

CHAPTER ONE

Part One

In early December of 1954, not long before his thirty-first birthday, Norman Mailer experienced a professional reversal that assumed, as it unfolded, the proportions of a major turning point in his personal as well as his professional life. Stanley Rinehart, whose Rinehart and Company had published Mailer's The Naked and the Dead in 1948 and his Barbary Shore in 1951, had been trying unsuccessfully to extract from the novelist certain changes in the text of his third effort, The Deer Park, as the book proceeded deeper and deeper into its production process. Claiming that the Mailer text went dangerously beyond acceptable limits of exploration in at least one of its sexually explicit scenes, and perhaps hoping that his lawyers would find the novel as a whole to be actually obscene, Rinehart finally broke his contract to publish the book, despite the fact that it was already in page proof, that it had already been advertised in Publisher's Weekly, and that copies were scheduled for release to

the bookstores in two month's time.

Rinehart's decision came very close to shattering Mailer, whose complex emotional investment in the book included the consideration that it was a comeback effort on his part, designed to show that the critical and commercial failure of Barbary Shore had not been barometric ~~of the course~~ ^{for} of his future career. From the edge of post-partum emotional exhaustion he was now forced back into a main current of furious marketing activity, and in the more than two months that it took him to contract with another publisher he found himself rejected by seven major houses: They had seemed to close ranks with Rinehart in a kind of concerted, industry-wide affirmation of what Mailer came to identify as a judgement of no-confidence in him and the vision he had been trying to discover in his work. By the time that Putnam's broke ranks and contracted to publish The Deer Park, its author saw himself as something more than a novelist having a run of bad luck; he now identified the fight over publication as simply the flashpoint for ~~touching off~~ a deep, subterranean explosion at the foundations of his life, and he saw this, in turn, as an explosion that had been a lifetime in the building.

Looking back on it in Esquire in 1959, in an essay called "The Mind of an Outlaw," anatomizing the structure of rejection and dawning disillusion, identifying the instant crisis as the virtually inevitable conclusion of a lifetime of misdirected thinking, Mailer designates the climactic moment of his perception in terms that will become central in his vocabulary

from this moment on: He identifies the crisis as apocalyptic. "And so, as the language of sentiment would have it, something broke in me, but I do not know if it was so much a loving heart as a cyst of the weak, the unreal and the needy, and I was finally open to my anger." In a fury of catharsis Mailer moves ^d through a ritual of renunciation, most specifically breaking off with the established literary and publishing community, whose journals had, six years earlier, rung with his praises: "I no longer gave a sick dog's drop for the wisdom, the reliability, and the authority of the public's literary mind, those creeps and old ladies of vested reviewing. . . ." But he ~~breaks~~ ^{breaking} as well, with the whole world of his past, whose institutions, role models and collective wisdom had gone so far toward shaping Mailer's personal as well as his professional identity. "I turned within my psyche, I can almost believe, for I felt something turn to murder in me. . . . I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it, I liked it a good night better than being a gentleman. . . ."

This first of many apocalyptic moments in Norman Mailer's career serves as a kind of signpost, for those who would find their way into the story of that career, indicating the direction toward ultimate discovery. To ^{determining} begin here, and to bear down hard on the question of just what Mailer was rejecting (to penetrate the immensely resonate term gentleman, for example), requires, ~~us~~ to depart from the terrain of January, 1955, and go backward in time. What he rejected, and why he rejected it, might emerge as

But, I wish I could convey just why this sentence troubles me — it is, I think, too indirect for such a major threshold in your narrative. I am not sure it is best to suggest, or give us with a new, more direct, sentence.

we do that, putting us in a position both to appreciate the intensity of his dramatic impulse toward divorce, and to decode the pattern of what came after. The new life Mailer set out to invent after The Deer Park is the one so tirelessly recorded in the journalistic annals of the years that followed--particularly, perhaps, the next fifteen--and reading that story, even trying to read through it into the story of postwar literary and cultural America, is the work of any student of the Mailer life story. But before one goes forward, simple lack of reliable information forces one first to go back.

The road back is clearly enough marked: His first years of public life, beginning with The Naked and the Dead, identified Mailer as "one kind of writer," and his struggle to change himself into "another kind" stands at the center of that period. And before that there had been almost two years of literary composition, a period begun after his discharge from the army in 1946, during which a traditional, indeed an almost classical disciplinary structure had been discovered which had, in turn, significantly shaped Mailer's sense of who he was and how he could most effectively function. There had been two extraordinarily formative years in the army before that, to which the tap-root of varieties of violence, renunciation and what he once called "the language of men" can unmistakably be traced; and before that there had been four years at Harvard. Those years concluded with his marriage, a relationship begun in December of his junior year and the

internal dynamics of which record, like a seismograph, a major stage in the process of his becoming; but Harvard, Harvard itself, represented nothing less than incarnation. Mailer discovered the word at Harvard: He wrote two novels, a novella and over thirty short stories while he was there and in doing so became, in the great, the high priestly tradition, a writer. He would deconstruct this first version of that identity and recompose it in terms of the deepest disavowal, but Harvard would transfix his inner ear for the rest of his life, the cause before all other causes, but one of what would happen after.

But the first cause, the actual prime mover, came at the very beginning, and it of course was produced by the impact between the infant Norman Mailer's essential genetic composition and the force field of his parents and their world. That hit would jar both sides profoundly, generating a relationship which at once warmly bonded and coldly polarized progenitors and offspring. The resulting dynamic went very far beyond the limits of normal parent-child interaction, requiring this particular child to sense so much and know so little that we, seeking to understand, have no choice but to go back and join with him there at the start. Contemplating the source of all the sources that would follow, we then can begin blazing a trail back up the years until we arrive, once again, at The Deer Park, Stanley Rinehart, and our now-grown child's ringing goodbye to all that. Then we can at least hope to respond specifically to a question about which we can now only generalize: Goodbye, we must

discover at last, to exactly what?

Part Two

The two people who brought Norman Mailer into existence met at a modest resort lodge in Lakewood, New Jersey, in April of 1920. Isaac Barnett Mailer, a twenty-nine year old South African national, had been discharged from the South African army in London the previous August. An accountant who had done duty as a quartermaster, he was in the United States under the sponsorship of his brother-in-law, David Kessler, a successful candy manufacturer in Brooklyn and husband of Barney's slightly older sister, Anne. The Kessler's had rented space at the lodge throughout the winter, while Anne recovered slowly from the dreaded influenza that had ravaged the country in 1919, and were introducing their relative and house guest for the first time to the Schneider family--proprietors of the unassuming kosher-menu boarding house--and, most pointedly, to the two unmarried Schneider daughters, Rose and Fanny. Within a month Fanny, the youngest of four daughters and then about twenty-eight years old,

was exchanging letters with the man everyone called Barney: He from New Orleans, where he had found work as an accountant with the United States Shipping Board; she from Long Branch, New Jersey, where she and her family lived and where, that summer season, they had just begun to lease and operate the Phelandro Hotel. Barney returned to stay with the Kesslers the following September, pursued his suit with Fan successfully, and, when he departed in October to a still better job in Milwaukee, was secretly engaged to be married. The two developed their relationship, and eventually their wedding plans, in an extended, extremely detailed correspondence that--broken by one dramatic visit home from Barney--lasted for nine months. Returning finally to Brooklyn in late July of 1921, Barney embarked upon an ultimately successful job search in New York city, spent a great deal of time in Long Branch, and worked out with Fan and her family the final nuptial arrangements. The two were married on February 12, 1922, at the Broadway Central Hotel in Manhattan. After a week-long honeymoon in Atlantic City, they moved into the Schneider family home at 15 Morris Avenue in Long Branch, where Fan re-immersed herself in the hotel business while Barney commuted daily to New York. The first of their two children, Norman Kingsley Mailer, was born in Monmouth Memorial Hospital in Long Branch on the morning of January 31, 1923, just two weeks short of the couple's first wedding anniversary. It was a high forceps, breech delivery birth, accomplished after twelve hours of extremely difficult labor. When the tiny mother--the

diminutive Fan stood about 4' 10"--was delivered of her seven pound infant, she had weathered the first great crisis of her married life. It was to be neither the last nor, by any measure, the worst.

Which is not to suggest that the idea of crisis, in itself, was new or especially intimidating to Fan; she had grown up in a family and a community that identified pessimism as worldly wisdom, and that spoke routinely of the worst being yet to come. Crisis-directed though it was, however, such dark thinking did not, in her world, serve to separate family members out from each other. On the contrary, a shared sense of life's impossible difficulties was a more or less conscious bonding device that served to bring loved ones together in united alliance against the forces of external adversity. But the crises that would begin to punctuate the lives of Fan and Barney and their children--a daughter, Barbara Jane, was born in 1927-- were of a kind new to Fan: newer than sex, newer even than childbirth. These last, after all, she had known about, and knew that they would one day come to her. In many ways she had looked forward to them. But what was brand-new to her was the idea of living with someone who led two completely separate lives: One of them all surface, conventionally respectable, conventionally intimate; the other one underground, criminal, fantasy-driven, totally narcissistic. Unheard of to Fan though it was, this was exactly the situation she discovered in her marriage to Barney, and all the more baffling was the fact that, even in retrospect, there was so

little apparent sign of it in the days leading up to the marriage.

Certainly Fan and her close-knit, always vigilant family felt no ominous vibrations when Anne and David Kessler brought Anne's younger brother to Fairview Lodge that April in 1920, carefully steering him toward the unmarried daughters. The couple was matchmaking, obviously, but married people in the Jewish community were always matchmaking: It provided them their only comfortable mechanism for relating to single friends and family of marriageable age. The Schneiders were confident that they understood what was happening, and, when they saw that Fan was receptive, the only important thing to be discovered was whether or not Barney was an acceptable prospect. He was Jewish, he came well represented, he was presentable on the face of it; what else was there to discuss?

A major potential impediment was the problem of money: Fresh from the army, Barney had no property, claimed no patrimony, and had almost nothing in the way of savings. On their side, the Schneiders were not at all well off. Their small Morris Avenue property was heavily encumbered, and they were living from season to season in the resort business. In place of money, however, they had achieved to distinctly significant standing in their community; standing that derived not from their modest mercantile enterprises, but from the fact that Fan's father was the functioning Long Branch Rabbi. His position was unpaid, but in compensation for that it placed Yehudda Schneider and his wife at

the very head of the town's small Jewish community. In that position she was honored and he was positively revered, for every testimony confirms the family folklore that what he lacked in shrewdness as a businessman he more than made up for in his wise, caring, even loving stewardship of that Long Branch congregation over a period, by 1920, of twenty-five years. Ten years before Norman's birth, Fan's sister Jenny had been married to Harry H. Michelsohn, son of a father who had amassed a small fortune in the liquor business and who had been eager to affiliate his family with the penniless Schneiders. Jenny's older sister, Rebecca, had in 1906 overcome her mother's objections and married a young entrepreneur named Louis Shapiro. By 1923 he was one of the leading Jewish businessmen in Long Branch, had opened his own bank, and was in the act of buying and extravagantly renovating the beautiful old Scarboro Hotel. The Schneiders had something to offer that was to many people more valuable than money, and when Barney Mailer, sponsored by his sister, showed that he could attract Fan's attention, the automatic first question was whether the family would think he was good enough.

Their decision that he was really quite suitable, reached upon due deliberation, stemmed from their conclusion that he would bring a great deal to the family besides money, and that he had every reasonable prospect of making a good living without the need for capital. He was, after all, a man with a profession. The many things that Barney had to offer added up to what could properly be called a touch of class. His family was South

African, and the testimony of his sister and her wealthy husband, both themselves emigrants, painted a reasonably accurate family picture of first-generation prosperity: Three of Barney's brothers were still quite young, as were three of his sisters, but his older brother Louis was already wealthy and landed, thanks to his success in the world of finance, and the two older sisters had married well. Barney's parents were respected and active in the Johannesburg Jewish community, and his mother in particular, once the preliminaries were past, was ardent in flooding the Schneiders with letters proposing alliance and solidarity between the two families. Barney's parents had come out from Lithuania to Johannesburg in steerage, and the immigration officer had impatiently shortened their unpronounceable name to "Mailer," but their notable success had been achieved in what the Schneiders identified as the Western European Old World, an impossibly hard nut for penniless Eastern European Jews to crack. This was impressive to a family that had itself sailed in steerage from Russia to Ellis Island--the father first and the mother and five children later--and which after thirty years was still struggling to get established financially. It was also impressive that Barney, born in Johannesburg, had trained for his profession in a university--an education that went vastly beyond anything to be got in Long Branch: Fan's sister Rose, trained in the Trenton Normal School, approved of Barney both as a professional man and a cultural ambassador. His experience as a world traveller struck them all. He had been

posted in London for two years, and had crossed to New York as a cabin passenger on an ocean liner (where he had been one of the organizers of the Third Class grand ball and entertainment program the night before landing.) He talked in a familiar way of countries and cities and experiences that the Schneiders had encountered only in books, and the way he talked was important to his new friends as well. To Long Branch, Barney's South African accent seemed British, and in fact his years in London had given him the opportunity to affect something of an actual British tone. His speech, that is, seemed elegant to a family whose mother and father still spoke badly broken English after thirty years, and all but the youngest of whose members had suffered in the streets or in the schools

while having to learn their new language. And consistent with Barney's speech, surpassing it even in elegance, was the way he dressed. There was something fantastic about his clothes. Barney was short, perhaps no more than 5' 4" when he met his tiny Fan, with a trim, full-chested build that he outfitted impeccably: carefully chosen suits, always spats, always gloves and a stick. He would have looked very fine if he were not particularly handsome, but in fact he was, extremely so, and handsome in a way that strikingly recalls so far-distant a contemporary as the F.Scott Fitzgerald of those years. Barney had a strong, cleft chin, broad brow, arresting eyes, with a mouth perhaps a little thin. But finally, the thing that the family discussed at greatest length was that he never--not in his looks nor in his

speech, not in his background nor in his name--in any way revealed the fact that he was Jewish. Whatever else that might have meant to Fan's people, it certainly meant that they thought he could get around the worst of the rampant anti-Semitism of the time and be free to flourish in his profession. In sum, the family not only saw nothing wrong with this prospective member, they judged him to be one who would both add to and appropriately draw upon the inner strength of the Schneider clan. They were thus ready to welcome him into their ranks.

Yet, when all of that was said, Yehudda Schneider, liking Barney--without exception, the most casual acquaintance always liked Barney--also said that Barney was "The strangest Jew I ever met." He said it gently, not only because Yehudda was himself gentle but because he cared so much for his youngest daughter, and Fan, apart from all other pros and cons concerning the suitor, was absolutely crazy about him. That fact alone would probably have decided the question of his suitability in the family's eyes, for by 1920 Fan had made them all aware that she felt they owed her something. The women in the family had always taken up extra burdens when the men found them too difficult to carry, and Fan had, she felt, labored longest and hardest in this connection. With her brother and two sisters married, and her other sister teaching school, Fan alone was left to serve as project manager, planner and supervisor of the hired help season after season in the resorts and inns that her father leased, catering to kosher vacationers from New York and New Jersey.

Indeed, in the summer of 1921, during which her engagement became public and plans for the wedding began to move forward, she managed a second season at the rented Phelandro Hotel so successfully that in October, all bills paid, her parents had ended with a net profit of ten thousand dollars on the season. It was almost three times more than the year before, and though the crush of paying guests had been a great burden for Fan, the profit changed her parents' lives. They paid off the mortgage on their Morris Avenue home, invested in the purchase of a cluster of three cottages on the corner of North Bath and Ocean avenues, and began for the first time in their lives to believe that they might actually be spared financial ruin. Though she felt a great sense of responsibility for her parents, and was glad for their good fortune, Fan now wanted deliverance. She wanted to function, like the other children, from a position of independence, and to join her brother and sisters as an equal partner in a kind of family consortium, jointly looking after the parents while individually pursuing goals and lives of their own. When she met Barney, all of the important things seemed to come together, and Fan intended to let nothing stand in the way.

Least of all was she deterred by Barney's own initial protestations that he was not good marriage material. She more than agreed with the rest of the family that his strengths were compelling, and she was self-confident enough to feel that his new secret weapon as a married man would be that he had her for a wife. Raised from earliest childhood to address the daily

adversities of family existence as life-or-death struggles, she knew in herself the power of a trained and seasoned fighter. She sometimes allowed herself to daydream about a life that included leisure, recreation and self-indulgence, but she actually knew these things only as the beleaguered resort-town worker knows them: At second hand. Her personal experience had prepared her not for pleasure but for striving, and she was positive that with a home of her own, shared with a man she loved and who loved her in return, she could break free from what she recognized as the tyranny of traditional Jewish weltschmerz and discover for herself the unimaginable compensations of success. If, in this vision, Barney proved tough enough to take the lead in moving his family forward, so much the better. But if he should falter, if in the unlikely event his capacity for dealing with the world were to show itself less than great, Fan had no fears. She knew all about the classic Jewish scenario in which kind, loving husbands and fathers, precisely because of their positive qualities, failed adequately to answer the challenge of the world outside their families. This had after all been the drama of her parents' marriage, and Fan had joined her mother and her sisters in putting the balance right. But Barney seemed such an unlikely candidate for this kind of role, seemed indeed to be so altogether a self-sufficient man of the world, that the idea of his falling into such circumstances served less as a warning to Fan than it marked the outside measure of her capacity to imagine marital misfortune. Certainly she imagined none greater.

A considerable amount of imagining was required, in any case, when Fan and the rest of her family undertook to acquaint themselves with Barney. He had met Fan just once in the spring of 1920 before he left for New Orleans. While there, he corresponded with her and they flirted a little back and forth, so that when he returned in September they could approach each other with some seriousness. Still, they had perhaps only four meetings that month before he left for Milwaukee, spent very little time alone, and, when she accepted his proposal and his kiss in parting, he remained very much of a stranger. The only people who could even claim to know him were his sister Anne and her husband David Kessler, and their agenda in representing Barney to the Schneiders did not permit of much freedom to be candid. To the contrary, their agenda required that they conceal beneath a facade of conventional matchmaker enthusiasm the fact that they were actually engaged upon a full-scale reclamation project; one that had been under way for at least a year when they first brought Barney to Fairview Lodge. In the spring of 1919, when the time for London-based Barney's discharge from the South African army began to approach, Anne and Dave had begun to plan with him by overseas mail the outlines of his new life. He would petition the army to discharge him in London rather than Johannesburg, and ask that the boat fare be applied instead to a steamer ticket to New York. He would petition the United States Consul for a hard-to-get entry visa, with his short-term support and long-term assurance of employment guaranteed by Dave Kessler.

Barney would come to New York, live with the Kesslers, find a good job, discover a strong wife from a strong family in the context of a traditional Jewish community, and he would put his prewar past where it belonged, behind him, forgiven, forgotten and filed away under the heading of Wild Oats. The Kesslers were not able to be candid because the Schneiders couldn't be allowed to know that when Barney originally went into the army in South Africa he did so as a family pariah: He was a gambler, a reckless one, and when his father agreed to pay off his very considerable debts it was on the understanding that Barney would join the army, apply for overseas service, and never again return to his homeland. Anne and Dave were undertaking to prove that Barney's stern father had been wrong, that the son's adoring mother had been closer to right, and that with them in charge of the rehabilitation, all would be well in the end. They were jubilant when Barney told them about the engagement (which he and his fiancée had agreed to keep secret) because they thought that Fan and the Schneiders and Long Branch were exactly the medicine their patient required.

Unlike the Kesslers, Barney apparently felt that he should tell Fan, if not everything, at least something. So when he came up from New Orleans that September, he began what turned into a courtship by explaining that he really shouldn't think of marriage because he not only had no money and no prospects beyond what his profession might permit, but because he also gambled. Fan heard him out and kept it to herself--she was very much

inclined to keep things to herself--but she didn't take it seriously. She told him that he was too much inclined toward self-deprecation, that in the context of their relationship he would come naturally to see that the risks of gambling made no sense, and that even if it turned out to be a weakness with him, she would help him to overcome it. In short, without actually having been consulted by the Kesslers in the matter, Fan shared their belief that she could handle it.

But the truth was that none of them--not the Kesslers, not Fan--knew Barney well enough to have the least insight into how he would deal with marriage and the family life. Anne hadn't seen her brother since well before the war, knew the details (whatever they may have been) of the legendary Johannesburg gambling crisis only at long distance, and had no knowledge at all of how her brother had passed his time in the army (his scant surviving private papers indicate that he passed much of it by gambling and by calling upon young ladies.) Fan, of course, knew infinitely less than this: She had only Barney's letters from Milwaukee, in which he assumes the identity of a serious, professional man, trying at long-distance to get his overemotional fiancée to calm down and grow up. (No more than one year older than Fan, he treated her at this time as if she were at least ten years his junior--which she may well have told him that she was.) He apparently never again spoke voluntarily to her about gambling, or about any other impulse or inclination that might suggest social or psychological aberration. When he returned from

Milwaukee it was as a reassuring combination of earnest job-seeker and ardent fiancée, and Fan very probably concluded that the gambling he had spoken of was a false alarm, perhaps intended to add a finishing touch of glamour to his man-of-the-world bachelor identity.

In fact, gambling was Barney's private door into a secret world, and apparently had been since adolescence. When he was a boy, one of the great stage melodrama heroes to be presented in Johannesburg theatres was "Raffles," the debonair criminal hero of The Amateur Cracksman and other stories by E. W. Hornung, and it is not unlikely that Barney would have seen some of these dramatizations. (His brother-in-law, Dave Kessler, had been a theatrical producer in Johannesburg before marrying Anne and coming out to the States.) Raffles is the romantic personification of the outwardly respectable man who secretly leads a criminal, if rather kind-hearted life, and the habit that most characteristically identifies him is gambling. Whether an adolescent Barney had ever actually seen and been smitten by this image, or whether he discovered his models in some other way, there is no doubting the fact of his secret identity. He was one of ten children--five sons and five daughters--who scrambled furiously in their first-generation South African world, seeking their fortunes while sustaining the conservative forms of Jewish family life. We can only infer that Barney somehow got stuck in the passage from adolescent to adult orientation, and that part of him remained arrested there, black sheep of a comparatively

snowy flock, while the other part--the outer, public part--went on to become, of all things, an accountant. The pointed, almost absurd contrast between this super-respectable, narrowly responsible public identity, and the uninhibited free-wheeling of Barney's private self, suggests, on the face of it, a fragile emotional structure that should quickly have broken down under the pressures of real-world marital responsibility. But no such breakdown, in Barney or in the marriage, was to come about. Somehow he put his underground and his surface lives into a juxtaposition that synergized energy for him; energy enough to permit commodious movement in both of the separate spheres, in each of which he seemed to feel altogether at home.

All Fan and the family saw at first was the slightly aloof, slightly conservative husband and parent. He early landed an enviable position in the Manhattan office of the General Motors Corporation, and as he left Long Branch every morning for the ferry shuttle to the city, his knife-edge wardrobe always distinguishing him from among the other passengers, it was as if a gifted actor were moving through a deceptively simple performance, making his difficult balance seem easy. Both at home and at General Motors, he conscientiously did all that he was expected to do, while at the same time he was doing something altogether otherwise. Gambling, for Barney, was not a compulsion that he tried but was too weak to resist; it was not an obsession that reduced or victimized him. For Barney gambling was a world full of people whom he liked and who liked him (Fan would

complain later that he "cared more about some stranger that he met in a bar than he cared about his own family.") Barney's gamblers were committed to an activity that brought skilled players together to test one another, like gentlemen who made up the membership of a particularly convivial club. They admired one another for winning with modesty and losing with insouciant good humor, and they required nothing more of each other than that. What seems to have made it both thrilling and energizing to Barney was its illicit, outlaw identity in the eyes of propriety-bound hearth, home and profession. As gambler, he related to the middle class in very much the way that a young artist of his generation might do. His pride was there. Without the gambling, it may be that Barney risked feeling flat and two-dimensional in the undramatic institutional grids of family and office. But with it, running every dangerous risk, he commanded a vantage point that permitted him always to see the ironic contrasts between where he was at the moment, where he had been a little while before, and where he just might be a little while hence. Commanding such a position, he was a force to be reckoned with. If only he had sufficient cash reserves, or sufficient skill at the tables to stay ahead of the game, it is at least theoretically conceivable that Barney might have gone along indefinitely with his double life--like a man with a manageable mistress, feeling at home wherever he finds himself. Then his wife and children might have known him only as a kind and concerned, if slightly stuffy man, who was in certain situations

unapproachable and even invisible; a man who needed to keep a certain amount of time free to be by himself. But of course Barney had no cash reserves, and his skills as a gambler were at best too limited for his means. He would sometimes lose on a scale that he couldn't begin to afford, and when that happened he would obtain money from one of his worlds to pay off his losses in the other. He would borrow, he would beg, and when all else failed he would steal.

This was the stage where met the infant Norman Mailer entered on January 11, 1923. His parents had been married for only a year, and it was a little too soon for Fan to have yet learned about Barney's gambling. The pattern, established from the start, was that a crisis involving uncomfortable losses would surface about every two years, and in fact it was some time between 1924 and 1925 that the bad news first started to break. Until spring of 1924 the new family continued to live at Morris Avenue, at which time they moved into the three-story apartment at 100th and Ocean Avenue, called "Kingsley Court" because Kingsley was Norman's middle name. They lived there for well over a year, renting it for four thousand dollars from Fan's parents while Fan managed it for the summer as a lodge, and while Barney continued to commute into New York. The first summer they did little better than break even; the second they did, as Fan put it, "well." Then, abruptly, they pulled out of Long Branch and moved to Flatbush in Brooklyn, to an apartment at 1407 Cornsford Road, about two miles distant from one occupied near Crown

Part Three

This was the stage whose set the infant Norman Mailer entered on January 31, 1923. His parents had been married for only a year, and it was a little too soon for Fan to have yet learned about Barney's gambling. The pattern, established from the start, was that a crisis involving unconcealable losses would surface about every two years, and in fact it was some time between 1924 and 1925 that the bad news first started to break. Until spring of 1924 the new family continued to live at Morris Avenue, at which time they moved into the three-cottage cluster at Beach and Ocean Avenues, called "Kingsley Court" because Kingsley was Norman's middle name. They lived there for well over a year, renting it for four thousand dollars from Fan's parents while Fan managed it for two summers as a lodge, and while Barney continued to commute into New York. The first summer they did little better than break even; the second they did, as Fan put it, "well." Then, abruptly, they pulled out of Long Branch and moved to Flatbush in Brooklyn, to an apartment at 2902 Cortelyou Road, about two miles distant from one occupied near Crown

Heights by Anne and David Kessler. It was from this time forward that some of Fan's family, notably her older sister Beck (as Rebecca was always called), began noting and complaining about Fan's closeness with the Kesslers, whose style had begun to seem offensively extravagant in Long Branch. Fan's in-laws had showered the infant Norman with a sea of gifts and then made a little too much of having done so, prompting Beck to suggest that Fan ought to be careful not to become in any way dependent upon such people.

The problem, however, was that Fan had been dependent upon them from the start. She depended upon their representation of Barney's sterling character--congruent as it was with what she wished to believe--and now she depended upon them to share her secret. Fan's natural inclination to be secretive, even within her own family, was immensely heightened when the first gambling crisis broke, and her initial instinct had been to flee from Long Branch so that it would be easier to avoid discussing the circumstances under which Barney had lost his job at General Motors. No coherent details survive to document the episode beyond establishing the fact that it was a matter of misappropriation of funds, and that only a timely restitution saved Barney from prosecution. The restitution was provided by Dave Kessler. He would continue to be the family banker in this connection, producing unrepayable "loans" every two years or so all through Norman's childhood and adolescence, in each crisis covering obligations of two, five, sometimes perhaps as much as

ten thousand dollars. Barney's entire salary, even in his best situation, could not have brought him more than five thousand dollars a year, and by 1930 he had become unable to find significant full-time work as an accountant anywhere. The General Motors position was followed by several others, but they ended in similar ways, each time depriving him of the letters of reference crucial to his continuation in his profession. Fan went on managing summer-season properties in Asbury Park and in Long Branch with her sisters Beck and Jenny, both of whom had begun to discover hard times of their own. By 1928--the year Ida and Yehudda died, bequeathing their properties to their children--both Beck and Jenny were struggling against deterioration in the health and business fortunes of their husbands. Norman's Uncle Louis Shapiro was slowly dying of heart disease as his Scarboro Hotel, still the showplace of increasingly unfashionable Long Branch, was failing to pay off his overinvestment in its renovation. At the same time, Jenny was watching her once wealthy husband, Harry Michelsohn, go to pieces under the strain of losing his patrimony in a liquor business made unmanageably perilous by prohibition. Both men died in 1936, but long before then their wives were effectively supporting their families in the tourist business and, working with them, Fan was trying to support hers. The great difference between the situations of the couples was that both Louis and Harry, reduced in fortune though they were, had clear and unambiguous identities in the eyes of their family and their community: They both were innocent, well-

intending victims of circumstance. But Barney, while seeming innocent to Beck and Jenny and the rest of the Long Branch family, actually operated in the context of his immediate family as a forceful and even frightening victimizer.

Which is not to suggest that he was conventionally brutal. On the contrary, his day to day behavior in the family circle was exquisitely considerate. From his first appearance he had been noted in Long Branch for an ability to interact well with children, and his genuinely great pleasure in having a son was, if anything, surpassed when, two years after the move to Brooklyn, his daughter Barbara Jane was born. Kind to the children, he was solicitously attentive to Fan in a way that simultaneously pleased and angered her, a combination of conflicting feelings that hereinout would characterize her painfully ambivalent response to the whole marriage. He declined, in the most dignified way, to so much as discuss his gambling with her, always saying when pressed that he had of course given it up. He attributed his inability to find work to anything and everything but the actual peculiar cause, and every morning of the working week he sallied forth as a figure of impeccable executive presence, evidently intent on cracking Manhattan's corporate wall. Always an essentially fictional figure, Barney's pattern of action at this time foreshadows one that developed some twenty years later in the analogously fictive life of John Cheever: It is a pattern that perhaps helps forge for us an illuminating link between the informal fictions of Norman

Mailer's childhood, and the formal world of fiction that he would eventually create. Cheever, for the time that he lived with his wife and two children in a Manhattan apartment building, would prepare to leave for work each morning like all the other men in the building. In business suit, with hat and briefcase, he would take the elevator down to the lobby with his fellow breadwinners, but just before getting out to the street he would duck down the basement stairs to his storage locker, which he had set up as a writing room. At day's end he would conclude his secret activity and rejoin his fellow sojourners for the trip back up in the elevator. Cheever was living his life as if he were a character in a story, which was very much the way Barney lived his life. Different though Barney's underground destination was, every sign indicates that he went to it with the transfixed determination of an artist going to his necessary work, and he must have endowed its rituals with an analogous totemic power. Nothing less would have enabled him to transcend with such apparent serenity the furious efforts at reform that he encountered every day at home. In this way and in this respect, he achieved to a virtually iron control over his wife, who progressively felt more and more helpless.

Fan characteristically hid the truth from the Schneider family, and in any case it required a passage of some time before she herself came fully to understand what the truth was. Barney was so persuasive in his denials and reassurances, and his wife, sister and brother-in-law were so anxious to believe him, that it

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was perhaps as late as 1932 before they fully realized that Barney was going to be irreclaimable. Since none of them, for various reasons, felt ready to contemplate abandoning their relationship with Barney, or what they saw as their responsibilities to it, they were forced to turn their attention to a strategy of damage control. Uppermost in this strategy, particularly in Fan's mind, was controlling damage that might touch the children, and when in January of 1933 the Kesslers moved from Brooklyn into Manhattan, Fan undertook to convert her family's new apartment, at 555 Crown Street in Brooklyn's Crown Heights section, into a kind of theatre for the acting out of necessary fictions. The children were encouraged to see their father off on each morning's job-search, and to commiserate with him each evening upon his return. Money, though in alarmingly short supply, was never officially acknowledged as a potentially disastrous problem, and the ongoing struggle between the parents was masked by a busy conversational keeping up on correspondence and news from all members of their large extended family. Barney rather formally presided at the evening meal--unless "business" kept him away--in the person of a caring but conservative paterfamilias, serious about such things as schoolwork and personal hygiene, cautious about the dangers of everyday life on the streets of a gentile-controlled city, but still jocular and knowledgeable about sports and movies and the comic strips. He would cheerfully chat about anything, in fact, except the subject of himself; his past was a firmly closed book, and the

→ a regular sport!

↓ sounds like Gatsby - sports and art

conventional questions from Norman about his father's experience in the Great War elicited only one anecdote, in which Barney is featured as being caught in the shower on a troopship during a submarine alarm in 1917. Beyond this, the war, foreign travel, post-adolescent experience, and any subject at all that might lead into autobiography, Barney would always turn aside. After a time Norman stopped asking, but the veil of mystery and separation that hung between father and son operated for the child as a major and baffling source of anxiety.

Norman had entered Public School 181 in Brooklyn in the fall of 1928, when he was five years and seven months old. Since that was the year in which both of his maternal grandparents died in Long Branch, the attention of the Brooklyn family was particularly directed toward the shore community, with its dense infrastructure of aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. But Long Branch was at all times a major influence on Norman, providing him with a singular identity and offering him an assertive model of how the world worked. The identity was that of the favored son figure, and the model of the world served to demonstrate why such a favored, indeed such a messianic son should be so urgently needed. The history of the Schneider family in Long Branch revealed a world where the women had been required to form into a matriarchy in order to compensate for the failure of their men to deal with the institutions of American commerce. Yehudda, his eldest child and only son Joseph, along with his sons-in-law Louis and Harry, had one by one failed capitalism's

trial by ordeal, and the Schneider sisters, led at the start by their mother, had stepped into the breach. They found in themselves the energy and strength and skill to make a living out of the tourist business, and they found in their men a quality that adequately compensated for their ultimate inability to prevail in the several arenas of business affairs. The men were kind, loyal, morally good, touchingly contrite concerning their worldly inadequacy, and above all they were faithful. For this their women loved them and, indeed, protected them against the consequences of their vulnerability.

For the favored son figure, however, the adult community and especially its women reserved a different kind of love: transmitted with liquid warmth, it nevertheless revealed at its core a white hot intensity of pure exhortation, calling for nothing less than that the sons prepare themselves to go forth and conquer the forces that had defeated the fathers. Barney, of course, did not actually match the description of a warrior fallen in the battle for family security, but Fan never stopped trying to fit her peculiar marital situation into this ethnically conventional framework, and she certainly never ceased to identify Norman as an authentically anointed messianic figure. The original favored son presence in Long Branch, however, was Norman's cousin, Cy (Charles) Shapiro. Eight years older than Norman, he served the younger boy as a model in much the way that Beck, his mother, had broken the trail and set the standards for Fan. Beck intended for Cy to smash the mold of the good masculine

figure who, in some way because of his goodness, fails in the world. Beck was deeply intelligent, and in her role of reality-instructor for the rest of the family she professed a rich distillation of classic immigrant wisdom: as a first principle, this wisdom taught that not only must supplicant outsiders in an alien culture learn how to become accepted insiders, but that they must accomplish this without suffering the loss of dignity or integrity. Beck's immigrant experience had taught her that failing in the world consisted of being rejected by those who owned that world and, owning it, denied admission to outsiders. She believed, and Fan believed and their children would inevitably learn to believe that while acceptance in the gentile world must not be purchased at the price of one's decency, rejection by that world spelled practical ruin. The sisters determined and were persuaded that their sons would so excel as to make it impossible for them to be rejected. They would attend great universities and would so master the life and the curriculum there as to compel those institutions to extend their full approbation in the form of degrees and honors: these would constitute the ^{+ passport} fabled passport into the hitherto forbidden territories beyond. The goodness the sons brought to this struggle would combine with the power their success would earn for them, and they would thus be different from the good but powerless men whose fate had shown them the way. In Cy's case, even his name would be different. While entering Columbia's law school in 1935, having just graduated from Harvard, he had his

name legally changed to Rembar, deriving it from his dying father's original last name. Louis had been naturalized under the name of the family that sponsored him: Shapiro. But his real name was Zaremba, and Cy's Rembar both retained and changed that. It was as if the change symbolized how he and his mother and older sister (who changed their names too) meant for him to keep his father's inner excellence, but in certain particulars to be different: To stand free of his father's vulnerability. Louis, in turn, vulnerable though he may have been, gave his son something that it is difficult for sons to derive from mothers: He gave him a strong sense of masculine self-confidence. Cy's formative years corresponded to his father's time of heady, if temporary success, as well as of robust good health, and the handsome, charming Louis was especially open to and intimate with his son.

Norman, by contrast, struggled throughout his pre-adolescent years with the enormous problem of establishing a usable identity ^{and from} for his own mysterious father. In the absence of any adult male figure that Norman could both clearly see and deeply identify with, Cy very probably meant more to his cousin than any man alive. Forty years later Norman salutes the relationship: "He was very much of an older brother all through my childhood, and I worshipped him (with enormous funds of love and envy) because he was a hero." Cy and Norman shared the rapturous admiration and indulgence of their elders, particularly the women, and the intensity of that experience imposed upon both boys the traditional sexual confusions, but Norman did not share Cy's

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body-builder's physique, his championship athletic prowess, his rugged good looks or, still less, his masculine self-confidence. There is a frankly mythic quality to the details of a middle-aged Norman's recollection of his cousin: "He was one of the few people I've ever known who had a happy look on his face when he came to bat in the late innings with men on base, his side behind, and the need for a homer prominent in everyone's head. Indeed he had his smile because it was slightly better than even money he was going to hit that homer." We then learn that Cy usually did hit it, just as he usually won the tennis tournament there at the Scarboro Hotel, which was the setting for all this, and won at football and won at "getting the best looking girls." He became a sort of spirit of the place for Norman, banishing all of the prior generation's Old World gloom: "He was the only figure I encountered in my childhood who seemed to believe it was more natural to win than to lose, and that life was therefore to be enjoyed rather than decried." Dissuaded by his high school advisors from applying to Princeton (his mother's choice), Cy went up to Harvard in 1931, the year Norman was entering the fourth grade, but the two cousins shared Long Branch in the summers well into Norman's adolescence. Cy had no brother of his own, and tried to be helpful to his little cousin, whose need for fraternal friendship he recognized. But quite apart from being so much younger, Norman was very different from Cy, both physically and emotionally, and the example of Cy's warm and open relationship with Beck and Louis at the seashore taught the

younger boy little that would help him in dealing with his own parents. He had to do that in Brooklyn, and he had to do it alone.

Very early on and certainly by the time he entered school in 1928, Norman had become aware that his parents were guarding a secret of apparently terrible proportions. Their Brooklyn apartments were not large, and though Fan was always "moving up," even within the same building, their accommodations never allowed for anything more than marginal privacy. Thus Norman was able to listen to the rise and fall of the voices when, every two years or so, the Kesslers would appear for what he came to think of as the trouble times. They would visit often enough at other seasons, but one could always identify the ominously special occasion by the way the evening was structured. A meal would be served and quickly eaten, the silence of the throttled adults barely sparing the children from the histrionics of an outright scene. Immediately after dessert, itself treated with unceremonious haste, the children would be delivered to their beds, and very shortly after that the four adults would begin upon a passionately whispered discourse. Straining to make out their words, Norman could always tell that Barney was on the defensive, that the other three were angry and, what was more, frightened at something that Barney had done, but the boy could never quite identify what the awful deed had been. Although ^{there} this ~~trouble~~ ^{is} surfaced scenario ~~showed itself~~ ^{showed} only periodically, to Norman, ^{then} the threat ~~of~~ ^{was} with ~~him~~ ^{Norman} always, and he regarded ~~it~~ ^{them} not as a peripheral

✓ trouble ^{Norman} is powerful; scenario is weaker, background

but rather as the radically central drama in the life of his parents. As such it both terrified and excited him long before adolescence, and virtually from the start he found himself hypnotized by its action in a virtually pornographic way. He was, after all, witnessing a profoundly sexual exercise in the dynamics of domination. The force that dominated here was nothing like the force that operated in Long Branch. There, the locus of power was feminine, and it asserted itself in the most open, if not always the most simple way. But from his darkened bedroom Norman could divine that some kind of masculine force was at work in his own household, and that it drew much of its potency from its apparently dangerous, shocking, and even criminal character. On each occasion he would trace the impassioned scene up to a climax of angry departure, with his Uncle Dave's voice at once issuing threats and capitulating into some kind of acquiescence, and after the door slammed behind the Kesslers his mother's sobs would fade finally into silence as Barney, never himself distraught, always reasonable in tone, endlessly offered some mysterious explanation. However many pieces in the puzzle remained missing, the central piece was in place: Norman knew that his father was a man of great power. It was a power so secret that it could only be discussed in whispers, with doors shut and curtains drawn, and it was strong--strong enough to reduce powerful women to tears and pleading; strong enough to ^{challenge} ~~overturn~~ even the financially empowered authority of Uncle Dave himself. The whole thing frightened Norman at least as much as it

(This section is riveting!)

excited him, and the residual effects of this fear would play a central part in the life of his childhood outside as well as inside the family. But frightening though it was, the sensing of such power was also exotic and stimulating, and Norman knew that it was only a matter of time before he would break the secret's code and discover its inner source. When he found it he knew that he would have found another world, as different from Long Branch as Mars, and he knew also that he would finally have found his father.

The family move from Flatbush to Crown Heights was made abruptly, in January of 1933, just as Norman was completing the first half of the fifth grade at P.S. 181, where Barbara had entered the first grade the previous September. Years later, Fan said that she wanted to move because she had come to dislike the neighbors. This, of course, could mean anything from a simple feeling that after four and a half years it suddenly seemed time for a change, to the possibility that the endless prying so characteristic of these neighborhoods had brought to light something embarrassing about Barney. In any case they moved to 555 Crown Street, some two miles away, pulling the children out of P.S. 181 and entering them in nearby P.S. 161, where Barbara continued first grade and Norman picked up the second half of fifth grade. He stayed in it only a month, however, and on March 1 the teacher, a Mrs. Bernstein, upgraded him into a special first half section of the sixth grade made up of accelerating students. It was the first in a problematically important

sequence of developments in Norman's Brooklyn school life, and being accompanied by a simultaneous change of neighborhood it placed him in a position of having to prove himself in two new arenas. Add to this the fact that he had just started to attend Hebrew School, which he hated at least as much as the other boys hated it, and his situation would have had to be called difficult even without the special trouble at home.

Norman celebrated his tenth birthday the day before entering P.S. 161. He was small for his age, and of course was, by virtue of the January 31st birthday, half a year younger than the average student in the fifth grade ~~anyway~~, but in Flatbush he had fit in with his classmates and on his block well enough. He particularly loved the comraderie of street sports, and his few recorded recollections of neighborhood life are punctuated by references to the games everyone played. Eventually, if not necessarily quickly, he was reintegrated into these in his new neighborhood. Crown Heights was generally regarded as a better neighborhood, a step up, and it certainly was more unicultural than the Flatbush mixture of Jewish, Italian and Irish. Crown Heights was absolutely Jewish, and sheltered its citizens in a honeycomb structure of synagogues, stores, shops, kosher markets and delicatessens, movie houses, duplexes, apartment houses and areas, both formal and informal, for the endless games of touch football, stick ball, and roller hockey that paused only for meals, school, and the fall of full darkness. A casual observer might have identified the Mailers as perfect for the area, peas

(See enclosed)

in the Crown Heights pod: two children, a four room, two-bedroom apartment with the children sharing a room, an ambitious, somewhat driven-looking mother and an elegantly laid-back father who was said to be an accountant in the city. There was so little to distinguish this Jewish family from its neighbors that even after the emergence of Norman's fame, which automatically sent everyone who had known them into a retrospective search for early foreshadowing signs of peculiarities, the Mailers still struck outsiders as having been more ordinary than otherwise. Only the fact that they went to Long Branch every summer, sometimes leaving Barney behind to keep the apartment and continue his commute to the city, seemed really unusual. As in Flatbush, most Crown Heights residents stayed in the neighborhood the year-round, at most removing for a week or two to the Jersey Shore or the Catskills. The polarization of the Mailers between Brooklyn and the shore seemed to the neighbors to be the reason why the family fought shy of affiliation with people who were not relatives. In Long Branch, as a matter of fact, they stayed for the most part within the circle of relatives as well, and Norman had comparatively little interaction with the peer culture that resided there the year-round. That changed to some degree in the summer of 1933, but he spent at least part of this summer on a very special, necessarily solitary Long Branch project: He spent it writing a novel.

The novel was a kind of end-product of a process begun, at least for the record, in the summer of 1930. The family archives

still contain the tattered fragments of stories started in a shaky hand, in pencil, on lined notebook pages. There is "Pony Express," which reads for its four hundred words like the opening of a traditional Western movie, and "A Plucky Boy," in which a young son opens fire with a pistol on two bad men who are trying to take his father away. Norman seems to have been seven when he wrote these, and when he was eight he started a murder mystery in which gangsters talk in "dese" and "dose" dialects. From the summer of 1932, when Norman was nine, are preserved manuscripts of "A Detective Harley Mystery, Starring Bobby Stern," and a spirited football story called "The Bench Warmer." Years later, Fan told people that Norman used to tell stories to the other children in and around the family, and that these written efforts (usually unfinished) represented his attempt to record the tales. Just after the move to Crown Heights Norman's fictional output increased: "The Collision," a hockey story, is preserved in a scrapbook, as apparently having been written on his tenth birthday, and in May of 1933, before going down to the shore, he struggled over three different versions of a World War I tale called "The Return of Jack Denyards," as well as a two-act play--another Detective Harley Murder Mystery--called "The Bloodless Death." The increase in production over earlier years, and so much of it before the annual move to Long Branch, may indicate that in his new neighborhood Norman was spending somewhat more time in the apartment than he had in Flatbush. Forty-five years later he would refer to his Brooklyn childhood in a interview:

"Go out in the street and you know, if you didn't have friends you
 get beaten up. It was as simple as that." But it is also true
 that he had positive reasons for staying inside: His Uncle Dave
 had bought him a 1932 Christmas or Hanukkah present in the form
 of an immense chemistry set, and the workbench-desk in his room--
 with his little sister as his admiring laboratory assistant--may
 have had the effect of stimulating him to pyramid scientific and
 literary projects on top of one another. These contrasting sorts
 of activities evidently had a energizing effect upon one another,
 and Norman's new-found scientific, aeronautical engineering and,
 especially, scale-model airplane construction interests may well
 have spurred him on to the production of more, and more ambitious
 fictional efforts. He would later associate the writing of his
 novel with his simultaneous consumption of the full canon of the
 Edgar Rice Burroughs Tarzan books. At any rate, the novel filled
 most of two "Composition" notebooks with twenty-four thousand
 pencilled words of a narrative he called "The Martian Invasion,"
 and he inscribed on a separate page at the start: "Dedicated to
 my loving Mother who wanted me to write a good book." The
 manuscript consists of eighteen of a projected twenty-five
 chapters, and as a blood and guts science fiction story,
 concentrates in large part upon the relationship of Bob, the
 young hero, with his father and, later, his friend Ben ("Bob's
 mother had died when he was a little boy so the only two people
 in the world that he loved was his father and Ben.") In addition
 to Edgar Rice Burroughs, the all-male fiction owes a lot to the

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comic strip adventures of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, as well as to Buster Crabbe's movie serial of the latter, but it also foreshadows remarkably a fiction Norman would write in 1962 and publish in Esquire under the title of "The Last Night." Both stories begin with the apocalyptic deterioration of the earth and its atmosphere; conditions which drive the countries of the earth to unite in building a fleet of space ships on which a selected portions of the world's population will attempt to escape and search for a new world to colonize. Like the mature story--which is not only one of Mailer's best but is also a working element in the compound of some of his future plans for fiction--"The Martian Invasion" dwells in detail on the way the world selects the pioneers who must leave the rest of the population behind to perish. The two fictions part company early on, as "The Martian Invasion" develops into an attempt to colonize an already inhabited Mars, triggering a chain of adventurous military episodes that constitute the narrative action. But the points of their similarity remain striking, and may in a peculiar way illuminate the frequently remarked fact that the published Mailer almost never represents childhood in his work, and even in interviews does not dwell upon his own. The present instance is the first, but it will not be the last to evidence the idea that Mailer the publishing writer maintains a conscious recollection of the operation of his juvenile fictional imagination, and draws upon that recollection for mature fictional material.

In the summer of 1933, however, by far the most striking

thing about the fact of Norman's novel is the comparatively massive scale on which it is able to sustain a notable unity and an ongoing coherence. The high level of the project's execution, along with its magnitude, reveal such a capacity for concentrating immense energy over a long period of time without losing direction as to identify him as a ten-year old charged with aggressive self-confidence. More than anything else, the novel shows that its author's sense of self is robust, despite the distracting elements at work in his life, and it argues particularly that in Norman's case the capacity for imaginative self-expression was the best barometer for measuring his state of well-being. By this measure he could hardly have been better off, and there were richly complimentary things happening in Long Branch that summer as well. In July, Norman wrote to his Aunt Nan and his Uncle Dave Kessler, welcoming them down for a visit that clearly was not the product of any bad news about Barney, and telling them that he was on the Scarboro Junior Baseball team, whose first game had ended in a 4-4 tie; that his family's new--first and only--dog, Dukie, was chewing Norman's shoe as he wrote; and that he had been working on a model airplane "of my own design." The hobby of scale-model planes had, along with the subject of aeronautical engineering, competed with fiction as an interest that summer--it very much shows itself in "The Martian Invasion"--and between the novel, the plane, the baseball and the dog (a present to Barbara on her sixth birthday), things were looking richly bountiful. But in fact this summer of 1933 would

prove to have been a distinctly high point in the tide of Norman's personal fortunes, and it would be a long time before things came together again for him in such a prosperous way.

Norman's most troublesome difficulties hereinout derived from a complex combination of things. Always first, there was the endlessly deteriorating state of Barney's situation, though in some respects Norman's positioning with regard to that situation would improve. There was the long grind of Hebrew School, cutting as it did into the street-play time that meant so much to Norman, and imposing instead the interminable acting out of a particularly depressing spectacle: tutors at once without dignity and without earned authority over students; students at once sadistically subversive of their tutors and without generous comraderie among themselves. More than anything else in his relations with adults and peers Norman hated--and feared--bullying, and he saw that Hebrew School turned both tutors and students into bullies. But the most important difficulty emerging after the summer of 1933 was the fact that Norman's acceleration in school over the next two years would push him beyond his depth in his relationships with his classmates. A sign of the fact that things were starting to shut him down was the growing imbalance between his interest in science and his interest in fictional narration. He was moving into a long period of narrative silence, during which his once lush capacity for imaginative, self-expression and, in that process, self-creation, ~~would~~ seem to fade away. The silencing of his imaginative voice

was manifestly repressive, and offered a striking measure of his growing incapacity to engage life in the context of an emerging puberty, where the most obvious focus for Norman's problem was his position among his classmates at school. Although the move to Crown Heights in January had required him to leave behind the familiar schoolmates of his first four years, this separation in itself was not, judging from his vigor in the summer of 1933, significantly daunting. But when he returned to P.S. 161 in September it was as a member of the acceleration class of the previous spring: He then completed sixth grade by January, 1934, continued with this group to complete the first half of seventh grade (7A) by June, 1934, and at that time was promoted to either 7B or 8A, depending upon the judgement of his fall, 1934 teacher. She was Marguerite A. McBride, and that fall she accelerated him into 8A, whereupon he joined a class whose average age was not five months but one year and five months older than his own. When Norman celebrated his twelfth birthday in January of 1935, the people with whom he was having to compete for a leadership role were all approaching the age of fourteen. The gap was too wide for him to bridge, and he would enter Boy's High in the autumn of 1935 at a disadvantage he would not, in his four years there, ever even begin to overcome.

Of course the downward turn of what had been a sharply rising intensity curve began quite gradually. During 1933-34, his fellow-accelerants in 6B in the first term and 7A in the second were, after all, not significantly older than he, and the

deepening of his interest in chemistry, engineering and, especially, model airplanes seemed to some members of the family--notably the Kesslers--to be actual signs of emerging maturity. For two months during that winter the Mailers had as a house guest Barney's younger brother Ernest, from South Africa. He had been accompanied by their older brother Louis, the really wealthy member of Barney's family, who had arranged the visit in part to help facilitate a behavior modification program for Barney. Louis and Dave Kessler at this time were still a good ten years short of giving up completely on the idea that they could exercise a modifying effect upon Barney's habits, and though Louis's visit was a short one, Ernest's more extended stay may have been a part of their overall tactics of containment. In any case, Ernest was a chemical engineer, and his presence encouraged his nephew--already well supplied with a laboratory--in this direction. The only imaginative writing that Norman did at this time was a brief sketch, written as a school assignment, of an episode that took place at Long Branch the previous summer. It tells of how Norman was caught in a rip-tide while swimming alone and almost drowned--"I got caught in a cross current so that although I kept on moving my hands and my feet it was useless and I was too tired." It is a curious note on which to recall what had been a summer of such energy and strength, but more notable still is his failure to produce any imaginative writing besides this. In the summer of 1934 he prepared one of his composition notebooks to serve as an anthology of his own short stories, and fitted it out with a

*you know the Long Branch
Kessler family
in the summer of 1934
the article
11 wrote back
on Long Branch
Summer of 1934
you did also*

title and a table of contents:

BOOK OF SHORT STORIES OF SPORTS STORIES

THE SNAP (Football Story)

FIERY CENTER (Ice Hockey Story)

KID BROTHER (Football Story)

SIGNALS ON (Football Story)

THE COLLISION (Ice Hockey Story)

[by]

NORMAN MAILER

The book, clearly, was to be the summer of 1934 counterpart project to the previous year's Martian Invasion, to be written during the months that Norman was waiting to see if he would be moved ahead into the eighth grade class of 1935. Only one of the stories, "The Collision," had been written the year before, and nothing further appears in the book beyond this carefully inscribed front matter. Nor do any of the summer's letters speak of baseball teams or other excitements (the dog had been killed by a Long Branch car during the winter), and Norman appears to have withdrawn into the production and test flying of extra large scale-model planes, as well as pasting up a long notebook which he called "Inventor's Picture Notes" cut from various issues of Popular Science Monthly. Barren as this summer's literary harvest was to be, however, it yielded more, in its limited show of interest, than would appear at any other moment during the

following five and a half years. If the summer of 1933 had demonstrated that the imaginative power of Norman's fictional output was the best measure for ascertaining his inner state of well-being--his self-confidence and his capacity for self-assertion-- then he was certainly entering upon an extended period of what could only be called massive self-eclipse.

Entering the eighth grade in the fall, five months before his twelfth birthday, Norman must have been conscious of the fact that his calendar was re-arranging itself in ways that set him problematically apart from his classmates. The boys in his new class had started having their bar mitzvahs that summer, and would celebrate them throughout the year, while his wouldn't come round until half-way through his first year at Boy's High. With his last year of grammar school spent in classes with people he had always regarded as his seniors, he was discovering that his previous year and a half at P.S. 161 had disappeared without having offered him much of a chance to get set there. And this final academic year was further complicated by the fact that, half way through it, Norman found out the facts about Barney. Another crisis had occurred, the familiar visitation from the Kesslers took place, and by listening carefully Norman learned enough so that he felt able to raise the matter directly with his mother. Somewhat to his surprise, she simply told him the whole story, from the beginning right to the present, filling in chapter and verse concerning amounts of money, dangers from the law and creditors--everything. Somewhat to her surprise, Norman

was considerably less than horrified in his reaction. He concealed his delight in the discovery as much as he could from Fan, but some years later, when he passed the secret along to his sister, he said that in his view this information gave their father the status of a great man. Though Norman had of course known for years that Barney wielded enormous power, the mystery concerning its source had been as much a cause of terror to him as it was of excitement. But now that Norman knew why--knew, as it were, the delightful way in which a man could achieve to such power--he was exultant. He could discover a depth and romance to Barney's gambler identity that lacked only a bridge of communication on the subject between father and son to make it completely satisfying. Barney's strategy of bland denial never wavered, however, and his son thus had to settle for the very considerable satisfaction that this new perspective provided. Apart from anything else, of course, Norman found that he was relieved of a great deal of that fear of the unknown which from the start had been for him the essential product of his parent's mysterious secrecy. But new intelligence about Barney could not undo what the lack of it had originally brought about, and Norman was not relieved of his long nurtured nightmare-perception that he was a physical coward. Those who knew him then do not remember him in these terms--he was ashamed of his feelings and hid them--but his friends did notice that he didn't get into fights. He would write a story some six years later depicting himself as a child riding a subway while carrying a small gasoline engine for

*He makes his
statement in an
interview - just
boldly. It's
it in Advertisements?*

a model airplane--Norman's trademark for most of these years--and about how completely terrified he had been by the presence of a bully whose veiled threats all but overwhelmed him. Another story describes his fears at night in an empty apartment. Norman's fearfulness was a given for him in his childhood, the concrete product of all the mystery, emotional fury and elaborate cover-ups that were the most basic elements in his family life. He lived with these feelings, as he approached adolescence, by positioning himself behind a screen of privacy, coming out only to bond with neighborhood friends whom he discovered he could trust to treat him decently.

He seemed always to like and recognize himself best, in the Brooklyn years that followed, as a kid on the block, not as part of a class or a clique in school. In an unpublished novel he would describe the neighborhood streets in terms of their lattice-scrolls of chalked game scores, and one funny story--also unpublished--would recollect his exhilaration at playing touch football in the street. Then, in an interview that was largely about other things, he would recall: "When you were playing roller hockey, if you bodychecked somebody hard they'd go flying across the sidewalk, and ... had to go scrambling up a lawn that was banked. If that ever happened to you you'd come out with fire in your eyes and your skates full of dirt." Family folklore, on the other hand, concentrated on his academic accomplishments, and one story has it that at graduation the Principal actually announced that Norman Mailer's I.Q. of 165 was not only the

highest in his class but the highest in the history of P.S. 161. Some incident like that could possibly have happened, but no effort by the Principal to valorize him could alter the fact that he was too much younger than his recent classmates to shine in their company or to assume any credible leadership distinction in their eyes. Whatever his I.Q., Norman accomplished a consistent B+ report card as an accelerating student: He did his work--he was never anything less than a very good student--but he was out of his class in every sense when he joined the eighth grade in the fall of 1934. With his age-peer friends, many of whom were two and most of whom were one year behind him in school, he enjoyed the street games, agonized through Hebrew School, and was satisfied to get along reasonably well by keeping a low profile with classmates at school. In preparation for his June 24, 1935 graduation from P.S. 161, Norman purchased a customized autograph book, whose leather cover was embossed with the name of the school, and which contained photographs of the Principal, Floyd R. Smith, as well as of the building. In addition to collecting some autographs, Norman inscribed in these pages certain basic information. He identified his best friend as Joseph "Slip" Slipyan, reported to have been the quietest boy in the school, as well as one of its fastest runners. He and Norman would spend whole weekends reading library books together, and when they entered the marathon neighborhood ballgames they would usually do so together, in a kind of alliance. Along with Jerry Reimer, who lived on the block and who suffered from epilepsy, Slip was one

of the two people closest to Norman in the graduating class. In the autograph volume, Norman also noted that his favorite book was The Count of Monte Cristo and that Dumas was his favorite writer, "Dixie" his favorite song, baseball (which he never played well) his favorite game and Lou Gerhig his hero. He listed NYU as his college of choice, Aeronautical Engineering as his profession and "Much haste, more waste" as his motto. His book was signed by eight faculty members, including the Principal, four students from classes he was leaving behind, and twelve of his fellow-graduates. One of these was a girl (out of her class of 69) and the other eleven were boys (out of their class of 75.) The girl, Adrien Schaeffer, Norman had listed as the class's "best athlete," and one of his other signers he had identified as the "brightest" in the class. The thinness of the census recorded in the book bears testimony to Norman's marginal identity in his new class, particularly in the view of its female division. It is noteworthy that although he took the trouble to list by name those male classmates he regarded as "wittiest," and "most cheerful," and "best looking," and "best dresser" and "most popular," none of them signed his book.

Still, Norman had a lot of friends at P.S. 161, and the school itself was located just three blocks down Crown Street from his apartment. Boy's High, located a good two miles away and drawing upon a multitude of grammar schools, enrolled well over two thousand students--his own entering class numbered six hundred fifty--and Norman, who must have been one of the youngest

boys in the school, was a largely unsupported stranger there. It therefore posed, on a comparatively massive scale, the same problem that had made the last year at P.S 161 so difficult, and posed it without the compensatory presence of his academically less advanced Crown Street cronies. Indeed, the structure of the Boy's High experience posed very significant new problems, besides which Norman's first year was complicated by the fact that he had to complete preparations for his February Bar Mitzvah. In one way he looked forward to it, since it meant the end of Hebrew School: The lessons at the Congregation Shaari Zedek school, to which he had travelled one mile each way for four weekday afternoons and two weekend mornings since he had moved to Crown Street, were not difficult: The boys were rather uncritically graded on Religion, History, Hebrew Language and Conduct. In fact, more than 90% of their time was spent on rote memorization of prayers whose meaning they did not understand, and on the mechanics of writing Hebrew. Norman particularly resented having to trade off his street-game time, and he continued to find his enforced involvement in the sometimes sadistic mutual acrimony between teachers and students deeply demoralizing. But if the Bar Mitzvah would bring an end to all that, it would also force him into a public profession of attitudes concerning his Jewish identity that Norman would certainly prefer to have been spared. There was, however, no possibility of that. His family's Jewishness was almost incomparably important to all of its members, both immediate and

extended, despite the fact that it did not take a particularly religious or ritualistic form. In 1928, after the death of her parents, Fan stopped keeping a kosher kitchen (except in the summer hotels), and while she lit candles and prayed at Friday sunsets, neither she nor Barney went regularly to synagogue. Much more important to her was the sisterhood organization of the Congregation, whose meetings and social events she attended regularly. In a broader context, the family affirmed its Jewishness as the most important identifying element in its composition--except perhaps for the element of family itself--and given these values Norman resigned himself to the inevitable: As an authentic favored son he was not denied much, but he would not have even thought to ask for the gift of exemption from Bar Mitzvah. Telling friends that once it was over he intended to put the subject of his Jewishness as far behind him as possible, he began working with his tutor to prepare the traditional speech. The ceremony was scheduled for February 15, 1936, just two weeks after his thirteenth birthday, and it brought into focus two important elements in his world at this time.

The first of these was the emotional condition of the Mailer household: The family fortunes were at a particularly low ebb, and though Fan did not have anyone she felt able to talk with about it, she had been brooding. Since the crisis of the previous year, when Barney had once again to be bailed out of serious gambling losses by Dave Kessler (possibly in conjunction with Barney's older brother Louis), she had begun to have her doubts

about the future. The question was whether the status quo in their household, with Barney virtually certain to bring further loss and trouble upon them, should be allowed to continue. The husbands of both of her sisters were now, by the end of 1935, so very ill as clearly to be at death's door, and she had begun to wonder if her own marriage should perhaps not be coming to an end as well. Fan, who had always wanted to identify her marital situation with those of Beck and Jenny, had struggled consistently to represent herself as a matriarch doing duty for an inadequate but blamelessly loving husband. But now, despite the fact that the idea of divorce did terminal violence to this image, she began actively to entertain it anyway. In the context of his formal approach to manhood through the Bar Mitzvah, she turned to Norman to share her concerns and to ask for advice about whether to proceed. When she took him aside and, reminding him of all that she had revealed about his father, asked if he thought she should get a divorce, Norman was absolutely shocked. Vehemently opposed, he enlisted his sister in joining his plea that their mother should absolutely abandon such thinking. Over the next few years his own thinking about his father would continue to expand: Having begun by identifying Barney with the gothically frightening and mysterious, like some presence out of Charlotte Bronte, Norman was currently seeing him as a kind of fine romantic scoundrel, one of Henry James's elegant double agents at large in the world of the bourgeoisie. But under the relentless pressure of his mother's analysis, as well as the very

No
quarrels
from
N.M.
arrived
late?

painful pressure of his own high school experience, Norman would be forced increasingly over the next four years to consider Barney in Dickensian terms: a pitifully attractive head of household who, when all was said, flooded his family world with weakness and failure. At thirteen, of course, the increasingly non-literary Norman would not have employed such fictional analogies, but they would eventually ring true, and at the time he already knew more than enough to sense that Barney's complex multiplicity of identity was in some way vital to the development of his own sense of self. At no point, least of all this one, would Norman seriously consider rejecting his father, and the shrewd thrust of his argument to Fan was that a divorce would do her children irreparable harm. That was all she needed to hear: She never brought the subject up again, and seems from this time forward to have been truly persuaded that, such as it was, her marriage was valuable and should be preserved against any forces that might threaten its continuation.

Another troublesome element, related to the emotional intensity surrounding Fan's momentary thoughts of divorce, was the family financial situation. They had run out of cash reserves altogether, and Fan was looking at an expensive Bar Mitzvah preparation without anything like the money to finance it. Her 1935 thanksgiving turkey and groceries had to be paid for by the Kesslers, who joined the Mailers for the meal, and at that time Dave reported that Louis Mailer was planning a quite substantial Bar Mitzvah cash present to the family. Fan said that she wished

she might have it in advance. A few weeks later, after the working out of some evidently complex tactics to insure that the envelope did not fall into Barney's hands, she found herself holding a check for five hundred dollars. It went to underwrite both the ^{Food for Uncle} ~~raw materials~~ for a buffet and the waitresses to serve it, new furniture for the apartment, clothes for the children, engraved invitations for the guests, and a small cash reserve for later. Welcome as it was that December, the gift served also to remind the adults of what had become the almost hand-to-mouth situation of the Mailer family, and it set Dave Kessler to planning a way of addressing that family's financial situation on a long range basis. His Continental Candy Manufacturing Company, located near the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, had made him wealthy through the production and marketing of various, locally popular chocolate-covered fruit candies. He had established the business before the war, and one story tells of how, when a sugar shortage developed at the war's start, the large commodity reserves at the Continental Company enabled its owner to make a major killing. Another commodity the Company always kept in heavy reserve was heating oil, for its ovens, and in 1936 Norman's Uncle Dave decided to establish a small independent heating oil supply company that could at once service the ovens at his factory and also develop a limited local market of resident and small company consumers. Such a company could serve as a tax shelter for the Candy Company, and at the same time could offer the Mailer family an opportunity to develop a regular household

income. So the office of the Sunlight Oil Company was established, at 56 Court Street in Brooklyn, just across from Borough Hall, and along with hiring a general manager and a secretary, Dave somewhat apprehensively installed Barney as both company accountant and customer contact representative.

The whole of the Bar Mitzvah preparation went forward, with one hundred guests invited for the ceremony at Congregation Shaari Zedek at ten o'clock on the morning of Saturday, February 15, as well as for the noon to 6:00 P.M. reception at the Crown Street apartment. The night before brought a heavy snowstorm, prompting Norman to predict that nobody would come, but the turnout was quite substantial and there certainly was a blizzard of telegrams, letters, cards and gifts to mark the moment when, according to Norman's Johannesburg Aunt Babs, "all responsibility on your parents' part ceases, and you are yourself to guide your own destinies." At the Temple he delivered a speech of about five hundred words, parts of which were pure convention: "How great is my joy to become a member of the people of Israel, the people that have spread morality, righteousness, poetry, love and light." Other parts lifted a few family eyebrows: "The nation of the prophets and of great men like Maimonides, Yehuda Halevi, Baruch Spinoza, Karl Marks, and Professor Einstein, and many, many more." He went on to pledge resistance to the Nazis and participation "in every good and progressive Jewish undertaking," called down blessings on his parents and on the audience, and as soon as possible thereafter left the premises. The references in

the speech to Spinoza and Marx and progressive causes were attributed by the Long Branch family to the perverse influence of Norman's Hebrew tutor, since the family itself normally distinguished quite sharply between its ethnic and its political loyalties. Aunt Beck was in fact county chairman of the Republican party, and the business background of both sides of the family was proof against the "street socialism" that was richly represented in the Crown Heights community. Back at the apartment, Norman presided over a long afternoon of congratulation and accumulation of gifts that Fan carefully cataloged so that he could send out notes of acknowledgement. There were fifteen cash contributions, ranging from a grand-uncle's five dollars to Louis's five hundred (the Kesslers gave one hundred) and a pile of packages that included books, clothing, a talith, a skull cap, a camera, three separate sets of military brushes and combs, and two watches. One of these, and quite a fine one, was sent by a Mr. Aronson, whom Fan had never met. Her suspicions aroused, she pressed an investigation until it revealed that Aronson was a gambler who ran a poker game in which Barney was a regular player. Fan waited until the reception was over, but the next day she called Aronson's home, not to offer thanks for the watch (Norman no doubt did that by mail) but, as she would recall thirty years later, "to curse him out of existence." Mrs. Aronson evidently answered the phone, and Fan "did not spare either of them." When Mrs. Aronson "begged me not to say those things, that her husband had a weak heart, I

followed it up by saying that he could drop dead that minute and I hung up." *He said to commit in Fair's journal for tonight, 1/2*

Teacher's note, child - esp. since it is minor in his story.
This whole drama, with its bizarre combination of outward classic composure and secret gothic fury, was of course being played out in the middle of Norman first year at Boy's High, and if his life at home was often filled with fire, his life at school quickly assumed the shape of a frying pan. He could deal with the classes well enough; indeed, he worked harder than he had at P.S. 161 and he did better. Boy's High offered a standard curriculum of four years each of English, History/Social Science, and Mathematics; three years each of Laboratory Science and Language study (Norman elected French); and two years each of Music and Drawing. Norman declined the study of a second language (Latin was the prestige election in the school.) But besides taking classes, he was being measured in an arena of adolescence for which he was neither biologically nor psychologically ready, and the best he could do there was abstain, simply and completely, from all forms of competitive participation. It was now no longer a matter of his refraining only from creative writing: The same kind of pressure that had stifled him into silence as a writer now built up at Boy's High on a really massive scale, blocking him from every non-curricular avenue on which he might come forward as a person and assert himself. As a student he won special honors in mathematics in every term of his four years, and he frequently was cited for excellence in French and history. His Science grades may well have been the highest in

*from his common
in Latin in French, 1/2
always because he studied it more.*

his class, and he made the comprehensive honor roll in every term summa cum laude. But his new school required "Health Education" for every term of the four years, and for the first two years these classes set standards that were absolutely and humiliatingly beyond Norman's reach. His grades in Health Education were not just lower than his academic grades; in his first two years they were so much lower that, even on the unemotional surface of his reverentially preserved Report Cards, they sound an unmistakable note of jeering derision. The specific pain generated by his experiences in the gymnasium burned so deep that Norman would never, ever, refer to it in public, but of course the implications of the experience were not confined to the gym. The broad message he received from the culture of Boy's High was that, outside the narrowest curricular confines, there was no place for him in the school at all. Hearing that didn't crush or destroy him--he got through it--but the rejection sent him into hiding, and he stayed hidden for the full four years. He would go to classes, go home, do his homework, and go out to the street games with his P.S. 161 friends. He was out of hiding when he was on Crown Street, and as his friends there graduated from P.S. 161 and came on to Boy's High in turn, life on the street began to approach richness while life in the school got closer and closer to tolerable, but the place never even began to become his. In his junior year he teamed up with two Crown Street sophomores to form a trio: Eppy Epstein on the drums, Harold Kiesel on trumpet, and Norman on clarinet. None of them knew how

among

to play--if they had known they no doubt would have joined one of the many performing groups at Boy's High--but back in their neighborhood they pretended to know. Their rehearsals, to which Norman's Uncle Dave contributed a new clarinet with carrying case, were ear-splitting parodies of actual sessions. But their make-believe allowed them to imagine for themselves an identity with some kind of masculine distinction: They day-dreamed about playing the Catskill resort circuit and making money and meeting girls; they listened to jazz records together and pored over the wisdom of Downbeat. It only lasted one winter--Norman for some reason dropped out--but the larger point is that in the culture of Boy's High itself, where the really serious striving took place for the really glittering prizes, Norman never even tried to compete.

His parents saved every scrap of paper that could attest to his accomplishments, but in the absence of any fictional or imaginative material there is very little in the files that speaks out loud to his personal feelings about ^{his high school} the experience, ~~he is having while in high school~~. One therefore pauses with real curiosity over an accidentally preserved few pages of notes from his English/Speech class in the first semester of his junior year, because they offer a profile in microcosm of Norman at school over a period of some six weeks. He characteristically used "Gas Model Airplanes" as the subject of a descriptive essay, and for another assignment outlined a speech of introduction for one Warren Niles, an expert on military aviation. Another speech-

outline covers the accomplishments of Wilbur and Orville Wright. All of this is flat, descriptive, crammed with fact and completely monotonous, despite his lecture-notes admonition that "imagination" is crucial to good speech "because imagination causes emotion." He adds: "If voice is monotonous [it] means [that it] needs vocal training or has little imagination or feeling. Yield to the imagination!" Quite obviously fleeing his imagination's vision of himself, and repressing what must have been a self-portrait of personal inadequacy, he plugs doggedly along in the class assignments, at one point criticizing his own style of public speaking. He writes that he uses the syllable "er" too often and that he shows "very often a hesitancy. Besides this," he goes on, "I have a slight lisp and am inclined to be indistinct. . . . The lisp is not noticed unless some particularly tricky sentence is used, and I think I shall be able to overcome my indistinctness by careful practice." Hesitancy and indistinctness apply not only to his speech, of course, but also and quite poignantly to any impulse he might have felt to assert his personal identity in the world of the school. The notes go on to reveal that in one class the students were asked to write against the clock in composing sentences that used the same word twice: once as a verb and once as a noun. "I will detail the work to you because you know it in enough detail," he wrote as his first example; and his second was "The Literary Digest is hard to digest." But the test called for ten examples, and Norman's last two, written quickly to finish, direct a painful crack of light

into his feelings about himself and his situation as he approached his fifteenth birthday. For number nine he wrote: "The insult was uncalled for; he had no right [sic] to insult me." And he concluded the exercise with: "I object to being made an object of ridicule." On the last page of notes from this class he copies out a poem titled "Courage." Courage had always been the outstanding quality in his fictional characters and clearly was a mythic term to Norman, invoking a world that he thought was personally beyond him except when he was writing. Now, cut off from any useful form of imaginative expression, he could only cling with a kind of terrible tenacity to the paraphernalia and above all to the idea of aviation: Perhaps he imagined that if he could fly it would make him brave. It can hardly be a coincidence, in any case, that the poem he chose to copy for his class is by aviatrix Amelia Earhart Putnam, lost in the Pacific the previous summer. Its opening lines are the most applicable:

Courage is the price that life exacts for
granting peace.

The soul that knows it not, knows no
release

From little things. . .

His Boy's High profile was so low that in the annals of his class yearbook, which reveals a structure of contests and competitions for distinction altogether comparable to the Olympic

Games, his presence at the school goes virtually unnoticed. Not only did he play no music, he didn't act, he didn't orate or debate, he didn't edit or photograph or write significantly for any of the myriad publications. He didn't hold office in class or school government, and he didn't join any of the public affairs forums. Of course he participated in no athletic activity. Even in the area of scholarship, where his level of accomplishment would have permitted him easily to bid for serious distinction and awards, he refused every opportunity. He was enrolled in the Arista League, which was the honor society, but he didn't enter until the spring of his senior year and he held none of its many offices. At the end of every class day he would retire to Crown Street; at the end of every school year he would go down to Long Branch, and what he did, besides heavy homework assignments, was play street games, build model airplanes, read books and magazines about building model airplanes, and soak up very large portions of such romantic adolescent fiction as Jeffry Farnol's The Amateur Gentleman and Rafael Sabatini's Captain Blood. He also enjoyed reading Spicy Detective. His social life among his Crown Street friends had warmth and some real satisfactions--as a senior he even began seeing an attractive young neighborhood girl who clearly enjoyed his company. But none of this penetrated the walls of the school world. His yearbook photograph caption identifies him as headed for Harvard as an Aeronautical Engineer, noting his "Honorary President" office in the Aviation Club. Nowhere else in the yearbook is this organization mentioned. He

Handwritten notes:
 The Amateur Gentleman
 Captain Blood
 Spicy Detective
 in the yearbook
 mentioned in the yearbook

is also identified as an editor of "The Physical Scientist," a publication which printed his 400 word essay "Model Airplanes," in December, 1938 (and which does not list him as an editor on its masthead.) The essay is the only thing he published while in the school, and as a piece of writing it is distinguished by being wholly without image, metaphor, figure or feeling of any kind. He had written with far more verve and flair when he was ten years old. When he goes up to Harvard the following autumn, his Crown Heights classmate Martin Lubin goes with him, and the two will become close and good friends. But to compare their identities at Boy's High is to see the difference between two entirely different sorts of adolescent experience: While Norman positively recoiled from the life of the school, Lubin was one of the people who ran the place. He is twice named on the yearbook list of Class Celebrities (where Norman does not even make "Greatest Grind") once as editor of the "Literary Recorder" and once as editor of the Latin Society's "Euclidian." Lubin is also pictured with the "Scholastic Hall of Fame" for his 96% overall scholastic average. In Declamation competition he won first prize for oratory, and was a "Mathelete," as a member of the competitive Math Team that won the Borough-wide championship cup. Norman had taken all the math courses the school offered and had earned straight A's: Apparently he just didn't see himself as significantly empowered by that fact. Inducted as a junior into the Arista League, Lubin held office in that organization and, as a crowning graduation distinction, was elected by his 649 peers

as co-valedictorian of his class. In terms of strictly academic achievement, his record was not remarkably superior to Norman's, and both applicants were readily admitted to Harvard. But in terms of being tested against peers and of developing self-confidence and position in the community, though their family apartments were less than three blocks apart, the two boys had lived on different planets for the whole four years.

So deep, indeed, was Norman's alienation from his High School experience that he seems actually to have repressed from consciousness his knowledge of the loss. "Later," he told an interviewer in 1983, "I began to realize that for many people high school was the prime experience in their lives. It was the dating period and all that." To have been in Boy's High for four years and not consciously known about that was to have un-known a universe, the weight of which must have been enormous. Having finally brought it to conscious acknowledgement, however, he never forgot it, and recorded at one point that he had felt his deprivation for thirty years. He explained, "I'd say high school [for me] was really the equivalent of college to somebody who was working at a job and going to night school, and was bitter afterwards because he felt he never had any college life." This reconstruction, acrid as it is, significantly sweetens an experience that in actuality had been even more bitterly galling. Survivor that he was, Norman must at the very least have been left wondering about what his next institutional initiation would bring him, and wondering about how to prepare himself for it.

Between the time of his Bar Mitzvah and his graduation, Norman's family life underwent a major structural change. While Barney tried out the job with his brother-in-law's oil company, Fan went out in an attempt to sell life insurance on commission. She was totally unable to make money at it, and she found its endless repetition of face-to-face rejection crushing and unbearable. But when it became clear that, on his part, Barney was not able to fit into the Sunlight Oil position, all parties concerned decided that Fan should take a crack at managing the company herself. The result was dramatic: Within a year she had the business operating at a profit, accomplishing this by a combination of the most excruciating economies and the most imaginative marketing strategies. Dave, who was after all the owner, must have taken some share of the profit, but most of what was not needed to pay for the business expenses seems to have gone to Fan as salary and/or commission, and she found herself able for the first time to start controlling the factors that produced financial stability for her family. The threat, of course, continued to be Barney. But by this time all the players clearly and coldly understood that he was the threat, and, so identified, he apparently could be defended against. Not only did Fan devise tactics to keep Barney in check--she kept him working at Sunlight Oil, for example, so that she could keep an eye on him--but Dave seems to have determined that Barney-created crises should be kept quarantined. By 1937 everyone understood that

these crises were inevitable, but since they were settled, as they arose, without reference to the Oil Company's continuation, it apparently had been decided that Sunlight Oil was to be kept free to serve as the source of the Mailer family income, and that insofar as Barney was able to go astray, his debts would be dealt with separately. Well before Norman's graduation from high school, Fan's central and dramatic introduction into the role of family provider invested her with a true matriarchal authority at last, and as Norman entered his senior year she sat down with him--and with Beck and the Kesslers--to lay out a strategy for college.

Norman's education had centered upon developing his strengths in mathematics and science. Though his grades were always very high, his four years of English left him absolutely untouched by serious literature of any kind, and it seems fair to assume that the same repressive shields that he raised up to shelter him from the self exposures of fiction-writing also separated him from serious fiction-reading. When his applications to college called for him to list current reading that had been important to him, he put down books like The Rise of Silas Lapham and The Americanization of Edward Bok, despite the fact that he had never read them or anything like them. Norman's years of recreational attention to engineering in general and aviation in particular had identified him to almost everyone in the family as someone who should seek a career in science or engineering, and so his applications in early 1939 went to the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology, and, as a back-up school, Harvard. When Norman was admitted to them both, Fan tasted her triumph, but an officer at M.I.T, noting Norman's age, suggested that he spend a year in prep school so that he could arrive at college among biological peers. Fan, who was always oblivious to the complexity of Norman's situation in this regard, thought that the idea was not only ridiculous but somehow insulting: She thus favored Harvard. Her sister Beck agreed, largely because she had never completely trusted this business of airplanes and engineering, and because she had never stopped thinking of Norman as a writer. Dave Kessler argued in favor of M.I.T., and Norman, for his part, went down to Washington D.C. after his graduation to talk things over with his cousin Cy, now a lawyer with a government agency. They concluded together that Harvard was the best choice, despite the fact that Cy had not been particularly happy there, and so it was all settled.

As he prepared for the move, Norman had to be hoping that this time he would not prove too young and unready to hold his own on a new terrain peopled by older and more established residents. Cy certainly had given him some direction, but at this stage Fan's presence so generated authority, and his own history at Boy's High had so sapped his capacity for self-confident independence ~~of~~ thought, that he had little choice but to approach the new experience in something like his mother's terms. "All you need do," she wrote him in Long Branch in the summer of 1939, "is to give your very best at all times because the

ultimate reward is for yourself, the benefits, satisfaction and happiness that you will enjoy. . . ." She was of course assuming that Harvard itself was not in any way to be tested--against what standard could a Jewish sixteen year old boy from Brooklyn test Harvard College? Harvard did the testing, and as the educationally final judge of who was to be approved for acceptance and success in the world, the institution commanded not only veneration from Crown Heights and Long Branch, but it commanded absolute trust. Though Norman, particularly with Cy as his adviser, must have seen that there was something a little simplistic about his mother's trust in both the ability and willingness of this institution to so utterly ensure the future of its own, as a practical matter he accepted Fan's truism: To make it at Harvard would be significantly to relieve at its source the anxiety of any outsider who feared the danger of rejection in the world.

Fifteen years later, what Norman renounced first of all was the idea that protection from the world's rejection was in any sense an honorable aspiration. Not simply to risk but actively to court such rejection would become his pride and his wisdom, requiring him consciously to renounce the accumulated wisdom of Long Branch and Brooklyn, as well as the profound tradition of immigrant subservience common to them both. This he aggressively set out to do after 1954, separating himself not so much from the people of his childhood as from their thinking, which he believed brought them down in the world the more it seemed to lift them

up. Arguing that it was disruption, subversion, the dangerous and even the criminal that honorable men must be willing to risk, the Norman of 1955 could see only one figure in the world of his childhood who in any way could be associated with such hazards. Long in gestation below the surface, the deepened and darkened figure of Barney would personally and, even more, symbolically, rise up to consciousness in Norman's imagination, and would make its presence felt there from that time forward.

But of course as he prepared to go up to Harvard, such thoughts were as far below the level of Norman's consciousness as they were distant in his future. His mind, in August of 1939, was fixed largely upon the problem of wardrobe: What should he carry, in his luggage and on his back, as he travelled into the alien country of New England?

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DOCUMENTATION

Part One

Pp. 1-6

Mailer's own account of the events of 1954-55, "The Mind of an Outlaw," Esquire, Nov., 1959, pp. 87-94, was reprinted as

"Fourth Advertisement for Myself," in his Advertisements for Myself, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1959, pp. 228-249. The direct quotes are from pp. 234, 248, 234.

The Naked and the Dead, Rinehart and Company, New York, 1948;
Barbary Shore, Rinehart and Company, New York, 1951.

"One kind of writer. . .", from "Hip, Hell and the Navigator," an interview with Richard G. Stern, originally published in The Western Review, Winter, 1959, is reprinted in Advertisements, pp. 376-86. The direct quote is from p. 379.

Part Two

Pp. 6-22

Unpublished correspondence between Isaac Barnett Mailer (IBM) and Fanny Schneider, 1920-21. Unpublished "Autobiographical Sketch," Fanny Schneider Mailer, (FSM), 1971, 1973-74. Correspondence of IBM with military and U.S. Consular officers, London, May-September, 1919. Unpublished correspondence: IBM, FSM, David and Anne Kessler, Norman Mailer, Barbara Mailer, Rebecca Schneider Shapiro, Rose Schneider. "The Book of the First Born," by Norman Mailer: unpublished section (82 pages) of a novel manuscript. Repeated unpublished interviews with Norman Mailer, Barbara Mailer Wasserman, Marjorie Rembar Radin, and Charles Rembar.

Mailer, His Life and Time, by Peter Manso, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 1985, Chapter I, pp. 11-38. Mailer, A Biography, by Hilary Mills, New York, Empire Books, 1982, pp. 55-56.

Part Three

Pp. 22-70

p. 22: Gambling pattern: NM/RFL interview.

"Kingsley Court": Manso.

Four thousand dollars: FSM, "Sketch."

Move to Brooklyn: "Sketch," FSM Letters.

p. 23: Beck's complaints: "Sketch."

IBM job loss, Kessler banking role: NM/RFL interview.

p. 24: FSM as summer season manager: "Sketch."

Situations of Louis Shapiro and Harry Michelsohn:

"Sketch;" Interviews with Charles Rembar and Marjorie
Rembar Rabin.

p. 25: IBM at home: NM/RFL interview.

Cheever parallel: Susan Cheever, Home Before Dark,

Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1984, p. 75. Scott

Donaldson, John Cheever, A Biography, Random House, New
York, 1988, p. 111.

pp. 26-27: FSM reaction to IBM: "Sketch."

pp. 27-28: Life at 555 Crown Street: NM interview; "Sketch;"
BMW/RFL interview.

pp. 28-30: World of Long Branch: "Sketch;" NM/RFL, CR/RFL, MRR/RFL
interviews; Manso.

pp. 30-31: Change of names to Rembar: CR interview; letter.

pp. 31-32: NM on CR: Norman Mailer, "Introduction to The End of
Obscenity", by Charles Rembar, first published in the

- British edition of the book, Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1969.
Reprinted in Norman Mailer, Existential Errands,
Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1972, pp. 211-215.
- pp. 33-35: Account of the trouble times: NM/RFL interview.
- p. 35: Move to Crown Heights: "Sketch."
- pp.35-36: Account of school arrangements: family scrapbook of
school records.
- p. 36: Recorded recollection: NM/RFL interview; "Portrait of a
Man Reading," interview with Charles Monaghan, Washington
Post World, 11 July 1972, 2; "Twelfth Round: An Interview
with Norman Mailer," an interview with Robert Begiebing,
Harvard Magazine, 85 (1983) 40, 42-50. The latter two are
reprinted in Conversations with Norman Mailer, ed. J.
Michael Lennon, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson
and London, 1988, pp. 188-192; 306-329.
- p. 36: Description of Crown Heights: Manso.
- p. 37: Neighbors in Crown Heights: Manso.
- p. 38: "Years later, Fan told...." Quoted in Tuli Kupferberg and
Sylvia Topp, First Glance: Childhood Creations of the
Famous, Hammond Inc., Maplewood, N.J., 1978, p. 95. This
anthology re-prints "Chapter XI. A Mystery," from "The
Martian Invasion."
- p 39. "Go out in the street...." From the soundtrack of the
Norman Mailer documentary film "The Sanction to Write,"
produced and directed by Jeffrey Van Davis, 1980.
- Edgar Rice Burroughs: "Portrait of a Man Reading," Charles

Monaghan, Conversations, p.188.

p. 40. "The Last Night," Esquire, December, 1963, 151, 274-80.

Reprinted in Cannibals and Christians, The Dial Press, New York, 1966, pp. 380-397.

p. 42: Hebrew School: NM/RFL interview.

pp. 46-47: "She simply told him...." NM/RFL interview.

p. 47: "Those who knew him...." Manso.

pp. 47-48: Both stories concerning his fearfulness were part of a three-part story titled "Harmony in Three Soprano Voices," written at Harvard in November, 1941. He appends the note: "The incidents are all from my childhood, of course."

p. 48: An unpublished novel: "No Percentage," a 488 page manuscript, written June-September, 1941. It is set in Brooklyn, Long Branch, and on the road.

"Twelfth Round: An Interview with Norman Mailer," Robert Begiebing, in Conversations, p. 308.

p. 51: His Jewish identity. Manso.

p. 52: "Fan stopped keeping...." Manso. NM/RFL interview.

p. 53: "Norman was absolutely shocked....": NM/RFL interview.

p. 54: "The family financial situation...." FSM, "Sketch."

pp. 57-58: The account of the Bar Mitzvah is in FSM's "Sketch," as is her account of the call to the Aronsons.

p. 59: Forming a trio. Manso.

p. 65: "Twelfth Round," Begiebing, in Conversations, pp. 308-309.

p. 66: The account of the Sunlight Oil Company is from FSM's

7A⁵—

"Sketch."

p. 68: The account of Norman's choice of college is from NM/RFL interview.

CHAPTER ONE

Part One

In early December of 1954, not long before his thirty-first birthday, Norman Mailer experienced a professional reversal that assumed, as it unfolded, the proportions of a major turning point in his personal as well as his professional life. Stanley Rinehart, whose Rinehart and Company had published Mailer's *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD* in 1948 and his *BARBARY SHORE* in 1951, had been trying unsuccessfully to extract from the novelist certain changes in the text of his third effort, *THE DEER PARK*, as the book proceeded deeper and deeper into its production process. Claiming that the Mailer text went dangerously beyond acceptable limits of exploration in at least one of its sexually explicit scenes, and perhaps hoping that his lawyers would find the novel as a whole to be actually obscene, Rinehart finally broke his contract to publish the book, despite the fact that it was already in page proof, that it had already been advertised in *PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY*, and that copies were scheduled for release to the bookstores in two month's time.

Rinehart's decision came very close to shattering Mailer, whose complex emotional investment in the book included the consideration that it was a comeback effort on his part, designed

to show that the critical and commercial failure of BARBARY SHORE had not been barometric of the course of his future career. From the edge of post-partum emotional exhaustion he was now forced back into a main current of furious marketing activity, and in the more than two months that it took him to contract with another publisher he found himself rejected by seven major houses: they had seemed to close ranks with Rinehart in a kind of concerted, industry-wide affirmation of what Mailer came to identify as a judgement of no-confidence in him and the vision he had been trying to discover in his work. By the time that Putnam's broke ranks and contracted to publish THE DEER PARK, its author saw himself as something more than a novelist having a run of bad luck; he now identified the fight over publication as simply the flashpoint for touching off a deep, subterranean explosion at the foundations of his life, and he saw this, in turn, as an explosion that had been a lifetime in the building.

Looking back on it in ESQUIRE in 1959, in an essay called "The Mind of an Outlaw," anatomizing the structure of rejection and dawning disillusion, identifying the instant crisis as the virtually inevitable conclusion of a lifetime of misdirected thinking, Mailer designates the climactic moment of his perception in terms that will become central in his vocabulary from this moment on: he identifies the crisis as apocalyptic. "And so, as the language of sentiment would have it, something broke in me, but I do not know if it was so much a loving heart

as a cyst of the weak, the unreal and the needy, and I was finally open to my anger." In a fury of catharsis Mailer moves through a ritual of renunciation, most specifically breaking off with the established literary and publishing community, whose journals had, six years earlier, rung with his praises: "I no longer gave a sick dog's drop for the wisdom, the reliability, and the authority of the public's literary mind, those creeps and old ladies of vested reviewing. . . ." But he is breaking, as well, with the whole world of his past, whose institutions, role models and collective wisdom had gone so far toward shaping Mailer's personal as well as his professional identity. "I turned within my psyche, I can almost believe, for I felt something turn to murder in me. . . . I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it, I liked it a good night better than being a gentleman. . . ."

This first of many apocalyptic moments in Norman Mailer's career serves as a kind of signpost, for those who would find their way into the story of that career, indicating the direction toward ultimate discovery. To begin here, and to bear down hard on the question of just what Mailer was rejecting (to penetrate the immensely resonant term gentleman, for example), requires us to depart from the terrain of January, 1955, and go backward in time. What he rejected, and why he rejected it, might emerge as we do that, putting us in a position both to appreciate the intensity of his dramatic impulse toward divorce, and to decode the pattern of what came after. The new life Mailer set out to

invent after THE DEER PARK is the one so tirelessly recorded in the journalistic annals of the years that followed--particularly, perhaps, the next fifteen--and reading that story, even trying to read through it into the story of postwar literary and cultural America, is the work of any student of the Mailer life story. But before one goes forward, simple lack of reliable information forces one first to go back.

The road back is clearly enough marked: his first years of public life, beginning with THE NAKED AND THE DEAD, identified Mailer as "one kind of writer," and his struggle to change himself into "another kind" stands at the center of that period. And before that there had been almost two years of literary composition, a period begun after his discharge from the army in 1946, during which a traditional, indeed an almost classical disciplinary structure had been discovered which had, in turn, significantly shaped Mailer's sense of who he was and how he could most effectively function. There had been two extraordinarily formative years in the army before that, to which the tap-root of varieties of violence, renunciation and what he once called "the language of men" can unmistakably be traced; and before that there had been four years at Harvard. Those years concluded with his marriage, a relationship begun in December of his junior year and the internal dynamics of which record, like a seismograph, a major stage in the process of his becoming; but Harvard, Harvard itself, represented nothing less than incarnation. Mailer

discovered the word at Harvard: he wrote two novels, a novella and over thirty short stories while he was there and in doing so became, in the great, the high priestly tradition, a writer. He would deconstruct this first version of that identity and recompose it in terms of the deepest disavowal, but Harvard would transfix his inner ear for the rest of his life, the cause before all other causes but one of what would happen after.

But the first cause, the actual prime mover, came at the very beginning, and it of course was produced by the impact between the infant Norman Mailer's essential genetic composition and the force field of his parents and their world. That hit would jar both sides profoundly, generating a relationship which at once warmly bonded and coldly polarized progenitors and offspring. The resulting dynamic went very far beyond the limits of normal parent-child interaction, requiring this particular child to sense so much and know so little that we, seeking to understand, have no choice but to go back and join with him there at the start. Contemplating the source of all the sources that would follow, we then can begin blazing a trail back up the years until we arrive, once again, at THE DEER PARK, Stanley Rinehart, and our now-grown child's ringing goodbye to all that. Then we can at least hope to respond specifically to a question about which we can now only generalize: Goodbye, we must discover at last, to exactly what?

Part Two

The two people who brought Norman Mailer into existence met at a modest resort lodge in Lakewood, New Jersey, in April of 1920. Isaac Barnett Mailer, a twenty-nine year old South African national, had been discharged from the South African army in London the previous August. An accountant who had done duty as a quartermaster, he was in the United States under the sponsorship of his brother-in-law, David Kessler, a successful candy manufacturer in Brooklyn and husband of Barney's slightly older sister, Anne. The Kessler's had rented space at the lodge throughout the winter, while Anne recovered slowly from the dreaded influenza that had ravaged the country in 1919, and were introducing their relative and house guest for the first time to the Schneider family--proprietors of the unassuming kosher-menu boarding house--and, most pointedly, to the two unmarried Schneider daughters, Rose and Fanny. Within a month Fanny, the youngest of four daughters and then about twenty eight years old, was exchanging letters with the man everyone called Barney: he from New Orleans, where he had found work as an accountant with the United States Shipping Board; she from Long Branch, New Jersey, where she and her family lived and where, that summer season, they had just begun to lease and operate the Phelandro Hotel.

Barney returned to stay with the Kesslers the following September, pursued his suit with Fan successfully, and, when he departed in October to a still better job in Milwaukee, was secretly engaged to be married. The two developed their relationship, and eventually their wedding plans, in an extended, extremely detailed correspondence that--broken by one dramatic visit home from Barney--lasted for nine months. Returning finally to Brooklyn in late July of 1921, Barney embarked upon an ultimately successful job search in New York city, spent a great deal of time in Long Branch, and worked out with Fan and her family the final nuptial arrangements. The two were married on February 12, 1922, at the Broadway Central Hotel in Manhattan. After a week-long honeymoon in Atlantic City, they moved into the Schneider family home at 15 Morris Avenue in Long Branch, where Fan re-immersed herself in the hotel business while Barney commuted daily to New York. The first of their two children, Norman Kingsley Mailer, was born in Monmouth Memorial Hospital in Long Branch on the morning of January 31, 1923, just two weeks short of the couple's first wedding anniversary. It was a high forceps, breech delivery birth, accomplished after twelve hours of extremely difficult labor. When the tiny mother--the diminutive Fan stood about 4' 10"--was delivered of her seven pound infant, she had weathered the first great crisis of her married life. It was to be neither the last nor, by any measure, the worst.

Which is not to suggest that the idea of crisis, in itself,

was new or especially intimidating to Fan; she had grown up in a family and a community that identified pessimism as worldly wisdom, and that spoke routinely of the worst being yet to come. Crisis-directed though it was, however, such dark thinking did not, in her world, serve to separate family members out from each other. On the contrary, a shared sense of life's impossible difficulties was a more or less conscious bonding device that served to bring loved ones together in united alliance against the forces of external adversity. But the crises that would begin to punctuate the lives of Fan and Barney and their children--a daughter, Barbara Jane, was born in 1927-- were of a kind new to Fan: newer than sex, newer even than childbirth. These last, after all, she had known about, and knew that they would one day come to her. In many ways she had looked forward to them. But what was brand-new to her was the idea of living with someone who led two completely separate lives: one of them all surface, conventionally respectable, conventionally intimate; the other one underground, criminal, fantasy-driven, totally narcissistic. Unheard of to Fan though it was, this was exactly the situation she discovered in her marriage to Barney, and all the more baffling was the fact that, even in retrospect, there was so little apparent sign of it in the days leading up to the marriage.

Certainly Fan and her close-knit, always vigilant family felt no ominous vibrations when Anne and David Kessler brought Anne's younger brother to Fairview Lodge that April in 1920,

carefully steering him toward the unmarried daughters. The couple was matchmaking, obviously, but married people in the Jewish community were always matchmaking: it provided them their only comfortable mechanism for relating to single friends and family of marriageable age. The Schneiders were confident that they understood what was happening, and, when they saw that Fan was receptive, the only important thing to be discovered was whether or not Barney was an acceptable prospect. He was Jewish, he came well represented, he was presentable on the face of it; what else was there to discuss?

A major potential impediment was the problem of money: fresh from the army, Barney had no property, claimed no patrimony, and had almost nothing in the way of savings. On their side, the Schneiders were not at all well off. Their small Morris Avenue property was heavily encumbered, and they were living from season to season in the resort business. In place of money, however, they had achieved to distinctly significant standing in their community; standing that derived not from their modest mercantile enterprises, but from the fact that Fan's father was the functioning Long Branch Rabbi. His position was unpaid, but in compensation for that it placed Yehudda Schneider and his wife at the very head of the town's small Jewish community. In that position she was honored and he was positively revered, for every testimony confirms the family folklore that what he lacked in shrewdness as a businessman he more than made up for in his wise, caring, even loving stewardship of that Long Branch congregation

over a period, by 1920, of twenty five years. Ten years before Norman's birth, Fan's sister Jenny had been married to Harry H. Michelsohn, son of a father who had amassed a small fortune in the liquor business and who had been eager to affiliate his family with the penniless Schneiders. Jenny's older sister, Rebecca, had in 1906 overcome her mother's objections and married a young entrepreneur named Louis Shapiro. By 1923 he was one of the leading Jewish businessmen in Long Branch, had opened his own bank, and was in the act of buying and extravagantly renovating the beautiful old Scarboro Hotel. The Schneiders had something to offer that was to many people more valuable than money, and when Barney Mailer, sponsored by his sister, showed that he could attract Fan's attention, the automatic first question was whether the family would think he was good enough.

Their decision that he was really quite suitable, reached upon due deliberation, stemmed from their conclusion that he would bring a great deal to the family besides money, and that he had every reasonable prospect of making a good living without the need for capital. He was, after all, a man with a profession. The many things that Barney had to offer added up to what could properly be called a touch of class. His family was South African, and the testimony of his sister and her wealthy husband, both themselves emigrants, painted a reasonably accurate family picture of first-generation prosperity: three of Barney's brothers were still quite young, as were three of his sisters, but his older brother Louis was already wealthy and landed,

thanks to his success in the world of finance, and the two older sisters had married well. Barney's parents were respected and active in the Johannesburg Jewish community, and his mother in particular, once the preliminaries were past, was ardent in flooding the Schneiders with letters proposing alliance and solidarity between the two families. Barney's parents had come out from Russia to Johannesburg in steerage, and the immigration officer had impatiently shortened their unpronounceable name to "Mailer," but their notable success had been achieved in what the Schneiders identified as the Western European Old World, an impossibly hard nut for penniless Russian Jews to crack. This was impressive to a family that had itself sailed in steerage from Russia to Ellis Island--the father first and the mother and five children later--and which after thirty years was still struggling to get established financially. It was also impressive that Barney, born in Johannesburg, had trained for his profession in a university--an education that went vastly beyond anything to be got in Long Branch: Fan's sister Rose, trained in the Trenton Normal School, approved of Barney both as a professional man and a cultural ambassador. His experience as a world traveller struck them all. He had been posted in London for two years, and had crossed to New York as a cabin passenger on an ocean liner (where he had been one of the organizers of the Third Class grand ball and entertainment program the night before landing.) He talked in a familiar way of countries and cities and experiences that the Schneiders had encountered only in books,

and the way he talked was important to his new friends as well. To Long Branch, Barney's South African accent seemed British, and in fact his years in London had given him the opportunity to affect something of an actual British tone. His speech, that is, seemed elegant to a family whose mother and father still spoke badly broken English after thirty years, and all but the youngest of whose members had suffered in the streets or in the schools while having to learn their new language. And consistent with Barney's speech, surpassing it even in elegance, was the way he dressed. There was something fantastic about his clothes. Barney was short, perhaps no more than 5' 4" when he met his tiny Fan, with a trim, full-chested build that he outfitted impeccably: carefully chosen suits, always spats, always gloves and a stick. He would have looked very fine if he were not particularly handsome, but in fact he was, extremely so, and handsome in a way that strikingly recalls so far-distant a contemporary as the F.Scott Fitzgerald of those years. Barney had a strong, cleft chin, broad brow, arresting eyes, with a mouth perhaps a little thin. But finally, the thing that the family discussed at greatest length was that he never--not in his looks nor in his speech, not in his background nor in his name--in any way revealed the fact that he was Jewish. Whatever else that might have meant to Fan's people, it certainly meant that they thought he could get around the worst of the rampant anti-Semitism of the time and be free to flourish in his profession. In sum, the family not only saw nothing wrong with this prospective member,

they judged him to be one who would both add to and appropriately draw upon the inner strength of the Schneider clan. They were thus ready to welcome him into their ranks.

Yet, when all of that was said, Yehudda Schneider, liking Barney--without exception, the most casual acquaintance always liked Barney--also said that Barney was "The strangest Jew I ever met." He said it gently, not only because Yehudda was himself gentle but because he cared so much for his youngest daughter, and Fan, apart from all other pros and cons concerning the suitor, was absolutely crazy about him. That fact alone would probably have decided the question of his suitability in the family's eyes, for by 1920 Fan had made them all aware that she felt they owed her something. The women in the family had always taken up extra burdens when the men found them too difficult to carry, and Fan had, she felt, labored longest and hardest in this connection. With her brother and two sisters married, and her other sister teaching school, Fan alone was left to serve as project manager, planner and supervisor of the hired help season after season in the resorts and inns that her father leased, catering to kosher vacationers from New York and New Jersey. Indeed, in the summer of 1921, during which her engagement became public and plans for the wedding began to move forward, she managed a second season at the rented Phelandro Hotel so successfully that in October, all bills paid, her parents had ended with a net profit of ten thousand dollars on the season. It was almost three times more than the year before, and though the

crush of paying guests had been a great burden for Fan, the profit changed her parents' lives. They paid off the mortgage on their Morris Avenue home, invested in the purchase of a cluster of three cottages on the corner of North Bath and Ocean avenues, and began for the first time in their lives to believe that they might actually be spared financial ruin. Though she felt a great sense of responsibility for her parents, and was glad for their good fortune, Fan now wanted deliverance. She wanted to function, like the other children, from a position of independence, and to join her brother and sisters as an equal partner in a kind of family consortium, jointly looking after the parents while individually pursuing goals and lives of their own. When she met Barney, all of the important things seemed to come together, and Fan intended to let nothing stand in the way.

Least of all was she deterred by Barney's own initial protestations that he was not good marriage material. She more than agreed with the rest of the family that his strengths were compelling, and she was self-confident enough to feel that his new secret weapon as a married man would be that he had her for a wife. Raised from earliest childhood to address the daily adversities of family existence as life-or-death struggles, she knew in herself the power of a trained and seasoned fighter. She sometimes allowed herself to daydream about a life that included leisure, recreation and self-indulgence, but she actually knew these things only as the beleaguered resort-town worker knows them: at second hand. Her personal experience had prepared her

not for pleasure but for striving, and she was positive that with a home of her own, shared with a man she loved and who loved her in return, she could break free from what she recognized as the tyranny of traditional Jewish weltschmerz and discover for herself the unimaginable compensations of success. If, in this vision, Barney proved tough enough to take the lead in moving his family forward, so much the better. But if he should falter, if in the unlikely event his capacity for dealing with the world were to show itself less than great, Fan had no fears. She knew all about the classic Jewish scenario in which kind, loving husbands and fathers, precisely because of their positive qualities, failed adequately to answer the challenge of the world outside their families. This had after all been the drama of her parents' marriage, and Fan had joined her mother and her sisters in putting the balance right. But Barney seemed such an unlikely candidate for this kind of role, seemed indeed to be so altogether a self-sufficient man of the world, that the idea of his falling into such circumstances served less as a warning to Fan than it marked the outside measure of her capacity to imagine marital misfortune. Certainly she imagined none greater.

A considerable amount of imagining was required, in any case, when Fan and the rest of her family undertook to acquaint themselves with Barney. He had met Fan just once in the spring of 1920 before he left for New Orleans. While there, he corresponded with her and they flirted a little back and forth, so that when he returned in September they could approach each

other with some seriousness. Still, they had perhaps only four meetings that month before he left for Milwaukee, spent very little time alone, and, when she accepted his proposal and his kiss in parting, he remained very much of a stranger. The only people who could even claim to know him were his sister Anne and her husband David Kessler, and their agenda in representing Barney to the Schneiders did not permit of much freedom to be candid. To the contrary, their agenda required that they conceal beneath a facade of conventional matchmaker enthusiasm the fact that they were actually engaged upon a full-scale reclamation project; one that had been under way for at least a year when they first brought Barney to Fairview Lodge. In the spring of 1919, when the time for London-based Barney's discharge from the South African army began to approach, Anne and Dave had begun to plan with him by overseas mail the outlines of his new life. He would petition the army to discharge him in London rather than Johannesburg, and ask that the boat fare be applied instead to a steamer ticket to New York. He would petition the United States Consul for a hard-to-get entry visa, with his short-term support and long-term assurance of employment guaranteed by Dave Kessler. Barney would come to New York, live with the Kesslers, find a good job, discover a strong wife from a strong family in the context of a traditional Jewish community, and he would put his prewar past where it belonged, behind him, forgiven, forgotten and filed away under the heading of Wild Oats. The Kesslers were not able to be candid because the Schneiders couldn't be allowed

to know that when Barney originally went into the army in South Africa he did so as a family pariah: he was a gambler, a reckless one, and when his father agreed to pay off his very considerable debts it was on the understanding that Barney would join the army, apply for overseas service, and never again return to his homeland. Anne and Dave were undertaking to prove that Barney's stern father had been wrong, that the son's adoring mother had been closer to right, and that with them in charge of the rehabilitation, all would be well in the end. They were jubilant when Barney told them about the engagement (which he and his fiancée had agreed to keep secret) because they thought that Fan and the Schneiders and Long Branch were exactly the medicine their patient required.

Unlike the Kesslers, Barney apparently felt that he should tell Fan, if not everything, at least something. So when he came up from New Orleans that September, he began what turned into a courtship by explaining that he really shouldn't think of marriage because he not only had no money and no prospects beyond what his profession might permit, but because he also gambled. Fan heard him out and kept it to herself--she was very much inclined to keep things to herself--but she didn't take it seriously. She told him that he was too much inclined toward self-deprecation, that in the context of their relationship he would come naturally to see that the risks of gambling made no sense, and that even if it turned out to be a weakness with him, she would help him to overcome it. In short, without actually

having been consulted by the Kesslers in the matter, Fan shared their belief that she could handle it. But the truth was that none of them--not the Kesslers, not Fan--knew Barney well enough to have the least insight into how he would deal with marriage and the family life. Anne hadn't seen her brother since well before the war, knew the details (whatever they may have been) of the legendary Johannesburg gambling crisis only at long distance, and had no knowledge at all of how her brother had passed his time in the army (his scant surviving private papers indicate that he passed much of it by gambling and by calling upon young ladies.) Fan, of course, knew infinitely less than this: she had only Barney's letters from Milwaukee, in which he assumes the identity of a serious, professional man, trying at long-distance to get his overemotional fiancée to calm down and grow up. (No more than one year older than Fan, he treated her at this time as if she were at least ten years his junior--which she may well have told him that she was.) He apparently never again spoke voluntarily to her about gambling, or about any other impulse or inclination that might suggest social or psychological aberration. When he returned from Milwaukee it was as a reassuring combination of earnest job-seeker and ardent fiancée, and Fan very probably concluded that the gambling he had spoken of was a false alarm, perhaps intended to add a finishing touch of glamour to his man-of-the-world bachelor identity.

In fact, gambling was Barney's private door into a secret world, and apparently had been since adolescence. When he was a

boy, one of the great stage melodrama heroes to be presented in Johannesburg theatres was "Raffles," the debonair criminal hero of The Amateur Cracksman and other stories by E. W. Hornung, and it is not unlikely that Barney would have seen some of these dramatizations. (His brother-in-law, Dave Kessler, had been a theatrical producer in Johannesburg before marrying Anne and coming out to the States.) Raffles is the romantic personification of the outwardly respectable man who secretly leads a criminal, if rather kind-hearted life, and the habit that most characteristically identifies him is gambling. Whether an adolescent Barney had ever actually seen and been smitten by this image, or whether he discovered his models in some other way, there is no doubting the fact of his secret identity. He was one of ten children--five sons and five daughters--who scrambled furiously in their first-generation South African world, seeking their fortunes while sustaining the conservative forms of Jewish family life. We can only infer that Barney somehow got stuck in the passage from adolescent to adult orientation, and that part of him remained arrested there, black sheep of a comparatively snowy flock, while the other part--the outer, public part--went on to become, of all things, an accountant. The pointed, almost absurd contrast between this super-respectable, narrowly responsible public identity, and the uninhibited free-wheeling of Barney's private self, suggests, on the face of it, a fragile emotional structure that should quickly have broken down under the pressures of real-world marital responsibility. But no such

breakdown, in Barney or in the marriage, was to come about. Somehow he put his underground and his surface lives into a juxtaposition that synergized energy for him; energy enough to permit commodious movement in both of the separate spheres, in each of which he seemed to feel altogether at home.

All Fan and the family saw at first was the slightly aloof, slightly conservative husband and parent. He early landed an enviable position in the Manhattan office of the General Motors Corporation, and as he left Long Branch every morning for the ferry shuttle to the city, his knife-edge wardrobe always distinguishing him from among the other passengers, it was as if a gifted actor were moving through a deceptively simple performance, making his difficult balance seem easy. Both at home and at General Motors, he conscientiously did all that he was expected to do, while at the same time he was doing something altogether otherwise. Gambling, for Barney, was not a compulsion that he tried but was too weak to resist; it was not an obsession that reduced or victimized him. For Barney gambling was a world full of people whom he liked and who liked him (Fan would complain later that he "cared more about some stranger that he met in a bar than he cared about his own family.") Barney's gamblers were committed to an activity that brought skilled players together to test one another, like gentlemen who made up the membership of a particularly convivial club. They admired one another for winning with modesty and losing with insouciant good humor, and they required nothing more of each other than that.

What seems to have made it both thrilling and energizing to Barney was its illicit, outlaw identity in the eyes of propriety-bound hearth, home and profession. As gambler, he related to the middle class in very much the way that a young artist of his generation might do. His pride was there. Without the gambling, it may be that Barney risked feeling flat and two-dimensional in the undramatic institutional grids of family and office. But with it, running every dangerous risk, he commanded a vantage point that permitted him always to see the ironic contrasts between where he was at the moment, where he had been a little while before, and where he would be a little while hence. Commanding such a position he was a force to be reckoned with. If only he had sufficient cash reserves, or sufficient skill at the tables to stay ahead of the game, it is at least theoretically conceivable that Barney might have gone along indefinitely with his double life -- like a man with a manageable mistress, feeling at home wherever he finds himself. Then his wife and children might have known him only as a kind and concerned, if slightly stuffy man, who was in certain situations unapproachable and even invisible; a man who needed to keep a certain amount of time free to be by himself. But of course Barney had no cash reserves, and his skills as a gambler were at best too limited for his means. He would sometimes lose on a scale that he couldn't begin to afford, and when that happened he would obtain money from one of his worlds to pay off his losses in the other. He would borrow, he would beg, and when all else failed he would steal.

PART THREE

This was the stage whose set the infant Norman Mailer entered on January 31, 1923. His parents had been married for only a year, and it was a little too soon for Fan to have yet learned about Barney's gambling. The pattern, established from the start, was that a crisis involving unconcealable losses would surface about every two years, and in fact it was some time between 1924 and 1925 that the bad news first started to break. Until spring of 1924 the new family continued to live at Morris Avenue, at which time they moved into the three-cottage cluster at Beach and Ocean Avenues, called "Kingsley Court" because Kingsley was Norman's middle name. They lived there for well over a year, renting it for four thousand dollars from Fan's parents while Fan managed it for two summers as a lodge, and while Barney continued to commute into New York. The first summer they did little better than break even; the second they did, as Fan put it, "well." Then, abruptly, they pulled out of Long Branch and moved to Flatbush in Brooklyn, to an apartment at 2902 Cortelyou Road, about two miles distant from one occupied in Crown Heights by Anne and David Kessler. It was from this time forward that some of Fan's family, notably her older sister Beck (as Rebecca was always called), began noting and complaining about Fan's closeness with the Kesslers, whose style had begun to seem offensively extravagant in Long Branch. Fan's in-laws had showered the infant Norman with a sea of gifts and then made a little too much of having done so, prompting Beck to suggest that

Fan ought to be careful not to become in any way dependent upon such people.

The problem, however, was that Fan had been dependent upon them from the start. She depended upon their representation of Barney's sterling character--congruent as it was with what she wished to believe--and now she depended upon them to share her secret. Fan's natural inclination to be secretive, even within her own family, was immensely heightened when the first gambling crisis broke, and her initial instinct had been to flee from Long Branch so that it would be easier to avoid discussing the circumstances under which Barney had lost his job at General Motors. No coherent details survive to document the episode beyond establishing the fact that it was a matter of misappropriation of funds, and that only a timely restitution saved Barney from prosecution. The restitution was provided by Dave Kessler. He would continue to be the family banker in this connection, producing unrepayable "loans" every two years or so all through Norman's childhood and adolescence, in each crisis covering obligations of two, five, sometimes perhaps as much as ten thousand dollars. Barney's entire salary, even in his best situation, could not have brought him more than five thousand dollars a year, and by 1930 he had become unable to find significant full-time work as an accountant anywhere. The General Motors position was followed by several others, but they ended in similar ways, each time depriving him of the letters of reference crucial to his continuation in his profession. Fan went on

managing summer-season properties in Ashbury Park and in Long Branch with her sisters Beck and Jenny, both of whom had begun to discover hard times of their own. By 1928--the year Ida and Yehudda died, bequeathing their properties to the children--both Beck and Jenny were struggling against deterioration in the health and business fortunes of their husbands. Norman's uncle Louis Shapiro was slowly dying of heart disease as his Scarboro Hotel, still the showplace of also-deteriorating Long Beach, was failing to pay off his overinvestment in its renovation. At the same time, Jenny was watching her once wealthy husband, Harry Michelsohn, go to pieces under the strain of losing his patrimony in a liquor business made unmanageably perilous by prohibition. Both men died in 1936, but long before then their wives were effectively supporting their families in the tourist business and, working with them, Fan was trying to support hers. The great difference between the situations of the sisters was that both Louis and Harry, reduced in fortune though they were, had clear and unambiguous identities in the eyes of their family and their community: They both were innocent, well-intending victims of circumstance. But Barney, while seeming innocent to Beck and Jenny and the rest of the Long Branch family, actually operated in the context of his immediate family as a forceful and even frightening victimizer.

Which is not to suggest that he was conventionally brutal. On the contrary, his day to day behavior in the family circle was exquisitely considerate. From his first appearance he had been

noted in Long Branch for an ability to interact well with children, and his genuinely great pleasure in having a son was, if anything, surpassed when, two years after the move to Brooklyn, his daughter Barbara Jane was born. Kind to the children, he was solicitously attentive to Fan in a way that simultaneously pleased and infuriated her, creating a combination of conflicting feelings that hereinout would characterize her furiously ambivalent response to the whole marriage. He declined, in the most dignified way, to so much as discuss his gambling with her, always saying when pressed that he had of course given it up. He attributed his inability to find work to anything and everything but the actual peculiar cause, and every morning of the working week he sallied forth as a figure of impeccable executive presence, evidently intent on cracking Manhattan's corporate wall. Always an essentially fictive figure, Barney's pattern of action at this time foreshadows one that developed later in the analogously fictive life of John Cheever: it is a pattern that perhaps helps forge for us an illuminating link between the informal fictions of Norman Mailer's childhood, and the formal world of fiction that would eventually follow. Cheever, for the time that he lived with his wife and two children in a Manhattan apartment building, would prepare to leave for work each morning like all the other men in the building. In business suit, with hat and briefcase, he would take the elevator down to the lobby with his fellow breadwinners, but just before getting out to the street he would duck down the

basement stairs to his storage locker, which he had set up as a writing room. At day's end he would conclude his secret activity and rejoin his fellow sojourners for the trip back up in the elevator. Different though Barney's underground destination was, every sign indicates that he went to it with the transfixed determination of an artist going to his necessary work, and he must have endowed its rituals with an analogous totemic power. Nothing less would have enabled him to transcend with such apparent serenity the furious efforts at reform that he encountered every day at home. In this way and in this respect, he achieved to a virtually iron control over his wife, who progressively felt more and more helpless.

Fan characteristically hid the truth from the Schneider family, and in any case it required a passage of some time before she herself came fully to understand what the truth was. Barney was so persuasive in his denials and reassurances, and his wife, sister and brother-in-law were so anxious to believe him, that it was perhaps as late as 1932 before they fully realized that Barney was going to be irreclaimable. Since none of them, for various reasons, felt ready to contemplate abandoning their relationship with Barney, or what they saw as their responsibilities to it, they were forced to turn their attention to a strategy of damage control. Uppermost in this strategy, particularly in Fan's mind, was controlling damage that might touch the children, and when in January of 1933 the Kesslers moved from Brooklyn into a Manhattan hotel, Fan undertook to

convert her family's new apartment, at 555 Crown Street in Brooklyn's Crown Heights section, into a kind of theatre for the acting out of necessary fictions. The children were encouraged to see their father off on each morning's job-search, and to commiserate with him each evening upon his return. Money, though in alarmingly short supply, was never allowed to seem a problem, and the ongoing struggle between the parents was masked by a busy conversational keeping up on correspondence and news from all members of their large extended family. Barney rather formally presided at the evening meal--unless "business" kept him away--in the person of a caring but conservative paterfamilias, serious about such things as schoolwork and personal hygiene, cautious about the dangers of everyday life on the streets of a gentile-controlled city, but still jocular and knowledgeable about sports and movies and the comic strips. He would cheerfully chat about anything, in fact, except the subject of himself; his past was a firmly closed book, and the conventional questions from Norman about his father's experience in the Great War elicited only one anecdote, in which Barney is featured as being caught in the shower on a troopship during a submarine alarm in 1917. Beyond this, the war, foreign travel, post-adolescent experience, and any subject at all that might lead into autobiography, Barney would always turn aside. After a time Norman stopped asking, but the veil of mystery and separation that hung between father and son operated for the child as a major and baffling source of anxiety.

Norman had entered Public School 181 in Brooklyn in the fall of 1928, when he was five years and seven months old. Since that was the year in which both of his maternal grandparents died in Long Branch, the attention of the Brooklyn family was particularly directed toward the shore community, with its dense infrastructure of aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. But Long Branch was at all times a major influence on Norman, providing him with a singular identity and offering him an assertive model of how the world worked. The identity was that of the favored son figure, and the model of the world served to demonstrate why such a favored, indeed such a messianic son was urgently needed. The history of the Schneider family in Long Branch revealed a world where the women had been required to form into a matriarchy in order to compensate for the failure of their men to deal with the institutions of American commerce. Yehudda, his eldest child and only son Joseph, along with his sons-in-law Louis and Harry, had one by one failed capitalism's trial by ordeal, and the Schneider sisters, led at the start by their mother, had stepped into the breach. They found in themselves the energy and strength and skill to make a living out of the tourist business, and they found in their men a quality that adequately compensated for their ultimate inability to prevail in the several arenas of business affairs. The men were kind, loyal, morally good, touchingly contrite concerning their worldly inadequacy, and above all they were faithful. For this their women loved them and, indeed, protected them against the

consequences of their vulnerability.

For the favored son figure, however, the adult community and especially its women reserved a different kind of love: transmitted with a burning intensity of emotion that constituted pure exhortation, it called for nothing less than that the sons prepare themselves to go forth and conquer the forces that had defeated the fathers. Barney, of course, did not actually match the description of a warrior fallen in the battle for family security, but Fan never stopped trying to fit her peculiar marital situation into this ethnically conventional framework, and she certainly never ceased to identify Norman as an authentically anointed messianic figure. The original favored son presence in Long Branch, however, was Norman's cousin, Cy (Charles) Shapiro. Eight years older than Norman, he served the younger boy as a model in much the way that Beck, his mother, had broken the trail and set the standards for Fan. Beck intended for Cy to smash the mold of the good masculine figure who, in some way because of his goodness, fails in the world. Beck was deeply intelligent, and in her role of reality-instructor for the rest of the family she professed a rich distillation of classic immigrant wisdom: as a first principle, this wisdom taught that not only must supplicant outsiders in an alien culture learn how to become accepted insiders, but that they must accomplish this without suffering the loss of dignity or integrity. Failing in the world, Beck's immigrant experience had taught her, consisted of being rejected by those who owned that world and, owning it,

denied admission to outsiders. She believed, and Fan believed and their children would inevitably learn to believe that while acceptance in the gentile world must not be purchased at the price of one's decency, rejection by that world spelled practical ruin. The sisters determined and were persuaded that their sons would so excel as to make it impossible for them to be rejected. They would attend great universities and would so master the life and the curriculum there as to compel those institutions to extend their full approbation in the form of a degree with highest honors: this was the fabled passport into the hitherto forbidden territories beyond. The goodness the sons brought to this struggle would combine with the power their success would earn for them, and they would thus be different from the good but powerless men whose fate had shown them the way. In Cy's case, even his name would be different. While entering Columbia's law school in 1935, having just graduated from Harvard, he had his name legally changed to Rembar, deriving it from his dying father's original last name. Louis had been naturalized under the name of the family that sponsored him: Shapiro. But his real name was Zaremba, and Cy's Rembar both retained and changed that. It was as if the change symbolized how he and his mother and all of the family meant for him to keep his father's inner excellence, but in certain particulars to be different: to stand free of his father's vulnerability. Louis, in turn, vulnerable though he may have been, gave his son something that it is difficult for sons to derive from mothers: he gave him a strong sense of masculine

seasons, but one could always identify the ominously special occasion by the way the evening was structured. A meal would be served and quickly eaten, the silence of the throttled adults barely sparing the children from outright expressions of distress. Immediately after dessert, itself treated with unceremonious haste, the children would be delivered to their beds, and very shortly after that the four adults would begin upon a passionately whispered discourse. Straining to make out their words, Norman could always tell that Barney was on the defensive, that the other three were angry and, what was more, frightened at something that Barney had done, but the boy could never quite identify what the awful deed had been. Although this scenario showed itself only periodically to Norman, the threat of it was with him always, and he regarded it not as a peripheral but rather as the radically central drama in the life of his parents. As such it both terrified and excited him long before adolescence, and virtually from the start he found himself hypnotized by its action in a kind of pornographic way. It was, after all, a profoundly sexual exercise in the dynamics of domination. The force that dominated here was nothing like the force that operated in Long Branch. There, the locus of power was feminine, and it asserted itself in the most open, if not always the most simple way. But from his darkened bedroom Norman could divine that some kind of masculine force was at work in his own household, and that it drew much of its potency from its apparently dangerous, shocking, and even criminal character. On

self-confidence. Cy's formative years corresponded to his father's time of heady, if temporary success, as well as of robust good health, and the handsome, charming Louis was especially open to and intimate with his son.

Norman, by contrast, struggled throughout his pre-adolescent years with the enormous problem of establishing a usable identity for his own mysterious father. In the absence of any adult male figure that Norman could both clearly see and deeply identify with, Cy very probably meant more to his cousin than any man alive. Forty years later Norman salutes the relationship: "He was very much of an older brother all through my childhood, and I worshipped him (with enormous funds of love and envy) because he was a hero." Cy and Norman shared the rapturous admiration of their elders, particularly the women, and the intensity of that experience imposed upon both boys the traditional sexual confusions, but Norman did not share Cy's body-builder's physique, his championship athletic prowess, his rugged good looks or, still-less, his masculine self-confidence. There is a frankly mythic quality to the details of a middle-aged Norman's recollection of his cousin: "He was one of the few people I've ever known who had a happy look on his face when he came to bat in the late innings with men on base, his side behind, and the need for a homer prominent in everyone's head. Indeed he had his smile because it was slightly better than even money he was going to hit that homer." We then learn that Cy usually did hit it, just as he usually won the tennis tournament there at the

Scarboro Hotel, which was the setting for all this, and won at football and won at "getting the best looking girls." He became a sort of spirit of the place for Norman, banishing all of the prior generation's Old World gloom: "He was the only figure I encountered in my childhood who seemed to believe it was more natural to win than to lose, and that life was therefore to be enjoyed rather than decried." Cy went up to Harvard in 1931, the year Norman was entering the fourth grade, but the two cousins shared Long Branch in the summers well into Norman's adolescence. Cy had no brother of his own, and was generously kind to his little cousin, whose need for fraternal friendship he recognized. But quite apart from being so much younger, Norman was very different from Cy, both physically and emotionally, and the example of Cy's warm and open relationship with Beck and Louis at the seashore taught the younger boy little that would help him in dealing with his own parents. He had to do that in Brooklyn, and he had to do it alone.

Very early on and certainly by the time he entered school in 1928, Norman had become aware that his parents were guarding a secret of apparently terrible proportions. Their Brooklyn apartments were not large, and though Fan was always "moving up," even within the same building, their accommodations never allowed for anything more than marginal privacy. Thus Norman was able to listen to the rise and fall of the voices when, every two years or so, the Kesslers would appear for what he came to think of as the trouble times. They would visit often enough at other

each occasion he would trace the impassioned scene up to a climax of angry departure, with his Uncle Dave's voice at once issuing threats and capitulating into some kind of acquiescence, and after the door slammed behind the Kesslers his mother's sobs would fade finally into silence as Barney, never himself emotional, always reasonable in tone, endlessly offered some mysterious explanation. However many pieces in the puzzle remained missing, the central piece was in place: Norman knew that his father was a man of great power. It was a power so secret that it could only be discussed in whispers, with doors shut and curtains drawn, and it was strong--strong enough to reduce powerful women to tears and pleading; strong enough to overturn even the financially empowered authority of Uncle Dave himself. The whole thing frightened Norman at least as much as it excited him, and the residual effects of this fear would play a central part in the life of his childhood outside as well as inside the family. But frightening though it was, the sensing of such power was also exotic and stimulating, and Norman knew that it was only a matter of time before he would break the secret's code and discover its inner source. When he found it he knew that he would have found another world, as different from Long Branch as Mars, and he knew also that he would finally have found his father.

The family move from Flatbush to Crown Heights was made abruptly, in January of 1933, just as Norman was completing the first half of the fifth grade at P.S. 181, where Barabara had

entered the first grade the previous September. Years later, Fan said that she wanted to move because she had come to dislike the neighbors. This, of course, could mean anything from a simple feeling that after four and a half years it suddenly seemed time for a change, to the possibility that the endless prying so characteristic of these neighborhoods had brought to light something embarrassing about Barney. In any case they moved to 555 Crown Street, some two miles away, pulling the children out of P.S. 181 and entering them in nearby P.S. 161, where Barbara continued first grade and Norman picked up the second half of fifth grade. He stayed in it only a month, however, and on March 1 the teacher, a Mrs. Bernstein, upgraded him into a special first half section of the sixth grade made up of accelerating students. It was the first in a problematically important sequence of developments in Norman's Brooklyn school life, and being accompanied by a simultaneous change of neighborhood it placed him in a position of having to prove himself in two new arenas. Add to this the fact that he had just started to attend Hebrew School, which he hated at least as much as the other boys hated it, and his situation would have had to be called difficult even without the special trouble at home.