

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

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

Great "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?"

try the "I always ^{said} if you ^{long for someone who's} wish to be (sexually naive, be
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 ^{was talking to me on the phone and} 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. ~~I didn't like that.~~ I wondered
if she were ^{was calling on} seeing some rich California friends ^{so she could} 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 ~~so~~ 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 goal} 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 splendid 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 ^{alive either,} ~~again-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 disappeared I was strolling down Commercial

with Patty. Since the night Jessica called, she had ^{Patty} disappeared. Then Bolo found me. I was strolling down ^{Dear god.} Commercial Street and there ^{Bolo} he was. ^(a bit of) It took convincing to make him believe I did not know where Patty was."

^{"And through him you got"}
"But how did you get to know Spider?"

^{"No, through"}
"Through Stoodie, whom I met that day through Bolo." ^{Bolo}
He and Stoodie had been dealing drugs together all last summer. ^{he}
Isn't it odd that Bolo and Spider didn't meet until this week? That's got to be karma."

He sounded distracted. Now I feared that I might have ^{had} been encouraging him to talk for too long. If he started going off in several directions, the pistol might go off in one.

I needn't have feared, however. He wanted to get the story out. "Yes, I met Spider the second day in town. He ^{had heard} ^{about me, he said} He was all for getting into the largest operations with me immediately. I would have shunned him, but Mr. Nissen was making an incredible presentation. He said he ^{controlled} ^{would} ^{was} had firm control over the top narcotics officer in town. If I could just supply the funds, he could run a prodigious drug operation for me. Yes, he said, he had the Acting Chief of Police ^{was} under his thumb. You may be certain I asked him to prove it. That was when he took me out to Stoodie's and showed me Laurel."

"How'd you know who it was? *her?*"

"I had seen Laurel in that dress before. ~~It was one~~
~~of a kind.~~ Plus the silver nail polish. Plus the tits.
You did notice Laurel's tits?"

"You were interested in ^{*spidee*} the proposition?"

"Not really. But I was intrigued."
"More than I expected. I thought: this peculiar town!

~~It's in a time warp.~~ How extraordinary to be proprietor of
the one fabulous hotel this side of Boston, and control all
the drugs. I'll be equal to a Renaissance prince."

"I don't think it could have worked."

"Well, I know it wouldn't, but I played with him. All
all." "I was half out of my mind. Lonnie's dead, Laurel's

dismembered, Patty is missing, and this disreputable sleazo
has the body in his possession and the top narc in his pocket.
~~I was also on pot.~~ So I took him seriously enough to ask
where the headless lady came from. He was on pot sufficiently
to inform me. I can't believe how trusting the criminal
element is. He would have told me all if I hadn't guessed
it for myself. The body had been left with Nissen and Stoodie
by the narc--who incidentally removed the head for himself."

"Regency?" I asked.

"Regency."

"Did he kill Jessica?"

"I don't know. He certainly wanted that body disposed

of. How arrogant these drug enforcement people are. He had eighteen ways to incriminate Spider so he assumed he could use him, ~~for anything.~~"

"Why not? If the body were discovered, he would say Spider and Stoodie had done it."

"Of course," said Wardley. "Gall backed up by powers. *But I can't think of anything, I'm without Patty. Is she all* And I'm two days without Patty. *I go back to Beach Point in* a whirl, and there she is. Waiting for me. Not a word about where she's been."

Again, he began to cry. It caught me by surprise. However, he choked down his own misery. Like a child forbidden to whimper, he said, "She no longer wanted the Paramessides estate. Since Lonnie was a suicide and Laurel had disappeared, she felt the deal was spooked. Besides, she was in love. She had decided to tell me. She wanted to go away with a man she had been in love with for a year. He wanted to go with her but had remained loyal to his wife. Now he was ready at last to depart with her. Did she mind, I asked, telling me who it was? A good man, she said, a strong man, a man without money. What about myself, I asked her. What about Bolo. No, she told me, it had all been a mistake. She had been trying to drive this man out of her heart, and she had failed. How do you think I felt?" Wardley asked me now.

"Ashes."

"Ashes. I had not been playing a game with Bolo and Patty, after all. I simply adored her so much I was ready to take whatever share she would hand out. Even if it was no more than her big toe." He began breathing very rapidly, as if there was no time to take a deep breath. ~~That was how he took in air now.~~

"'All right,' I said to her, 'leave my life.' I was hoping to clutch my dignity. I felt like a nude who's trying to cover herself with a little gauze before the eyes of a mad artist. 'Just go,' I said. 'It's all right.' 'No,' she said, 'it's not all right. I want money.' Tim, she named a sum on the order of magnitude of what I would have paid for renovations on the Paramessides estate. 'Don't be insane,' I told her, 'I won't give you a cent.' 'Wardley,' she said, 'I reckon you owe me two million and change. If you don't come up with it, I'm going to have you killed.'

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"Then all the truth came out. I couldn't believe how hideous it was. I had been playing a game with her-- I thought!--but no, she had been playing a game with me. You know, when I first got together with her, she was only a stewardess, and certainly not at all polished. You have no idea how much she developed under my tutelage. She was so bright about the little tricks of making her way in my world. So I saw her now as a reincarnation, possibly, of Jay Gatsby. I thought she'd be wild to have a hotel for her palace. She was certainly encouraging me all the while to think so. But, au fond, she didn't give two spits for high society. Boy, she let me have it now. She told me that the two million I was ready to allot her to fix up the place was going to be squirreled off off into other ventures. With that policeman friend of hers! About the time I would discover there were no renovations going on, she would tell me to kiss off--I would now be implicated in the cocaine trade."

"She informed you of all that?"

"No. But she told me enough so that I could see the rest. Only a fool wouldn't. At the end, she said, 'Wardley, I warn you. Give me the money anyway, or, this time you will get killed. I have the man who can do it now. All the worms will run out of you.'"

He rubbed his face as if his nose, his cheeks and his sinuses felt as harsh as a salt mine. "'All right,' I said, 'I'll write a check,' and I went into the bedroom,

took out my .22, popped on the silencer, walked back into the living room and shot her. It was the calmest thing I ever did in my life. I picked up the phone to call the police. I was going to turn myself in. But the devil came right out of Patty and into me. I bundled her up, put her in the car, called Spider to meet me at Stoodie's, and asked him to bury her with Laurel. I would pay them well, I said. What do you think he replied?"

"What?"

"'Take off,' he said, 'and leave the details to me.'"

"The rest is a nightmare?" I asked.

"All of it."

"Why did you tell me you wanted the head of Patty Lareine?"

"Because that was the day I found out that Spider had *decided* to cut her off at the neck. I was having some sort of reflex from the information. ~~I don't know why else.~~ I knew I was in terrible trouble. I could see where Spider's mind was moving. Right into the Hilby millions. They think my money is there to make raids on. As if it were not part of me. What substance do I have other than my money?" He laid the gun on the ground beside him.

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"You may not believe this," he said, "but Patty was my last great romantic hope. I don't mean for me. If she'd found true love, I would have been best man at the nuptials. She had such possibilities. I adored the idea that she and I would create this extraordinary place on the very tip of Cape Cod where only the most insanely special people could get reservations. Just the most special mix of true celebrity and true society. Oh, how they'd have gone for Patty and me as co-hosts." He gave the weariest sigh. "She never took it seriously. She gulled me. She was planning all the time ^{her} to make ~~that~~ fortune in cocaine. Tim, she was crass, she was cheap. And I had no acumen." *People like me are a trial to the world when they lose their acumen.*

Now, he picked up his gun. "I came here thinking I would shoot you. There's a peculiar pleasure in shooting people. It's much more intoxicating than you'd think. So I've been trying to find a good reason to ^{off you} ~~plug you~~. But I'm not certain I can. I can't get angry enough." He sighed. "Maybe I should turn myself in."

"Should you?"

"No," he said, "that's not a viable alternative."

enough. ~~I wish I had the guts to turn myself in.~~ He shook his head. "No," he said, "that's not a viable alternative. I suffered more from the publicity of my divorce case than anything that ever happened to me. I just couldn't live through ^{such} the ridicule again."

"Yes," I said.

He lay on his side, curled up, and brought the gun barrel near his mouth, and said, "I guess you're in luck." He put the muzzle in his mouth.

I think he suddenly felt how vulnerable it would be to lie out there exposed.

"Will you cover me with some sand," he asked, "afterward?"

"Yes."

I cannot explain what I did next, unless it was for the act itself, but I stood up and came near. Whereupon he took the gun out and pointed it at me.

"Trick or treat," he said.

Then he lowered the gun. "Sit beside me," he said.

I did.

"Put your arm around me," he said.

I obeyed.

"Do you like me a little?" he asked.

"Wardley, I do like you a little."

"I hope so," he said, and fired into his mind.

For a gun with silencer, it made a loud sound. Maybe a door to his spirit had blown ajar.

We sat together for a long time. There would never be another classmate I could mourn so well.

When the chill became intolerable, I rose at last and tried to dig a grave with my hands but the shingle was too cold. I could do no more than leave him in a shallow trench covered by a few inches of sand. I thought to bury his gun with him, but that seemed a great waste, so I slipped it into my pocket. Then I made a vow to come back with a shovel in the morning, and set down the beach again on a long walk to the jetty.

It was longer once I came to the rocks. My foot, for all its earlier flexibility, now ached as badly as an exposed tooth, and my shoulder gave the most startling twinges on each mean twist of an unsuspecting nerve.

Yet pain provides its own palliative. Battered by a hundred experiences too large for me, I was calm on the trip along the breakwater, and began at last to think of the death of Patty with something like a commencement of grief. Yes, that might be the antidote to pain--sorrow itself.

I had lost a wife I never comprehended, and with her had departed the vitality of her invincible confidence and

the horrid equations of her unfathomable mind.

I began to think of the day before Patty left me-- was it now twenty-nine or thirty days ago? We had been shopping in Orleans and went for a drive through October woods and inlets, prettier by far in the leaf season than our own scrub pines. There were hardwood trees still in abundance around Orleans at the elbow of the bent arm of the Cape. Coming around a turn, I saw a maple with orange-red foliage against a full blue sky, the leaves quivering and ready, tipped between their last red and the later shadows of the brown oncoming Fall. Looking at the tree, I murmured, "Oh, you sweet bitch," and I do not know what I meant, but Patty, sitting beside me, said, "I'm going to leave you some day." (It was the only warning she gave.)

"I don't know that it matters," I said. "I don't even feel near to half of you. It's as if I don't even have half a half."

She nodded.

There was always a touch of hyena in her cat-like sumptuousness--a hard untouchable calculation of the will at the corners of her mouth. No matter her strength, she was always full of pity for herself, and now she whispered to me, "I feel so trapped. I'm so terribly trapped."

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "It's always out of my reach." And then, in the limited degree to which she could feel some sympathy for me, she touched my hand. "Once, I thought I had it," she said, and I squeezed her hand back. For we had our romantic point of reference. It was the night we met and fornicated like firedancers and copulated into cornucopias of each other, one night--yes--when we were as happy as Christopher Columbus for we each discovered America, our country forever divided into two halves. We were each dancing in the joy of our complimentary charms, sweet as two sugar tits nestled side by side.

In the morning, Big Stoop, her husband, put on one of his other hats, and we all went to church, Madeleine and Patty, Big Stoop and I. He conducted the service. He was one of our fundamental American madmen: He could orgy on Saturday and baptize on Sunday. Our Father's House has many mansions and I'm sure he saw last night as the outhouse. I never understood their marriage. He was the football coach and she was the cheerleader, and he got her in trouble, and they got married, and the baby came out stillborn. That was her last attempt at procreation. By the time we met, they had had several returns on their ad. ("No golden

showers. Must be married.") Yes, with talent enough, I could write a book about Big Stoop and the compartments of his American mind, but in this year I will not try to describe him further except to tell you of his sermon for ~~that~~ I still remembered ~~that~~ and had a recollection here, making my way across the rocks, of sitting in ~~that~~ plain white church, no larger than a one-room schoolhouse, and no grander than a shed. His voice was near me now that Patty was gone.

"Last night I had a dream," he said, and Patty, sitting on the other side of Madeleine from me, squeezed my hand and whispered in my ear like a high school girl, "Your wife-- that was his dream!" but Big Stoop never felt her presence, and went on, "Brethren, it was more than a dream, it was a vision. A vision of the end of time. The skies rolled back and Jesus came again on the clouds of glory to gather His children to Him. And it was awful to see, Brethren, the sinners that screamed and cried and begged for mercy falling on their faces before Him. The Bible says that there will be two women grinding corn--one will be taken and one will be left. There will be two in the bed"--Patty Erlene gave me a stiff jolt in the ribs with her elbow-- "one will be taken and one left. Mothers will wail as

their babies are taken from their breast to be with Jesus and they are left behind because they would not give up their sins. Sin," said Big Stoop, "Sin is the force that the Devil unleashes on the world to keep them from Jesus." Patty Erlene's fingernails were cutting into my palm, but I did not know if it ^{was} ~~were~~ to suppress her giggling or a pinch of childish fright.

"The Bible says," said Big Stoop, "that there will not be one sin in heaven. You can't be a Christian sitting in the Church on Sunday morning, and then go to the creek bank fishing on Sunday night, and stay out of Church. Brethren, that's Sin! That's just what the Devil wants you to do-- He wants you to say, 'Well, it won't hurt to miss this one night.'"

"It sure didn't," whispered Patty Erlene with her breath in my ear, while Madeleine, offended to her navel, her womb, and her core by such carrying on, sat ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ disapproval, cold as congealed grease on my other arm.

"The next thing you know," said his voice, "you're going to the movie houses, and then you're taking a drink, and then you are on your way to Hellfire and damnation-- where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not. Don't do it, Brethren. Come now, while there is still time.

Come before the clouds roll back and it's too late to
cry for mercy. Come to Jesus tonight. Give up your sin.
Give your heart to Jesus. Let Him take over your life."

"You're a hell-cat," whispered Patty Erleen to me,
"and so am I."

"Come and kneel," said Big Stoop, "come and kneel
as we stand and sing number 256. Patty Erlene, come to
the piano. Sing with us and let Jesus speak to your heart."

Patty Erlene played the piano in bang-it-out style
and the congregation sang:

"Just as I am without a plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou biddest come to Thee,
Oh, Lamb of God, I come--I come."

Afterward, we went back to Big Stoop's house for Sunday
dinner which his sister had cooked. It was pot roast done
to a gray dead turn, and potatoes rescued cold and early from
the boiling, and wilted turnip greens. Until that meal I had
never spent time around people who had so much vitality as
Big Stoop and Patty Erlene, but that meal was the other side
of the moon. We ate in silence, and all shook hands when
we left. Three hours later came the automobile accident
with Madeleine. It was ^(almost) five years later before I saw Patty
Erlene again in Tampa and she, after a divorce from Big Stoop,
and ^{her} a stint as an airline stewardess, had met Wardley on a
flight and became Mrs. Meeks Wardley Hilby, the Third.

The power of recollection is such that it can lift you above pain, and I came at last to the end of the jetty in no worse condition than I began. The tide was out and the sand flats carried the smell of the marsh. Under the moon, Irish moss and sea colander waved in tidal pools gifted with silver. I was almost surprised to find my Porsche where I had left it. *Death was in one universe and parked automobiles in another.*

Only when I was turning the key to the ignition did it occur to me that the four to five hours I had allowed for Madeleine to arrive must ^{certainly} have expired by now, and I thought ~~I~~ If not for that, I would never go back to my house (Patty's house) to face Regency, no, I would go to The Widow's Walk where it all began and get so drunk I could remember nothing by morning. Instead, I lit another cigarette, set the car down Bradford Street for home and was back before the fog had to be dinched in the ashtray.

Across the street from my door,
I was surprised. A police cruiser was parked behind my father's car ~~on Commercial Street just across from my door,~~ and that I might have expected, but Madeleine had not arrived. ~~That pair were the only cars in sight.~~

I didn't know what to do. It seemed crucial to see her first, to arm myself indeed with the mutilated photographs she had found in the locked box, but then it occurred

to me that I had not even told her to bring them. Of course she would, ^{but} ~~except~~ would she? It was not her gift nor her vice to employ for practical purposes, properties that horrified her.

In her absence, however, I thought I might as well make certain that, ^(indeed) it was Regency's car outside, so I walked as silently as I could around the house to the kitchen window and there, indeed, on either side of the table, were visible my father and Alvin ^{father} Philip, each appearing quite comfortable, each with a drink in his hand, and Regency's holster and gun ~~even~~ slung on another chair. I would have sworn by the composure with which he sat, that he had not yet discovered the loss of the machete. But then it was also possible he had had no occasion to open his trunk lid for a week.

As I watched, they began to laugh, and curiosity overcame me. I thought I would take the chance that Madeleine, having not ^{Don} arrived in five hours, would not be here in the next five minutes. (Although my heart began to race in rebellion against ^(such a gamble) my ~~timing~~.) Nevertheless, I went around the house again, let myself in by the trap door to the cellar, and walked to the area beneath the kitchen. It had been my retreat at many a party when I became too bored with guests lapping at my booze (Patty's booze) and so I knew you could hear ^{down there} ~~from underneath~~ all that was said ^{above} (in the kitchen).

Regency was talking. He was reminiscing, no less, about old days on narcotics in Chicago and told my father of a tough partner he had, a black man named Randy Reagan. "Do you believe the name?" I heard Regency say. "Of course we rechristened him Ronnie Reagan. ^{The real} ~~That~~ Ronnie was still merely a governor in California, but that was all right with me. Ronnie Reagan became my partner."

"I once had a waiter worked in my bar named Humphrey Hoover," said my father. "He used to say, 'Count the salt shakers that's missing and multiply by five hundred. That's your receipts for the night.'"

^{Humphrey Hoover!}
They laughed. They could go on like this for hours. ^{Another} ~~one~~ of my father's unsung arts. He could keep someone you wanted in a chair remaining in that chair for an evening.

Now, Regency went on. Ronnie Reagan had set up a cocaine ^{entrapment} ~~entrapment~~, but the ^{accomplice} ~~accomplice~~ ^{ratted} ~~ratted~~, and ^{so} ~~so ^{as} ~~as~~ Ronnie came through the door ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{entrapment}, but someone ratted, and ~~as~~ he received for his pains a sawed-off shotgun blast on the side of his face, as ~~he came through the door~~. They gave him operations to restore the missing half of his physiognomy. ^{was feeling} "I ~~felt~~ sorry for the poor son of a bitch," said Regency, ^{and} ~~as~~ I brought a pup bulldog up to the hospital for him. But when I got to ^{the} ~~his~~ room, the doctor ^{was} ~~in~~ there putting in this plastic ^{fucking} ~~fucking~~ eye."~~

"Oh, no," said my father.

"Yeah," said Regency, "a plastic fucking eye. I had to wait while they installed it for the first time. The moment I'm alone with Ronnie I drop the bull pup right on the bed. A tear comes into his real eye. We got to watch out, I think, or there'll be a waterworks. So he says--the poor bastard, his ear is also gone--he says, 'Will I scare the pup?'

"'No,' I tell him, 'the pup loves you already.' If ^{blankets} peeing on ~~the blanket~~ is love, the pup loves him already.

"'How do you think I look?' asks Ronnie Reagan. 'I want the truth.'

"'Well,' I says, 'it's all right. You never was a hot-shit beauty.'"

They laughed. They would go on, story for story, until I came in. So I left by the cellar to return outside, came around, and ran into Madeleine at the front door. She had been registering her nerve to ring the bell.

I could not see her well ~~by the moon~~, but she looked pale and she was ^{quivering} ~~trembling~~. I made no effort to kiss her. It would have been a mistake.

She clutched me, however, and laid her head on my shoulder until the ^{quivering} ~~trembling~~ stilled. "I'm sorry I took so long," she said. "I turned back twice."

"It's all right."

"I brought the pictures," she said.

"Let's go back to my car. I have a flashlight there."

By its light, I had one more surprise. The photos were no more nor less obscene than the other Polaroids, but they were not of Patty Lareine. It was Jessica's head that the scissors had cut from the body. I looked again. No, Madeleine could not tell the difference. Jessica's body was young. It was a natural error. But it offered further light on Alvin Philip Regency. It was one thing to take ^{such} a Polaroid of one's wife or steady girl, but quite another to convince ^{the} lady who ^{had been} was ^{only} in your bed for a week. Prowess is prowess, I thought glumly, and debated whether to tell Madeleine. I did not wish to disturb her any ^{however} ~~more deeply~~ ^{Further} than ~~her reiled feathers would permit~~, and could not decide whether the introduction of another woman ^{in her husband's love} would halve her disruption or double it. ^{So I was silent}

^{quivered} She shivered again. I made the decision to take her inside.

"We'll have to be quiet," I said, "he's here."

"Oh, no, I can't go in."

"He won't know. I'll put you in my room and you can lock the door."

"It's her room too, isn't it?"

"I'll take you to my study."

We managed to ascend the stairs silently. After we were on the third floor, I guided her to a chair by the window. "Do you want a light?" I asked.

"I'd rather sit here in the dark. The view is beautiful through the window." I suppose it was the first time she had ever seen the sand flats of the bay when the moon was on them.

"What are you going to do down there?" she asked.

"I don't know. I've got to have it out with him."

"That's crazy."

"Not with my father there. It's our advantage, really."

"Tim, let's just go away."

"Maybe we will. But first I need the answers to a couple of questions."

"For peace of mind?"

"To keep from going crazy," I nearly said aloud.

"Hold my hands," she said. "Let's just sit here for a moment."

We did. I think her thoughts may have passed into me on the intertwining of our fingers for I found myself remembering the early days when we met, I, a hot young bartender much in demand (for in New York, good young bartenders

build)
get (a reputation among restaurant proprietors not un-
analogous to good young professional athletes) and she,
a saucy hostess, in a Mafia midtown restaurant. Her uncle,
a man much respected, *got* obtained her the job, but she made
it her own--how many sports and dudes and bankrolls passing
through her purlieu tried to get a piece of her, but we
had a perfect romance for a year. She was Italian and a
one-man girl and I adored her. She loved silences. She
loved sitting still with me in a dim room for hours while
the velvets of her loving heart passed over to me. I might
have stayed with her forever, but I was young and *got* bored.
She never read a book. She knew the name of every
famous author who had ever lived but she rarely read a book.
She was as smart and shiny as satin but we never went any-
where except into each other, and that was enough for her,
but not for me.

Now, I might be going back to Madeleine, and my heart
lifted like a wave. A wave at night, be it said. Patty
Lareine at her best used to give me emotions that were close
to sunlight, but now I was approaching forty, and the moon
and the mist were nearer to my sentiments.

I relinquished her hands and kissed Madeleine lightly
on the lips. It brought back how nice was her mouth and

how much like a rose. A faint sound, husky and as sensual as the earth itself, stirred in her throat. It was marvelous, or would be so soon as I was not full of adrenalin at what awaited me below.

"I'll leave you a gun. Just in case," I said, and took Wardley's .22 from my pocket.

"I have one," she said. "I brought my own," and from the flap of her coat she withdrew a little over-and-under Derringer. Two shots. Two .28 holes. Then I thought of Regency's .38 Magnum.

"We're an arsenal," I said, and there was enough light in the room to see her smile. A good line well-delivered was half, I sometimes thought, of what you needed to keep her happy.

So I went downstairs with a piece after all.

I did not like the idea, however, of talking to Regency with the bulges of the handgun poking out of my pants or shirt--there was really no place to conceal it. I compromised by leaving it on a shelf above the telephone within easy reach of the kitchen door. Then I strolled in on both men.

"Hey, we never heard you open the outside door," said my father.

Regency and I said hello with eyes averted and I

made myself a drink. Companion to the adrenalin were the double barrels of my fatigue. I threw the first bourbon down neat and poured another before I put the ice in the glass.

"Which leg are you filling?" asked Regency. He was drunk, and when I finally did reach his eyes, I could see that he was not nearly so calm and well-balanced as he had appeared by his posture when seen through the kitchen window, or as I had supposed by his voice heard through the kitchen floor, no, he had the ability of many a big powerful man to stow whole packets of unrest and their manic fuses in various parts of his body. He could sit unmoving like a big beast in a chair, but if he had had a tail, it would have been whipping the rungs. Only his eyes, preternaturally bright, and glazed by the last hundred hours of lurid unmanagables ⁱⁿ ~~his life~~, gave any clue to what he was sitting on.

"Madden," he said, "your father is a prince."

"Ho, ho," said my father, "you'd think we were getting along."

"Douggy, you're the best," said Regency. "I'll flatten anyone who disagrees. What do you say, Tim?"

"I'd say you're looking to flatten ^{some fish} ~~somebody~~."

"Ho, ho," said Regency.

"Well," I said, tipping my glass, "Cheers."

"Cheers," said Regency, tipping his.

There was a pause. ^{He said!} "I told your father. I'm in need of a long vacation."

"Are we drinking to your retirement?"

"I'm resigning," he said. "This town brings out everything that's unstable in me."

"They should never have assigned you here."

"Right."

"Florida's where you belong. Miami."

^{"Who?"}
~~"Tim,"~~ said Regency, ^{"who"} "put the hair up your ass?"

"All the tongues in town," I told him. "It's common knowledge you're a narc."

His eyelids fell heavily. I do not wish to exaggerate, but it is as if he had to turn a mattress over. "That obvious, huh?" he asked.

"There's a job profile to being a narc," said my father equably. "You can't conceal it."

"I told those chowder-heads who appointed me, it was bad enough pretending to be a State Trooper, but this was the pits. Portuguese are stupid stubborn people except for one thing. You can't bullshit them. Acting Chief of Police!" If there had been a cuspidor, he would have spit

into it. "Yeah, I'm going," he said, "and Madden, don't say 'three cheers.'" He burped, and said "excuse me" to my father, and then looked morose. "I've got an ex-Marine over me," he said. "Can you imagine a Green Beret in a chain of command under a Marine? It's like putting the steak on the fire and the skillet on top of the steak."

My father thought that was funny. Maybe he laughed to ameliorate everyone's mood, but it did tickle him.

"I got one regret, Madden," said Regency, "it's that we never did get shit-face while talking ^{a little} philosophy."

"You're practically there right now."

"Never. Do you know how much I can drink? Tell him, Dougy."

"He says he's halfway through his second fifth," said my father.

"And if you put a mickey in my drink, I'd drink right through that too. I burn the stuff faster than it can touch the lining of my stomach."

"You must have a lot to burn," I said.

"Philosophy," he said. "Let me give you a sample. You think I'm a crude unlettered stupid son of a bitch. Well, I am, and proud of it. You know why? A cop is a human creature born stupid and raised in stupidity who

wants to become bright. You know why? It is God's desire. Every time a stupid guy gets intelligence, the devil's in shock."

"I always thought," I said, "that a man became a cop to be shielded from his own criminality."

The remark was smartass. I knew it as it left my lips.

"Fuck you," said Regency.

"Hey," I said.

"Fuck you. I want to talk philosophy and you make quips."

"That's twice," I said, holding up a finger. He was about to say it again and restrained himself. My father's mouth, however, was tight. He was not pleased with me. I could see where it would be a disadvantage to have him there. Regency would not be divided so much as myself. Alone with him, ^{Alone} I would not have cared if he said "fuck you" all night.

"What is the strength of a dirty soul?" asked Regency.

"Tell me," I said.

"Do you believe in karma?"

"Yes," I said. "Most of the time."

"So do I," he said. He reached across and shook my hand. For a moment I think he debated whether to crunch

my fingers in his, and then gave me the charity of releasing them. "So do I," he repeated. "It's an Asian idea, but what the hell, there's cross-fertilization in war, right? There ought to be. All that slaughter. Let's get a couple of new cards in the deck at least, right?"

"What's your logic?"

"I got one," he said. "It's as big as a battering ram. If a lot of people die unnecessarily in a war, a lot of innocent American kids,"--he held up a hand to forestall any argument--"and a lot of innocent Vietnamese, I'll give you that, the question becomes: what's their redress? What's their redress in the scheme of things?"

"Karma," said my father, beating him to the punch.

If my father didn't know how to wear a drunk down, who did?

"That's right. Karma," he said. "You see, I am not an ordinary cop."
~~"What's your logic?" I asked again.~~

~~"Madden's jab keeps piling up points," said Regency.~~

~~"Only, not for me. Cause I am not an ordinary cop."~~

"What are you," I asked, "a social butterfly?"

My father happened to like that one. We all laughed, Regency the least.

"The average cop puts down cheap hoods," he said.

"I don't. I respect them."

"For what?" asked my father.

"For having the moxie to get born. Contemplate my argument: Think about it. The strength of a rotten dirty soul is that no matter how foul it is, it has succeeded in being reborn. Answer that one."

Is he thinking of ~~Wissen-en~~ himself, I wondered.

"What about gay people being reborn?" I asked.

I had him there. His prejudices had to bow to his logic. "Them, too," he said, but it wearied him of the argument.

"Yeah," he said, looking at his tumbler, "I've decided to resign. In fact, I have. I left them a note on my desk. I'm taking a long leave of absence for personal reasons. They'll read it and send it to the Marine in Washington. The grunt who's over me. They took ^{this} a grunt and ran him through a computer. Now he thinks only in BASIC! What do you think he'll say?"

"He'll say your personal reasons translate into ^{psychological} ~~medical~~ reasons," I said.

"Fucking aye. Up his Mrs. Grundy, I say."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tonight, tomorrow, next week."

"Why not tonight?"

"I have to turn in the cruiser. It's town-owned."

"You can't do it at night?"

"I can do anything I want. I think I want a rest. I've been working for eight years without a real vacation."

"Are you feeling sorry for yourself?"

"Me." I had made the mistake of jolting him by that remark. He looked at me and my father as if measuring us for the first time. "Fellow, get it straight," he said. "I have nothing to complain about. I have the kind of life God wants you to have."

"What kind is that?" asked my father. I think he was genuinely curious.

"Action," said Regency. "I've had all the action I wanted. Life gives a man two balls. I've used them. Let me tell you. It's a rare day when I don't ^{bang} ~~fuck~~ two women. I don't sleep well at night if I haven't gotten ^{my} ~~that~~ second fuck in. Do you read me? ^{There's} ~~I have~~ two sides to ^{my} ~~my~~ nature. They both got to express themselves in order for me to sleep."

"What are those two sides?" asked my father.

"Doug, I'll tell you. They are my enforcer and my maniac. Those are my two names for myself."

"Who is talking right now?" I asked.

"The enforcer." He laughed to himself. "You ^{had to be} ~~was~~

hoping I'd say the maniac. But you haven't seen him yet. I'm merely enforcing this conversation with two so-called good men."

He had gone too far. I could take his insults but there was no reason for my father to suffer them.

"When you turn your police cruiser in," I said, "be careful to wash out the mats in your trunk. The blood stains from the machete are all over it."

It came to him like a bullet from a thousand yards away. By the time the idea reached ~~him~~, its force was gone, and the shot fell ~~spent~~ at his feet.

"Oh, yeah," he said, "the machete."

Then he struck himself across the face with more force than I had ^{ever} ^(give to) seen a man ~~put~~ on a blow against his own person. The sound ^{splattered} ~~sizzled~~ the air in the kitchen.

"Would you believe it?" he said. "This sobers me up." He seized the edge of the kitchen table in his hands and gave it a squeeze. "I'm trying," he said, "to be a gentleman about all this and leave town quietly, Madden, without me impinging on you and you impinging on me."

"Is that why you're here?" I asked. "To leave quietly?"

"I wanted to see the lay of the land."

"No," I said, "you wanted to get the answers to some questions."

"Well, maybe you haven't got it wrong for once. I thought it might be more courteous to come here than pull you in for an interrogation."

"That's all you need," I said. "If you bring me in, you have to enter me on the books. Then I don't answer a single question. I just get a lawyer. When I finish telling him what I know, he'll ask the State to form a committee to investigate you. Regency, do me a favor. Treat me with the same courtesy you'd give a Portugese. Don't try these bullshit threats."

"Hear, hear," said my father, "he's laying it out for you, Alvin."

"What do you know," said Regency. "Your son is not incompetent with a problem."

I glared at him. When our eyes locked, I felt like a small craft cutting too near the wake of a ship.

"Let's talk," he said. "We got much more in common than we're opposed. Isn't that true?" he asked my father.

"Talk," said my father.

Regency's expression was bent by the last remark, and as much, I thought, as if we were brothers at odds looking for good marks from our father. The insight saved me from building one accumulating woe. For I recognized then how

jealous I was of Regency now that he was around Dougy. It was as if he, not I, was the good, strong, and very bad son that Big Mac wanted to straighten out. God, I was as bad about my father as most girls are about their mothers.

Now all three of us stayed silent. There are chess games where one hour of the two you are allotted to make ¹⁵ your forty moves may be spent on one move. He didn't know how to go on. I didn't either.

Finally, I decided to proceed. His confusion had to be deeper than mine.

Therefore, I said: "Correct me if I'm wrong, but you want answers to these questions. One, where is Stoodie and, ^{two, where} 15 Spider?"

"Check," he said.

"Where is Wardley?"

"Ditto."

"Where is Jessica?"

"I'll buy that."

"And where is Patty?"

"You got it all," he said. "Those are my questions."

If he had had a tail, he would have thumped it hard at the mention of Jessica's name and twice as hard at Patty.

"Well," he said, "let's have the answers."

I wondered if he ^{was wired.} had a tape recorder hidden on his person. Then I realized it didn't matter. He was not there to act as a police officer. His Magnum in its holster on the chair was what I wanted to keep my eyes on, rather than the remote possibility he was recording what I said. After all, he was here just as much as ^{me} myself to look for ^{his} sanity. Not to know the truth of certain matters might condemn you ^{at the end} to ^{every} circles ^{the} of ghosts, impotent and obsessed.

"What are the answers?" he repeated.

"Both women are dead."

"How do you know?"

"Because I found their heads in the same place my marijuana is kept." I waited. He really didn't have the conviction that to pretend astonishment would serve any purpose.

"What happened to those heads?" he asked.

"Did you put them there?"

"I never put both heads there," he said. To my astonishment, he began without warning to groan in great pain like a wounded animal. ^{"I've"} "I've been in hell," he said. "I can't believe it. I've been in hell."

"I'll bet you have," said my father.

"It doesn't matter any more," Regency said.

"Why did you sever Jessica's head?" my father asked.

He hesitated. "I can't tell you."

"I believe you want to," said my father.

"Let's slow up," said Regency. "I'll tell you what you want to know provided you inform me about what I want to know. Quid pro quo."

"It won't work," I said. "You have to trust me."

"Where's your stack of bibles?" he ^{asked} said.

"It won't work," I repeated. "Every time I tell you something, you're going to ask another question. After I give it all to ^{up} you, there won't be any reason for you to tell me."

"Turn it around," he said. "If I talk first, what's in it for you?"

"Your Magnum," I said.

"You think I'd off you in cold blood?"

"No," I said, "I think you'd lose your temper."

My father nodded. "It's logical," he murmured.

"All right," Regency said. "But go first. Give me one piece of news I don't have now."

"Stoodie is dead."

"Who did it?"

"Wardley."

"Where is Wardley?"

"You have a reflex," I said. "You ask questions. I'll tell you when the time comes. Keep your part of the bargain."

"I'd like to meet this Wardley," said Regency. "Every time I take a step, he's underfoot."

"You'll meet him," I said. Only after the words were out of my mouth did I realize how spooked they were.

"I'd like to. I'd give him a fistful of teeth."

I began to laugh. I couldn't help it. That may, however, have been the best reaction. Regency poured himself a drink and swallowed it. I realized it was the first liquor he had tasted since I mentioned the machete.

"All right," he said, "I'll tell you my story. It's a good one." He looked at my father. "Douggy," he said, "I don't respect many people. I respect you. From the moment I came in here. The last guy I met who was your equal was my Colonel in the Green Berets."

"Make it a general," said Douggy.

"We'll get there," said Regency. "But I want to make it clear. There's rough stuff ahead."

"I would think so," said Douggy.

"You love your son. You're going to lose sympathy with me."

"Because you hated my son?"

"Hated. That's past tense. How did you know?"

My father shrugged. "You seem to respect him now."

"No, I don't. I half respect him. I used to think he was dirt. Now, I don't."

"Why?" I asked.

"I'll tell it my way," he said.

"All right."

"Get it straight. I did a lot of things to you. I was trying to drive you off your nut."

"You nearly succeeded."

"I had a right to."

"Why?" asked Dougy.

"My wife, Madeleine, when I ^{first came across} met her, was a rescue case. ^{I could}
^{Your} ~~You~~ son drove her into depravity. She was a coke-head, ^{when}
^{have arrested her, Your son} ~~I met her.~~ He put her in orgies, cracked her up in his car,
^{on her} destroyed her womb, and took off (a year later. I inherited
^{was obliged} a woman who had such a ~~coke~~ habit she had to deal for the
stuff in order to feed her own nose. Her ~~womb was destroyed.~~
You try living with a female who can't have your son. So,
get it straight, Madden, I hated your guts."

"Well, you stole my wife in turn," I said quietly.

"I tried to. Maybe she stole me. I got caught between

two women, your wife and mine."

"Jessica, too," I said.

"I make no apologies. When your wife took off, she
(me as well as you)
was leaving both of us, Buster. I got my habit. Love is
nothing to do with it. I have to stick it in two women a
day. I've even made it with Beth and with some of Stoodie's
disease-bags to give you an idea of the force of the principle.
(for Patty)
Jessica was a surrogate, no more."

"Then you and Madeleine. . .every night you went home?"

"Of course." He belted some more bourbon. "It's simple.
Let's not get side-tracked. I hated you, and I have a simple
mentality. So I took Jessica's head and hid it right next
to your marijuana locker. Then I ~~practically~~ told you to
go there."

"Didn't you think I might associate you?"

"I figured it would ~~scare~~ *open* your ass. I thought you
would die in your own shit. That's the word."

"Did you put the blood on the front seat of my car?"

"*FBI*"
He nodded.

"Whose was it?"

He didn't reply.

"Jessica's?"

"Yes."

I was about to ask, "How did you do it?" but I could see his eyes going in and out of focus as if the scene were still thrusting itself upon his mind, and he kept forcing it back. I wondered if he had used her head for ^{such a} the purpose and put the thought away before I would start to visualize it.

"Why?" asked my father, "didn't you do a test, ^{next day} for the blood on the seat of the car?"

Regency smiled like a cat, ~~through the bourbon he~~ sipped. "Nobody would ever believe," he said, "that I put the blood there, if I was too dumb to test it, and ^{so} let you wash it off. How could they ever accuse me of entrapment then?" He nodded. "I woke up that morning worried that I would be accused of entrapping you. It sounds stupid now, but that's how I was thinking then."

^{Tim.} "You were losing the best part of your case against ~~him.~~"

"I didn't want him to hang. I just wanted to drive him nuts."

"Did you kill Jessica?" I asked. "Or did Patty?"

"We'll come to that. It's not the point. The point is that I was crazy about your wife, and all she'd talk about is you, and how much she hated you, and how you ^{used up} ruined her life. All I could see is that you were half her size by

any real measure, so what was she bellyaching about? Then I got it. She fucking well had to destroy a man. Because when I wouldn't lift a finger against you, she took off, and almost destroyed me. So I got the picture then. I had to do a job on you. Forsake my police vows and do a job."

"It wasn't a small one," said Dougy.

"Fucking aye. It was brilliant." He shook his head. "The details were brilliant. I told Patty to take the gun that killed Jessica and put it back in its case uncleaned. The smell alone should have given you a stroke. There you were, all passed out, and she stopped by the bed and put the gun away."

"How did you ever find my Polaroids and cut the heads off? Patty didn't know where they were."

^{blank.}
He looked confused.

"I never knew you had Polaroids," he said.

I believed him. My heart fell into a small hole lined with cold lead.. "It was done," I said.

"Patty says you do crazy things when you're drunk. ^{sliced those heads off the photos yourself?} Maybe you ~~did the slicing yourself on those photos.~~"

I didn't wish to live with the thought, but I had to believe him.

"If you ever cut up a photo," I asked, "why would you do it?"

"I did," he said, *"I cut Jessica's photos up. Recently."* "recently. And I'll tell you why. It was to get the beheading out of my system. I couldn't stop seeing Jessica. ^{her} Her last expression ~~staring at me~~ ^{transfer it} ~~out of the walls.~~ So I decided to get it down to the level of the image. That's right in the psychology of violence." He took a little more bourbon. I thought he was going to have an epileptic fit. His jaws were grinding, his eyes were bulging, and his neck muscles knotted. Then he got the question out, "What about Patty?"

Before I could answer, he gave a fearful groan, stood up, went over to the door, and began to butt his head against the door jamb. I could feel the kitchen shake.

My father approached from behind, seized him around the chest and tried to pull him away. He threw my father off. My father was seventy. Nonetheless, I could not believe it.

It calmed Regency, however. "I'm sorry," he said.

"So be it," said my father, as if making his farewell to the last illusion that his strength remained intact.

I was afraid of Regency again. As if I were the interrogator and he were the aggrieved husband of the victim, I said softly, "I had nothing to do with Patty's death."

"I will pull you apart with my hands if you're lying," he said.

"I didn't know whether she was dead or alive until I saw her head in the burrow."

"I didn't either," he said, and he began to weep.

It was not an attractive noise. He may not have cried since he was eight years old. The sounds that came out were like the shaking of a machine when one of its legs comes loose from the bolts on the floor. I felt like a towel-boy in a whorehouse comparing my grief to his. How he had loved my wife!

Yet I knew I might ask him anything now. Weeping, he was helpless. He had lost his rudder. He would wallow in questions.

"Did you remove Jessica's head from the burrow?"

He rolled his eyes. No.

I had an inspiration. "Did Patty?"

He nodded.

I was going to ask why, but I knew he could hardly speak. I had to bend the question, but I didn't know how.

My father stepped in. "Did Patty think," he asked, "that whatever Tim deserved, you ^{couldn't drop the head} shouldn't do that?" ~~that~~ ^{on him?}

Regency hesitated. Then he nodded.

"So she asked you to keep the head?" my father went on.

He nodded.

"~~So~~ you put it in your car?"

He nodded.

"And then ^{Patty left you?} she disappeared?"

He nodded. "Gone," he managed to say.

"So you decided to ^{put Jessica's head back (C.H.)} return Jessica to where she had been?"

Regency nodded.

"And you found," said my father in a most gentle voice,
^{Patty's head had been put there, too,}
 "that ~~Patty was also there.~~"

Regency put his hands on the back of his head and employed them to bend his neck. He nodded.

"Was that the most terrible sight you ever saw?"

He nodded.

"How did you keep yourself together?"

"I did," said Regency, "until now," and began to weep
^{sound}
 all over again. He made a noise like a horse screaming.

I thought of the last time I had seen him. ^{But a couple of hours before} ~~he had dis-~~
~~covered Patty dead and dismembered but a couple of hours be-~~
^{he had gone to the barrow and discovered Patty's head.}
~~fore.~~ With what power he had held that knowledge!

My father said, "Do you know who put Patty there?"

He nodded.

"Was it Nissen?"

He nodded.

"Yes, it had to be," said my father.

"Did you kill Jessica?" I asked Regency.

He shrugged. Then he shook his head.

"Was it Patty?"

He shook his head. Then he shrugged again. Then he nodded.

"It was Patty?"

He nodded.

It seemed to me that one could find the outline now.

After Lonnie shot himself and Jessica called, Patty sent Wardley off to the rescue with false directions. That offered Patty time to join Regency so both of them could pick Jessica up. Patty or Jessica must have driven Lonnie's rented car back from Race Point to The Widow's Walk. Considering Jessica's state, it was probably Patty. Once the car with Lonnie's body was parked, all three must have gone off together in the cruiser. Who could measure Patty's rage that Jessica had tried to buy the Paramessides estate for herself? How could Wardley not have told her? He loved so much to play with Patty's expectations. So, Patty could well have carried her .22 to the meeting with Jessica. If she then saw Ms. Pond appealing to Regency for help, and with just a hint of carnal history in that appeal, well, it wouldn't violate the limits of Patty's temper in these extreme circumstances to jam a gun barrel into ~~the simulations of~~ ^{mendacious} Jessica's lips. And if

Regency had made a move to stop her, that would have kicked the trigger.

Regency sat in his chair ^{the way} like a fighter sits in his corner after he has taken a terrible beating in the last round.

"Why did you cut off Jessica's head?" I asked. In my mind, I saw the down-coming sweep of the machete blade.

He made a gurgling sound in his throat. His mouth was distended at the corner. I began to wonder if he had had a stroke. Then his voice sounded, hoarse and as full of awe as the voice of Harpo.

"I wanted," he said, "to join Patty's fate with mine."

He fell out of his chair and onto the floor and began to thrash in a fit.

Madeleine came into the kitchen. She was holding the Derringer in her hand but I do not think she was aware of that. It had been in her hand so long. I suppose she had held it all the while she was in my study.

She looked older and more Italian than ~~ever~~ before.
Her face showed something ^{of} ~~like~~ the mute fright a stone wall
may feel when it is about to be pulled down. She was further
away than any of us from the promise of tears. "I can't
leave him," she said. "He's ill, and I think he may die."

Regency was motionless now but for his right heel.
That beat against the floor in an ongoing convulsion of
nerves. Or was it a lashing from the tail he did not have?

It took all of my father and myself to carry him up-
stairs, and then it was a near thing. We almost toppled
backward more than once. I laid him on the king-size bed
that Patty and I had occupied upon a time. What the devil,
he had been more ready to die for her than I had been.

Epilogue

Regency lay there day after day and Madeleine nursed him as if he were a dying god. It is incredible what you can get away with in Provincetown. She called the police station in the morning to tell them he had ^{had} a breakdown and she was taking him on a long trip. Would they arrange the papers for a leave of absence? Since I had ^{found} ~~had~~ the wit to wash the trunk of his cruiser before dawn and park it at Town Hall with the keys under the seat, there was nothing to connect my house to his absence. Madeleine made a point of calling each day for four days and chatted with the Sergeant about his condition, and the poor weather in Barnstable, and how she had had the phone turned off so he wouldn't be disturbed. Indeed, she did have her phone service disconnected. Then, on the fifth day, Regency made the mistake of recovering to a degree, and we had some horrible scenes.

He lay in bed and cursed us all. He spoke of how he

would bust us all ~~down~~. He would have me ^{taken down} arrested for
my marijuana patch. He was going to ^{also going to accuse me of} have me accused of
the murder of Jessica. My father, he declared, was a
~~practicing thief and sodomite~~. He, Regency, was leaving for
Africa. He would be a professional soldier there. He was
also going to ^{stopping in EU} San Salvador. He would send me a postcard.
It would be a ^{photo} picture of himself holding a machete. Ha, Ha.
He sat there in bed, his muscles bulging out of his T-shirt,
his mouth twisted from the stroke, his voice coming to him
by way of new arrangements in his brain, and he picked up the
phone and slammed it down when he discovered the line was
dead. (I had been quick to cut it.) We gave him tranquilizers
and he went through them like a ^{bull} ~~horse~~ breaks a fence.

Only Madeleine could control him. I saw a side of her
I never witnessed before. She would soothe him, she would
lay a hand on his forehead and calm him, and when all else
failed, she would ^{upbraid} ~~curse~~ him into silence. "Keep quiet,"
she would say, "you are paying for your sins."

"Are you going to stay with me?" he would ask.

"I will stay with you."

"I hate you."

"I know that," ~~she would say~~.

"You're a filthy brunette. Do you know how dirty
brunettes are?"

"You need a bath yourself."

"You disgust me."

"Take this pill and be silent."

"It's designed to injure my testicles."

"Good for you."

"I haven't had a hardon in three days. Maybe I'll never have one again."

"Never fear."

"Where's Madden?"

"I'm here," I said. I was always there. She tended him alone at night, but my father or ~~myself~~^I was always on guard in the hall holding his Magnum.

Very few calls came in on the downstairs phone. No one who was left connected me to much. Regency, so far as anyone knew, was on the road. Beth was gone, and Spider as well, so people, if they thought of them, assumed they were on a trip. Stoodie's people, being afraid of him, were happy not to hear. No one I knew missed Bolo, and Patty was assumed to be travelling in some part or another of the wide world. So was Wardley. In a few months, Wardley's relatives might consider how long he had been away without a word, and declare him a missing person so that after seven years the nearest of kin, just in case, could pick up his estate. In a few months, I might

declare Patty missing, or then again, I might never open my mouth. I thought I would let events decide that for me.

Jessica Pond's son, Lonnie Oakwode, might yet prove to be a problem. But then, what could connect me to her?

It was Regency. If our security depended on Alvin Philip then we had none. He inhabited every crossroads. Nor did I like the way he kept to his bed. It indicated to me no more than that he was waiting until he could find a story for himself. In any event, he did not leave his bed.

Within it, however, he had a fearful mouth. To Madeleine, in our hearing, he would say, "I made you come sixteen times in one night."

"Yes," she said, "and none were any good."

"You didn't act that way. You twitched and bounced all over the goddamn mattress."

"I thought you were an electric eel."

"That," he said hopefully, "is because you got no womb."

She shot him that afternoon. Any one of us could have done it, but it happened to be Madeleine. My father and I had already discussed it in the hallway. "There's no way out," Dougy said. "It has to be done."

"He's sick," I said.

"He may be sick, but he's no victim." Dougy looked at

the big time,
and I bet on the
"Giant" and sold him to
"I" and "Y" with the big time when I
painted "He

me. "I have to do it. I understand him. He's my kind of guy." I think my father meant that one must shoot one's own injured animals.

"If you change your mind," I said, "I can manage it." I could. My damnable faculty of being able to visualize what I might soon see, was becoming more palpable. In my mind, I discharged Regency's Magnum into his chest. My arm flew up in the air from the kick of the handgun. His face contorted. I saw the maniac. Regency looked like a wild boar. Then he died, and as he did, his face took on an austere look, and his chin became as wooden and set as the good jaw of George Washington.

Do you know, that was the last expression he offered before he died? I came in after the double blast of Madeleine's little Derringer, and he was expiring on what had been my marriage bed. It seems the last thing he said before she pulled the trigger was, *"I like Patsy Laverne. She was big time and I belong there."* ~~"I'll always keep a clear picture of you, baby. From asshole to appetite."~~

"Good luck!" said Madeleine,
It was nothing that remarkable to go out on, but she had come to her own conclusion that he must be executed. Crazy people in serious places had to be executed. That much you learned with your Mafia milk.

A year later, when she would talk about it, she told me,

"I thought you were big time when I met you," he said; "but you were small potatoes."
"Bet on it," said Madeleine, and shot off her gun.

"I just waited all day for him to say enough to ^{the word that would} get my blood to rise."

His body was taken out to sea by my father that night, ^{it was} and buried with a cement block tied by separate wires to his waist, his armpits and his knees. By now, of course, my father was practiced at such a course. On the first morning after Regency had his attack, and lay unconscious, Dougy insisted on being taken in the boat to Wardley's cemetery out on Hell-Town beach, and there he had me find the graves. I did. That night while I kept guard over our fallen narc, my father put in six hours of the hardest work. Near the dawn, on the rising of the tide, he took out all five bodies to the deep water and sank them well. Doubtless, I am in danger of writing an Irish comedy, so I will not describe the gusto with which Dougy now made his preparations to take Alvin Philip to the watery rest, except to say his comment when done was no less than, "Maybe I been in the wrong occupation all this time." Maybe he was.

Madeleine and I went out to Colorado for a ^{awhile} time, and now we inhabit Key West. I try to write, and we live on the money that ^{comes} from her work as a hostess in a local restaurant and mine as a part-time bartender in a ^{hole} place across the street from her place. Once in a while, we wait for a

knock on the door, but I am not so sure it will ever come. There was a flurry about the disappearance of Laurel Oakwode and pictures of her son in the papers. He said he would not rest until he found his mother, but his face in the photographs lacked, I thought, that kind of character, and the feature story hinted that the local people in Santa Barbara were ready to assume Laurel, having financial peccadilloes in common with Lonnie Pangborn, had doubtless found a wealthy Singapore businessman or someone of ^{that} his ilk. Blood, or no shirred blood, Pangborn's end was officially called a suicide.

One piece appeared in the Miami Herald about the disappearance of Meeks Wardley Hilby III, and a reporter actually tracked me down to Key West and asked if I thought Patty and Wardley might be together again. I told him they were both out of my life but doubtless dwelling in Europe, or Tahiti, or somewhere between. I suppose that story can always flare up again.

No one ever seemed to want to know what happened to Regency. It is hard to believe, but there were almost no official inquiries to Madeleine. A man from the Drug Enforcement Agency in Washington telephoned her once and she told him that she and Regency were driving down to Mexico, ^{had been} ^{Laredo,} but Alvin disappeared on her in Laredo, so she never crossed

(Earlier on our way)
the border. (On our way earlier to Colorado we had even
taken ^{the} a long detour to Laredo to provide her with a motel
receipt that she could show to official eyes if her story
was ^{ever} questioned.) I do not think, however, that anyone in
the official side of the drug business was wholly unhappy to
lose him. There for now it rests. I asked her once about
Alvin's brother, but the occasion on which the photograph of
the nephews was taken happened to be the only time she met
his family--one brother.

Since we had little money, we thought of selling our
houses, but neither was in our name. I guess they will be
lost eventually for taxes if bad weather and lack of main-
tenance does not take them first.

My father is still alive. The other day I received a
letter from him. It said: "Keep your fingers nice and
crossed, but the chirpy birds, to their big surprise, now
think I got remission. It's as big as absolution to them."

Well, Douglas Madden's son, Timothy Madden, has his own
theory. I suspect that my father's present state of physio-
logical grace has something, doubtless, to do with all the
heads and bodies he plumbed and weighted and carried out to
sea.

No wonder that cancer is so expensive to cure.

And I? Well, I am so compromised by so many acts that I must try to write my way out of the internal prison of my nerves, my guilts, and my deep-rooted spiritual debts. Yet I would take the chance again. In truth, it is not all bad. Madeleine and I sleep for hours with our arms around each other. I live within the fold of her deed, not uncomfortable and not insecure, deeply attached to her and aware that all my stability of mind rests on the firm foundation of a mortal crime.

Let no one say, however, that we escape from Hell-Town wholly unscathed. One fine summer sunset in Key West when winds from the Equator were blowing across the Caribbean and the air conditioning had given out, I could not sleep for thinking of the photographs of Madeleine and Patty that I beheaded with a scissors. For it came to me then to remember that I had done it after sunset (in some dreadful intimation, doubtless, that Patty would leave me) just before we set out for the seance ^{which} ~~that~~ Harpo conducted. If you remember, Nissen began to scream because he had a vision of Patty in her final state.

What can I tell you? The last news I had from Provincetown was by way of a friendly floater who passed through Key West and told me Harpo went mad. It seems he gave another

seance some time ago and claimed to see six people at the bottom of the deep and two women spoke to him who were ^{void of} ~~without~~ a torso or any limbs. Poor Harpo was committed, and from what I hear, is only to be released a little later this year.

END

Comedy:

"bad people and things, marriages, drinking parties, gaming, swindling, and mischievous servants, braggart squires, intrigues, youthful indiscretion, stingy old age, procuring, and the like as they occur daily among the common people.

Tragedy:

"death-blows, desperations, infanticide and parricide, fire, incest, war, insurrection, wailing, howling, sighing."

Martin Opitz von Boberfeld

(1597-1639)