to believe that optimism is my most dangerous symptom. For now I had the impulse to look at the nude Polaroids I had taken ~~on that weekend~~ years ago of Madeleine and Patty Lareine. What a curious desire. To think of Polaroids at



-34-

the moment one is feeling encouraged by new signs of character in oneself. Let no one say I have a classic personality.

I went upstairs, and in a file box were the pictures where I had left them in an envelope. There were three of Patty and two of Madeleine. All, I fear, had their legs nicely separated to show the Luciferean gleam of their nether soul, yes, their labia had ~~once~~ been well exposed to the flare of the flashbulb. Now, however, there were ten pieces of glossy paper in the envelope. All the heads had been neatly snipped from the bodies.

Do you know, I believe that was the moment when my father, having fastened ^{used baling wire to fasten} the two heads to the links of the anchor chain ^{overboard} with ~~baling wire~~, had tossed that grisly and monumentally incriminating assemblage ~~overboard~~ into the deepest water he could find. I know I was immediately laid low by an attack from Hell-Town. It was the most prodigious bombardment I ever received.

"Hello, ^{fuck} fuck-face, you're foul and moldy," shrieked the first voice. "Say heil to the ghoul, fool," said the second.

"It's Timmy Light-Fingers, smash his yeggs."

"Maim the bloody sandbagger. Open the moon cancer full of pus."

"Hey, Timmy, sniff the rot, ^{burn} and ~~skip~~ the snot."

"You're a raider, you're a depredator, you traitor."

"Bring him in--he stole my house."

"You ravisher, you floated my ^{deep} ~~house~~ away."

"Disembowel the pike-man. Masticate his prick."

"He and his father did the job. Killers. Crazy kooks and cock-eyed killers."

"You ^{murdered} ~~killed~~ Jessica," came the howl in my ear.

"Douggy killed Patty," screamed the hargy in the other ear.

"Why? Why did we kill?" I asked aloud.

"Oh, darling boy, your ^{Cancer dad is} ~~sick father~~ was looking for his cure. That's the cure. Sniff the blood."

"That's him," I said aloud, "but what of me?"

"You're sick as well, you swagman. You're under our spell."

"Go away, you whores," I shouted.

Standing alone in the rosy gray air of twilight in that third floor study, my eyes out to sea, my ears in the sands of Hell-Town, and my feet, for all I knew, on the floor of the bay, I saw in my mind how the heads, blonde hair waving, descended like sea flowers tied to the stem of the chain and the root of the anchor. Down they went through

palisades of water to the bottom of the sea and I believe I knew the moment when the anchor touched, for the voices ceased. Had their cries ^{in my ear} ~~to me~~ been a welcome to the head of Patty Lareine? I stood there soaked through in my own perspiration.

Now, my limbs began to tremble freely of one another. Parts of my body were shivering while the rest was still, an experience I had not had before. It was then I felt an idea coming forward to the center of my attention, pressing my spirit against all resistance, as if the thought and I were on opposite sides of a door. Then I could hold it off no longer: I had to examine my pistol (Patty's pistol).

It was a .22, ~~and it had a silence.~~ ^{in the extreme}
~~This may sound like an implausible, I know, but for the~~
~~For the~~ last five days I had avoided this thought.

~~Through how many doors of my mind had I slipped to avoid~~
~~such a meeting, but~~ now the subpoena was served: I had to examine the .22.

It was where it had always been, there in a locked cabinet on her side of the king-sized bed. It was sitting in its case. The lid raised, ^{the box} ~~it~~ reeked. Someone had fired it recently and put it back, ~~uncleaned~~. Was it myself? The casing had been ejected from the chamber and there was a round missing in the magazine. ~~Material evidence was~~

~~collecting with the voices.~~

I did not, however, feel guilty. I was ^{angry} ~~enraged~~.
The nearer this evidence came to me, the angrier I became.
~~There had to be something wrong in the heavens if I was~~
~~guilty of such a crime.~~ The pistol was particularly in-
furiating ~~to me~~ as if I were a criminal lawyer presented
with one more nasty witness inserted against ^{his} ~~my~~ case and
inserted without fair notice, yes, I felt innocent ~~in the~~ ^{and full of}
~~anger of my desire not to be stripped of my strength.~~ ^{anger} How
dare they? Whoever they were. What was being done to tear
my mind from its hinges? How curious that the more likely
it would seem to others--including my father--that I had
^{at least} killed one of these women, ~~at least~~ the more certain I was ^{now}
that I had not.

The telephone was ringing. It was Madeleine.

I took it for a sign that it was Madeleine.

"Thank God, it's you, darling," she said, and began
to weep.

That rich and husky voice had dimensions for expressing
misery. Her emotion soon opened into those ^{deeps} ~~harbors~~ of
sorrow that speak of the loss of years of love, and hot vows
of fucking in the wrong bed. "Oh, baby," she managed to
say, "oh, darling," and was off again. I could have been

listening to the wails of a woman who had just learned she was a widow.

"Darling," she said at last, "I thought you were dead. I had a chill in my heart." She started to wail again. "I was so afraid no one would answer your phone."

"What is it?"

"Tim, don't go out. Lock your door."

I could not remember a time when she had wept so terribly as this. "What's the matter?" I begged.

Slowly it came from her. Phrase by phrase. ^{Every} ~~Each~~ few words ^{were} ~~was~~ followed by her woe, her fear, her outrage. Now there were moments when I did not know if she failed to speak from horror or fury.

She had found some photographs. That was clear at last. She had been replacing washed clothing in his drawers and came across a locked box she had not seen before. It had enraged her that he dared to keep a locked box in their bedroom. If he had secrets, why didn't he hide them in the cellar or the garage? So she smashed the box.

How her terror keened into me over the phone. I could hear the trembling that went beneath her ^{pleas} ~~prayers~~ for courage when she broke his box.

"Madelaine, no," I said, "speak clearly. You must

speaking clearly. What are these photographs? Who is in them?"

"Patty Lareine," she said. "They're of Patty Lareine. They're nude. They're obscene." She began to choke on her words. "They're worse than the ones you took of me. I don't know if I can stand it. I thought you were dead when I saw those pictures."

"Am I in them?"

"No."

"Then why?"

Her weeping had changed. It was not unlike the whimpering of a young girl who has been thrown from a horse, and now must, no matter the shock, sheer panic, and bottomless fright, get back on again. So did Madeleine force herself to see the photos in her mind. Then she said, "Darling, he cut ^{off the} her head off in every one of them."

"I think you better get out of that house," I said.

"It made me sure he decided to kill you."

"Madeleine, get out of that house. It's likely to be more unsafe for you than for me."

"I'd like to burn this place," she said. Then she began to giggle. That was more upsetting than her grief.

"I can't, though. I might burn the neighbors down."

"You would."

"I'd like to see his face when his guns are melted."

"Listen to me carefully. Does he have a machete anywhere in his collection?"

"Several," she said. "And swords. But he uses a scissors." She began to giggle once more.

"Do you see any swords missing?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't keep up with his collection."

"Could you recognize a .22 handgun?"

"Is that a pistol?"

"Yes."

"He's got all kinds of pistols."

I let it go.

"Madeleine, I want you to come and join me here."

"I don't know if I can move. I ripped up a few gowns for he bought me. It's left me paralyzed."

"Hey," I said, "you can do it." *"You can make the move."*
"No," she said. "Nothing in me works at all."
"Don't," she said. "It doesn't work at all right now."

"Madeleine, if you won't come here, then I'll drive down to get you."

"Don't do that," she said. "With his timing, he'll walk in on both of us."

"Then, come here. ~~Pack a bag.~~ Pack all your bags and get in your car."

"I don't want to drive," she said. "I've been up all night. I haven't slept since you were here."

"Why?"

"Because I still love you," she said.

"All right," I said.

"All right, what?"

"I can understand that," I said.

"Sure," she said. "Both of us loving you. That's not hard to understand." She actually stirred out of her woe long enough to give one suspicion of a merry laugh. "You're a fiend," she said. "Only a fiend could hit a happy note at a time like this."

"If you don't want to drive," I said, "call a cab. Take it to Provincetown."

"Take a cab fifty miles? No," she said, "I won't support the cab companies." Yes, she still had her dependable little thrifty streak.

"I need you," I told her. "I think Patty Lareine is dead."

"You think?"

"I know it."

"You saw her?"

"I know it."

"All right," she said after a time. "I'll come. If you need me, I'll come."

"I need you," I said.

"What if he shows up?"

~~"I prefer to face him here."~~

~~"I don't want to see that man anywhere," she said.~~

"Maybe he's afraid of you,"

"You better believe," said Madeleine, "that he is afraid of me. Before he left the house this morning, I told him never to turn his back ~~when I'm around~~. I said, 'If it takes ten years, you filthy fuck-head, I'm going to shoot you from behind.' He believed it. I could see his face. He would believe something like that."

"I'd believe it more," I said, "if you knew what a .22 was."

"Oh," she said, "please don't understand me too quickly."

"Who said that?" I asked.

"Andre Gide."

"Andre Gide? You never read him."

"Don't tell anybody," she said.

start
this
line

~~skip on a banana~~
"I could get wild about you again," I said.

"Promises," she said, "promises."

"Take your car. You can do it."

"I'll get there. Maybe I'll call a cab. But I'll get there." She asked for the address and was reassured when I told her my father would be in the house.

"He's the man I could have lived with," she said, and hung up.

I calculated that it should take no more than an hour to pack, and an hour to drive here. Madeleine's habits being likely to endure, however, over ^{ten} eight years, I could count on waiting four to five hours before she showed.

Again, I wondered whether I should drive out for her, and decided I wouldn't. If Regency did ^{come upon Madeleine and me} walk-in-on-us in his house, that would weaken us. We would be stronger here.

Now I heard my father return. First I heard the rattle of the dinghy being hauled up the davits, then his heavy tread on the deck. He went around, however, to the front of the house and let himself in with the key Patty Lareine gave him years ago when he first visited us.

Patty Lareine was dead.

This thought which kept arriving in my mind like a telegram delivered every fifteen minutes, still had nothing

to offer but its integument. It was more like the envelope to a telegram with no message inside. Certainly no emotion.

"Yes, Madeleine," I said to myself, "I could get crazy about you, ^{but not now} again, but ~~tomorrow~~."

My father came into the kitchen. I took one look at him, and poured some bourbon into a glass, and put the water on to boil for coffee. He looked as tired as I had ever seen him. Yet the flush on his cheekbones was still spread across his face. He looked virtuous and wholly fatigued.

"You did a good job," I said.

"Pretty good." He squinted at me like an old fisherman.

"You know, I was three miles out in the bay before I realized they might be following me with field glasses or worse.

Maybe they ^{even} had a surveyor's transit, where ~~they can mark the~~ ^{mark the angles and} angles. Get two of those on you, and they can intersect the place where you stop to drop it off. Then they send a diver down. Nothing to it. So I realized I better drop my package ~~casual-like~~ ^{casual} while I'm going at medium throttle, and make sure I do it ^{casual} on the side of the boat away from shore. That way my body ~~can~~ conceal what I'm doing. I'm sure it was all for nothing," he said, "and nobody was watching ~~me~~. That's the likelihood. But that's not how I felt then."

-356-

The coffee was ready. I handed it to him. He poured it down his throat as if he were an old ^{diesel} engine taking in fuel. "Just at the moment I was about to drop it off," he resumed, "I started to worry if the baling wire was going to hold. You know, getting those heads onto the chain was the toughest part of the job." He went into detail. Like an obstetrician describing how he got two fingers in to turn the head out of breech, or, yes, like an old fisherman, taking you ^{along} step by step through how to bait ^{on} the hook so that the wriggler stays alive, he accompanied his account with motions of his hand. I ^{followed} got enough of it to realize that the operation had ^{carried} taken him through the socket of one eye and out through a hole he had driven in the skull with a spike. It left me startled again at how little I knew my father. He gave his account with a ruminative relish like a man who works for the Department of Sanitation giving a recital of the worst barrel he collected in an interesting work career, and it was only when he was done, that I could recognize why he enjoyed the account. There was some kind of cure in process. Do not ask me to certify my statement. But there was a faint smug complacency in my father's air as if he were a convalescent who was getting better by disregarding doctor's orders.

Then he startled me. "Did you feel anything unusual," he asked, "while I was gone?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I didn't think I would tell you," he said, "but when I dropped the anchor, I heard a voice."

"What did it say?"

He shook his head.

"What did you hear?"

"I heard that you did it. That's what the voice said."

"You believe your own voices?"

"Considering the circumstances--no. But I'd like to hear you say so."

"I didn't do it," I said. "So far as I know, I didn't do it. I'm beginning to think, however, that I'm responsible in some way for the minds of all the others." When I saw that he did not really follow me, I said, "It's as if I was polluting the pipeline."

"I don't care if you're only half-Irish," he said.

"You're certainly degenerate enough in your mentality to be ^{entirely} ~~whole~~-Irish."

"Shove the abuse," I said.

He took another sip from his coffee.

"Tell me about Bolo Green," he said.

"I can't keep up with you," I told him.

Our conversation was taking on the slippery frustrations of a dream. I felt close to some elusive truth and he wanted to talk about Bolo Green.

He certainly did. "All the while," he said, "that I was bringing the boat back, he kept coming into my head. I felt as if Patty was telling me to ^{think about him} include him in my thinking." He stopped. "Am I being a sentimental son of a bitch about Patty?"

^{"Maybe"} "I think you're getting a little drunk."

"I'm getting a lot drunk," he said, "and I miss her. I tell myself--you want to see how crude I am deep down?-- I tell myself, if you put a weight on an old dog and sank him at sea, you'd miss the dog. Is that crude enough for you?"

"You said it."

"It's gross. But I miss her. I buried her, god-damnit."

"Yes, dad, you did."

"You didn't have the balls to do it." He stopped.

"I'm getting unreasonable, aren't I?"

"What's the ^{good} use of being ^{thick} Irish if you can't welcome senility?"

He roared. "I love you," he cried out.

"I love you."

"Tell me about Bolo."

"What do you think?"

"I think he's part queer," said Dougy. "~~I think him~~
~~and Wardley are thick.~~"

"What's your evidence for that?"

He shrugged. "Patty. Patty told me on the water."

"Why don't you take a nap," I said. "We're going to need each other later."

"What are you up to?"

"I want to snoop around town."

"Keep alert," he said.

"Get your rest. If Regency comes around, talk to him nicely. When he's not looking, hit him over the head with a shovel and tie him up for me."

"Too bad you ain't serious," my father said.

"Give him a wide berth. He might be able to hold his

own against both of us."

I could read my father's thought, but he pinched his lips together and said nothing.

"Get some sleep," I told him and left.

I was being casual but, truly, I was not in hailing distance of such a state. An out-size stimulation had begun so soon as I said, "I'm responsible for the minds of others." A recognition stirred that I must get into my car and drive around town. The impulse was as powerful as the force that came through my drunkenness on the night I tried to climb the monument. I knew the same fear, delicate, near to exquisite in my chest, like the shadow of one's finest pride.

I obeyed. I had not spent near to twenty years contemplating the lessons of my climb up the tower for too little, no, with as much marching grace as my bunged-up toe and half-paralyzed shoulder could permit, I crossed the street, got into my Porsche and drove slowly with one arm ^{on the wheel} down Commercial Street, not knowing what I looked for, nor whether feats would be demanded of me, no, it was something like the excitement, I must suppose, of an African hunter when big animals are near.

The town was quiet. The town bore no relation to my mood. In the center The Brig was half empty, and through

the windows of The Bucket of Blood, I could see only one pool player measuring his shot. He looked as lonely as the ^{waiter} man Van Gogh painted holding ^{standing in middle of the} a cue in the cafe at ~~night in~~ Arles.

I took a turn to the right at Town Hall and parked across the street from the basement entrance to the police station. Regency's car was standing outside, double-parked and empty. The motor was running.

Then came a temptation clear as the mandate to mount the tower. It told me to step out of my car, walk over to his, turn off the motor, take his keys, open his trunk, look inside--speak of creative visualization, I saw the machete in the trunk!--remove it, lock the trunk, put the keys back in the ignition, start the motor, and stroll back to my Porsche and a good exit, yes, I saw all of this in advance and ^{as} ~~it~~ vividly as any trip to the burrow I had thought out for myself, before I went. Now, my first reaction was yes, do it! My second was no.

It was then I understood, as never before, that we lived with not one soul but two, our father and our mother--at the least!--the night and the day, if you will; well, this is no exposition of dualities, but two souls I possessed that were equal to two matched horses--badly matched!--if

one said yes, the other said no, and the poor driver was nothing but my own person who now cast the deciding vote: Yes, I would do it, I had to. I could not live through the debacle of the monument one more time.

So I got out of my car. To my misery, the side street was deserted, thereby giving me no excuse to hold back, and with an exaggerated hobble (as if a maimed man could do less harm in the eyes of the police) I crossed to the car, my heart beating at such a pitch that my fear passed through vertigo into the delirium of intoxication itself. Have you ever taken an anesthetic through a mask, and seen the concentric circles bore in upon your brain as you go under? I saw them now as I took the keys from his car.

"Oh, hullo, Regency," I ~~would have said, if he had come out then.~~ "Hope you don't mind. I need a tire iron from your trunk."

"Oh, yes, I mind," said he, and drew his gun, and shot me.

That passed. Toes tingling, hand shaking, I got the key into the lock of his trunk.

The machete was there.

In that instant when my heart spun like a cat on a high power line and I thought I would die, I knew some

far-off chord of exultation and woe: He exists, or It exists, or They are out there. It was confirmation that the life we live with all our wit and zeal is only half our life. The other half belongs to something other.

My first impulse was to run. Instead, I pried the machete from the floor of the trunk--it was stuck to it!-- slammed down the rear deck of his police cruiser, forced myself (it was the ^{most demanding} bravest measure of the sequence) to get ^{inside his vehicle} back behind his wheel long enough to start his motor again, ^(only then was I) and ~~A~~ was free to cross the street to my own car. Under way, the wheel kept oscillating in my good hand until I was obliged to hold it with both.

Five blocks down Bradford Street I pulled under a lamp for a moment and looked at the machete. It was covered with dried blood on the side of the blade not sticking to the rubber mat. All my notions of Regency collided. Never could I have conceived he would be so sloppy as this.

If he had used the weapon upon Jessica (and, yes, he must have used it upon Jessica) then the only way to account for ^{it} this is that he had not been able to go near ^{the blade} it since. If one is going to remain on the abyss, it is reassuring to discover that one's fellow maniacs ⁰¹³² know fear and trembling.

I drove through town like a man meandering in ^{my} ~~his~~ thoughts, ^{until} ~~and when~~ at last I came to the simple conclusion that the machete must, at least, be placed in my trunk rather than kept beside me as a companion in the front seat, I happened to be ^{then} ~~cut~~ at the circle at the end of Commercial Street where the Pilgrims came in and the breakwater goes over the marsh. There I stopped, and lifted my front lid, and laid the machete in--its blade was nicked, I noticed--closed the trunk, and ^{saw that} ~~noticed~~ a car was stopping behind me.

Wardley got out. He must have put back the beeper. My God, in the state I left my house, I had not even checked my car.

Now, he came toward me. We were all alone by the breakwater and there was just enough moon to see.

"I'd like to talk to you," he said. He had a gun in his hand. It most certainly had a silencer on its muzzle. And, yes, it looked like a .22. It took little creative visualization to conceive of the head of the soft-nosed bullet resting in its chamber.

8.

"Wardley," I said, "you look a mess." ~~However,~~ ^{however, (and that was enough to)} my voice quivered to spoil the suggestion that I was feeling no respect for his fire-arm.

"Yes," he said, "I've been on a burial detail."

Even by the uncertain gleam of the moon going ^{taking a} ~~its~~ wan trip through the scud, I could see that he was covered with wet sand. It went up to his hair and eyeglasses.

"Let's take a walk along the rocks," he said.

"It'll be difficult," I ^{told him,} ~~answered:~~ "I hurt my foot kicking Stoodie."

"Yes," said Wardley, "he thought you had kicked him. He was angry about that."

"I expected to see him today."

"We won't see Stoodie any more," said Wardley.

He made the most delicate move with the muzzle of his

gun as if he were showing me to the comfortable chair in his home, and I set out a few steps to the front of him.

It was not easy walking. The breakwater extended for a mile across the sand flats, the marshes and the bay, and you picked your route over the rocks. They were more or less level on top for much of the way, but now and again you had to leap a four or five foot gap, or else go down the angle of one boulder and up another. In the dark, with my injuries, we made slow progress. He did not seem to mind. Behind us, a car would occasionally come down Commercial Street on its way to the circle, and either turn in to the Provincetown Inn, or ride along the marshes ^{at} to the end of town to the termination of Bradford Street, or even further out to where the highway began, but after we had walked a few hundred feet over the breakwater, ^{these cars} they seemed a distance away. By now, ~~moving ahead of him in my~~ ^{their} slow progress, ~~the headlights of each automobile that~~ ^{were} passed by in the distance seemed as far removed as a ship's running lamps at sea.

The tide had been high, but was now going out, and we continued on our rock-paved route some six or eight feet above the water. Beneath, was the sound of the tide coming out of the marshes and passing through the boulders,

and the sky seemed to come near ~~to~~ my ears until I felt I could capture every sound of the sea. Maybe it was the pain in my foot, and the heavy throb of my shoulder, but I was resigned. If my life were to end on this endless jetty, well, there were worse places, and I listened to the cawing of the gulls, their unrest picked up from our nocturnal passage. How loud were all these transactions at night! I felt as if I could even listen to the eel-grass stirring in the inlets, and the sponge eating at the oyster shells. The wrack and sea-lace began to breathe on the rocks as the swells undulated out from our jetty. It was a windless night and, if not for the chill of November, could have seemed like summer for the placidity of the water, but no, a late Fall night it had to be--no calm equal to this could rise from warmer waters. A Northern chill lay upon the calm telling us of those eternities beyond eternity where the realms of magnetism are icy and still.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Are you planning to go all the way across?"

"Yes," he said, "and I warn you, ~~we've got another~~ *after we cross this, you* *got another* half mile ~~then~~ *midway from* along that beach." He pointed to our left, to about halfway ~~between the place where the breakwater~~ *7/6* ended on the outermost spit of the Cape and the lighthouse

a mile further to the left, there where the tip of the last point on the barrier beach of Cape Cod was reached. For all that mile until the lighthouse there would be no other dwelling and no roads but sand wallows for four-wheel vehicles. They would hardly be stirring on a November night.

Hell-Town had once thrived out there.

"It's quite a walk," I said.

"See if you can make it," he replied.

He was keeping a good number of yards behind me, so that he did not have to carry his gun constantly in his hand, and whenever I came to a difficult passage (and there were one or two low places where the rocks had settled ^{so low that} ~~deep~~ ~~enough to be slippery~~ from the outgoing tide) he merely waited until I found my way across and then took it himself.

After a time, I felt cheered. Local news is most important in catastrophic times, and my toe, broken or not, nonetheless, ~~seemed~~ seemed to be flexing a little better, and my bad left arm was widening the movements it could make without pain. Besides, I did not feel totally afraid. It had always been hard for me to take Wardley seriously. I had, after all, seen him cry on the day we were kicked out of school.

Yet these boyhood certainties might be dangerous. If Wardley were to pull the trigger, his finger would probably be stimulated for lack of taking him seriously.

More than halfway across, I asked for a break. He nodded and sat down about ten feet away from me, near enough so that we could talk while he held the gun. It was then that he filled me in quickly on all kinds of fascinating details. He wanted to talk.

In brief: Nissen was dead. Stoodie was dead. Beth had left town with Bolo Green.

"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"Well, I saw Bolo kill Stoodie, and I certainly saw Beth and Bolo off on their trip. I even gave them money. They left in the van you damaged. *It's her's,*

"Where are they going?"

"Beth said something about visiting her folks in Michigan. Apparently, they've retired ^{*mother and father in*} ~~and live in~~ ^{*to*} Charlevoix."

"Bolo ought to make an impression on Charlevoix," I said.

"Personable blacks have entre everywhere but Newport," he told me solemnly.

"Wasn't Beth concerned about Spider?"

"I told her that he had decamped suddenly with some of my money. She didn't seem too perturbed. She said she was going to sell their house. I think she's been missing Michigan more and more."

"Does she know that Stoodie is dead?"

"Of course not. Who would tell her?"

I tried to ask the next question with tact. It was as if I had been talking to a stranger and had just told a Polish joke and now had to ask, "Are you by any chance Polish?" So with considerable modesty of voice, I said, "Do you know who killed Spider?"

"Well, I did," he said.

"Why?"

"It's sordid."

"Was he holding you up for money?"

"Yes."

"May I ask about it?"

"Tim, you've been concerned lately about heads, I would think. Chez nous, it's been bodies. Spider and Stoodie were on the burial detail."

"They buried the women?"

"Both of them. They lie near one another."

"Where? I would like to know."

"Right where we're going."

"Terrific."

We were silent.

"Right in Hell-Town," I said.

He nodded.

"You know about Hell-Town?"

"Of course. Patty Lareine told me. She's fixed on Hell-Town. It's a pity her remains are separated."

"From her point of view, yes."

"Where's the head?" asked Wardley.

"At the bottom of the sea. I don't know enough to tell you more than that. I wasn't along."

"I don't think that I'd want to do her such a great favor anyway," he said.

No reply came to me easily.

"Where are Stoodie and Spider buried?" I asked.

"Close by. They're all near one another. Indeed, they're near enough so they can have a ball together should the spirit arise." He was taken by a small convulsion of mirth at this, but since it came forth soundlessly, I cannot say that either of us expected me to laugh with him.

Then he raised his pistol and fired a shot into the air. It made the pop I expected--like a small inflated

paper bag being suddenly broken, no great event.

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"Exuberance," he said.

"Oh."

"I'm feeling good that I finished all the work of burial."

"Didn't Bolo help you?"

"Of course not. I was ready, I can tell you, to send him off with Beth. I always knew he was strong, but he killed Stoodie with his hands. Just strangled him. It's a relief that Bolo is gone."

"Where did this take place?"

A perverse look seemed to come on his face. I say "seemed" because I could not see him too clearly by the moon we had, but it was as if he chose now and again not to answer questions for the pure pleasure of failing to reply.

"Why do you want to know?" he said at last.

"Curiosity."

"The desire to know is so powerful," he said. "Do you think that if I do kill you, and I'm not saying I will-- to tell you the truth, I don't have a clue--do you think you'll go out into that dark dominion better armed if a few

questions are satisfied?"

"Yes, I think I do feel that."

"Good. So do I." He gave me a sly smile. "It all happened in the Provincetown woods. Stoodie had a little shack for himself off the highway. Just as well it's by itself. We made a racket."

"And you left both men laying there and took Bolo over to visit Beth?"

"Yes."

"And he and she just took off. Like that?"

"Well, they got started on something last night. Apparently, she had quite a time with him after ^{you} they left The Brig. So I encouraged them to go away together."

"But why did Bolo have to kill Stoodie with his hands?"

"Because I primed him." Wardley nodded. "~~I told a~~ lie. I said ~~that~~ Stoodie had killed Patty Lareine and disposed of her body by feeding it to his dogs."

"Good lord."

"He doesn't even have a dog," said Wardley, "so far as I know. You'd think he would. He's the kind of cur should have a beast."

"Poor Stoodie. Did he kill Patty Lareine?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"I'll tell you in a while, perhaps." He became so thoughtful that I began to hope the muzzle of the gun might lower but, no, it didn't. It kept pointing at me. I would say it was as powerful in its effect as a bright light in one's eyes during interrogation.

Now, Wardley said, "Motivation should have its own field of psychology. Here, Bolo had every reason to do a job on Stoodie, but he hung back. Stoodie kept saying, 'I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't,' and maybe Bolo believed him to some degree. Finally, I had to say, 'Bolo Green, this is the man who calls himself Austin Healey.' That snapped the string in Bolo and, incidentally, took care of Stoodie's neck as well. After that, it was routine for me to shoot Spider. But first, I wanted him to see Stoodie's end."

"Why?"

"No great motive. I just disliked Spider cordially."

"Well," I said, "let's get going."

"Yes," he said.

"Can I ask another question," I said as we stood up.

"Of course."

"How did you ever get the bodies from that shack all

the way out to Hell-Town?"

"I just took them out in my car to the boat I rented. I'm out at Beach Point, by the way. There's no one there now. No great trick to get a body on a boat in the dark."

"Weren't they heavy?"

"I'm a little stronger than I look."

"You didn't used to be."

"Tim, I work out now."

"I ought to."

"Perhaps you should."

"You took the bodies out by water to Hell-Town and buried them there?"

"I should have done all the burials ~~myself~~ from the beginning. If I had, Spider and Stoodie would have known less."

"But this last"
"And after the burial, you went back in your boat to Beach Point?"

"Yes."

"And the beeper led you to me?"

you threw the beeper away."
"No, the beeper's lost." He gave his shy smile once more. "I just wandered into you."

"That's awesome."

"I love design," he said. "Motivation and design. It's what it's all about."

"Yes."

We kept walking. "I have to admit I was looking for your car," he said. *"I just drove around until I saw your Porsche."*

"I don't know if that makes me feel better or worse," I said. Maybe it was the pain, but I seemed obliged to exhibit the cheerful wit of the patient being wheeled by his surgeon to the hour of his operation.

Now we walked along in silence. There was a great deal of phosphorescence in the water, and I pondered the luminous activity of the plankton, but cannot say I had a new thought. We had come to the deepest cleft in the walk, and since I could hardly jump across, I had to take a series of lower boulders on the flank of the cut, and so got a mean scrape on my hand from barnacles. When I swore, he sympathized. "It's cruel to march you so far," he said, "but it's essential."

We continued. It took on at last that ~~go-along~~ rhythm which speaks of movement without beginning or end, and so I hardly noted when we came to the other shore a mile from where we had begun. Now, we left the breakwater and trudged along the last arm of the bay beach. It was icy on one's feet to walk down ⁱⁿ the moist sand, but slow going where the strand was dry. In the dark, for the moon

was now behind a cloud, one had to watch each step. Old boat timbers, stout as bodies, and silver as the light of lunacy itself, were at every odd place in the sand. How one could hear the ebbing of the tide at this hour. Every chirp of a sandpiper stirred by us, every scuttling of crabs or whistle of field mice was audible, and our feet crunched upon oyster shells and razor clam shells, empty quahog shells and ^{mussels} ~~mussels~~ and whelks--how many sounds could calcium offer in ^{cracking?} ~~its-breaking?~~ All the dry kelp and sargassum weed ^{scrunched} ~~crackled~~ like peanut shells beneath our feet, and the mourning of the harbor buoy came back to us on the slow expiring of the tide.

Maybe we walked for half an hour. By the water's edge, pink jellyfish and moon jellies lolled in the moonlight like fat ladies in the sun, and the seaweed that is spoken of as mermaid's tresses washed ashore. I lived in ^{the} ~~in~~ wet phosphorescence of the shore as if the last lights of my life might endure in these ^{cold} ~~icy~~ flashes.

We came at last to our destination. It was a strip no less, nor more remarkable, than any other, and he pointed me up a shallow dune through beach grass and poison ivy to a small hollow. If you sat down, you could no longer view the ^{bay} ~~sea~~. I tried to tell myself that I was on the

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sands of Hell-Town but I doubted if spirits nested here. There was only a pall upon us. The winds must be astringent on this barrier beach. Spirits, I thought, would ^{prefer} choose to cluster in the sheds floated over a century ago to Commercial Street.

"Patty is here?" I said at last.

He nodded. "You can't see where I buried them, can you?"

"Not in this light."

"Not in broad daylight, either."

"How do you know where they are?"

"By their relation to these shrubs," he said pointing to a plant or two on the perimeter of the sunken bowl.

"~~That~~ seems vague."

"Do you see that horseshoe crab shell on its back?"

I nodded.

"Take a better look. There's a stone I put in it so it wouldn't shift."

I could not really see the stone in this light, but I pretended I did.

"Patty Lareine," said Wardley, "is buried beneath that shell, Jessica is four feet to her right, and Spider is four feet to her left. Stoodie is still another four

feet to the left."

"Do you have a place picked for me?" was what I wished to say--the elan of the brave patient demanded no less--yet I could not trust my voice. I was feeling enough fear in the throat to leave it husky. It is absurd, but at the proximity of my death I now felt no more terror than before the kickoff of my first high school football game when I was sixteen. Certainly less than my one and only bout in the Golden Gloves. Had life ground me down to meager emotions? Or was I still on the alert to get his pistol?

"Why did you kill Patty Lareine?" I asked.

"Don't be certain it was I," he replied.

"Did you kill Jessica?"

"Oh, no. Laurel had some serious flaws to her character, but I wouldn't kill her." With the hand that did not hold the pistol, he passed sand through his fingers, as if debating the run of his next remarks. "There," he said, "I think I'm going to tell you."

"I wish you would."

"What difference does it make?"

"Somehow, I think it does."

"How interesting if your instinct is well-founded."

"Please tell me," I said, as if speaking to an older relative.

He liked this. I don't believe he had ever heard such a tone in my voice before. "Do you know what a hog you are?" Wardley asked.

"We don't see) ourselves,"
"Nobody sees (that in themselves," I told him, "until
~~we~~ they change."

"Well, you're a fearfully greedy and covetous person."

"I have to admit that I don't see myself that way."

"You know, my friend Leonard Pangborn was a silly man in a lot of ways. He pretended to gallivant through many a gay world he never went near. He was a creature of the closet. How he suffered his homosexuality! It was agonizing for him. He wanted so much to be a hetero. He was incredibly pleased that Laurel Oakwode had that affair with him. Did you have to have sex with her right in front of him?"

"How did you know that?"

"Because Jessica, as you call her, told me."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes, darling. She phoned me late that night, Friday night--six nights ago."

"That's the night."

"Of course. She was in a total state. After all your show business, you had the gall to drop both of them

back at their own car. 'Get lost,' you snarled at them, 'you're pigs.' How's that for your bartender's rectitude, Madden? What could they do in answer to that? They went for a drive and had a terrible fight. Lonnie reverted. Just like a little boy in a tantrum, he stopped the car, and went into the trunk--so fetal! Isn't that a thought? She didn't even know it at first. The pop wasn't that loud. I mean, they had this godawful end-of-the-earth fight. He calls her a slut, she calls him an old aunty. That's got to be the worst word for such circumstances. So, he gets out of the car, slams the trunk lid, for all she knows, and she waits. Her ears are ringing. She doesn't even hear the pop until it comes through to her that she did. There had been a pop. So she looks. There he is in the trunk, all tucked away. The perfect death for one of my ilk. 'Dear friend,' you might as well say, 'I'd rather have a cock in my mouth than a gun barrel, but if one has to go out cold tit, then cold tit it will be.'"

All the while that Wardley was telling me this, he kept the gun barrel pointed in my direction like a forefinger.

"Where did you get a .22 with a silencer?" I asked.

"He always carried one. Years ago, I bought a ^{rare} special set of three. I don't believe there are a hundred such sets in the world. set of three, and gave one to Patty Lareine and another to

Lonnie. But that's another story. *There was a time, believe it or not, when I was very much in love with Lonnie.*

"I don't understand why he was carrying ~~it~~ *a gun* on Friday night."

"He always carried it. It made him feel like a man, Tim."

"Oh," I said.

"Never occurred to you?"

bothered?
"If he was ~~so~~ *bothered* upset by what I did with Jessica in front of him, why the hell didn't he plug me?"

"You don't carry a gun," said Wardley, "because you would use it. He couldn't. Oh, I know Lonnie. His fury would have liked to reach those high cataclysmic proportions. Kill you, kill Laurel--but of course he couldn't do either. It backed up on him. That's why he was queer, dear."

"That's all it took to kill himself?"

"I want to be truthful. It isn't all your fault. He was in terrible financial trouble. He faced a stiff jail sentence. He threw himself on my mercy just a month ago. Begged me to help. I told him I would try. But, as much money as I have, it would probably have been too big a dent. He sensed I wasn't going to be able to come through."

I was beginning to shiver again. It was as much from

fatigue as anything else, but my shoes and the bottoms of my trousers were wet.

"Would you like to make a fire?"

"Yes," I said.

He debated it. "No," he said at last, "I'm afraid it would be too hard to start. Everything is damp."

"Yes."

"I hate smoke."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry," he said.

I was playing with sand in my hands. Suddenly, he fired a shot. Like that. Pop. It dug into the sand one inch below the heel of my shoe.

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"Don't try to blind me with a handful of dust."

"You're a good shot."

"I've practiced."

"I can see."

"It didn't come naturally. Nothing graceful has ever come naturally to me. ^{Do} Don't you think that's unfair?"

"It may be."

"Oh, well, it's enough to solicit the devil."

We were silent. I tried not to shiver. It seemed to

-384-

me that such shivering might irritate him, and then what would he do?

"You didn't tell me the rest of it?" I said. "What did you do when Jessica called?"

"I tried to get her to calm down. I wasn't so calm myself. Lonnie dead! Then I told her to wait in the car. I'd pick her up. They had been out at Race Point looking at the waves all the while they had the fight."

"What were you going to do?"

"I hadn't begun to think. I don't care how smart you are, at times like that, all you ~~can~~ tell yourself is, 'What a mess.' I didn't know how to handle it, but ^{all the same} I set out in my car to Race Point. However, the directions I had been given were treacherous. I found myself lost in North Truro and all turned around. By the time I found Race Point, Laurel was gone, and so was the car. I went back to Beach Point to tell Patty Larcine what I thought of her directions, and she, too, was gone. She stayed out all night, in fact. I never saw your Jessica again."

"Patty Larcine was living with you?"

"We'll get to that."

"I'd like to."

"First tell me. Did Jessica go back to your house?" Wardley asked.

"I don't think so."

"You can't remember?"

"I was too drunk."

"Did you see Patty Lareine?"

"I can't remember that either, but I think I did.

I think she may have passed through the house."

"Do you know," asked Wardley, "what Patty Lareine used to say about your forgetful spells?"

"No."

"She'd say, 'There's the asshole going up his asshole again.'"

"Probably she would say that."

"She always spoke of you as an asshole," said Wardley.

"When you were our chauffeur in Tampa she used to call you that when she was with me. And when she and I got together again last month, she still spoke of you that way. Asshole. Why would she call you that?"

"Maybe it was her word for jerk."

"She hated you too intensely for that. Especially when she used the word."

"I don't know why," I said.

"I think I do," said Wardley. "Certain men take care of the female components in themselves by having their

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"I think I do," said Wardley. "Certain men take care
of the female components in themselves by having their

special oral sex,"
women practice ~~analingus on them.~~

"Oh, Christ," I said.

"Did you and Patty ever have anything of the sort?"

"Wardley, I don't care to talk about it."

"Heteros are uptight about such matters." He sighed. *He*

rolled his eyes.
"I wish we did have a fire. It would be sexier."

"It would certainly be cosier."

"Well, we can't." To my amazement, he yawned. Then I realized he did it like a cat. He was casting off tension.

"Patty Lareine used to do it for me," he said. "In fact, that's how she seduced me to marry her. I'd never had it practiced so well before. Then, after we were married, she stopped. When I indicated to her that I'd like it to continue, she said, 'Wardley, I can't. Every time I see your face now, *it reminds me of* ~~I see nothing~~ but your rear end.' That's why I didn't like it at all when she called you 'asshole.' Tim, did she ever do it with you?"

"I'm not going to reply," I said.

He fired the pistol. From where he sat. He didn't aim. Just pointed it like a forefinger, as I say, and pressed the trigger. Only the best shots can do that. I was wearing baggy pants and the bullet went through a billow in the trousers below the thigh.

"Next time," he said, "I'm going to shatter your knee. So please answer my question."

He had gotten to me. No question of that. My courage was now down to its reserve tank. It seemed enough under these conditions to keep some semblance of poise.

"Yes," I said. "I asked her to do it once."

"Asked her or made her?"

"She was ready. She was young and it was a novelty to her. I would say she had never done it before."

"When did this happen?"

"The first time Patty Lareine and I went to bed."

"In Tampa?"

"No," I said. "She never told you?"

"Tell me, and I'll tell you."

"I took a trip with a girl to North Carolina. A girl I had been living with ^{for} two years. We were in that stage where you have to try something or break up. So on a whim we answered an ad and went down to North Carolina to meet a couple who wanted to swap partners for a night. The ad said you had to be married, so we said we were. On our arrival, there was this big old boy and his young bride, Patty Lareine."

"Was that when she was called Patty Erlene?"

"Yes," I said, "Patty Erlene. She was married to the local preacher who was also the high school football coach, and the town chiropractor^{as well}. In his ad, he had said he was an ~~obstetrician~~^{a gynecologist} but that was a lie. As he soon told me, 'It's a decoy. No woman can resist a swap if she thinks she's getting an obstetrician.' He was one big gangling old boy, bald, and bountiful down below, at least from what my girl later told me. To my surprise, they hit it off. It was no surprise to me that Patty Erlene and I seemed just about made for each other. She was so excited that I was a real bartender from New York." I stopped. I had the uneasiness of having talked ~~far~~ too long. I had certainly lost my feeling for his attention.

"And that night, she actually did it with you?"

I shouldn't have been wondering about his attention.

"Yes," I said, "that first night was like no other we ever had. It was as if we had been waiting for each other." Let him live with that, I thought.

"She did everything?"

"More or less."

"More?"

"Put it that way."

"Did she ever go so far again in Tampa?"

"No," I lied.

"You're lying," he said.

I didn't want him to fire the gun. It came to me that his good father Meeks must often have struck Wardley like that. Like a shot, without warning.

"Can you take the truth?" I asked.

"It's my pride that I can. Rich people are always lied to," he said. "So it's my pride that I will live with the truth no matter how unpalatable."

"All right," I said, "in Tampa it did happen once or twice."

"When?" he asked.

"When what she wanted most was that I agree to kill you."

It was the largest gamble I had yet taken with him. But he was a man of his word. He nodded at the truth of what I had said. "I always thought so," he said. "Yes, of course," he went on, "that's why she called you asshole."

I did not tell him that after that night in North Carolina, Patty Lareine used to write me for a while. It was as if once I was gone and back in New York, so did the night back up on her as well. She had to keep wiping the memory of it off her mouth. "Asshole," she kept calling me in the letters she wrote. "Dear asshole," she would

begin, or "Listen, asshole." It never stopped until the letters did. Which was about the time I went to prison. In the slammer, I did not take to being called words like that and ^{didn't} answer her seldom and she stopped writing. We were out of touch ^{Then, a few years later, while standing} until ~~one evening in a bar~~ ^{One evening at a bar} in Tampa, I felt a tap on my shoulder, and when I turned around, saw a beautiful blonde woman, very well-dressed, who said, "Hello, asshole."

"I guess she really wanted to kill me," Wardley said.

"You have to face it."

He began to weep. He had been holding it for a long time and it came out. I sat very still. To my surprise, I was moved, but that was only half of me. The other part was locked--it had never seemed so dangerous to make a move.

After a few minutes, he said, "This is the first time I've cried since that last day at Exeter."

"Is that true?" I said. "I cry from time to time."

"You can afford to," he said. "You have something manly to come back to. I'm more or less self-created."

I let that stand.

"How did you and Patty ^{set} ~~come~~ together again?" I asked.

"She wrote a letter to me after our divorce. A couple of years after. I had every right to hate her, she said in

the letter, but she missed me. I said to myself that she must be short of money. I threw her letter away."

"Wasn't Patty awarded a chunk for the divorce?"

"~~She settled for considerably less.~~ My lawyers were ^{ready} going to appeal for years and years. She couldn't afford the cost of fighting that. So she settled ^{for considerably less.} She never told you?"

"We didn't talk about finances."

"She just paid your way?"

"I wanted to be a writer. I made my contract."

"Did you write well?"

"She kept my thoughts too occupied to write as well as I hoped."

"Maybe you're a bartender," said Wardley.

"Maybe I am."

"You don't know anything of her finances?"

^{"Are you saying she was?"}
"Was she close to broke?"

"She had no instinct for investments. Too much of a redneck to trust good advice. I think she began to see that some mean economic years lay ahead."

"So she started writing to you."

"I held off as long as I could. Then I answered. Did you know she kept a post office box in Truro?" Wardley asked.

"I had no idea."

"No."

After a while, she showed her interest. It

"We corresponded. She broached her interest after a while. ^{was for the} The Paramessides estate. I think it became a sign ^{may have reminded} to her of all she'd lost in Tampa."

"And you played with her ^{desire?} interest?"

"I wanted to scourge each of the four chambers of her heart. Yes, I played with her. For two years I brought her hopes up and ^{then I took them} down again."

"And all the while I used to think that each of her bad moods was my fault."

"Vanity is the first vice," said Wardley. "I kept telling myself that she ^{to return to her ways to go back} might just as well be the devil for ^{to the devil} her effect on me, but I missed her. I kept thinking that I might ^{still} be truly attractive to her." He patted the sand by his feet. "Does that surprise you?"

"She never said anything good about you."

"Nor about you. The most unpleasant aspect of Patty's character is that she bad-mouthed everyone. If you want to find true lack of compassion, give me a good Christian every time."

"Maybe it's because she gave such good measure other ways."

"Of-course," said Wardley. "Those wonderful parties"

~~The way she'd offer her body. Generous to a fault.~~ He
coughed from the cold. "Did you know that I used to fuck
her good?"

"No," I said. "She never told me."

treat
"Well, I did. I think it irritated her that I could
know her body so well. No dyke could have done her better.
There were times when I felt sensational around her."

"What happened when she showed up in Tampa with Bolo
Green?"

"I didn't mind," said Wardley. "That was clever of her.
If she'd appeared on my doorstep alone, I would have been
suspicious as hell
wary. This way we had fun. Bolo swings in all directions.
He's got a tweeter right next to his woofer. We had some
tasty three-way scenes."

"It didn't bother you seeing Patty with another man?"

"I always *say* *long for someone who's*
~~said if you wish to be~~ (sexually naive, 33

try the Irish. How could it bother me? Sometimes I was in Patty
while Bolo was in me. *You haven't lived till you feel*
that little thrill.
~~I didn't always get to see his ex-
pression, you might say."~~

"It didn't bother you?" I repeated. "Patty used to
describe you as
~~tell me you were very jealous."~~

"That was when I was trying to be a husband. I never
felt more vulnerable in my life. But now, I was playing a

game. I enjoyed it so much. ^{So,} I gave the word to Laurel.
Go east, dear woman, and sniff out the Paramessides estate,
for me. She did. Unfortunately, it all got complicated by
greed. Lonnie Pangborn happened to mention that Ms. Oakwode
was back in Santa Barbara. ^(I don't like that) She was supposed to be dickering
in Boston and Pee-Town. ^{was calling on} I didn't like that. I wondered
if she were seeing some rich California friends in order to
buy the estate herself and hold me up. By now, I confess,
I wanted it almost as much as Patty. She needed the castle
if she was to play the queen, but I wanted her ^(to be) in a position
where she would need me altogether. That's not ~~an~~ exceptional,
is it?"

"No," I said.

"So Laurel's presence in Santa Barbara convinced me.
I proposed to Patty that we pay a surprise visit to the
Coast. It was also ^{a good} an opportunity to get rid of Joseph
'Bolo' Green. He was taking up too much of our time."

^(Wardley's) His voice had gotten dry as if he had determined to tell
this tale no matter how his throat might protest. For the
first time I recognized that he ^{was} ~~could be~~ even more weary
than myself, and ^{was} ~~was~~ ~~obliged to wonder what drove him to~~
~~continue.~~ It was as if at any moment he would say, "I have
to share what I know with you. When I'm done, I'll recognize

which one of us should go. That's fair, isn't it?" Was the muzzle of his handgun pointing just a hair toward the ground?

"Laurel couldn't have been more attentive to Patty at the dinner, and told her fabulous stuff about her splendiferous personality, and hogged Patty's ear. When it was over, I told Pangborn, 'I don't trust your woman at all. Find some business in Boston and stick with Laurel. Keep an eye on her.' After all, he had recommended her. How ^{could I} ~~was I to~~ know I was sending him to his execution?"

I lit a cigarette. "And you and Patty came east, as well?"

"Yes. I got a place out at Beach Point. Hadn't been here twelve hours when it happened. ~~That was the night~~ Jessica called and I was delayed in getting to Race Point. I never saw her again ^{alive either,} until Spider Nissen took me to visit the body. It was a shock, I'll tell you, to see those headless remains dumped in lime."

"Where?"

"Stoodie's backyard. Out in the woods off the highway. He had them in a stout metal refuse can. The old-fashioned kind they used to make before plastic got into everything."

"Were you sick?"

"I was aghast. ^{Can you imagine witnessing a sight like that in the company of people as awful as Spider and Stoodie?} For one thing, I had been out of touch

"But how did you meet them in the first place?"

"Through Belo Green. The day after Patty