

CHAPTER TWO

Part One

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Norman made the classic Harvard wardrobe mistake. Every outsider, according to a celebrated Cambridge fop of the period, bought and brought the wrong clothes to Harvard; suffering through the process of getting rid of the wrong things and acquiring the right things was one of the rites of passage that made almost all freshmen in each class kin. There were, of course, levels of rightness and wrongness, just as there were social stratifications in the class and the community that identified different needs for different people. Freshmen who received invitations to Hasty Pudding-Institute of 1770, and hoped for or expected later invitations from any of the smaller, "finals clubs," would require more and different clothes than did those who had no such ambitions. And freshmen who had never even heard of these legendarily exclusive fraternal organizations needed still less, as was certainly demonstrated by the little circle of marginalized peers that Norman joined in Gray's Hall in the Harvard Yard one late September afternoon in 1939.

He had been a passenger up from Brooklyn with his Boy's High classmate Martin Lubin--himself assigned to live in Thayer Hall--whose father had made the drive. Norman discovered that in his

two-bedroom, one-bathroom suite in Gray's he had been assigned two roommates, and that the three of them, along with a good percentage of people on their hall, shared at least two things in common besides having chosen the wrong clothes: they had all been educated somewhere in the American public school system, and they were all Jewish. It was not Harvard's residential policy to segregate people from minority backgrounds in separate buildings, but being Jewish and having attended a public school seem to have been usual criteria for roommate assignment in any given Hall.

Norman and his two roommates in Gray's 11-12--Maxwell Kaufer, from Kingston, Pennsylvania, and Richard Weinberg, of Memphis, Tennessee--made a sort of circle with Seymour Breslow, from Westport, Connecticut, and his two roommates in Gray's 3-4, and various of them were often joined by or went over to Thayer Hall to visit Lubin and his Hoosier roommate Harold Katz. Though Norman's gold and brown jacket and his green trousers with the vertical blue or perhaps even orange stripe were to become a beloved and permanent joke in the Mailer family folklore, none of his freshman friends recalls that Norman's new clothes were worse than anybody else's. What a number of other students do remember noticing about Norman was his age. Virtually all of the boys were eighteen, and some were older, but the two Brooklynites were not: neither Norman nor Marty Lubin would even turn seventeen until the second semester.

Indeed, Marty was a month and a half younger than Norman, but it was Norman's age difference that people were aware of and still

remember, recalling how, when he was out of the room, they might use it to account for his shyness, his initial hesitancy to engage much in the dynamics of their very modest social life, and for his combined air of seeming grimly determined and at the same time slightly lost. He had the single in his suite, and he promptly put up over his desk a full-sized Petty Girl poster, upon which his roommates and visitors periodically inscribed ironic commentary. Some of the boys found girls to take out, but for the most part these new freshmen had neither the time nor the opportunity.

Early in the semester a big Saturday night out would more typically be a visit to a burlesque show. Norman's own recollection includes a story about going that fall to the Old Howard burlesque house on Boston's Scollay Square with a Gray's Hall group, and being checked for age at the door. Knowing sixteen to be too young, he lied and told the doorman "seventeen," only to be turned away because the minimum age was eighteen. Frantically producing his Harvard identification card and pleading a slip of the tongue, he cried out "I'm really eighteen! You have to be eighteen to get admitted to Harvard!" The doorman let him in, but for the rest of the year it became a standard Gray's Hall routine to interrupt him during dormitory arguments by waving identification cards at him and shouting "I'm really eighteen! You have to be eighteen to get admitted to Harvard!"

Years later one member of the class of 1943 will refer to Norman as "the baby of our class," but the reference is affectionate, and it slowly became clear to Norman that, despite

his initial apprehension, he was in no serious danger of having his youth held against him at Harvard. Everyone that he knew in his class, after all, was afraid of having some inadequacy or other held against him in this extraordinary new environment--it was part of what bonded them together. One sign of self-assurance appeared in late November, when he began asking a waitress from the Harvard Union out on Saturday nights for ice skating or the movies.

To be sure, he encountered one rejection that felt unpleasantly familiar. Perhaps the most crushing experience at Boy's High had been delivered by a Mr. Hiney, the first of a number of Physical Education teachers who said in effect that Norman was too small and too young and should never have been accelerated into the school. At Harvard he was eager to prove that he did belong, athletically as well as every other way, and as a way of satisfying the Physical Education requirement in his new environment he went out for freshman crew--a sport he knew nothing about-- with something well beyond mere enthusiasm. He had not yet got his full growth, which finally would measure a scant 5'7", his arms were disproportionately short, and if he had heard he had not accepted the conventional wisdom that crew men had to be tall and long-armed: after all, he probably reasoned, basketball players could be short.

His posture of furious commitment alarmed his family, but despite their pleas he structured the grueling crew schedule into his crowded time-table and pulled with his short arms on the long oar of the shell throughout almost the whole first semester.

Then he was cut, without a word or even a glance from the coach. A more experienced acquaintance at this point explained to him that, except for the position of coxswain, people with his build were automatically and always excluded from the shells--it was nothing personal. True enough, no doubt, but Norman took it personally enough to identify the experience forty years later as the only distinctly unpleasant thing that Harvard, as an institution, ever did to him.

Of course forty years can screen out a lot of detail, and as a student he found more things to criticize about Harvard than the policy of the Freshman crew coach, but even at the time he did not identify the residential segregation or the admissions office quota (about one fifth of his thousand man class was Jewish) as the tip of any anti-Semitic iceberg. It is not even clear that he identified these institutional policies at all, so preoccupied was he, in those first months, with not only the issue of community acceptance, but with the problems posed to him by his responsibilities to his family, by his academic/athletic schedule, and by the task of discovering--one might more properly say of rediscovering--his identity in his own eyes.

In those eyes, Norman's responsibilities to his family loomed very large. His parents and the Kesslers had confidence in him to an almost problematic degree, freighting him with the most solemn sense of the seriousness of his mission; and despite his mother's insistence that the importance of his success was "for yourself," he could not fail to understand that it was actually, to a very

significant degree, ^{for} them as well. Certainly his parents were making ^{the} financial sacrifice. He had been admitted to Harvard on the understanding that his family could afford the costs, and with the aid of the Sunlight Oil Company's continuing profitable operation they very nearly could. Indeed, the previous year Fan and Barney had even acquired a car, that they used for personal as well as business purposes, and Harvard had turned down their request for scholarship aid in the first year.

In applying for such aid in anticipation of his second year, Norman noted The University's Tuition and Infirmary fee in 1939-40 was \$420.00, the Gray's Hall room was \$200.00 for the year, and board at the Freshman Hall of the Harvard Union was \$350.00. With modest amounts itemized for laundry, clothing, books, room furnishings, and earmarking \$105.00 for the year's recreation and travel, Norman listed his total expenses for his first year as \$1167.00, and anticipated his second-year expenses as \$1202.00. His family income was listed as \$3,000 from Barney's salary. Fan was listed as unemployed. Norman had taken a job of some sort upon arriving in Cambridge, but it evidently paid very little and interfered with his work, so he dropped it almost immediately. He accepted from home an allowance of four dollars a week, as well as coverage of all his expenses, in return for which he agreed to do his utmost to distinguish himself on the new testing ground.

The communications system devised to track his progress toward this goal was elaborate: he was committed to writing a letter every Sunday, to writing a postcard (from a massive supply

pre-purchased by Fan) every Wednesday, and to calling on the telephone every Thursday--and this was only for his parents and sister. He was also expected to stay in close touch with Dave and Nan Kessler, and to write with decent frequency to his aunts Beck, Jenny and Rose, as well as to his cousin Cy. His more extended family, including his father's people in South Africa, was to a certain degree attended to by his parents, though he was always expected to do his part.

Barney continued to be a very significantly threatening force in the family, though his style when he was present in family circles was to ^{defer,} humorously, and ~~indeed~~ affectionately ^{defer} to Fan. Even so he had ventured to suggest that, based on his own experience, there was a tendency in the family to over-monitor the behavior of the males, and he warned that Norman should not be tracked too closely.

? In characteristic to this, Fan proceeded to arrange for monthly trips to Cambridge for herself, usually in the company of Mrs. Lubin. Fan would work at the Sunlight offices until the end of the day on Saturday, close down the office, join Mrs. Lubin in catching the late-night, bargain fare train and arrive in Boston at 5:00 on Sunday morning. The two mothers, having sat up in day coaches, would rent shower facilities at the depot, and then take the subway out to Cambridge to spend the day--often separately--with their sons. At day's end the women would take another night train back to New York. Norman had only been in residence a month before he was arguing with his mother--in cards, letters and on the

telephone--about her proposals to increase the frequency of her visits, and he was able to hold her down to a once-a-month schedule only through the repeated display of stubborn resistance.

Part of his argument against increased visits from Fan was that he was busy with his work. He was carrying a five course load as a beginning Engineering student: Math, Mechanical Drawing, Physics, French and English, and along with his heavy commitment to crew, on the one hand, and communicating with his family, on the other, he really didn't have much spare time. He tried to keep Wednesday nights free for his beloved movies, and Saturdays, particularly Saturday nights, were saved for recreation, but otherwise he was either in class or addressing himself to one or another kind of assignment. The academic work, in which he had so excelled at Boy's High, was a serious challenge for Norman and his friends.

They had all been very good students in high school, but the level of competition created by their Harvard classmates daunted them, just as the quality of undergraduate instruction sometimes disappointed them, in response to which they all worked very hard. Marty Lubin, and his roommates ^{from Gray's} Harold Katz, ~~from Indiana~~ and Seymour Breslow ~~(from Philadelphia)~~, consulted regularly with Norman and his roommates, Richard Weinberg ~~(from Memphis, Tennessee)~~ and Maxwell Kaufer ~~(from Philadelphia)~~, and they had other friends from elsewhere in the halls and from class, many of whom were dependent upon financial aid and all of whom strove for academic distinction. The "Gentleman's C," along with the

occasional D, casually accepted by some devotees of the club life, were simply unheard of in this secluded world.

Norman's biggest problem was with his inadequate preparation in Physics ("The Physics course at Boy's High is notoriously bad," he told his family in October) and his first impulse was to transfer into another Math section: he couldn't believe, until investigation persuaded him otherwise, that all the freshman sections had in them such ^{an} alarmingly ~~large~~ number of brilliant students, or that none of the sections was taught ^{any} ~~significantly~~ better than any other. His French course stunned him with the quantity of work demanded, but otherwise left him cold, and the Mechanical Drawing--the only Engineering Sciences course in his schedule--served not at all to reawaken his old appetite for designing and building model airplanes. Indeed, his sole reference to that long-lived hobby was in a sort of housekeeping letter to his mother in early December, asking that the accumulated copies of his "Model Airplane News" magazines be forwarded, and indicating that he intended to have the subscriptions sent directly to Harvard. No mention of the hobby ever recurs in his correspondence.

The course that really mattered to Norman was English Composition. It didn't have its strongest effect immediately, since it not only took him a while to settle into the course, but he very clearly needed, as a first priority, to make certain that the Harvard community was going to forgive him his youth and his cultural inexperience and accept him into its midst. It seems not

✓ Bob,
forgive my response⁹ to your
adverts. They stand out a bit, I think

to have taken him more than a month or six weeks to conclude that in this respect he could feel secure, and that though he might develop difficulties of one sort or another, he was not starting with ~~significantly~~ ^{much} more than anyone else. That established, and despite the false hopes being built up by his misguided participation in the crew competition, Norman found that the English course began to bring back from wherever he had been storing it his capacity for associating writing with large imaginative stimulation.

He had been keeping his imagination alive for the previous six years and more by feeding it the drama of sports and movies, along with quantities of romantic adolescent fiction; now, almost suddenly, he found himself swept up and away by the discovery of high culture American literature. He was required to read a certain amount of fiction, and was assigned a regular writing exercise in response to it, with the writing increasing in length and complexity of assignment as the semester progressed. A young Wallace Stegner, who was serving that year as the Briggs Copeland Assistant Professor of writing, was the faculty member in charge of the whole, sprawling course, and Norman's section man was a Mr. Simpson. The reading was in contemporary American literature, and leaned heavily in the direction of such authors as Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Hemingway and, most important of them all for Norman, James T. Farrell.

There were differences between Farrell's Chicago and the Brooklyn of Norman experience, but they didn't matter, and in fact

← references to
AFM, interviews?

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Norman would associate Chicago and Brooklyn ~~together~~ for the rest of his life. What Farrell offered to this wide-eyed reader, who had never until now even heard of him, was the proposition that the creative, indeed the fictional imagination was exactly the tool that could dominate the gritty worlds where both Farrell and Norman had been reared. The perception struck Norman with the dramatic force of a conversion experience. At first he responded by writing papers that both analyzed and extolled what these writers, particularly Farrell, were doing. They were dealing with the world--not running ~~or escaping~~ from it--engaging it in ways that took it in, that contained and thus controlled it.

His little black Remington portable typewriter flew as he turned out his increasingly long assignments, and he soon enlisted his mother, ever vigilant ~~at hand~~ ^{type} ~~to do some of the typing from~~ his longhand manuscripts. She, and various staff workers from the now-expanded Sunlight Oil Company office, would come to play a larger and larger role in her son's production plans in the semesters and summers that followed. This and subsequent English courses provided Norman with critically ~~important~~ opportunities to push forward with the processes of self-discovery and self-definition, but of course these processes were in no way confined to the classes. Harvard had got him away from Brooklyn, where the twin threats of ruinous family crises and humiliating high school rejections had driven him into a kind of psychic hiding. With his family now too far away to throw the full shadow of its inner conflicts over him, and with Harvard's culture failing to confirm

his Boy's High pariah identity, he was finally free to begin asking basic questions.

First, he now could assess on its intrinsic merits the self-image that had hitherto served him as a kind of psychological and social disguise: was he really an engineer, deeply bonded to the worlds of mathematics, science, and the principles of aeronautical design? He had been representing himself in this way for so long, and had persuaded so many people (perhaps himself included) while doing so, that the question must have genuinely troubled him for a time. Indeed, he and his friend Seymour Breslow signed on as staff assistants in the Science Fair sponsored that winter by Elizabeth Peabody House in Boston. But by as early as the end of his first semester he could discern a compelling alternate direction, and while he continued for a semester or two to tolerate the idea that he might, as a practical matter, be required to put some of his scientific training to vocational use after graduation, he took it less and less seriously.

He would probably have transferred out of candidacy for the Bachelor of Science--which is what the Engineering Program graduates earned--and into the Bachelor of Arts group at some point, but for the fact that he had not taken Latin at Boy's High and was thus unable to meet the prerequisites for the A.B. A less determining but still significant reason for staying with the S.B. program was his concern for family expectations. He well realized that however quickly he himself could adjust to the idea of a life outside the boundaries of engineering, it would take some members

of the family, especially his mother and his uncle Dave, a lot longer. Being a fledgling engineer, after all, had been Norman's way of showing both himself and others that he could be located somewhere in the lexicon of conventional identities: it was a goal that he knew he could reach.

He abandoned it as part of a process that led him to discover, and none too gradually, that there was something wonderfully better: something that he not only could be but had to be. That was the difference. The goal of engineer was not charged with a sense of the necessary or the ultimate; it had always served him only as compensation for the things that were not available to him, as they seemed to be available to certain favored others. A sense of high drama in one's life, passion, lust, the fury of the storm, these were the things he really wanted as he approached the age of seventeen, and when like a vision they began to appear before him on the pages of the novels he was reading, he was thrilled. He felt that he could learn to write in this way--indeed, it seemed as if the purpose of serious literature was to teach him to write in this way--and once he imagined that this was within his reach he never looked back.

Marvelous!

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Though he knew by the time of the Christmas vacation that he was going to do it, Norman didn't actually start writing fiction

until the early February beginning of his second semester. Throughout the first semester he drove hard on his courses, sustaining high hopes to the end for his chances at crew, enthusiastically supporting the football team by tearing down goalposts after the wins--he played host to his father and Cy for the Princeton game on November 24--and, like all of his friends, experiencing significant homesickness around the time of Thanksgiving (the New York and Massachusetts dates for the holiday differed, and he couldn't make it home on either calendar) and at the approach of Christmas.

For that vacation he planned a hero's return to Crown Street, where most of his friends were still finishing high school, and a few, like Jerry Reimel, were enrolled in local colleges. He used his mother as travel agent, arranging for her to buy him tickets to various Broadway plays ("The Little Foxes," "Margin for Error") and New York Rangers hockey games, to which he would be taking his friend Phyllis Bradman. Phyllis had not yet graduated from high school in Brooklyn, was about Norman's age, and would remain quite close to him throughout his first two years of college. In the course of his correspondence he very warmly recommended certain movies to his father, among them "We Are Not Alone," with Paul Muni, John Houston's "Key Largo," and the Marx Brothers in "At the Circus," which he thought Barbara would enjoy.

The first item of business when he did get home for the holiday was, indeed, new clothes: a suit, as well a sport coat and slacks. They were mailed, after the final fitting, direct to

Cambridge, and a card from him there, postmarked January 7, 1940, records that he is wearing the suit as he writes ("It really fits well & looks even better.") After a highly satisfying vacation he was working wildly on paper and exam preparation for his five courses, but he found time to inquire into some possible affiliations for the second semester that would afford writing opportunities.

Wallace Stegner was organizing a section of English Composition that permitted the writing of fiction instead of themes, in addition to which Norman identified the Crimson, the tabloid daily newspaper; the Freshman Red Book, which was his annual class yearbook; the Lampoon, the prestigious undergraduate humor magazine; and the Advocate, the college literary magazine. All of these required that one apply, in contexts of varying complexity and with very significant possibilities of rejection in each, and the Boy's High recluse who had for years been afraid to apply for anything, decided he would have a go at them all.

His six[^] day semester break on January 25, after the dreaded finals, required him to travel back to Cambridge on his seventeenth birthday, January 31, and the early days of February found him readdressing his courses--all of which continued on from the first semester--exploring his writing options and, over a period of time, learning his grades. These were provisional, and final grades for the courses would come at the end of the year, but he found himself just barely on the Dean's List by having been given a B+ in Math, a B in English, a B- in the Mechanical Drawing, and C+ in both

French and Physics. He professed himself satisfied, and predicted to his family that he would improve the record by year's end.

He tried out for the Crimson by writing a 425[^] word article (the words counted carefully in the manuscript margin) on the fall season of the cross-country team, and when it was rejected decided not to explore this avenue further. At the same time he tried and failed to execute a humor piece for the Lampoon, ("I can't write humor") and, daunted also by the group's \$100 initiation fee, stepped back from that possibility. He made contact with the editor in charge of The Red Book, was assured that if he would carry his share of the load he would be most welcome to work on the volume, and Norman was pleased to agree. But the yearbook was nothing much more than a project, the practical point of which was to turn out for the record a commemorative account of the class's first year, and Norman was really looking not for a project but for a home base, a sphere in which he could start his development as a writer. He discovered it on the evening of Friday, February 12, when he went to the Advocate offices for an open house, and there, amid information and beer and the musty smells of unaired upstairs rooms, he at once felt himself wonderfully at home.

In Advertisements for Myself in 1959, Norman maintains that the first fiction he wrote at Harvard was in September of 1939, the first week, when during a speech by Archibald MacLeish about the beginning of the Second World War, he wrote the following:

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We were going through the barbed-wire when a machine gun started. I kept walking until I saw my head on the ground.

"My God, I'm dead," my head said.
And my body fell over.

It is of course possible that these lines actually were written in Norman's first days at Harvard, and it is certain that the vision they convey will, for years, recur in his work like an insistent, inscrutable birth recollection. But the autobiographical accounts in Advertisements can be artful, and the probability is that this "shortest story I've ever written" started going through the first of its many drafts not in September 1939 but months later, in February of 1940, just about the time of the Advocate open house. Certainly this was when he wrote a six hundred word story, "The Lady Wears a Smile," that records the grim thoughts of an aging burlesque queen as she moves through a striptease routine.

He noted on the manuscript that this was the "first story written" at Harvard, but immediately after his evening at the Advocate he began another. At the open house he had met and very much liked Bruce "Pete" Barton, Jr.; son of a famous advertising executive and a member of Norman's class, he was an announced candidate for admission to the magazine's board of associates. Barton explained that to be invited onto the staff, applicants needed to submit three pieces--fiction or otherwise--that the editors thought worthy of publication (space limitations would almost always prevent the material from actually being published in Advocate pages.)

Barton also explained the financial details, which Norman

passed on to his family in a letter two days later: "You have to sell 10 subscriptions and pay an initiation fee of \$40.00," he reported. At a dollar apiece, the subscriptions were normally purchased by the candidates themselves, and the forty dollars was refunded if an invitation to join the staff was not extended. He explained to his parents that the Advocate was like a club, that it enrolled people whom it would be good for him to know (he mentioned Barton's name), but he also told them repeatedly that if the expense was too great he didn't want to do it. Their reply was a check for fifty dollars.

terse problem?

For his part, Norman at once began a serious, multi-dimensional writing project aimed, on one level, at ^{producing} ~~getting him~~ the manuscripts he needed to apply for the Advocate; but on another level the project ^{was} ~~is~~ aimed at both obtaining and recording an insight into the emotional ordeal Norman had been experiencing in his pre-Harvard, imaginatively inarticulate years as an emotional fugitive. He first writes a story; he then writes a poem which is a decoding of the story's secret theme; and, finally, he keeps to himself and hides from the reader of both story and poem their still more secret autobiographical history. He calls the story "Pick Them Up and Lay Them Down," a reference to the evidently splayed, flat-footed gait of "Jerry Reddle," the character about whom the narrator is talking.

The autobiographical, 2,500-word story selects Norman's epileptic Crown Street friend and Boy's High classmate Jerome Reimel as its focal figure, and depicts a Christmas vacation visit

home to Brooklyn by the narrator, college student "Dave," self-identified as Norman on the manuscript margin. Little in the way of dramatic action develops in the story; the two boys walk the streets of their Brooklyn neighborhood, past the chalked scores of the punch ball games and roller hockey sites, bringing each other up to date on what has been happening to them. For Dave that means a successful four months away at college; for Jerry it means a deterioration into increased epileptic seizures, impending failure at City College, and a growing sense of being marked, not only for sickness and early death, but for expulsion from the society of healthy people.

As Jerry rages against the social isolation his condition has brought to him, assuming a hostile posture toward the society of local young people, the story goes on to document his condemnation in the eyes of a neighborhood girl who is depicted as the cruel, unsympathetic voice of the healthy community. "After all, there was so much suffering going on, and so many worse-off people who at least stayed fighting even when they were licked that she couldn't see why he had to go to pieces like that. So rude to everybody, and so nasty to all the girls." At story's end, Dave is hating the girl and, ineffectually, feeling sorry for an ostracized Jerry. If the story lacks dramatic structure, it still delivers a vivid characterization of Jerry and, especially from a biographical point of view, presents a notable attitude on the part of Dave. Though his strong sympathy for his pariah friend is not strong enough to close the gap between them, the story does not attempt to explain

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why, and Dave is left seeming to be a conventionally friendly person who simply doesn't know how to bond with Jerry.

But Norman had in mind another explanation for the distance between the two boys, and he provides it in the second dimension of this project, a poem he calls "Allegory" -- a title which he apparently intended to mean "key to the hidden meaning." In the poem, as in the story, Jerry's illness is made the object of ridicule and the cause of his rejection, but now the "I" speaker ("I have a friend:-/Jerry Reddle/Who is sick sometimes"), who is clearly Norman himself, is not so sympathetic. Though he knows he should be kind, and tries not to laugh at Jerry's affliction, he needs, as a much more important first priority, to distance himself from the other's illness:

So I laugh at him too.
not because I
want to,
but because I
have to.

After all it's his sickness
and not mine.
He was born sick,
so it's all
right for him,

But I was a healthy child,
and it's bad for my
kind
to become like him.

So now the reader sees that the nasty-spoken girl in the story was actually reacting in a healthy way to Jerry's illness, and that the Dave in the story was a sentimentalist who failed to appreciate the need for keeping health and illness separated, even at the cost of

isolating or even ridiculing the unhealthy figure.

Taken together, story and poem constitute a complete thesis/antithesis unit, and require no third dimension, but since we know that Dave is Norman, and that Jerry Reddle is his once-close friend Jerry Reimer, we also know why the lesson of "Allegory" is such an important one for Norman to have learned. In the years when he lived on Crown Street and graduated from P.S. 161 and Boy's High with his best friend and closest confidant Jerry Reimer--epileptic, invalid, and therefore outcast--Norman Mailer actually did "become like him." He did so not because he was "born sick," like Jerry, but because the emotionally crippling effects upon Norman of family, school and whatever other demons deviled him made him appear in his own eyes as the figure of Jerry appeared in the eyes of the peer community.

While the story and the poem, taken together, do not publicly record they nevertheless privately reveal Norman's retrospective judgement that his ~~invalid~~ invalid condition at Boy's High was in a sense of his own creation. His apparent sympathy for Jerry had in fact been a profound empathy, having less to do with his positive feelings toward Jerry, and everything to do with his negative feelings toward himself. Now, with his ego at last on the road to restoration, Norman can not only return to writing but in the act of doing so can penetrate into the misery of those years to affirm that he was, regardless of how he felt at the time, actually "a healthy child." The emotional implication of his having been blind to that fact is what has come home to Norman now, and both

story and poem, in their content but also simply in the fact that he has written them, constitute his declaration that he has finally recognized his healthiness. *lovely interpretation*

"The Lady Wears a Smile," "Pick Them Up and Lay Them Down," and "Allegory" were the three pieces that Norman submitted in his application to the Advocate, hoping that they would be regarded as of publishable quality. As he did so, communicating with his family on the subject three times a week, he built up a sort of Crown Street cheering section that began to take on a life of its own. Young Bruce Barton was one of the freshmen who seemed sure to be selected for admission, and his father, Bruce Barton, Sr., was an acquaintance of Norman's uncle Dave. Fan and Dave thought that the elder Barton might somehow advise them on how to get their candidate admitted as well, and Norman had to beg his uncle not to try to intercede.

He also found himself having almost constantly to calm his mother, who had begun raging simply at the possibility of rejection. When rejection actually came, in early March, it precipitated something close to a family crisis, and no explanations from Norman about the infrequency of freshman admitees (Barton, in fact, was admitted) and the probability of admission in the sophomore year could comfort Fan or quiet her smoldering suspicions of anti-Semitism. Norman's own response was to swallow his disappointment, agree with his Advocate critics that neither of his two submitted stories offered enough in the way of dramatic action, and to write, in the next three months, six more stories.

Four of them were major efforts. One was a 3,500 word account, strangely titled "Some Miss Their It," of three boys going to a brothel, one of whom is hoping that the experience will cure him of a traumatically induced castration fear. Mr. Simpson--to whom most of the stories were being submitted for credit in the special English section-- thought it was a little crude, but gave it a B+. A 4,500 word story called "Life is Where You Find It," presents a fledgling writer from Brooklyn, now attending Harvard, who is in search of material to write about: "He hadn't eaten with Okies like Steinbeck, or fought in Spain like Hemingway, or lived like Dos Passos. And he couldn't copy Farrell." The story reintroduces a now uncrippled Jerry Reimel, and features, as its own material, an argument in a Brooklyn candy store about a pinball machine.

In "Prelude to Sleep," a girl breaks off a sexual affair with a boy who is, like Norman then, possessed of a "theory of free love." The approximate point of the theory is that people should cast off inhibition and freely cultivate the impulse toward sexual and other kinds of union. (At this time Norman, not having yet experienced sexual intercourse, had the subject very much on his mind.) Mr. Simpson gave the 2,500 word story an A-, remarking: "I still feel the need for more restraint at the verbal level." The last of the major efforts was "No, Mother," a one thousand word conversation between a mother and her stenographer daughter, in which the mother advises the daughter to fake a pregnancy in order to snare a reluctant boyfriend into marriage. All of the stories owe a strong debt to Farrell, but all of them show too, elementary

as they are, a certain headlong quality, very much in keeping with their author's attitude of throwing himself unrestrainedly into his new commitment. *redundant*

As the semester ended, Norman was working on "Oh, Night That Covers Me," an ambitiously sub-titled, four-part manuscript--"1. Joys 2. Ideas 3. Love 4. Life"--that reprises earlier material, including the experiencing of an epileptic seizure by a Jerry-like character, and which dwells in some detail upon the short short-story of the soldier whose head and body are separated. In this first of many reappearances of those lines in his work, Norman broods over and finds frightening their central idea of a nightmare separability in the individual--a capacity to be both actor and commentator-observer at the same time.

He had also written a little non-fiction narrative that he called "Some People Won't Listen," inscribing it with the note: "This was committed on May 2, 1940." It relates an account of a quarrel during a lunch at the Harvard Union shared by Norman and his Gray's Hall friends Seymour Breslow and Stan Lampert. Norman pillories his friends for their bourgeois fatuity in disapproving of unconventionality. They seem not only to have criticized Marty Lubin for having gone to Chemistry class in his bathrobe, but, and more to the point, they have laughed at Norman and heaped scorn on him for his "theory" concerning free love. He clearly had felt offended, even hurt by the quarrel, but instead of pursuing it in the Union, he got up, went back to his room, and composed this narrative--sending copies to all participants--as his reply. His

sense of the power of the written word, even in what he recognizes as so trivial a situation as this, affirms his new writer identity and his commitment to it.

So too is it affirmed in his response to a narrative written in early April by his sister. Barbara, who had just turned thirteen, had been an entranced supporter of Norman's conversion to literature, and for a surprise she wrote him this brief, narrative account of her life, calling it "Babbie Till Her Teens," and dedicating it to her brother. It was Norman's first assignment as critic of someone else's writing, and he positively covered the manuscript with criticism, advice, exhortation and affectionate reprimand. He referred her to his own work repeatedly (at this point he had completed no more than five manuscripts), and at the close of his comments he ends with a flourish to his parents: "Mom, Dad: The kid can write."

He was fond of his sister for many reasons, and they would remain close their lives long, but at this early point in his life as a writer the thing he liked most about her was that she was younger than he. He, who was younger than virtually everyone else he associated with, at least had Barbara to mentor and educate and simply assist, as people were always assisting or failing to assist him. He insisted that she be allowed to take off from school and accompany the Kesslers on their drive up to Cambridge in April, when they visited and drove him back down (with Marty Lubin) to Brooklyn for spring vacation; he was meticulous about including her in his family correspondence; and he was tireless in his efforts to

help her plan for college (she would graduate from Radcliffe), maintain her position in the family and the Crown Street community, and discover self-confidence as she found her way into puberty. He hugely enjoyed and was manifestly successful in the role of older brother.

It is not the case, of course, that the whole of Norman's second semester consisted of the pursuit of literary goals, however much it sometimes seemed so. His friends in Gray's and Thayer were frequently asked to function as critics of his story manuscripts and were glad to comply, expressing for the most part supportive approval, but a more practical question they were all asking was about where they would live in sophomore year. Norman had got on well enough with Weinberg and Kaufer, but they--who wished to stay together as roommates-- didn't invite him to join them. He had been much closer to Marty Lubin, Hal Katz and Sy Breslow anyway, and so in various combinations the four of them applied for rooms in Lowell (where Cy Rembar had lived), Eliot, Adams and Dunster Houses.

For one reason or another there was no acceptance forthcoming from any of them. Finally Norman, with Lubin and Breslow, took a triple suite in Claverly Hall, which was a not unattractive Harvard residence for upperclassmen, though it lacked the House amenities and prestige which the boys had really wanted. Norman was deeply disappointed at this rejection by the House system, and a certain measure of his new-found self confidence suffered as a result. Disappointed as he was, however, Norman remembered his family's

outrage over the Advocate decision and was careful to praise the Claverly arrangement to Crown Street, and to assure them that there was no cause to complain.

His grades, which drifted in during the summer, put him somewhat more firmly onto the Dean's list: he got an A in Math, a B+ in English (notoriously conservative in its grading), went up to a B- in French, kept his C+ in Physics and, rather pointedly, dropped down in the Engineer Drawing course from a B- to a C. His plans for the summer were straightforward: he was going down to Long Branch, move into his admiring Aunt Beck's Scarboro Hotel and write all summer, except for a short interval of carefully planned "bumming" on the road.

End Part One, Chapter Two

Chap Two

Part Two

i

Summer would always be the season for Norman to come into his own. In his childhood, Long Branch sunshine rolled back the shadows cast by school and parental troubles, offering him ~~if not~~ ~~always a reprieve then at least a reliable~~ three months of blessed relief from the load. Later in life, years after Long Branch and its community of ~~equally~~ indestructible buildings and relatives had melted away, he would continue to seek out other seashores in the summer, depending upon them in ways that indelibly recalled the sanctuaries of Kingsley Court, the Scarboro, and the beach dunes of Monmouth County.

Now, in the summer of 1940, having more than survived his first year at Harvard and having determined deeply what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it, he would both recreate and apotheosize there his golden Long Branch summer of 1933. Then he had written of a fleet of rockets blasting off to explore a strife-torn but glorious future; now he would launch some rockets of his own, and they would do the same.

The summer rockets of 1940, of course, were stories, six of them, ~~as it turned out,~~ and they were designed to accomplish several things. On the most practical level, they would satisfy, before the semester even began, most of the assignments for Norman's first creative writing course properly so called: English A-1, to be taught by Robert Gorham Davis in the fall. But the course itself, in a larger sense, was an integral part of Norman's plan to crack

the wall that had kept him off the Advocate the previous semester. He had come to the task too late and unprepared the first time around; now he would be more than ready, and would overwhelm the editors with a wave of his fiction. But the Advocate, in turn, club-like though it might be, was no mere club to Norman; it was not, that is, simply a haven where he could feel wanted and approved while at Harvard.

The magazine, along with its social/editorial infrastructure, was rather a vehicle--like the writing and literature courses that Norman intended to take in connection with it--designed to transport him to his real goal, which was the discovery of his material and his credentials as a writer. He knew what he wanted in the long haul; he talked about it freely. But to get to the state of being a professional writer, leading whatever the literary life might be, he had first to mine down and find the things he could, at the age of seventeen, actually write about; he had to have an audience to read and to critique and, if possible, to admire what emerged; and he had to develop the discipline necessary for him to continue writing in the face of his own understanding that for a unknowable period of time the quality of what he produced would remain amateur. He knew that the classes and the Advocate could serve as powerful supports for him in this apprenticeship, and he thus shaped his plans for the immediate future in terms of their requirements.

In the matter of fictional material, Norman was already discovering that he had two readily available theaters in which to

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stage his narrative productions: the worlds of Brooklyn and of Long Branch. He could knowledgeably set anything in either place and, rather in the fashion of James T. Farrell's Chicago, expect that the setting would lend some measure of authenticity to the people and the action. On the other hand, he didn't want to limit his stories to these two worlds, and he had a plan for later in the summer that would, he hoped, broaden his horizon in this as well as other respects.

At the summer's start, though, he first wrote "Oh, Don't You Be That Way," a narrative account, with no names changed, of an end-of-term party that he had actually just given for some of his freshman class friends at the Crown Heights apartment of his obligingly absent parents. Phyllis Bradman had invited four other high school girls to join four of Norman's classmates--among whom were Seymour Breslow and Marty Lubin--and she and Norman hosted an evening of dancing, fairly moderate drinking and, in the case of Marty and a young woman named Evelyn, heavy petting. Norman wrote the fifteen hundred word story just days after the party, apparently circulating it as a kind of memento among the guests, and in it we encounter, for the first time, Norman Mailer as man-of-the-world.

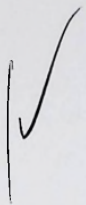
Introducing his classmates to the girls, he notes that "they made a pretty formidable entrance. I really felt proud of them, because I had promised the boys a good-looking bunch and they were getting it." He depicts himself as insouciantly indulgent of Lubin's hitherto unsuspected prowess as a lover. Indeed, for all

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its insouciance, the story reveals how extremely precious to Norman was his friendship with the former Boy's High student leader, the acknowledgment of which may have been part of the reason for its being written. Its original title, "Just Don't," quotes Norman's reply to Marty, who says at the end that he feels "like a heel" for having neglected his pre-arranged date in favor of the speedy Evelyn. The real-life model for Evelyn, in turn, having been shown a earlier draft of the story, contributes the final draft's opening epigraph: "Personally, I think," said Evelyn, "that journalistically it stinks."

It is significant that when he wrote about his Harvard friends, Norman brought them to Brooklyn for the purpose. He remained sufficiently conscious of his unfamiliarity with Harvard that it would be well into 1941 before he felt ready to set a story there (the narrative about the argument in the Union was really a non-fiction memorandum), while all four of the serious stories of the previous spring semester were located in Brooklyn.

Of this summer's crop, two besides "Oh, Don't You Be That Way" can be described as Brooklyn Stories: both "Her Eyes and Her Hair," and "I'll See You in the Morning," depict a male protagonist suffering the experience of losing a girl to a rival. In the first case the hero is a writer come home from school to learn the news and to experience a colorful, alcohol-induced purgation; in the second he is a wretched Brooklyn drugstore soda jerk, forced to serve ice cream and finally even sell condoms to his predatory college-boy rival. Neither of these one thousand word narratives is



particularly autobiographical, apparently, but, like the spring semester's "Prelude to Sleep," they present the relationship between adolescent boys and girls in notably consistent terms of frustration, hostility, and failed attempts at union. Conventionally didactic though these presentations are, Norman's association of their scenario with Brooklyn lends them a kind of force--as if arguing that the place in ~~a certain sense~~ determines the possibilities of what people can accomplish there--and provides some relief from the dominant mood of adolescent anguish.

The evocation of anguish only deepens when his stories depict relationships between grown men and women, but once again the setting functions so as to provide a certain amount of redemptive authenticity ~~to the situation~~. In his first Long Branch story, "He Was Her Man," Norman presents a quietly convincing resort hotel whose guests include the bored, idle wives of men who usually commute to join them only on weekends. Three young men, employed as clerks and bellhops in the hotel, sit around the lobby at midnight, talking, when an overweight, exhausted husband comes in from the city, only to discover that his wife has ignored his message and gone out for the evening. He goes up to the empty room to wait; she comes in later (half-drunk, she kisses one of the bellhops) and goes up to her death. The gory murder/suicide scene that a horrified young bellhop discovers is rendered in merciless detail as the story closes.

Norman's youthful insistence that people, particularly women, invariably get worse as they get older, as well as his weakness for

the gory detail, undercut this fifteen hundred word effort. But these things don't conceal the fact that he knows the world of resort hotels and can write about what he knows with some assurance. By contrast, the unquestionably least successful story of the summer has no real setting at all. Taking its title from a William Saroyan quotation, "The source of the grief of man is the monotony of peaceful living," it is set for its first page on a cinematic model of a European battlefield. But "The Source of the Grief" shifts quickly for its thousand words into a monologue by its soldier-of-fortune hero on, indeed, the grief of man. Caused by peaceful civilian living in the contexts of such stultifying institutions as the family and religion, the grief soon fails Norman as a subject, and his speaker is left to conclude: "It all means so little.....so goddam, dishearteningly, little."

This, like all of the stories of the summer, was written at the Scarboro Hotel. While Fan and Barney worked during the week at the Oil Company office in Brooklyn, often coming down on weekends, Norman and Barbara lived with Beck at the hotel, where Norman was given an envied upstairs room to himself. His aunt arranged for special room-service meals to suit his schedule--sometimes he would write through the night--while he outfitted his studio quarters with desk, bundles of Scarboro letterhead stationary, and the portable Remington. He spent very nearly all the summer writing in that room, sleeping late, swimming for exercise, and breaking to see the occasional movie. For companionship, he depended on a new friend, Herb Zilber, whose family were summer-long guests at the

Scarboro. Herb and Norman gradually evolved a plan to carry out what Norman had entered the summer hoping to do: they were going to explore the open road in the form of a hitch-hiking expedition.

Norman had one kind of relationship with his friends at Harvard; he had another kind with Herb, who was just about to enter his senior year in high school. The Harvard relationship produced the narrative of the end-of-term party on Crown Street, featuring Norman as the sophisticate who was capable of conjuring up five "at least pretty" girls, in an unquestionable effort to impress his friends. He may well have succeeded. But he made no effort to cultivate such sophistication with Herb, with whom he shared the ultimate humiliating secret: they were both, at the age of seventeen, still virgins. After extended discussion, they had resolved to use the occasion of the hitch-hiking trip to end this situation by going to a brothel together and experiencing a thoroughgoing debauch.

Indeed, Norman had been anticipating the experience by beginning a short story--just after concluding "The Source of the Grief"--in which a clearly autobiographical hero is having an "intermission" conversation with a prostitute about her personal history. In its five handwritten pages, the story gives Norman the opportunity to talk to the woman about Shakespeare and James Joyce and, in the insouciant style of "Oh, Don't You Be That Way," to offer a confident demonstration of his power to deal with this kind of situation. The story breaks off abruptly, perhaps interrupted by the start of the hitch-hiking adventure. Twelve years later, just

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after the publication of Barbary Shore, Norman would complete, though he would never publish, a story that begins with the lines: "It was the summer of 1940, but they did not hear the War. They were both seventeen and they had never had a woman."

"Love Buds" is its title, and it goes on to record how a thinly disguised Norman and Herb (to whom Norman gives the name "Eppy" in the story) had acted on information--preposterously acquired information--which persuaded them that the best brothels in the Eastern United States were in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Explaining to their distraught families that they were going to visit a Northeastern Pennsylvania camp counselor of their acquaintance, they set out on their first experience of hitchhiking, allowing themselves two days to reach their destination, and two days to return. The story, some eighteen hundred words long, tracks them finally to a dark alley ~~intimidatingly~~ filled with Scranton brothels, in one of whose ^{intimidating} parlors they separate (first shaking hands) and accompany women to bedrooms. Ten minutes later, back on the street, the boys boast unconvincingly for a moment, and then admit that neither of them had been "able to do it." The story concludes:

By the admission, each had somehow saved the honor of the other. Al [Norman] let out a whoop of laughter, and Eppy pummelled him on the back. They laughed, they hugged one another, they jumped up and down on the city street beneath the light of a street lamp, and roared with laughter at themselves and at each other. What a relief! Soon, they were busy describing the thundering details of incapacity, each trying to defeat the other in the enormity of his failure. They laughed until they were weak, sensing the balm of such laughter, applying it in broad sweeps of unguent. As they walked back to their room, they swore with profound seriousness that never, never would they tell on one another.

Back at the Scarboro Norman permanently shelved the manuscript of his "Intermission" conversation, and postponed for about a year attempting a fictional version (notably different from "Love Buds") of the Scranton brothel experience. For the moment he occupied himself with extending the horizon of his fictional terrain, moving it beyond both Brooklyn and Long Branch by setting a new story in the highway world of "bumming." The two thousand word "The Principle of ^{the} Thing" clearly derives from the hitch-hiking part of his experience with Herb, but Norman has ambitiously expanded the scale of the expedition and altogether removed the slightest suggestion of larkiness.

In the heavily Steinbeckian story, the two boys have been on the road for weeks, have been estranged from their families for months, are dangerously near exhaustion on a stretch of Pennsylvania highway running from Scranton to Milford, and are reduced to sometimes savage disputes over the tactics of their unsuccessful hitch-hiking. With night coming on and no food, the boys are rescued by a family of Samaritan campers who give them a life-restoring meal, and listen sympathetically to their harrowing stories of hardship in hobo camps, Great Lakes fishing fleets and Chicago freight yards. (In a moment of privacy the hitch-hikers even tell the boy in the family about a street in Scranton lined with eight "whore-houses.") In the end the boys resume the road, nursing a bruised satisfaction that, in a world largely characterized by cruelty and selfishness, it was still possible to encounter a few decent people.

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In the course of the summer, Norman had produced some eight thousand words of fiction in the form of six stories, and he turned that September with added confidence in the direction of Cambridge. Hopeful as he was, however, even he might have found it hard to believe that within a year's time, at the age of eighteen, he would be the best known student writer at Harvard, would have received a flourish of national attention, would have completed a three part (Brooklyn, Long Branch, On the Road) 90,000 word novel, and, ~~indeed~~, ^{finally}, would finally have lost his virginity.

ii

"They did not hear the War," Norman had said about the summer of 1940, and it is remarkable how absent, in his fiction and in the documentable details of his undergraduate life, the war would remain. France had fallen in the month of "Oh, Don't You Be that Way," and the Battle of Britain was about to begin as Norman returned to the Harvard Yard for his sophomore year, but the war seems to have had only the most passive priority in his mind or in the minds of most of the undergraduates he knew. He said more about the Nazis in his 500 word Bar Mitzvah speech in 1936 than he did in the first two years of his heavy correspondence and still heavier literary composition at Harvard.

Archibald MacLeish, in his late September, 1939 address to Norman's freshman class, compared them to the class of 1918, and issued a kind of mordant call to arms; in reply to this, most of

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the freshmen booed the Boyleston Professor of Rhetoric off the platform, and a Crimson editorial on the episode struck an isolationist note. Debate raged in the community, with pro-Soviet radicals (after the August Nazi-Soviet Pact) siding with conservative isolationists in a call for neutrality, and liberals like MacLeish and Harvard's President James Conant supporting the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. There was deep undergraduate participation in this discourse⁶; no doubt it preoccupied the minds of many students who consumed the endless journalistic copy, but there is little evidence that it impacted deeply on Norman's circle of friends, and none that it engaged Norman himself. He was very deep into something very different.

His new Creative Writing teacher, Robert Gorham Davis, would preside over a different scene than Norman had known the year before. Then, in Wallace Stegner's massive, multi-section Composition course, Norman had been allowed into a more or less precocious Composition section of fiction--as contrasted with theme--writers. Now, all of the forty or fifty students in the Davis class were fiction writers, and as Norman began to feed-in his revised and updated summer's writing, the professor/writer soon saw that there was real, if raw talent in the work, but that there was also less evidence of literary or cultural background than comparably talented other students displayed.

huge

Most good undergraduate writers, after all, begin their love affair with serious literature in high school, or even junior high school, and most come to regard the cultivation of their aesthetic

sensibility, their taste, as the quality that sets them apart from other people and that recruits them as writers. This would normally be as true of Brooklyn or Chicago undergraduate writers as of anyone else, but it had not been true of James T. Farrell--which may have been part of his charm--and of course it wasn't true of Norman.

He was conscious of this absence in himself now, more urgently if not more clearly than was Davis, and what he wanted to do, along with moving forward with his writing, was to make up for some of that lost cultivation at Boy's High. On the face of it, his program in Engineering Sciences didn't seem to allow for this: along with English A-1 he was taking Statistics, Physics and Math, and he was playing football for the Claverly Hall team. But the childhood energy that so many members of his family testify to was apparently reemerging at some kind of exponential rate, and the last thing that worried him as the academic year rolled forward was the fear of being overwhelmed.

Ensnared in a Claverly triple with Breslow and Lubin, each of whom functioned as in-house critics of his summer's store of new fiction, he laid out his plans. He would of course continue with his fiction writing through English A-1, and he would begin negotiating a spring semester application to the Advocate. Though he had no intention of neglecting his other courses--on the contrary, he felt that he now knew how to study for them and intended to do extremely well--he also undertook a program of modern literary reading outside the classroom context, starting

with Ulysses.

Norman's central theater of literary activity that fall was the Davis class, which in the lecture hall operated as a workshop where the students listened to the instructor read student work and then joined him in criticizing it. A running calendar of individual tutorials with the professor was the other part of each student's arrangement. Davis remembers that he required about six typewritten pages of work every two weeks, and if he is correct in this recollection he no doubt noticed that his uncultured young Brooklynite regularly submitted twice as much as was required. Norman kept a log in which he recorded the titles, dates of composition and the length of writings he was willing to acknowledge (he left out all fragments and everything under a thousand words, including "It," "The Lady Wears a Smile" and the "Allegory" poem) and though he listed "Oh, Don't You Be that Way" he didn't offer it to Davis for class criticism and credit.

The first story he did submit, on October 8, was a significantly revised version of his Long Branch resort hotel story, "He Was Her Man," and to Norman's alarm Davis brought it in the next week and read it to the class. The reading was presented ^{as part of} ~~in the context~~ of a discussion of restraint and understatement as fictional devices, which Davis felt that the story needed, and he then re-read the lines where the bellhop finds the body of the murdered wife:

Mrs. Hoflerman was lying on the floor with a bullet hole at the base of her skull. I walked over and turned her over not thinking of what the other side would look like. It was an awful mess. I could make out where her

eyes and mouth had been, but I wondered what had happened to her nose. I couldn't guess whether it was mashed into the carpet, or if it was still floating around. I hoped it was in the ground, because stepping on it was certainly better than breathing it in.

The class burst out laughing at ~~the success of~~ this, and the humiliated author wanted to leave the room; but in-class readings were always done anonymously and to leave would be to advertise his identity, so Norman sat there, as he recalls, wanting to kill Davis. Later, in tutorial, the teacher apologized, pleading that he hadn't anticipated the degree of the class reaction, and the incident served to start a friendship between the two, as Norman remembered forty years later. Perhaps to ease the pain, he also remembered that Davis had given the story the grade of A-; in fact he gave it a C-, and the comment: "Tempo & manner of first part suggests you are building up to something, but is it just mashed brains & nausea?"

Davis was a much harder taskmaster than the combination of Stegner/Simpson had been, and his reaction to Norman's stories throughout the term made it clear that he thought the young writer had a long way to go. He may or may not have known that he was getting revised versions of the summer work for the first five assignments, but Davis began to respond much more positively when he saw the fiction Norman had done after returning to Harvard, and, ~~indeed, after spending four or five weeks as a member of the~~ class. "The Source of the Grief" got a C+ and the suggestion that Norman compare his hero with those of Malraux and the Hemingway of the just-published For Whom the Bell Tolls, which Norman was

reading and would put to use in the spring term. The two summer stories of broken romance, "I'll See You in the Morning," and "Her Eyes and Her Hair," pulled a C+ and a B-, respectively, along with some encouraging commentary. The best of the summer stories, to Davis, was the hitch-hiking narrative, "The Principle of the Thing;" he gave it a B and told Norman that parts of it were extremely good.

precursor of
to
Sam
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His teacher didn't give Norman an A- until Davis read "Today is Sunday," a three thousand word portrait of a middle-aged literary artist who works six days a week in a shoe factory and writes a story every Sunday, getting better and better at it as he does so. The post-summer story is a remarkable assertion of how the passion to write can become absolutely all of life, leading nowhere but to the act of writing itself, producing nothing but the manuscript, and proving absolutely satisfying and self-sufficient in so doing. Norman finished it in late October, and spent the next month on "Beer Bottle Polka," also some three thousand words long, which Davis liked so much he suggested that it be submitted to Esquire. Set in a Scranton jazz club, some version of which Norman no doubt saw the previous summer, it narrates in a very complex structure how a black saxophone player in a white band is killed by some of the musicians after he seduces the white woman who sings with the band.

There were three other stories, shorter and considerably less ambitious, completed during the semester, but these two, finally unrealized though they are, unmistakably send the signal that as a

unmistakable

writer Norman was starting to grow. By the end of the semester Norman had completed ten stories for English A-1, totaling some sixteen thousand words. This was approximately twice the required assignment, but the severity of the writing course grading standards is indicated by the fact that this was the only one of his four courses in which Norman failed to pull a mid-year A.

Both academically and literarily it had been a very successful semester. There is evidence to indicate that during it Barney got into trouble again, this time with the resources of the Sunlight Oil Company itself, but Norman clearly had achieved sufficient distance from that scene to be able to keep his equilibrium while Fan and Dave Kessler dealt with the situation. He sent his father an affectionately inscribed fifty-first birthday card in January, and proceeded with his own planning. Though he and his friends continued at Claverly, they formed a non-resident affiliation with Dunster House, where they had arranged to live after completing sophomore year. As a kind of affirmation of his new association, Norman arranged for Phyllis Bradman to come up for the March 7 weekend of the Dunster House formal, and he escorted her through the traditional Friday-Saturday-Sunday structure with what he told his parents was great success. It was the first in a sequences of successes that spring, and each would be greater than the last.

The key to all of Norman's good fortune was a sharp second semester improvement in his writing. He presented Davis with a five thousand word story in mid-February, "The Greatest Thing in the World," that took a youthful, down and out drifter hero on a grim,

✓ named as
Al Groot later

Here you might include more comment on the story - especially the tear home mentioned in it. Also, Good details himself by his hard-earned victory - like Norman

skillfully plotted ride for his life. By far the longest story Norman had yet written, it was also clearly the best. The professor liked it immensely, and invited his student home to dinner, where Mrs. Davis remembers him as handling the evening very well. The editors at the Advocate liked the story too, when Norman passed it along to them the following week. He was submitting stories to the magazine for "acceptance," though it was understood that such material would only be used to determine whether or not its author would be invited onto the editorial board, and would not actually be published.

Norman was beginning to feel the pressure generated by the competition to join the magazine, and he wrote to his parents in mid-March that, although he had two stories already accepted ("They won't be published, you realize,") he had been hearing disturbing rumors: "I happen to know, though, that they're a bunch of snobs, and Brooklyn may go against me. Before I take out a subscription for you, I'm going to have a show-down with them. Don't worry, I won't jeopardize my chances." At the same time, no doubt in partial response to the increase in his cost of living created by his accelerating social and editorial life, he was applying for a supplementary scholarship and had made out an application for the Harvard Temporary Student Employment office. Within days, the readers at the Advocate had accepted two more stories and had offered Norman a position on the board. At the same time they told him something else: they were going to violate their own policy and publish "The Greatest Thing in the World" in their spring issue.

The new members of the Advocate were required, as part of their April 9 initiation, to write and perform in a play. Norman either wrote it over spring vacation--during which he also took Phyllis to Walt Disney's Fantasia with \$1.10 tickets supplied by Fan--or he co-wrote it with his fellow initiate George Goethals. No copy of it survives, but Goethals says it was an obscene parody of For Whom the Bell Tolls, titled by Norman "For Whom Your Balls Squall" and featuring a galaxy of burlesque characters, one of whose parts Norman himself ^{played} performed.

The hilarious evening was followed by a series of new developments. Davis admired a new story, Norman's first to be set at Harvard, "Fair Harvard, Thy Sons. . .", which combines the scene of an intramural house football game with a locker room aftermath, and satirizes the efforts of a prep-school liberal to conceal his racial prejudice. The professor urged Norman to send the story to the New Yorker, and he told Norman that "The Greatest Thing in the World" had been selected (Davis was one of the judges) to represent Harvard in a national fiction contest conducted by Story magazine.

Story, under the editorial guidance of Whit Burnett and Martha Foley, published one college literary magazine story each year, and awarded its author their widely publicized annual prize (of one hundred dollars). Norman wrote home that "my chances of winning are of course slight, but I still feel good at winning the Harvard part." He felt even better when the Advocate came out the next week, with his story in the lead position, and when the

Crimson saluted the new issue with an editorial review that celebrated Norman as the author of the first and the best story in the magazine. Norman was no stranger to admiration: in his family he had been extravagantly admired from the start. But now he tasted the impressed attention of strangers, to whom he suddenly was known and by whom he frequently was admired. Locally at least, the baby of the Class of 1943 had become famous.

(booked in felt)

Part of the ritual of acceptance into the ranks of the Advocate that year was a May 10th black tie Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Dinner at the Harvard Club of Boston, with distinguished alumni of the board in attendance, and featuring a still more distinguished speaker. He was to be Advocate alumnus J. P. Marquand, whose H. M. Pulham, Esquire had been reviewed in the April issue. When Norman got to the Harvard Club, however, in borrowed evening clothes, he learned that Marquand had been "called to Hollywood," and that the dinner would therefore have no major speaker.

Among those present was Roy E. Larsen, a member of the Advocate Board of Trustees and president of Henry Luce's Time, Inc. Like most people present, Larsen had been reading the April number of the Advocate and had read "The Greatest Thing in the World." He kept telling people how much he liked it and, when someone brought him to Norman, he repeated the compliment. He repeated it also that evening to a young editor from the house of Farrar/Rinehart, Theodore Amussen, who promptly wrote to Norman, asking about Norman's plans for future work and suggesting, in a

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magic formulation, that they get together that summer in New York "for a drink."

Norman told the family about Larsen and the Advocate dinner and sent two short Amussen letters home. Both went into the first of many scrapbooks, but this kind of recognition, the first of more to follow, would begin creating a change of attitude in Norman's family world. Until now, while more than encouraging Norman in his writing and identifying it as a sign of real strength, his parents and the Kesslers continued to think of him as an unusually literate engineer. After all, his mid-year sophomore grades showed him to be an A student in math, physics and statistics, and a B student in English. It positively alarmed Fan to read, as she had in a March letter, that "I simply can't stand any of my Engineering courses," but as new evidence of literary strength accumulated, the balance of family opinion would begin to shift.

One thing that everyone could agree on was that Norman's literary reputation was vastly enhancing his stature within the Harvard community. The Signet Society, of which in the winter of 1940/41 he quite possibly had never heard, was Harvard's intellectual center for people whose interests and claims to distinction were literary or political. A meritocracy, in contrast to most Harvard clubs, Signet annually admitted no more than seven people from each class, traditionally drawing upon the senior editors of the Crimson, the Lampoon, and the Advocate for both membership and nominations.

Norman's nomination, of which he had been unaware, came after

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his April publication in the Advocate and when, in early May, he received his Signet invitation, he had another set of circumstances and ceremonies to share with Crown Street. For him to enter the Society, which was primarily a luncheon club with daily tables convening to discuss either literary or political questions, an additional round of preparation was required. There was an acceptance speech to be written and delivered at an initiation, another black tie banquet, and an eighty dollar "incidental" fee. The fee apparently was waived, and Norman wrote an initiation speech that, like the Advocate initiation play, lampooned For Whom the Bell Tolls. He was still wondering about whether to deliver it when he wrote to Millicent Brauer, a Long Branch friend who was a freshman at Rutgers' Douglass College.

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Trying out a cocky voice for discussing all this, he first refers to the 5 May 1941 issue of Life magazine, which contained a ten page cover story on Harvard that included a picture of Advocate "Pegasus" editor Bowden Broadwater, and the statement that the most popular house in the system was Eliot House. "The Life write-up in general stinks," Norman wrote. "Every emphasis was misplaced. Particularly, Eliot House is not the most popular house. This year it was so underapplied that it had to take fellows who never even mentioned the place in their applications. Dunster House (my house) is, of course, terrific." He then turns to the Signet invitation:

Big news. I was elected to Signet, an honorary society of campus big shots, (presidents of Crimson, Lampoon, Advocate & extra-curric. boys.) Whoopee, I'm a clubman. I'll have to cut my hair a shade shorter. Only trouble is that they all talk French there, (my three years of it in Boy's High School, Brooklyn, won't shine,) and

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the incidental fee of \$80 to get in. I can't pay it, but they're heavily endowed, and it may be waived.

He used a different voice when he was writing to the family; surveying the series of positive developments in his life, and having just mailed a story off to the New Yorker, he wonderingly observed: "It's all happening too easy."

Inevitably, Norman's status in English A-1 changed in the second half of the semester. He completed one more story after "Fair Harvard. . .", a 3,500 word narrative account of how an aging high school dropout returns to a pretentious alumni reunion and both disgraces and distinguishes himself. Norman called the story "Mr. Berliner Establishes a Milepost," perhaps partly because the subject of mileposts in his own life was very much on his mind. Norman entered the "Berliner" story in his log--it was number 21 on a list beginning with "Pick Them Up and Lay Them Down"-- and then he backtracked and drew a line under number 19 on the list. This was "The Greatest Thing in the World," dated 13-15 February, 1941, and the milestone it marked was identified by the note: "In first year--19 stories--38,500 words." At the top of the log he had dated the first story 17-18 February, 1940, and he wanted the anniversary to be part of his private record.

His mid-March story total for the second semester was only four (though his word count was ten thousand) but instead of continuing with stories, he wanted to mark the moment by trying something appropriately new. After consulting with Davis, Norman launched into the writing of what he at first called a novelette, the first draft progress of which was so great that he would report

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in mid-May that he had completed forty five thousand words in less than a month. He was ^{now well} moving ~~explosively~~ into his second season as a writer, and his accelerating momentum of composition was carrying everything else along with it.

Norman's work in his often lamented non-English courses was somehow flourishing: he got grades of A in both Statistics and Math, and though he dropped to a B in Physics he finally got his first A in English. His organization of domestic arrangements also gave him some long delayed satisfaction--he and Marty Lubin had picked out their two bedroom suite in Dunster House for junior year--and his relationship with the world of the Signet Society landed running. He quickly became a regularly at its literary table, drawing for conversation there upon the new locus he had discovered for his extra-curricular program in cultural self-improvement.

The locus was in the office suite of the Advocate. Acceptance onto the board had given Norman the first place at Harvard that he could really call his own. The previous spring semester, when he had come to the open house and began to sense what the editorial membership could offer, he knew that he wanted to join, but he couldn't know how much he wanted and needed it until he was actually admitted. Board members were given a key to the premises and could come and go as they wished, but none of the others used that key the way Norman used his. While writing a kind of memoir for the editorial inhabitants of quite different Advocate quarters in the mid-seventies, he remembers it:

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One climbed a dull, carpeted staircase as dusty as a back road to Guerrero, used one's Advocate key to go through the door at the top, and opened the suite, an entire floor-through of five rooms, five mystical chambers full of broken-down furniture and the incomparable odor that rises from old beer stains in the carpet and syrup-crusting empty Coke bottles in the corners. It is a better odor than you would think, sweet and alcoholic and faintly debauched--it spoke of little magazines and future lands of literature, and the offices were almost always empty in late afternoon.

His tone of lyric reverie leads to the recollection of a specific activity, one that would not only serve as substitute for all of the reading and studying and knowing that had for so long passed him by, but for something even more important:

Maybe I loved the Advocate offices more than anyone who was taken in my competition -- I spent the spring of sophomore year at Harvard drinking Cokes by a table at the window. . . and I read old issues of the magazine. Once I was an authority on the early published work in The Advocate of T. S. Eliot, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, Conrad Aiken, E. E. Cummings and Malcolm Cowley--it must have been the nearest I ever came to extracting genealogical marrow from old print.

That the link to his high modern literary predecessors supplied by the Advocate should seem to him genealogical, that it should seem to supply him not simply with texts but with family, speaks directly to the question of what Norman needed and was trying to get from this association. He began early on to fight shy of reading major figures, especially major moderns, on the grounds that they might awe him into literary silence. He stopped reading Joyce for that reason. But his individual talent was not threatened by the tradition when it was delivered in the pages of old Advocates, and in the dusty intimacy of the magazine's offices that

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Handbook, ed.

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spring he secured his position as an apprentice to the art of literature. In the process, he no doubt also acquired an inexhaustible supply of discussion material for his Signet lunches.

The president and editor of the Advocate that year was Marvin Barrett, who was a year ahead of Norman and, along with his elegant editorial associate Bowden Broadwater, was rather proud of having discovered and prominently published the young Brooklyn newcomer. Because his name led the masthead on the issue that contained "The Greatest Thing in the World," Barrett received just at the closing of spring term the telegram from Whit Burnett, announcing that Norman had won Story's Eighth Annual College Short Story Contest.

Norman had left for home that day and missed the news, which followed him to Brooklyn like a bolt of lightening. Winning the prize triggered a process that would immensely confirm Norman's conviction that he was capable of a career as a professional writer, and, hardly less important, it influenced the feelings of Norman's family in this direction as well. One of Burnett's first requests was for "a biographical note about yourself to be used when the story appears." Norman replied:

For my autobiography. I am eighteen years old, born in Long Branch, N. J., January 31, 1923. I have lived in Brooklyn, N. Y. most of my life, and went to Boy's High School there. Entered Harvard in September 1939, and for the first time was introduced to the "boys," Dos Passos, Farrell, Hemingway, Newhouse, O'Hara, and so on. I started writing February before this, and haven't let up since. In the last summer I went bumming for a time, and that gave me the background for "Greatest Thing in the World." The story was roughly my twentieth, and was written almost exactly a year after I started.

He mentions the fact that he is working on a novel, and concludes:

"In summary, as Life would put it, Mailer is eighteen, five-eight, smokes Camels, and writes his first drafts long-hand."

Though "The Greatest Thing in the World" would not be reprinted by Burnett until the Story issue of the following November/December, Norman's most immediate return--apart from the prize money--was a renewed head of steam to drive forward "No Percentage," his novel in progress.

END PART 2, CHAPTER TWO

Chapter Two

Part Three

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After a brief but triumphal visit to Crown Street, Norman mailed off his letter to Burnett and repaired to Long Branch, where by June 20 he was reinstalled in his special room at the Scarboro. The "novelette," while in need of extensive cutting and revision, stood at just under fifty thousand first draft words, and was clearly going to go beyond its original Brooklyn territory into something larger and more ambitious.

Norman went back, started over, and laid out a structure that would take his hero, Robert Branstein, over three stages of action: a winter/spring season in Brooklyn, where Robert's financially comfortable family lives while his father practices law in Manhattan; a summer season at the New Jersey shore, where Robert, his sometimes fiancée and his younger sister and parents are guests in the (very Scarboro-like) Shore-Fiesta hotel; and an end of summer season on the road, where the hero unsuccessfully seeks to escape from the frustrations of family and other interpersonal relationships. The range of the novel's world is at many points coextensive with the fictional world of Norman's accumulated stories, and the stories themselves are actually recreated in the

novel, revised and adapted to support the structure of Robert's quest for freedom.

To begin with, an early, untitled version of the mini-story "It," serves as the novel's epigraph. Then, in the Brooklyn section, we reencounter the street scenes of "Pick Them up and Lay Them Down," and what was a minor dispute over a candy store pinball machine in "Life is Where You Find It" escalates in the novel into a full-scale fight between neighborhood Jews and Gentiles. The party scenes in "Oh, Don't You Be That Way," are elaborated and adapted to fit the shape of Robert's not dissimilar social circle, and his relationship with a troublesome Shelia Wexler, the girlfriend he dolefully marries at the novel's end, resembles that of most of the couples in Norman's thwarted-lovers stories.

In the Jersey Shore section, Norman has elaborately re-written the "He Was Her Man" story that Davis had read to the English A-1 class, casting Robert's mother as the errant wife: in this version she is actively promiscuous with the young waiters and bellboys in the hotel; and Robert's father is the wronged husband who, instead of shooting, brutally beats her in retaliation.

In the final section of the novel, with its action set on the road, Norman draws upon his previous summer's road experience, first by dramatizing the failure of his hero's friend in a Scranton brothel; and then by re-arranging his hitch-hiking story, "The Principle of the Thing." In this, he replaces the amiable Herb with a more grotesque partner for his hero--one who is "sick" in a way somewhat analogous to the Jerry Reddle figure--as well as

elaborating the action in a variety of ways. And of course the "bumming" background of "The Greatest Thing in the World" operates in this section of the novel as well.

Related though these previous stories clearly are to this new manuscript, however, the most striking thing about the novel is not the way it draws upon fiction already written, but rather the way it demonstrates the accelerating energy of its author's imaginative forward motion. If as a realized fictional accomplishment "No Percentage" is far from successful, as a serious fictional effort it is close to Herculean. After a fifty thousand word warmup, accomplished while excelling in four courses amid the chaotic excitements of Advocate, Signet, and Story magazine scenarios, Norman turns in the closing days of June toward serious, sustained composition.

A bare three months later he emerges with a three¹ part, ninety thousand word novel that in its variety of fictional elements resembles nothing so much as a literary decathlon event. The novelistic equivalent of broad jump, pole vault, discus throw and hundred yard dash succeed one another in astonishing array: *Heckman* love scenes, riots, natural disasters, breakneck automobile races, solitary soliloquies and--as recognizable as an old friend--an episode in a certain row of eight brothels in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

The central action into which all this is shaped is technically sound in its structure, but ~~of course~~ its credibility is constantly tested by the fact that its eighteen¹ year old

creator, ~~significantly~~ younger and ~~significantly~~ less experienced than virtually all of his characters, must constantly fall back on either his imagination or his reading in the representation of what they do and feel. His twenty year old hero, for example, is supposed to be the sexually sophisticated target of a beautiful, wealthy young woman, and when they make love--as they very often do--the reader hears an unintentional parody of Hemingway:

Afterward she was to say with wonder in her voice, 'It's like you're me, and I'm you,' and he was to know that although she had read it somewhere, and it was not original, he was also to know inside of him that she had said it as wisely and well as she was capable. . .

This passage is not typical of the prose in the manuscript, representing rather its most extreme reach of dependence, but at virtually all times "No Percentage" signals the reader that ^{it} is a kind of exercise: an exercise not entirely different, perhaps, from that of building a sort of literary model airplane.

W.C. The novel's action tests Robert, and in finding him wanting it establishes the argument that fundamentally decent personal character is weakened and ruined by the self-indulgence and pointlessness of what Norman represents as haute bourgeois living. Robert's grandfather (clearly drawn from the life of Yehudda Schneider) has lived a wholesome life of hard work and little self-gratification, and serves in the novel as a moral contrast figure to the men who scramble for dollars and the women who spend them. Robert's lawyer father has been ethically compromised by his profession, and his mother is savagely portrayed as stupid and sluttish.

Indeed, women who don't earn their own living are treated severely in the book, which operates on the assumption that a hard life with few amenities builds character in both women and men. Useable though this assumption is, Norman devotes most of the novel to exploring its other side, and his vision of how self-indulgently people with money live (before Harvard, the only wealthy people he knew well were the Kesslers) is notably not the product of intimate first-hand knowledge. A veteran observer of the boorish manners of vacationing tourists, the young novelist relies almost absolutely upon such moral insight as this vantage point provides. The third section of the novel, set on the road, presents Robert after he has been separated from the corrupting presences of his selfish mother, his greedy fiancée and her carnivorous father, and after he has been of some service in helping his own father to escape the threat of prosecution and prison as the consequence of professional indiscretion.

On his own at last, and after an elaborate series of travel experiences, Robert sets himself the test of risking serious physical danger in the form of "boarding" a moving freight train. When his nerve fails him he identifies himself as a coward, and he despairs. The softness of his life has produced self-doubt and then self-loathing, and he returns as a captive to the prison of marriage and his father-in-law's wealth. That situation, we should remark--of a wealthy, tyrannical father who lives in the penthouse of a malevolently tall building and who has an obviously incestuous attraction for his scheming, beautiful daughter--foreshadows the

murderous marital situation of Stephen Rojack over twenty years later in An American Dream. The Mailerian fictional imagination of 1941 is ^{now} both producing and storing material ~~as it has before and as it will again.~~

In remembering "No Percentage" many years later, Norman stressed that it dealt with a "rich" young man who couldn't get beyond the weakening influence of money; but a college classmate who read the book at the time remembers thinking of it as autobiographical. Both recollections are of course correct, since Norman ~~clearly~~ draws upon his own experience extensively in all three narrative sections, but at the same time tries to recast what happens into a different class structure. Thus Robert lives not on Crown Street in Crown Heights, but on a fictional Durant Street in what the narrative represents as an opulent section of Flatbush, and he has gone not to Boy's High but to the tonier Erasmus Hall. Turned down in his application to all the Ivy League schools but Penn, he has gone there and lived the life of a (Jewish) fraternity activist, learning little of value.

He has his own car (Norman ~~had~~ got his ~~own driver's~~ license that summer), and goes to Long Branch as a paying guest at what is evidently the Scarboro, doing while there many of the things that Norman had done and seen done. When Robert goes on the road he ~~surely~~ comes close to ~~literally~~ mirroring Norman's own experiences and feelings, and at the center of his childhood life stands a suspiciously familiar chemistry set. Less direct is the modeling of family, and Robert's mother hardly resembles the hard-working,

self-denying Fan, but the grossness of the characterization is clearly intended to shock, and Norman had taken to shocking his mother, more or less systematically, the deeper he got into writing. Certainly we can hear the echo of Barney's situation in the characterization of Robert's father, who has made the kind of mistakes with other people's money that threaten to "send him up the river." Robert is ~~instantly~~ and unquestioningly loyal to his father in his troubles, just, after all, as Norman continued to be to Barney in his.

^{About}
~~Almost exactly~~ a month after Norman's arrival in Long Branch, Fan entered Caledonian hospital, on Brooklyn's Parkside Avenue, for an unexpected hysterectomy. Following a flash of family alarm, her recovery was swift and uncomplicated, and Norman was therefore able to take a week or ten days off from his schedule for another sojourn on the road. He felt that he needed to know more than he did about that territory before he undertook the third section of his novel, so he hitch-hiked south, stopping to explore the Black ghetto in Washington, D.C., and continuing^{ed} down to Norfolk, where he slept out on uncomfortably cold sand at the local Coney Island, Ocean View Beach. He was simulating Robert's situation, which was that of self-imposed poverty, so he very thriftily followed the flow of traffic through Portsmouth down into North Carolina, continuing as far south as New Bern before he turned back up, routing through Raleigh and Durham on into Danville, Virginia.

From here he sent his parents a postcard on August 11, saying that he was "Heading home. . . . Tomorrow go over Skyway Drive & head for Harrisburg, then up to Stroudsburg, & across down to Long Branch." He added, "Don't worry, am having a good time." He hitchhiked all the way, punctuating the trip with letters to his Harvard friends describing funny things that happened. These included a brush with evangelists that would evolve into a short-story, a ride with a farmer who had gone sleepless through two nights of extended sexual intercourse and was keeping awake by describing to a shocked Norman what had gone on, and a ~~putatively~~ comic episode in Danville with a prostitute which ended Norman's virginity.

Back in Long Branch, after being put by his elders through an Ellis Island-like sanitary inspection, he re-addressed the final section of his novel. Norman's encounters with the evangelists, the indefatigable farmer and the Danville prostitute never found their way into "No Percentage," but nearly half of the 135 pages of Book Three are devoted to a fictionalized account of the trip, with Robert tracing Norman's path, and crucially failing the freight train test that Norman, too, may well have attempted for himself. The earlier two sections of the novel were out in the hands of various family readers--Marjorie Rembar, Cy's older sister and one of Norman's most conscientious readers, wrote Fan in the hospital that a heat-wave description in Book One "was one of the most exquisite and effective descriptive passage I have encountered" ¹ ~~2~~ Norman had the whole of his final draft completed by mid-September.

No doubt with the help of the Sunlight Oil staff, it was typed and ~~sturdily~~ secured within a stiff leather binder, held together with brass rivets, and promptly sent off to Farrar/Rinehart's Ted Amussen, who had been keeping in touch with Norman and had already seen and very much liked Book One. He would correspond with Norman all through the fall about the possibilities for publication, which at first the young editor clearly regarded as very good, producing in Norman's ongoing life an atmosphere ~~increasingly~~ taut with dramatic expectation. What, Norman and his family and friends wondered, if he actually pulled off the publication of his first novel during his junior year in college! What would that say about the direction of his future?

The previous June, Norman had taken time to write to his Uncle Ernest, the Johannesburg chemical engineer who had been a house guest in the winter of 1933/34, asking his advice about choosing between an engineering and a literary career. Since Norman himself had long before already made the choice, his consultation ~~clearly~~ was conducted for the benefit of the family, and he must have been hoping that Ernest would tell him to follow his own sense of what was right. This was exactly his uncle's advice (Norman knew that Ernest himself had left engineering, and was pursuing a career in the South African Army), but the rapid unfolding of literary events by the end of the summer had, in all likelihood, made it unnecessary for Norman even to argue his case in the family council.

With a major publishing house sending him positive signals

about his novel, with the Story prize in hand (the check for one hundred dollars, long anticipated, arrived in mid- August) and Story's publication of "The Greatest Thing in the World" anticipated for the fall, it seemed that the question of his future had come very close to answering itself. When the November/December issue of Story was released on October 15, it triggered at least two more professional inquiries: Elise B. Cobb, an editor at the Dodd, Meade publishing house, wrote to ask if there might be a novel in the vein of "The Greatest Thing in the World;" and Jacques Chamburn, a New York literary agent, offered to place Norman's future fiction in "the larger magazines." [Footnote Norman's reply.] In forwarding these communications, Whit Burnett added his personal plea to be given the opportunity for "first possible refusal" of "No Percentage" for his own Story Press, which he operated as an imprint in cooperation with the Lippincott publishing company.

Norman, who was only slightly less wild than Fan and the family from the suspense, pressed Amussen for a decision, and on October 27 got from him this Western Union wire: "Sorry for delay. Will you hold on couple days more?" True to this timetable, it was only days later that the first blow fell, in the form of a joint decision by the Messers Rinehart and Farrar to reject the manuscript for publication. Amussen, attempting to soften the blow, called in literary agent Monte Stein as a consultant, but the result of this reading produced a grim confirmation of the publishers' joint decision: the book "shows brilliance, but really

for your own good should not be published."

Norman responded by sending one copy of the manuscript to Burnett and another to a lawyer friend of his family, Bernard Buchwald, who was associated with the publishing firm of L. B. Fisher. Both Buchwald and Burnett, like everyone who read the manuscript, were at pains to communicate admiration and encouragement to its author; but, apart from Amussen's early enthusiasm, no one in publishing ever voted for the publication of "No Percentage."

Norman's conscious disappointment at the failure of his efforts to get the manuscript published, however, ^{was} ~~must on a less~~ ~~conscious level have been significantly~~ offset by the depth and breadth of the support system which those efforts put into motion. His family at home, his peers and his professors at Harvard, and no less than five separate contact figures in the publishing industry ~~itself~~ came together in a rising tide of support that ~~positively~~ steeped him in reassurance. His talent, his imaginative power, his social and psychological insight, but above all the rightness of his ambition to move forward toward his lifetime goals as a writer were affirmed and reaffirmed.

It was a here and now support system that very functionally supplied some of Norman's immediate needs, of course, but it was more than that. It was a choral voice ~~constantly~~ telling him that the sentiments and the value systems of the major social institutions touching his life--family, university and commercial publishing--were in perfect accord with him and the values he was

developing in his work. While it lasted--which was not to be forever--this almost dream-like harmony would be the most important source of external strength in Norman's life, and in the present crisis it must have gone far to relieve, even on the conscious level, the pain caused by the reversal of his hopes for "No Percentage."

ii

From the heights where all of those hopes had taken him, however, the descent back down to earth must still have been something of a plunge for the eighteen year old Norman, despite the fact that his landing point was the long-coveted fifth floor, two bedroom suite in Harvard's Dunster House. He wrote the family that the suite was "beautiful. It looks out smack on the river and the court-yard. From my window I can see the Charles, the business school, and the stadium." Other compensations for Norman's disappointment included the fact that he was sharing the suite with his closest friend (Marty Lubin), was distinguishing himself playing house football for Dunster, and, perhaps above all, was now the proud owner of an automobile.

Authorized by his newly ^{new} issued driver's license, Norman had driven his machine up to Cambridge from Brooklyn in late September, having then been presented with it--as a reward for his sustained burst of creative energy--by an admiring Uncle Dave. The car was old, and frequently out of repair, but it was black and a

convertible coupe, and Norman and his friends shared both the use and the expense of the Chevrolet for the rest of the school year. Much of his autumn correspondence records the agonies he experienced--along with cost-sharers Lubin, Breslow and Katz--in finding affordable insurance and reliable repair shops; and to help defray the escalating costs of all this he began applying for scholarship aid, loans and even a job. Eventually successful with a laborious \$150 scholarship application, he also got two short term loans from the Dean (\$100) and landed his first college job of any consequence: he was to work nine hours a week and earn \$150.00 for the school year drawing up a complete set of plans of Harvard's gas and water-main systems.

The job drew, of course, upon his engineering background, and one of his four fall courses was Engineering Sciences 6a, the study of Forces in Motion. He didn't like the course or the job (which he quite after five weeks, explaining in a later loan application that it had caused him serious eye-strain), but he did take some satisfaction from Sociology 7a--which treated the topics of Poverty, Handicaps and Crime--and Philosophy A, covering the canon from Plato to Kant. The autumn course that was of most interest to him by far, however, was English A-2, the next unit in the Creative Writing sequence. He continued to invest the major part of his energy in his work as a writer, and the course, along with his retrospective shepherding of "No Percentage" and his increasing responsibilities and involvement with The Advocate, occupied the real center of his attention.

The Advocate editorial suite of rooms was abuzz, in October, with political consultations, as election time neared for the mid-year changing of the editorial guard. Some members from Norman's class of 1943 would ascend to senior status at this time, and Norman's sympathies went very much in the direction of his friend Bruce Barton, Jr.'s candidacy for President, as against the candidacy of John Crockett, a leading light among the "aesthetes" on the board. In fact, after the early November election, Barton was President, and thus editor in chief, Crockett was Pegasus, the staff title for literary-editor, and Norman himself was elevated to office as an editor.

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As the old editorial team of President Marvin Barrett and his ~~almost fabulously~~ elegant Pegasus Bowden Broadwater saw to the December emergence of their final issue, the new board began assembling copy for their first issue. It was due to be published in March, and Norman sent to the Sunlight Oil staff a hurry-up request for a typed excerpt from his novel manuscript. He chose a self-contained ten₁ page scene in a Scranton brothel, grimly rendered, in which a fearful, emotionally distraught young man makes what is obviously ~~going to be~~ an unsuccessful attempt at losing his virginity. Norman submitted it to Crockett and, as it were, to himself, and it was promptly accepted by both of them for publication.

Similarly, Norman seems to have dipped into his novel manuscript to satisfy the first few assignments of his A-2 fiction-writing class. He reports in October to Brooklyn that he has

submitted two stories to his Professor, receiving an A on one and a B on the other, but his usually well-kept files reveal only one October manuscript (bearing a grade of B). They do, however, contain two carbon copy excerpts from "No Percentage," including the brothel scene noted above, and their author may have submitted these as assignments, failing to save the marked and graded copies his professor returned. The first preserved manuscripts of fiction written since the novel's September completion, besides the one October piece, were submitted to A-2 during November, December and January, and they offer us an instructive core sampling of Norman's imaginative state of being at the time.

too much detail

7

The October story, "Man Overboard," bears a note from Norman:

This is the first of a series of stories about a guy named Joe Danton. I can think of five others to add to this first one. Maybe I'll write them all, or this might be the last one, but that depends [on] how soon I get tired of him.

In fact this is the last ~~ascertainable~~ Danton story that Norman will write, but the tone he uses in referring to him, and the character himself, are what is important. Danton is a certifiable tough guy, and Norman uses a tough tone in talking about him.

The real Joe was and is a floater; sailor, hobo, doorman, handyman, nature lover, lover, chauffeur, garage mechanic, and some other things that he no doubt forgot to tell me. This story is something he told me in a few sentences, [and] I felt it was worth blowing up to more. The irrelevancies, the cynicism, the speech are all part of him.

"Man Overboard" tells of how narrator Danton, ferociously brawling during a Galveston shore leave, passes out and fails to catch his ship when it sails, and ends up in bed with a prostitute whose six-year old daughter watches them copulate. The story is all callous,

and in being so it strikes the tone of a number of others Norman wrote this term.

Two stories present a clearly autobiographical protagonist who can only be described as cold and tough. "Four Pamphlets for Jesus" takes us back to the previous August and Norman's encounter with a car full of evangelists "twenty five miles on the wrong side of Charlottesville," as he rather toughly put it in his covering note to the instructor. A hitch-hiker--clearly a transformed version of Norman--reduced by parching heat, poverty and an angry sense of social injustice--glowers out at a world populated by comfortable car owners ^{either} ~~alternately~~ indifferent to or afraid of figures like himself. As a matter of course he angrily and cynically rejects an evangelist who exhorts him to accept salvation, but his style in doing so is worth remarking. The style is worldly.

Though the hitch-hiker is depicted as unemployed, three years ^{and} a vagrant, reduced to an existence like that of Al Groot in "The Greatest Thing in the World," he is ~~emotionally~~ cold and unafraid. The country-rube respectability and timidity of the evangelist is stressed by contrast, and when he approaches, the hitch-hiker "said to himself, 'six to five against the bookie, he comes from Texas.'" The correctness of this observation, as well as its hard-boiled frame of reference, endows the observer with a kind of authority in the story, which is strengthened when the religious exhortation itself is presented as merely asinine. The hitch-hiker takes the religious pamphlets, given to him in the simple-minded belief that he has an interest in them, and uses them to line his ~~solitary~~ ^{warm} ~~solitary~~ ^{litter}

shoes, singing as he does so a punning lyric about how he "Done got Jesus in my soul."

Even this insouciance is surpassed in a companion story for the course, "The Schedule Breaker," to which Norman attaches the note: "The incident is basically true; happened to me the end of my freshman year." The story depicts the attempted seduction of a working class, slightly older woman by a patently insincere young man, and it is once again the style of the character that is most remarkable. He is as cool and calculating as a professional ^{safe-cracker} burglar ~~trying to break into a house~~. The third person narrator makes reference to the young man's "timing," his "technique," and retails for us his lines of false affection and consideration. The story rests upon the assumption that a whole, loosely networked population of similarly predatory males are out on a kind of heartless, competitive hunt for complaisant sexual partners such as the one we meet here.

This seduction is interrupted and thus foiled by the arrival of another suitor who has been supplied through the network with the name and address of the woman and, supposing her to be alone, arrives on the porch with "timing" and "technique" and an approach of his own. The woman, seeing the resemblance in attitude between the two "boys," angrily rejects them both with the words: "Oh, you bastards. All of you damn bastards. What did I ever do to you, that you toss dice for me?" The hard-guy, cynical ring of the story's closing line, however, defines the quality of its cosmos best. As the original suitor leaves, the story concludes: "Maybe some other

→ "The Greatest Thing in the World" ²
↳ been forever reprinted in anthologies like "The Tough Ones"

evening,' he tried, playing the percentages all the way." The stony, cold world of playing the percentages, tossing the dice, and betting with the bookie supplies the controlling metaphor for what might be called Norman's tough guy personae; but this is not the only kind of figure in his fiction and, in this season, it is perhaps not the most instructive.

Toughness argues an absence of feeling, but, outside of his tough stories, there is a great deal of feeling to be found in Norman's work at this time, and the feeling that most centrally prevails there is fear. He approaches this emotion in a great variety of ways, almost as if he is studying it, turning it in examination, trying to get at its root cause. Fear, putatively induced by soft living and unexamined self-indulgence, is the emotion that rules Robert Branstein in "No Percentage," and when his fear of bodily harm overcomes him in the freight-train boarding episode he is represented as disappearing into despair. Fear is associated with impotence in the several brothel stories, fear drives Al Groot in his losing battle for survival on the road, and fear is central to all the rest of the stories Norman produced for A-2 in the fall of 1941.

In "The Worm that Tears At Me," a young woman who has breast cancer and is, apparently, facing a mastectomy, sits alone and anticipates the loss of her lover and her own beauty with great fear. In "A Clean, Well-Ordered Life"---"The title is, of course, with apologies to Mr. Hemingway" Norman noted to his Professor-- a timid night-clerk at a summer resort hotel expels two tough-talking

vagrants (one of them "sounded like John Garfield") from an unused storage shed where they have sought shelter for the night. The clerk is ruled by the emotion, afraid of the vagrants but even more afraid of losing his job. Here, as almost always, fear is perceived by Norman as weakness, the opposite of the strength suggested by being tough. *yes! many quotes available on advancing into fear*

The most personal in this batch of stories, surely, is "Harmony in Three Soprano Voices," relating three incidents which are, Norman notes, "all from my childhood, of course." The soprano voice is, that is to say, his own, and the fearful things that make it quaver come first from the outside world. A bully on a subway train notices and is attracted by the model-airplane miniature gasoline engine recklessly displayed by the protagonist, who is terrified. The bully seems "tough," he is a "tough kid," and the boy feels weak and thus afraid in his presence. Quaking with fear, the boy prays for the deliverance of his station stop. The next sketch is also set on the subway, where a predatory homosexual tries to trap the child protagonist into joining him in a lavatory assignation, and again the boy sees his adversary as strong and grown up. "It's a man's room," the grownup says, "It's for men, ain't it?" The boy is consumed by fear at the end: "As they walked out the door, he could feel the man's hands coming over him." (Norman noted to his Professor, "I was lucky and did get away. That had no point in the piece, and was kept out.")

In the last of the three sketches we get closer to home, and the fear comes as much from the inside as from the outside world,

as we see parents ("Pop" and "Fan") going out for the evening, the mother uncertain, the father arguing with her: "My God he's a big boy already, we've got to leave him alone sometime, we haven't even been to a movie together for a year." The boy is brave for his mother's benefit, "Aw who's afraid of the dark and the empty house, no robbers can get in, go ahead ma, have a good time." When left alone, however, and after he turns out the lights at bedtime, his sense of his own weakness takes over: "You were in your bedroom and the house was all dark and you could hear men walking loud outside." Undressed, in bed, he is armed with his indoor baseball: "And then you heard the robbers moving, and you tried to keep quiet, but they weren't making any sound either, and then finally you sat up in bed, and screamed, and shouted, 'Goway you damn robbers, goway I got a baseball I'm going to throw at you, goway, goway, goway, Goddamn you, Goddamn you. . . .'"

Norman's last story of the semester was by far his most ambitious--its seven thousand words make it six times longer than any of the other A-2 stories--and it deals very centrally with the operation of fear. It does so, however, in a way that is ~~self-evidently~~ at a great remove from Norman's personal experience and, coming just after the "Soprano Voices," it clearly represents its author's strategic retreat from terrain that may have ^{been} ~~proved to be~~ ~~much~~ too close to home. The experiences of childhood will be represented again in his pages during this academic year, but only after elaborate preparation. Now, "Right Shoe on Left Foot" introduces Ivory and Dolly, a young married Negro couple living in

rural North Carolina--where Ivory picks tobacco for a living--and it presents them as deeply fearful victims. Their victimizer is the white man Spence Hovergarden, local policeman, who is drawn to the beautiful Dolly and crudely tries to take her away from her husband. As the couple flees in great terror they realize that having resisted--indeed, resisted with a certain amount of force--the orders of a white policeman places them in mortal danger, and they lay plans to depart immediately for New York.

But as they prepare to depart, harassed at a local harvest dance by a Black police enforcer, Ivory gradually develops an insight into the cold, always over-reacting hostility of the white male culture. Ivory's own culture sees the white men as frigid and unfeeling--indeed "tough" as the earlier Mailer stories would have it--while the Negro culture, by contrast, is infused with feeling. But paramount in the feelings of Ivory's culture is fear, fear of the implacable oppression of the whites, which is symbolized by the sadistic Enforcer whom they employ to express their will, so that at first Ivory perceives himself as weak. On the eve of his departure, however, the reason for white overreaction against blacks becomes clear to him: "White men got so wild cause they's really scared inside." Before the story ends Ivory has confronted Spence Hovergarden, accused him of being a guilt-ridden coward and has provoked him into self-revealing violence. Totally without fear at the end, Ivory is laughing as he takes the white man's beating, while "Spence's face looked like it was tearing apart, inside."

uncontrollable!

In the context of this long story, fear loses its enervating

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hold over its original victims, but it does so, after all, only because their oppressors turn out to be even more debilitated by an even deeper form of this disease-like emotion. The equation between coldness and strength, on the one hand, and fear and weakness, on the other, ^{will} ~~was~~ to reappear in Norman's work for a long time to come. It ~~would~~ ^g operate as an important and persuasive dimension for his readers, and, indeed, "Right Shoe on Left Foot" was very well received. In a journey that will be retraced a little later in this chapter, the story travelled from English A-2 into the pages of The Advocate the following May, and the Crimson review of the issue singled Norman out for special praise: "Norman Mailer's 'Right Shoe on Left Foot' [is] a powerful and taut story of the eternal clash between blacks and whites in the South. Mailer has the intensely realistic style of a James T. Farrell; he has perfected this technique and keeps perfect control over his subject matter."

The story was completed on January 10, 1942, well before the end of the semester, so, though the instructor's copy has not survived, it must have been submitted for credit in A-2. But if we don't know how he received this specific manuscript, the record does show that this particular Professor gave Norman very few As that semester--the only one we are sure of is "The Schedule Breaker"--and at semester's end he recorded a grade of B for the term's work overall. It had not, in fact, been a particularly successful term from an academic point of view. Philosophy A was a year-long course, so the mid ¹ year grade was only advisory, but Norman's other three courses were one-term only, and they brought

him no A's. He got a B not only in English A-2 but also Sociology, and for his Engineering 6a he got a C.

The slippage in his grades worried his parents, especially his mother, and there was a certain amount of nagging through the mails on the subject, with Norman not infrequently asserting his indifference to such trivia. What is most notable, however, is the way the fabric of intimacy and support that had bound Norman to his family for his first two years at college, was holding as fast and firm as ever. He continued to communicate by card, letter or phone several times each week, and if the central issue of the term was the fate of "No Percentage," there was considerable attention paid to other things. The Brooklyn Dodgers were beaten by the New York Yankees in the World Series that fall, and Norman shared the excitement of radiocast accounts of the games with his father and his sister. Money remained important, and a week seldom passed without some application for loan or scholarship aid not being discussed, while Norman issued a steady, if low-keyed appeal for allowance checks.

He took the train down with Lubin and Breslow to attend the Harvard game at Princeton on November 1, stopping by pre-arrangement to pick up his thrilled younger sister, to whom the three friends paid all the courtesies of a formal "date." Two weekends later he received his Aunt Nan and Uncle Dave at Dunster House, taking them to the Brown game at Harvard Stadium and ~~introducing~~ to the ritualistic receptions, cocktail parties and dinners of a Harvard football weekend, as well as to a

commemorative drive along the Charles in the convertible that had, ⁶
~~after all~~, been their gift.

Fan apparently had discontinued her overnight monthly pilgrimages to Boston on the train, though she sometimes proposed them. Also, while she would seem to have tried, she was not entirely able to refrain from warning Norman about one of her favorite dangers: the untrustworthiness of friends who cared for you only because of your literary reputation or your car, and the need to beware of being taken advantage of--being made a "sucker"--by such people. In a burst of irritation Norman wrote to her in mid-October: "Thought you were finished, mother, with all this 'sucker' talk. I detest it."

The truth was that, apart from the pressure generated by the "No Percentage" drama, Norman seems to have had quite an enjoyable semester. The Dunster House football season went extremely well; he regularly participated at the Signet luncheon sessions; he had been flattered and pleased to join Pete Barton as an officer of The Advocate; and he certainly did find that being a car owner broadened his social horizons. For all of its capacity for breakdown, the car took Norman and his several cost-sharing associates--along with all of their assorted friends--much farther afield than they had been used to going. One weekend in December it took them into Boston to meet some other students at a concert, and there Norman was introduced by a mutual friend to Beatrice Silverman, a music major from Boston University who was ten months older than he.

It was a meeting that changed his life, just as something else on a weekend that December changed all of their lives. The Mailer family chronicle for the closing months of 1941 is filled with the details of Norman's comings and goings as well as with the evolving fortunes of other members, the most apocalyptic manifestation of which was the dramatic and total destruction by fire of Aunt Beck's beloved Scarboro Hotel. She no longer lived there during the off-season, and, while it was shut-up and untended, some accident created the annihilating blaze. The glow from the Scarboro's embers signalled the end of the family's first American era, and perhaps because all the Schneiders and their families were fixing their attention upon it so closely, they failed anywhere in their elaborate network of correspondence to take note of the December 7 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The smoke from both events, however, would soon come clouding into the air of Norman's world, and into the pages of his fiction.

great
transition!

iii

The coming of the war wrought tremendous change at Harvard, institutionally speaking, and the effects upon personal lives and plans were ~~of course quite~~ often radical. In most cases the result was one form or another of acceleration: the institution made it possible for students to take on acceleration course-loads and combine them with officer training programs that were themselves designed for accelerated completion. Undergraduates opting into

these programs, in turn, seemed suddenly to disappear from the sight of those keeping to the usual four-course, four-year schedule.

Marty Lubin, for example, had been ~~just~~ in the process of selecting ~~the~~ second-semester courses for his junior year biology major when Pearl Harbor struck. By the time second semester actually arrived, however, he had plunged into a biology course overload and a senior honors-thesis project with such headlong abandon that he was able somehow to complete it all and amazingly graduate (summa cum laude) with the class of 1942 at semester's end, only three months after his nineteenth birthday. Just after graduation he entered Harvard's school of medicine. If Lubin's example was not entirely typical of what happened to undergraduates in the class of 1943, it did serve--as his Boy's High career had served--to contrast notably with Norman's reaction to ~~a parallel historical and institutional situation~~. the coming
L.M.

In a much remarked recollection eighteen years after, Norman said in Advertisements for Myself:

I may as well confess that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty eight hours after Pearl Harbor, while worthy young men were wondering where they could be of aid to the war effort, and practical young men were deciding which branch of service was the surest for landing a safe commission, I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific, and the longer I thought, the less doubt there was in my mind. Europe was the place. (P. 28)

Other people, looking back even later, make occasional reference to conversations with Norman in which he is said to reveal some

WTH
patriotic determination to go into the army to fight, or some professional determination to gain experience for writing fiction about fighting, or some egalitarian determination to avoid, above all, seeking out or accepting a commission. But while these recollections presumably have some basis in fact, what still remains striking about Norman's documented response to the war was the way he saved it for his fiction, responding to it in few other ways.

12th Aug
He wrote no letters about it, refrained from altering his curriculum because of it, and made no mention of its effect on his life in the numerous applications for financial aid that he filling out at this time. A short story, apparently written in the interim between semesters and then re-written for his new creative writing workshop, tells of an intoxicated old lady on a Boston subway train sharing the last of her pint of whiskey with an also intoxicated veteran sailor. Meeting quite by chance, the two discover a serendipitous, uncomplicated compatibility that defies the rest of the variously mocking and disapproving other passengers on the train. Norman called the story "Three Fingers of Friendship," and in the course of the dialogue he has his character repeatedly employ the already established slogan "Remember Pearl Harbor." His first recorded mention of America at war is here, in his fiction, and for the most part that is where his acknowledgment of the war will remain while he is at Harvard.

To understand why it was that Norman seemed somewhat deaf to the sounds of the war in his everyday, exterior life, we could

probably do worse than recall again the opening sentences of "Love Buds," that tale of how he and Herb Zilber had gone to Scranton in the summer of 1940 ^{was search of sex:} on the track of sexual intercourse: "It was the summer of 1940, but they did not hear the war. They were both seventeen and they had never had a woman." By December of 1941, to be sure, Norman was eighteen, and he had in a technical sense "had" that prostitute in Danville, Virginia during the previous summer. But such an experience, only slightly less ridiculous than the earlier Scranton fiasco, was not the kind of thing that he and most of his similarly innocent peers wanted. They wanted, indeed yearned for thoroughgoing sexual intimacy, and, in a culture that threatened ruin to those young women--of various social classes--who might offer it, for the most part they yearned for such experience in vain. Certainly Norman converted his yearning into seeking, and he sought it at least as earnestly as most of his student peers by "playing the percentages" with all the ~~likely~~ partners he could find.

When he met Beatrice Silverman, however, and clicked miraculously into what he must at first have identified as the relationship of his dreams, he found himself abruptly free from fooling around with such games, and perhaps the least complicated effect of their union was that, locked inside it, they could hear each other a lot more clearly than they could hear the war. On the day they met, when Norman revealed to Bea that he really knew nothing about classical music, they skipped the concert and returned instead to his suite, indeed to his room in Dunster House.

There, over the months that followed, they made a kind of House history by successfully defying the rules that limited female visitors to the hours of 1:00 to 7:00 PM. As they moved deeper and deeper into what was for Norman his first adult three dimensional intimate relationship, he must--however complex his subsequent feelings would become--have received an initial charge of almost overwhelming excitement. At the same time, he was certainly receiving the envious admiration of the whole Harvard house system.

Bea was quite attractive, dark-haired with a beautiful, heart-shaped face--though conventionally overweight at 150 pounds on her five-foot one-inch frame--but she was most remarkably striking in her social presence. In the conventional Cambridge community, she with justice saw herself as liberated from prevailing bourgeois fears of "ruin," and-- admitted to Dunster, Advocate and Signet inner circles in the role of Norman's intimate companion--she argued the case for such liberation at every opportunity. "I was a big loudmouth," she told Hilary Mills forty years later, which is a way of saying that she was confidently outspoken on matters sexual, social and political. Politically, she was a woman of the left. Socially, and, more specifically, sexually, she represented a better informed version of the vision expounded by Norman when, as a freshman, he had irritated some classmates with his "theory" of promiscuous free love.

The idea that he would ever meet a young woman as undaunted by convention as Beatrice Silverman must from time to time have occurred to the young theoretician, but even he would probably have

identified such thinking as fantasizing. Certainly everyone else did, so that when Bea actually appeared on the scene there was a slightly unreal aura about her presence, and Norman's demeanor reflected this. His affectation of a kind of mock amazement at her unconventionality was probably not all affectation, but, at least as far as people on the outside could see, he was uncomplicatedly pleased and proud of their relationship.

The couple became the center of a crowd, and the convertible was their official vehicle: filled often to overflowing with admiring friends, blatantly functional with its mattress installed on the floor of the trunk, it came ~~so successfully~~ to symbolize a kind of delightful moment in the collective history of their circle that, decades after it had broken down and was abandoned, the old Chevrolet would be rolling still in the memories of more than a few.

The Norman Mailer who two years before had slipped anonymously into the Harvard Yard was now, ~~on the face of it,~~ ~~really~~ relishing both his status in the community and his closeness to his remarkable partner. His only obvious problem was how he was going to introduce Bea to his ever-watchful family, and he was ~~apparently~~ in no hurry to get that task accomplished. As the first semester ended and the second got under way, the young author was even more silent with Brooklyn about the subject of the new relationship than he was about the subject of America's new war status, which finally did begin to force itself into occasional, if rather oblique, mention. (The first took the form of an

acknowledgement of food rationing: dining-service portions were being radically reduced, and Norman sent out a call for supplemental food packages from home.)

He also settled into his new academic schedule, a normal four course load, which featured, in addition to the ongoing Philosophy A, the ~~sequentially~~ continuing Engineering Sciences 6b, English 70b (major American writers of the 20th century, taught by Howard Mumford Jones), and the next Creative Writing workshop, English A-3, under the much admired Theodore Morrison. This semester would ^{α/50} serve as a ~~kind of transition period with regard to Norman's writing, as he begins a process that will, eventually, wean him away from the short-story as his characteristic form of fictional expression.~~

More immediately important, however, is that in some of this semester's fiction he presents us with a complicated vision that speaks not only to the obvious but also to darker, less obviously operative elements in his newly reconstituted world. ~~The obvious~~ ^{These} ~~operative elements~~ include certain literal facts: Pearl Harbor, the burning of the Scarboro, Norman's initiation into intimacy with Bea, and even--since two of the stories feature ~~carefully structured~~ automobile rides--the acquisition of Uncle Dave's celebrated car. All of these things get foregrounded in one way or another, but it is the way Norman goes past and beyond them that makes this new fiction so important.

"Three Fingers of Friendship," the very first story of the term, presents the accidental coming together of a man and a woman

as a simple matter with simple consequences: they meet, they drink, they sit there--remarking on the memorability of Pearl Harbor--and are happy in each other's company. But "Land Lashed," written two months later, mixes simple and complicated elements together into a difficult compound. It is easy to recognize that the story is responding directly to the burning of the Scarboro and to the fact that Norman is now initiated into the dynamics of intimate sexual union. Tony and Wren are recently estranged lovers, reunited for the moment as they drive recklessly in Tony's car toward a place where he has, since childhood, vacationed and at other times retreated into interior explorations of his private self.

The place is in a forest rather than at the seashore, but its function is very Scarboro-like: the forest of Jenkyn Wood contains the tiny, idyllic green valley that all his life has served Tony as a kind of personal chapel, and it is threatened now by a raging forest fire. As lovers, the two young people have only once achieved the exalted level of climax that Tony demands from the relationship, and that one time was during a tryst in the valley. Indeed, their inability to repeat this redemptive levitation has caused them to separate, and as they speed toward the fire they quarrel over Tony's unrelenting conviction that the function of union is to bring about transcendence, and that an imperfect union is not worth having. The fire destroys the little valley as the couple stands watching, and Tony rages that he has lost the only vantage point from which he could hope to "find the answer" to what we suppose is the question of self-realization. Wren's rebuttal

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that they after all have each other falls on deaf ears, and the story ends as an indictment of the failure of their love to deliver on its promise.

Since the Scarboro had burnt down before they met, Norman and Bea had of course never been to it together, and there is no indication that they drove down together later to contemplate its ruins. Rather than offering a literal version of an episode in his life, it would appear that Norman's story is trying to cross two quite different but extremely important lines of personal reference. The burning of the hotel, on the one hand, and Bea's entrance into his life, on the other, vectored sharply across the landscape of Norman's imagination, and despite their obvious differences they cross at an important point of intersection. The story shows that what the two experiences deliver with almost identical impact is an explosive sense of personal loss. The Scarboro-like green valley is the place where as a child the story's hero imagined a future for himself as a fully realized, ~~confidently~~ mature adult. Somehow the process of his development into such a figure has failed, and the destruction of the valley represents for him the loss of the only place where he might have had a second chance to re-shape his adult life ~~successfully~~.

round?

A major problem in that adult life, of course, is Tony's failure to design his union with Wren into the vehicle that he thinks it ought to be. In his vision, monogamous union ought to empower its participants, moving them into a state of self-realization ~~measurably~~ greater than they could achieve separately.

It clearly was his expectation that this would come about, and just as clearly he has been faced with the fact that it has not and presumably will not happen. His sense of loss here is like his feeling about the vanished valley: something he had always needed and wanted and believed in was suddenly gone. These are new elements in Norman's work, and we can hardly question that they reflect some sense of new development in his life. In the case of his relationship with Bea we can see that, whatever the pleasures of full sexual union, disappointment was setting in early. One unmistakable reason for this was that Norman's expectations for the experience were very great, but another of his stories from this season suggests that the problem was not necessarily so simple nor, indeed, so high minded as this. [Footnote the "Charde and Dana" story, as an unrealized, but related effort.]

The story is called "Retreat," and it presents a fictional version of how two Harvard undergraduates respond to the fact that their country has entered the second World War: It is December 8, 1941, and they are furious. They had dreamed of taking an apartment in Greenwich Village after graduation and living the free, indeed the licentious life there while one of them wrote and the other painted. The life they had imagined was to be, one of them recalls, a kind of idyll:

You write, I paint; we eat good, we eat so good we eat well, we sleep when we want, and work when we want; we go whoring and tailing and slutting; we make love, we eat, we work, we drink, in short, we live. We're not gonna get caught like everybody else; we're gonna live for the sake of living.

"I coulda taken a year in the army," one of them says, "but not five years the way it's gonna be, without a chance to open our mouths, or live while the living's best."

The other tells of having heard President Roosevelt's Day of Infamy speech as it was broadcast that morning into the examination room in Memorial Hall:

Everybody was quiet during the speech, nobody was making a sound, and then suddenly Roosevelt finished, and the radio started cheering, and then everybody in the room got up and started cheering too. Every living bastard of them got up to yell, and I looked at myself and I was standing and yelling too.

They are appalled at themselves for sharing some of the community's patriotic fervor, and specifically to renounce such affiliation they drive out--again quite recklessly--into the countryside on a freezing afternoon.

Near Concord they stop by a grove of white birches, on a stone fence-bordered farm--"right out of a Robert Frost poem"--and hike in to a small, frozen lake. Here, until nightfall, they self-consciously act out rituals of destruction and creation: first gouging and smashing the ice on the water, then attempting to improvise a hut out of dead branches and brushwood on the lake's edge. Working without tools, they exhaust themselves and are forced finally to watch the unsecured hut collapse in the wind. It is plain that the external forces in their lives are irresistibly strong, and in the end the defeated pair acknowledge the helplessness of their historical situation: "Let's go home," one comrade says to the other, "let's go home to Cambridge."

As a direct response to Pearl Harbor, "Retreat" is a kind of monument to the controlling authority of the war in Norman's external, historical environment. In this respect the story does for Pearl Harbor what "Land Lashed" did for such other new developments in his life as the Scarboro destruction and Bea's arrival: it imprints the event on the fictional record and acknowledges its power. But the relationship between the two young men, and the vision of the good life that they share, stands so dramatically in contrast to the relationship between the lovers in "Land Lashed" that it is impossible not to identify this male bonding as a specific and even pointed alternate model to that of monogamous heterosexual union.

Just as the danger of disaster posed by the forest fire unites the lovers in the earlier story, the declaration of war in the wake of Pearl Harbor brings the two friends together as allies. In the case of the lovers, however, the reunion is unsuccessful; the partners cannot, as it were, rise to the occasion and discover the needed strength in their sexual relationship. The story is very specific on this point: it is the intensity of climax in the act of sexual congress that has proved insufficient. With the two young men, of course, actual carnality is relegated to the realm of recreational promiscuity, but the passionate union that forms between them as they act out their mutual defiance on the lake's edge never breaks down. They are defeated by the adversity they fight, but they are defeated together, emerging in the end closer and more firmly bonded as a result of their shared experience.

Unlike the lovers, they know how to act with respect to each other.

The stories written thus far in the term had carried Norman forward into the month of March, 1942. It had been back in the previous November, well before Thanksgiving--as well as before the Scarboro fire and Pearl Harbor and his meeting with Bea--that he completed "Harmony in Three Soprano Voices," the story that concluded with the boy in bed crying out "Goddamn you" to the robbers he imagined in the dark all around him. Recoiling, we may imagine, from the nakedness of that moment, Norman in the months thereafter had written exclusively of adult experience, but in doing so it seems ~~finally~~ that he had the whole while only been curving back towards the moment of childhood.

This time around, however, instead of offering an exercise to demonstrate how the children of innocently ignorant parents can become mysteriously frightened, he re-conceives of childhood in the context of his most recent fictional illuminations. Having in "Land Lashed" represented the failure of adult heterosexual compatibility, he now offers a demonstration of how such failure, when carried far enough, creates fear--along with anger and hatred--and then traumatically inflicts it upon the issue of its own union. The story is "Maybe Next Year," the boy at its center is nine years old, and, caught in the heterosexual trap that brought him into the world, he is totally defined by his fear.

There is no questioning that the vision of terrible heterosexual warfare in this new story grows directly out of "Land Lashed," and to that degree out of autobiographical experience. But

the way the experience of the child in "Maybe Next Year" refers to Norman's own childhood is much less easy to ascertain. If the boy in the story very much resembles the fearful Norman in "Harmony," the parents in the new story bear no apparent resemblance at all to the Norman-worshipping Fan and Barney: they hate each other and hate their son, whom they sadistically beat and torment. Only in the vision of nightmare could such a substitution seem real, and in fact "Maybe Next Year" represents the initial fictional venture of Norman Mailer onto nightmare's totemic terrain.

It is almost as if the "Harmony" child in his Brooklyn bed has finally dozed off, baseball in hand, exhausted from his quaking about robbers, and dreamed himself a different home with a different set of parents: two who bear only the faintest, most grotesque resemblance to those who had gone ~~pleasantly~~ out to a Brooklyn movie just hours before. This new pair know no pleasure together, unless the wife's shriek-like incessant attack on the masculinity of both father and son can be sadistic pleasure, and unless the father's terrible capacity to absorb such punishment can be its masochistic counterpart. The boy's defense is to flee out of the house and into a strange, dream-like landscape where the tall, razor-sharp grass cuts ~~castratingly~~, where the dirt and foulness of excrement is everywhere, and where the shining rails of the trackbed reflect back an agonizingly split vision of the running fugitive.

The landscape's only population is a colony of frightening, robber-like figures in the form of freight-train vagrants, men

encamped in a clearing by the tracks. They menace the boy, threatening to befoul him, but at worst they are only a faint echo of what waits brooding back at the home to which their rejection sends him ~~dream-fleeing in return~~. The father beats the boy--whose primary form of expression is a kind of repertoire of weeping--and then is forced by the hate-filled mother to lead a group of vigilantes against the vagrant camp, pouring her violence upon their heads as the father has upon the head of the boy. In turn, the boy smashes stones onto the skull of a vagrant crippled in the vigilante attack, thus completing the terrible cycle the nightmare parents have begun and showing in the process that he has inherited the full legacy of their emotional estate.

32
In waking life, of course, Norman's actual childhood relationship with his parents, problematic though it in many ways was, bore no ~~rationaly-comparable~~ resemblance to the shocking, gothic horrors of "Maybe Next Year." If the little boy in "Harmony" actually had drifted off to such a nightmare he no doubt would have been eager to awaken from it back to a comparatively protected Brooklyn life with "Pop" and "Fan." But if nightmares do in fact inform waking life, then this one may tell us that the dark underside of Norman's imagination retained a response to the ~~after~~ ~~traumatic~~ fearfulness of his early years--a trauma that was not easily nor accurately to be plumbed by rational measurement.

The story, as a kind of protruding tip of a buried mass, also promises the prospect of future excavations that will reveal many landscapes to link up with this one, all of them drawing us deeper

and deeper below the structured surface of rationality which--for the present moment--makes "Maybe Next Year" seem just an ~~oddball~~, offbeat aberration. Norman himself, at this time and even later, was inclined to attribute the story's haunting strangeness to the fact that he had been reading Faulkner for the first time--an experience, he seemed to imply, that might nudge anyone toward nightmare. The manuscript was submitted to The New Yorker (where it drew a respectful rejection letter from drama critic John Mosher), to Professor Robert Hillyer, who was chairing two of the local competition committees, and Norman submitted it as well to his fellow officers at The Advocate, where it was promptly accepted.

He had become increasingly more active since being elected to an editorial board seat on the magazine, and had accepted responsibility for organizing the screening of candidates for the March election of new members. He devoted, as he wrote home to Brooklyn, six to ten hours a week to this task for the first six weeks of the second semester, and at the same time he took more and more of an interest in assembling new issues of the magazine. No issues had been published by the new editorial board, and by March of 1942 Norman himself had three manuscripts ostensibly awaiting publication: the brothel scene from "No Percentage," (which actually he had decided to withdraw), "Right Shoe on Left Foot," and now "Maybe Next Year." He didn't mind admitting, he said in his letters home, that he was getting impatient to see some of this work in print.

He would soon learn the reason for the delay, and in the process he would find himself immersed in what would prove to be a two-stage dramatization of the magazine's final wartime indulgence in the politics of undergraduate intrigue. The war was about to catch up with The Advocate, breaching the walls of a citadel that had at once been the nurturing place for real talent and for innocently preposterous games of one-upmanship. During 1942-1943, the academic year to come, the magazine would find itself so disrupted by external distractions and internal thinning-out of the ranks that continuing as a productive organization became impossible, and The Advocate would suspend publication for the duration of the war.

For close to the last time, though, in the spring of 1942 nothing seemed to its members to be as important as the inner drama being played out in its editorial power structure, and Norman was as riveted by the spectacle as anyone involved. The drama was one of deception, and the deceiver was Pegasus John Crockett. He had assembled the copy for what should have been the March issue in November, and while he had then expressed distaste for publishing an issue that featured only undergraduate writing, and most of that from members of the board itself, he had said no more. Privately, though, in revolt against Barton and most of the board, he determined to delay, if not altogether to abort this issue, and to substitute instead a very grand, very secretly prepared "75th Anniversary Issue."

He and his "aesthete" co-conspirators, of whom Bowden

Broadwater must have been one, assembled the contraband materials, transporting them to a printer for preparation. The surprise issue would feature material from such former Advocate greats as Wallace Stevens, Conrad Aiken, and Robert Hillyer, as well as guest contributors ^{Such as} ~~like~~ Djuna Barnes, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams. Phillip Johnson would contribute a six-page essay on Harvard architecture. Out of twenty-four literary contributors, only two would be students: past-Pegasus Bowden Broadwater, and his successor, John Crockett.

When these two conspirators had gleefully seen to its circulation in mid-April, the issue attracted considerable notice outside The Advocate organization, most of it favorable ("Worse luck!" Norman remembers saying), and its effect inside was close to anarchic. President Barton summoned all members to an emergency meeting, publically regretting the deception of the literary editor but assuming full responsibility himself. A wholly unrepentant Crockett was castigated but--in consideration of the thoroughgoing success of his surprise issue-- spared dismissal. Though the "Anniversary" issue had run up three times the usual printing bill, thus doubling overnight the standing Advocate debt, the original March issue along with a new one were quickly prepared for publication and came out in May and in June.

The May "Spring Fiction Issue" featured "Right Shoe on Left Foot," which attracted praise in The Crimson; and "Maybe Next Year" appeared in the June "Commencement Issue," which Norman told the family was "the best one I've come across since I've been in

college." A dissenter to this would surely have been Pegasus Crockett, whose detestation of Barton and all his works and friends grew over the years into something like legend, but was perfectly apparent even at the time. For the moment, presumably, Crockett was content to allow history to judge which issue of the magazine had been the best that spring, but he would have one last opportunity to assert himself in the role of Advocate arch-deceiver. Perhaps he thought of it at the boisterous, but to him surely parochial April party the organization gave in its suite of offices to welcome the newly elected associates. His party would be in the fall, and, unlike the April party, it would be anything but parochial. It would, in fact, be the party to end an Advocate era.

absolutely
lovely

The Signet Society, still very vigorous, continued to add members to its ranks, and Norman participated in the society's May initiation ceremonies with enthusiasm, assisting his stage-frightened friend Jack Maher through the ordeal. Commencement itself was ^{also} being accelerated--most freshmen were to begin their sophomore year in June instead of September--and Norman would thus be taking his final exams earlier than usual. Professor Morrison, whose English A-3 creative writing workshop required no exam, gave Norman an A for the term, having admired his leadership qualities in the class sessions at least as much as his work. The Engineering course examination had been particularly difficult however, and Norman was relieved when he got a C for the course, though he was a little disappointed to get another one for the year-long Philosophy course. The Modern American Literature course--where he

had started reading Faulkner among others--brought him a B.

Beyond the area of classes, Norman's ^{financial} personal affairs had got into some disarray, and in late April he arranged for a \$150 loan from the Dean's fund so that he could pay off ^{his} \$138 term bill, ~~which had been pressing~~. At the same time, he ran afoul of a new, more demanding Physical Training Program requirement: required to participate a full four hours a week, he took too many cuts in the closely monitored program and was put on probation for the first month of the fall term as a result. The Dean's office also notified him that because his grades had fallen below the level of honors, he would not be eligible to apply for a scholarship in his senior year. These notices, with copies sent home to Brooklyn, set off another round of concerned communication with his parents, who had already been worried about him.

Norman, having become all but inseparable from Bea, had tried since the start of the second semester to spend as much time in the Cambridge/Boston area as possible, and of course his family noticed his increasingly elaborate excuses for not coming home, as well as the cut-short vacations. He drove the ^{nearly expired} rapidly expiring car down in early May, so that Fan could either sell or junk it, but the visit was a very short one. Uncle Dave had offered to help Norman if he encountered financial difficulties in his plan to spend the summer in Boston, but Fan remained characteristically concerned. ~~The fact was that~~ Norman had always come home to his family, specifically to Long Branch, during the summers, and though the Scarboro was no more, Aunt Beck had a place for him in neighboring Monmouth Beach.

Instead, he insisted on staying in Boston. As always, Fan finally came around to seeing things Norman's way, but she was ^{not} ~~hardly~~ reassured by one of his most central arguments in support of his plan. Earlier in the spring he had applied for and received his first social security card, and he already had landed a job, he told her: starting June 12 he would be earning \$15 a week plus room and board as an attendant at the Boston State Hospital. It was a public facility for the emotionally disturbed, and locally it was referred to as the insane asylum.

END PART 3, CHAPTER TWO

Chapter Two

Part Four

i

Norman moved out of Dunster House and on Friday, June 12, moved into the West Wing of the Male Attendants' House of Boston State Hospital, whose buildings were laid out campus-fashion on grounds at 591 Boston Centre. With him came Douglas Woolf, a student-writer who had appeared with Norman in the May Advocate, and the two undergraduates began a schedule of twelve hour days as apprentice-attendants.

Assigned to assist the veteran attendants, they mopped the lounges and wards and helped herd the inmates around from sleeping to recreational to eating areas, monitoring them in their routine activities and getting sunburnt with them in the outdoor exercise compounds. Crushed by the work load and shocked by the brutality of the attendants and other staff members, Norman and his friend quickly realized that they were in over their heads. Woolf left at mid-week and Norman lasted just eight days before he collected \$20 in salary and plunged through the streaming dark in a rainstorm to seek shelter at Bea's family home in Chelsea. There he called his parents in Brooklyn, told them something about how difficult the hospital job had been, and explained that he was going to find another job in Boston to support himself as he stayed there and

wrote for the rest of the summer.

Norman's experience at the hospital made an enormous impression upon him, as subsequent events would reveal, but for the moment he had little time to think about it. He moved into a one-room Boston apartment at 4 Otis place, which he shared with Woolf and another writer-friend, and began canvassing the town for a job. Having been turned down by the personnel offices at Harvard University, the Boston Navy Yard and every newspaper in town, he finally was hired by the C. F. Hovey Company, a department store, as a counter-^{attendant}~~boy~~ in its large soda fountain: 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday, \$18.00 a week and free meals. "Did a full day's work today," he reported on June 23, "and found it rather pleasant. Much better than the insane asylum."

At the same time he got some disappointing news on a long-shot competition he had entered in the spring. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer annually offered apprentice screen-writer positions to half a dozen college seniors--nominated by their home institutions--whose writing samples won out in the final, ~~Nation-wide~~ contest conducted at the Hollywood studio. Despite the fact that he was not yet a senior, Norman had been nominated by Robert Hillyer, who chaired the Harvard local nomination committees for both the Story Magazine and the MGM competitions, as Harvard's nominee for both awards. Since no student writer had ever won the Story competition twice, Norman was not surprised when that fell through, but he had thought a lot about the screen-writing position. It offered starting pay of \$50.00 a week, with options over a seven^T year period that could

raise the salary to a weekly \$300 or more, and could even, under the right circumstances, involve a deferment from the draft.

He had tried not to get his hopes up, but he was disappointed when he learned in late June that he was not ~~to be one of the writers~~ selected. He had submitted a raft of writing samples: "The Greatest Thing in the World," "Maybe Next Year," "Three Fingers of Friendship," "Land Lashed," "Right Shoe on Left Foot," and a story called "Charde and Dana," written the previous March for Morrison in A-3.¹

Another fragment of writing undertaken in the spring connects significantly with the summer: "The Darndest Things Happen on Mars" survives as four handwritten pages of "A Three-act play by Norman K. Mailer." Norman wrote it while taking English A-3, showed it to Theodore Morrison--who encouraged him to continue with it--sent it home to the family, and used it as part of his excuse for staying the summer in Boston. He regularly reported that he was "working on my play" and consulting with people in a Harvard drama group about a possible production.

The fragment, which may be all that ever got done, presents the comic situation of a young couple who seem to be in a New York apartment but may actually be on Mars. The girl is pregnant and

¹ A depiction of two couples on a fast and furious night out in Boston nightclubs and hotels, "Charde and Dana" shares with "Land Lashed" a vision of how heterosexual union is self-defeating. Unlike that story, however, ~~this one~~ ^{the latter} is almost wholly without merit.

Norman received the news of his rejection in a June 18, 1942 letter from Kenneth MacKenna, Scenario Editor at MGM.

their problem is that they are monogamously committed to each other in a distopian society that condemns monogamy, encourages promiscuity, and enforces state-run child centers. Now, the lovers are trying to decide, should they deal with this governmental interference, [?] ~~in their private lives?~~ The play is significant not ~~aspecially~~ because of what it presents but because it links Norman as a writer to the theatre, [?] and this linkage continues into the summer.

British spelling?

Predictably, Norman didn't stay long in the soda fountain. Less than two weeks after starting it he quit and went to work for "board" but no salary as a press agent for the Joy Street Playhouse. He wrote home enthusiastically:

I write releases for them, see to poster distribution, talk to the drama critics of the newspapers, fill in an acting walk-on part if necessary, watch rehearsals, listen to the audience comments. . . .It's a wonderful opportunity.

The theatre was in a carriage house at 36 Joy Street, on Beacon Hill, seating 100 people at most. It housed a group called The New England Repertory Company, ^{which} and during the weeks of Norman's association, ~~with it~~ produced "Criminal at Large," by Edgar Wallace, and "The Vinegar Tree," by Paul Osborne.

Norman explained in a letter to his parents that he would work for the theatre, [?] prepare a play of his own, and accept some financial support from his Uncle Dave.

Since I'll see a play from selection to casting through rehearsals, and direction, and staging, I'll learn the theatre inside out which is what I need if I want to write plays. Besides, it's journalistic experience: I get to know all the newspaper tricks, get to know the reporters and drama critics, and have a chance to break

into the newspapers with a feature story. . . .I worked today and I loved it.

As a closing remark, he adds: "It's a good deal better than minding lunatics or wrestling dishes."

The theatre was certainly modest, asking for a minimum 50-cent contribution as admission, but it had been in operation for twenty years and, under the direction of Catherine Huntington, was locally respected. A feature story about the Playhouse appeared in the Boston Globe at the end of that summer, and in stressing the youthfulness of the company it mentioned the names of some of the younger associates. "Harvard senior Norman Mailer, 19, of Brooklyn N.Y." it said, "helps with publicity."

Thanks to the generosity of both his parents and Uncle Dave, Norman moved to a better room at 4 Otis Street, where he welcomed his mother for a late-July visit. He had asked Fan to bring his sister Barbara, but Fan may have wanted to come by herself so that she could discover, undistracted, what this Boston business was all about. As if to answer the question, Norman took her to the Joy Street Playhouse for a performance, and it is even possible that he introduced her to Bea before hurrying his mother back onto the train for home.

The rest of the summer passed in an organized way. He kept in touch with the extremely active summer community in Cambridge through Signet and the Harvard Dramatic Club, and when the Joy Street Playhouse offered a Harvard Summer School special performance, Norman recruited twenty people to attend. In mid-August he and Bea went out to a Cambridge cocktail party co-

sponsored by Signet and The Dramatic Club, in honor of Paul Robeson, Uta Hagen and Jose Ferrer, among others, who must have been appearing in a local production. The rest of his time he divided between swimming at the beach with Bea, working at ~~the~~ Joy Street, reading, sketching an outline for a novella that would occupy him ~~centrally~~ at the end of the year, and taking notes in preparation for writing a play based on his time at the State Hospital.

His most dramatic experience there had taken place about half-way through his eight¹ day stay, and so hypnotically did it affect him that he could readily recount it in interviews thirty-five and forty years later, always with perfect consistency of detail:

A colored kid went ape, a kid I knew, in another ward. He'd broken a table, and he had the two legs in each hand for clubs. The attendants were moving in on him with mattresses, trying to smother him back into a corner. But he broke through, and I tackled him. Then they closed in on him and took turns beating him until they knocked him unconscious, which took a while because he was tough. I didn't hit him, but I knew I was perhaps three months away from that kind of thing.

He wanted to write about it, and he also wanted to take Bea down and introduce her to more of the family, and an invitation from his Aunt Beck provided the perfect opportunity for both. The aunt with whom he had spent so many summers at the Scarborough was living this summer in Monmouth Beach, close by Long Branch. She may or may not have been leasing a hotel, but she had some kind of accommodations and she wanted her nephew to visit her. So toward the end of the month Norman took a midnight bus down to Brooklyn, stayed only a day, and then proceeded to his Aunt's. Bea, in turn,

took a bus to Monmouth Beach ~~directly~~, and the couple presented themselves for inspection.

Bea's famed self-possession must have taken something of a testing as Beck and Rose and Jennie, not to mention the numerous cousins led by the formidable Osie, came to meet the girl that must ~~already~~ have been the subject of much conversation ~~between them and~~ ~~Far~~. The parties all seem to have got on reasonably well, and Bea took the bus back as Norman settled into ~~specially~~ prepared quarters to address his "insane asylum play." He began it on August 31, worked steadily for two weeks, and completed the 113 ¹/₁ page typescript on September 14.

The specific action of the play does, indeed, center around the subduing and subsequent beating of a young black inmate, a dope addict, who has run amok. The episode--which is played off stage--is employed, however, to illuminate the nature of the institutional ^{illuminate} ~~community~~ ^S, and to address the question of how brutality is elevated to a level of social respectability by originally decent and civilized people. The play's central characters are David Land and Ralph Hughson, undergraduates who have come to work as attendants for the summer. Ralph is a pre-med, self-confident and successful at adjusting to the job, while David, a school of social work student, is struggling, full of self-doubt, and something of a failure as an attendant.

The two students are aware that in normal times they would never have been hired as attendants, for they are hardly typical of the people who work in the hospital, but the manpower shortage

created by the war has got them their jobs. They work in a world designed to control rather than rehabilitate the ~~patient~~ inmates, and the control is exercised by a variety of devices, chief among which is the technique of supervision developed by the staff of attendants, or "Hacks," to whom Ralph and David are apprenticed. In the absence of effective medication, the Hacks rely on cigarettes (the air of the play is dense with clouds of tobacco smoke), and on regimented routine in the moving of wards full of patients through sleeping, eating and recreational schedules. Control is also exercised through cajoling, humoring, and even of affectionate bonding with cooperative patients, but the centrally indispensable ~~element in the compound of attendant~~ technique is brutality. If the patients will submit to control for no other reason, they submit because they are afraid.

as with Gnost
Fear, for Norman, had probably always been the most authentic emotion; certainly he made it so in his fiction. But when he got to the hospital and for the first time in his life encountered the administration of fear as public policy, the shock of recognition seems to have penetrated through to the deepest center of his imagination. There is a kind of totemic character to the resonance of his response: his title for his play, "The Naked and the Dead," was to remain associated with him for the rest of his life, haunting with its cadence the inner ear of the postwar literary world. Its specific meaning in the play speaks to the interplay between the brutalized and the brutal, the patients and the attendants, to be sure, but all fearful victims everywhere

submitting to the unfeeling dominance of all enforcers.

When Ralph and David argue the matter at one point in the play, David takes it out of the context of hospitals and clinically identifiable patients by saying: "This all happened on a bigger scale in Germany. Germany is like an attendant!" David is clearly the autobiographical figure in the text, and his clumsy ineffectuality as an attendant is presented ~~finally~~ as a major point in his favor. Just as Norman had done, he tackles an out-of-control patient, who is then beaten into unconsciousness by the other attendants. The patient is next taken to a hydro-therapy treatment room, where he is immobilized and immersed up to his neck in water as a pacification technique. Whatever the intrinsic value of the treatment, in the hands of the attendants in this room-- which include a ~~thoroughly~~ brutalised male attendant and ~~an~~ ^{the} amorously ~~inclined~~ Nurse Marion Gannon--the process is merely a method of frightening and, when necessary, torturing helpless patients into a state of abject obedience.

David decides to appeal to the authorities in the hospital in order to expose and arrest the brutality; an attempt that triggers the real action of the play. Aware of his intentions, the other attendants meet and conspire to frighten David into resigning from his job and leaving the hospital without sounding the alarm. Their intention is to trap him into being beaten by a crazed patient, and they persuade Ralph to work with them against his erstwhile friend. A very considerable strength in the play is the persuasive way the attendants reason, both with Ralph and with each other. Far from

seeing themselves as cruel or sadistic, they ^{believe} ~~understand~~ their own actions ^{to be} ~~as critically~~ necessary to the successful operation of an otherwise anarchic hospital. They indict the hospital administrators, doctors and head nurses as unrealistic bureaucrats who hypocritically endorse unworkable codes of staff conduct; and this aspect of their argument is in a sense proved true by David himself. Desperately though he tries, David is never able to find a sufficiently responsible supervisor with whom he can lodge his complaint. Neither the doctors nor Supervisor Nurse Tashko are ^{interested.} ~~available for such purposes.~~ As he attempts to find them, David is warned of the plot against him, so that when the violent patient is unleashed upon him he is able ~~successfully~~ to defend himself. In the fight to bring the patient under control, however, David is horrified to discover a thrill of pleasure in himself as he beats the man into submission. He and Ralph finally see the hopelessness of staying on ~~at the hospital,~~ so they both resign ~~their positions~~ and leave for what they hope will be a restorative fishing trip.

Langley - G. W. K. W.
Though in fact it is by no means lacking in power, Norman found himself unsure about the play--it was, at most, only the second one he had ever written--and he resolved to get some reactions to it before considering further revision. When he takes ^{the} ~~its~~ story up again the following spring, it will be to re-envision the action in the form of a long and tortured novel, but first he had a few things he needed to do. Earlier in the summer he had been reading Malraux, and was struck by a line in Man's Fate: "All that men are willing to die for, beyond self-interest, tends. . . to

justify that fate by giving it a foundation in dignity." He thought that "The Foundation" might be just the right title for a novella he had been planning, and he wanted to start on it as soon as he was free. Claiming first priority, however, was the need to move out of Aunt Beck's, pull his things together in Brooklyn, and get started on his senior year at Harvard.

ii

Norman's original plan had been to live in Dunster House alone during his final two semesters, and he had reserved the two-bedroom suite B-41 accordingly. Marty Lubin was well into medical school by this time and probably ineligible to live in an undergraduate house, and in any case Norman's relationship with Bea seemed to call for an increased measure of privacy in his domestic arrangement. It was only when he saw that there was a \$45.00 per semester difference between a single and a shared rent that Norman rethought his position, and went in search of an appropriate suite-mate.

He soon found Hal Katz, who had roomed with Lubin at Thayer freshman year, with Norman and Lubin in the Claverly triple sophomore year, had lived in Dunster the year before, and had been a cost-sharing contributor to the Chevrolet's upkeep. Hal was clearly a good enough friend so as to create no complications concerning Bea's presence in the suite--though it is perhaps a measure of the strain Norman and Bea subsequently put upon his

everyday life that Katz alone, among all their friends interviewed in later years about the couple's intimacy, remembered its overt sexuality as being pretentious.

In any case, he agreed to share the suite with Norman at least for the first semester, and they each selected their rooms. Norman, who took the smaller of the two, reported home that he liked the space even better than his fifth floor room of the year before. He also signed on to the Dunster House football team, where, at 135 pounds, he planned again to play guard. He dropped off the team after two weeks, however, pleading a lack of time and a need to start writing "a terrific story" he had been planning. At the same time, he gave a copy of his "Naked and the Dead" play to readers in the Harvard dramatic society.

Over ~~the summer~~ the summer, the military presence in the Yard, and indeed all the environs of Harvard Square, had increased to the point of saturation. Uniforms were everywhere, with squads ~~of uniformed men~~ drilling in the open spaces and marching to assemblies and to classes. Norman's own classes would emphasize Engineering Sciences more than in previous years, for his pre-registration consultation with his tutor informed him that he needed to take three such courses as a senior in order to fulfill the minimal program requirements. He registered for two in the Fall: Engineering Sciences 9a, an introduction to electrical, and 11a, which was the first in the aeronautical sequence. He must then have recalled--surely with some bemusement--the Boy's High Aviation Club, his application to MIT, and his years of

identifying himself as a future ~~Aeronautical Engineer~~.

He also registered for a drama course, English 3A, under the redoubtable Theodore Spencer. Spencer himself could have been part of the attraction, since he was extremely well known, but Norman's playwrighting and increased interest in the theatre probably determined the choice. It is notable that this would be the first (and last) semester at Harvard when he took no writing course of any kind. His fourth registered choice was Psychology 35, a lecture course in Clinical Psychology that concentrated on clinician/patient interaction. Finally, Norman decided to audit a semester of Fine Arts F, a survey of European painting from the neo-classical to the modern. On a very modest scale, he was continuing the painting he had begun the previous summer[not yet noted], and he apparently wanted to know more about it. As with the drama course, and, as events would prove, the psychology course as well, Norman liked the subject-matter of his courses to connect with something he was doing himself.

The acceleration that had affected every calendar at the University struck The Advocate's this fall, and Norman, along with Barton, Crockett and the rest of their board, participated in an early changing of the editorial guard. They stepped down right after the October publication of their September issue, in order to give new officers--who might not be in office for long--the chance to assemble a December issue. As a mid- October election was being arranged at a party-cum-meeting, Crockett commanded the attention of all with a thunderous announcement: Trying, as always, to

elevate the tone of this organization, he said, he had taken a Pegasus parting shot by contacting W. Somerset Maugham--who was visiting in the Boston area--and proposing that the author attend a cocktail party held in his honor at The Advocate offices. With a slight qualification, he reported, Mr. Maugham had been pleased to accept.

Writing home excitedly with the news, Norman identified the author of Of Human Bondage for his parents, and said that the big party was to take place if Maugham did not have to go to California. Crockett evidently reported then that the acceptance had become unqualified, and the party was ~~accordingly~~ scheduled for just after the upcoming board election. It was Crockett's idea to give a party on the grand scale, a party that every literate person at Harvard would die to attend, a party, in short, that for fair reasons or foul people would remember.

When Norman remembers the experience thirty[^]five years later he gets the date wrong--thinking that it took place at the same time as Crockett's hoax in connection with the "75th Anniversary Issue" the previous April--but he evokes the atmosphere remarkably. News of the party's coming, he says:

ran around the ring of Cambridge like a particle in a cyclotron. Nothing in four years at Harvard, not Dunkirk, Pearl Harbor or the blitz, not even beating Yale and Princeton in the same season for the first time in years, could have lit Harvard up more. Not to be invited to that party was equal to signifying that one had mismanaged one's life.

Norman and Bea were there, of course, as were all their friends and foes, all of the members of the current literati and such later

members of it as Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Joan Didion.

Four hundred people jammed into the five small rooms, Norman remembers, impacting into a mass so solid that movement through the interior was impossible. In this frozen state the guests drank drinks passed overhead from hand to hand and waited for the sight or at least some word of the fabled guest whom Crockett had captured. Nobody ever saw Maugham, though many claimed to have, and the final, definitive word, pronounced a day or two after the party ended, was that Maugham had never come. It was reported, though never confirmed, that his telegram in response to Crockett's original invitation has read: "Certainly not."

Depending on what historical authorities one consults, Crockett either phlegmatically confessed or passionately denied everything--he certainly denies it now--but the veterans of his "75th Anniversary" campaign felt that they knew their man. Knowing him, however, what could they do? "It was too late to ask Crockett to resign," Norman correctly remembers, "our term as Advocate officers was up; the new President and Pegasus were in. Because of the party, we were left with a debt that had just doubled again. The Advocate has never been solvent since."

Crockett's grand deception had arrested the whole Harvard community immeasurably more than the actual appearance of Mr. Maugham could have done, and ^{Combined} along with the "75th Anniversary" caper, it ^{ed} ~~combined to~~ mark the end of ^{the} ~~a~~ high-spirited, intrigue-~~ridden~~ peacetime Advocate era. Despite Barton's clarion editorial, in the September issue, calling for the continuation of the

magazine as the war went on, the end was almost upon them. Experience would quickly prove that the organization could not survive in an era of wartime, and as he was drawn more and more into that era himself Norman would start to leave The Advocate behind. *huh?*

~~Almost immediately~~ after the Maugham party, Norman had to turn his attention to a long anticipated visit from his sister Barbara. Having been accelerated through school like her brother, she was still fifteen years old in her senior year of high school, and the ostensible reason for her coming to Cambridge was to see Radcliffe and decide whether she wanted to apply. All through the autumn Norman's letters home had been laced with messages to her about what weekend to choose, what train to catch, what to wear on each of the three days, along with critiques of her poems and stories.

His relationship with his sister had always been close, and as his career at Harvard developed she followed it eagerly, always reading and responding to his writing, sending him her own modest output of manuscripts and complying completely with his editorial directions. On his visits home, from freshman year onward, she and her girlfriends in the neighborhood functioned as a sort of unofficial Norman Mailer admiration society, listening to his advice about life and love, asking his opinions about plays and movies, reading the books he recommended. Insofar as Norman thought of Barbara as a part of Brooklyn, he treated her as a member of this group, and still more--always calling her "the kid"--as a

member of the family team.

The function of the family team, it was ~~all but formally~~^e understood, was to offer Norman whatever support and admiration he might want and need, and this he was happy to receive from his sister. ^{But} He also thought of her, ~~though~~, as someone who would be going beyond Brooklyn, and who would need help and guidance in doing so. Norman clearly cared about his sister, and ~~clearly~~ felt that he should take ~~significant~~ responsibility for guiding her through an initiation into the great world. Quite apart from the question of Radcliffe, Norman wanted Barbara to come to Cambridge so he could share it with her, take her to the places and people from whom he had learned so much, introduce her to the young man he had pre-selected as her first grown-up boyfriend, and, above all, introduce her to Bea.

Barbara slept at Bea's family home in Chelsea in the few hours she was not whirling through her specially prepared weekend. Arriving on a Friday afternoon, she was taken on the grand tour, then dinner, then an evening that ended with a gathering of kindred souls listening intently to "Six Songs for Democracy," one of the first phonograph albums of revolutionary songs from the Spanish Civil War. Her special date the next day was Jack Maher, whom Norman had wanted her to meet the previous summer. He wrote to his unresponsive mother then, "I've gotten her a date with a swell friend of mine, about a week older than I am. He's short and honest, and unaffected so Barbara ought to feel comfortable with him." Then he added ~~directly to~~^{for} his sister: "Babbie, I told him all

about you, your age, etc so he's laboring under no misapprehensions."

Maher and Barbara had lunch and saw the Harvard-Army football game and had dinner and went to the big dance at Lowell House--all with Norman and Bea and their crowd. The couple clicked so perfectly that Sy Breslow was excused from his escort assignment for the next day, and Jack took his new friend to meet Pete Barton in palatial Eliot House. It was the great Houses, one after another, that overwhelmed Barbara, and she discovered in Bea ^{just} the mentor and model that Norman had intended ~~for her to discover~~. At the visit's end Norman's sister returned to Brooklyn on a wonderful train ride, having never got over to visit Radcliffe ~~at all~~. But she told her parents that she was absolutely sold on Cambridge, applied to Radcliffe forthwith, and the following summer she matriculated there as a freshman.

Fan came up to Cambridge that semester as well, and so did Uncle Dave, but Barney stayed at home. His trips had been very few, and there is no questioning the fact that his presence in Norman's life in these years was vastly overshadowed by Fan's. She ran the office where her husband worked, and very carefully kept him outside the process of financial and probably any other kind of decision ^{making}. Perhaps the only family feeling Norman and Barbara did not share was the son's complicated, and in many ways unconscious, admiration for the father. Norman was conscious enough of how little room there was for Barney as an active participant in most of Fan's strategic campaigns, and the son took

pains to single his father out in letters from time to time, but the way it was done only made the situation more clear.

Just before Fan's visit in mid-November, for example, Norman wrote^e a letter that first addressed the visit, and then talked about one of Barbara's short stories, but concluded with this:

I'm afraid I've been leaving you out of this, Dad. But the kid's literary future is important. How is the office, and the people there? Why don't you write me, and tell some stories about them. What about the barber who's a welder now? Come on, old geezer, you're backing down on the pen and paper stuff.

There is no shortage of affection here, but the fact is that most of Norman's letters to the family are not about affection, they are about one form or another of practical, often financial decision-making. In this context, Barney had no significant role to play.

not crystal clear
As long as Norman operated on his mother's assumption that abiding by the rules of the institution was compatible with his goal of self-realization as a writer, he would be sympathetic to his father's presence, and quite aware of the secret life that must be being led somehow, but the son would have no operational use for this knowledge.

For the moment, Norman's Uncle Dave was a much more important person than Barney. Having no children of his own, he was more than avuncular with Norman, visiting him in Cambridge at least once a year, generously participating in all decisions concerning financial need, and handsomely entertaining his nephew and his friends with bird and bottle. Fan was quite aware of Dave's activities, and her ambivalence toward him was pointed. She was certainly glad for his support, through the Sunlight Oil Company

and otherwise, but she resented his self-congratulatory style, and his conspicuous extravagance with Norman and his friends. Still, she must have been comforted by the knowledge that there was really no one ^{more} remotely ^{than herself} as important in her son's life as she was.

She, not Uncle Dave, was really Norman's banker; she was the one who read philosophy when Norman took a philosophy course, read Freud when he took a psychology course, read and circulated through the whole family every word he wrote; and it was she who ran a kind of production line of typists--no doubt including herself--to respond to his endless calls for more and more copies of more and more manuscripts. If her virtually constant expressions of concern and alarm provoked some conflict with her son, such conflict was superficial. It remained true that Norman's basic strategy as a student at Harvard was the one that Fan had originally proposed: seek such ~~appropriate approbation~~ ^{approval} as the institution and its ~~community can offer~~ ^{consequent}, and reap the rewards ~~produced by that approbation~~. It was only when Fan thought that Norman was losing track of this ^{plan} ~~principle~~ that she would question him, and when he reassured her, it was always on this point.

For example, there was the troublesome question of Norman's status in the draft. Virtually the first thing he did that semester was go to consult the university's "War Office" about whether Harvard could ensure protection from the draft until graduation, and he learned that:

They can guarantee nothing, no course can keep me from being drafted if they want to. However the University gives the case for every student, and its not too likely that I'll be drafted.

The Dean in fact did file a form with Norman's Brooklyn draft board (it was Board number 217, on Montgomery Street), informing them that Norman was indeed a senior, registered full-time in the Engineering Sciences program, and was scheduled to graduate in June, 1943. The Dean noted that the degree candidate had been in Group III (Distinction) as a Freshman, Group II (High Honor) as a Sophomore, and Group IV (High Pass) as a Junior. On a student-rating scale of Superior to Inferior, Norman was identified as "Above Average."

As a part of the classification process, his draft board required Norman to fill out and have notarized an elaborate questionnaire, which he duly executed. The very idea of the draft sent Fan into states of high anxiety, and her hopes that Harvard would stand between her son and such a fate made her particularly sensitive to any suggestion that he was not in the highest good standing with the institution. His grades junior year had dropped to their lowest level of the three years, and Fan begged Norman to bring them up lest he fall into probabtionary status. She was already frantic at the fact that the Dean's office had put Norman on a 30-day fall probation for over-cutting the Physical Training Program, fearful as she was that the draft board would somehow find out about it and take punitive action.

Norman was at pains ~~regularly~~ to reassure his mother concerning his intention to live up to the highest Harvard standards, and he found himself having to reassure with a vengeance after receiving a late November letter (copy to Brooklyn) from an

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increasingly para-military Dean's office. He was told by Assistant Dean R. W. Paul that, having for thirty-days taken no cuts, he was being relieved from his probation in the Physical Training Program, but that there was still a cause for concern:

The Board was disturbed to note that you began cutting as soon as you finished this month. I must warn you against a continuance of this practice. If we continue to receive reports of unexcused absences, then it will be necessary for us to take up once more the question of disciplinary action. I hope this will not be necessary.

In her anxiety, Fan thought that the cuts being referred to were unexcused absences from academic classes, and that her son was on the brink of real trouble. Norman wrote to correct her ("How many times do I have to tell you that my courses do not take attendance, and it doesn't matter whether I go to them or not?") and to assure her that they were not in any disagreement as to how he should proceed:

Please stop all your worrying, mother. I've assured you time and again that if anything bad every happens I'll be the first to let you know.

In the midst of this exchange of letters, both of them were no doubt glad to hear from Uncle Dave (who apparently had ~~his~~ sources everywhere) that the Brooklyn draft board had classified Norman 1-A, but privately had decided to defer him until sometime in May.

Norman did not, after all, want to be drafted any more than his mother wanted him to be, but the significance of his efforts to reassure her about his status at the university goes beyond the question of the draft. Nothing institutionally "bad" happened to him in four years at Harvard because, however different their styles of expression, he was no less committed than his mother to

the general principle of courting institutional approbation. Harvard had its rebels, even during this season of high patriotism, but Norman wasn't one of them. Apart from anything else, he was too busy.

Norman had been trying all semester to find time to begin writing "The Foundation" ^{which} that he had conceived of in August, but by early December he still hadn't started it. On November 28 a fire in Boston's crowded Coconut Grove nightclub killed almost 500 people, burning most of them beyond recognition. In an effort to get them recognized, the authorities publically displayed the bodies in the North End Mortuary, and Norman--having first reassured Brooklyn that he had been safely in Dunster House at the time of the fire--took Bea down to spend several hours at the display. The experience seems to have moved him closer to the starting of his story--which was to be very much about death--but he had first to meet his mid-December course paper deadlines.

His four thousand word survey, "Euripides and Philosophical Modernity" moved Theodore Spencer to the disapproving level of a C+, pulling Norman's overall final course grade in English 3A down to a B. But the courses that clearly were dovetailing with his plans to get back to fiction-writing were Fine Arts A and, even more pointedly, Psychology 35. Norman had enjoyed the advanced level psychology course, seldom missing a lecture and scrupulously reading the substantial assignments. There was a choice from five optional topics for the ^{SIX- EIGHT} ~~5~~ to ~~5~~ thousand word December "thesis," and Norman chose to "apply the theories discussed in lectures and

reading to the concrete facts of a life-history." The subject whose life he chose was Beatrice Silverman.

The resulting analysis of her family, personal history, interpretation of tests taken, and range of conclusions drawn could hardly have been more revealing. The paper was so revealing, indeed, that Norman couldn't send the 28¹/₂ page manuscript home for typing, and so he submitted his own rough typescript, which prompted his professor, in giving it a B, to note that "a clean copy of a final revision would have made this an A." Despite a professorial guarantee of strict confidentiality concerning the life-histories, Norman also took the precaution of changing Bea's name in the paper: he called her Cova, which is also the name of the chief female character in his about-to-be-written story.

In that story, Cova is for a time married to the story's chief male character, an Army Captain called Bowen Hilliard. In civilian life he had been a painter, and all through the story one sees the signs of Norman's own recent experiments with painting, as well as of his faithfully attended lectures in Fine Arts F. Norman began writing the story as soon as he got home for the holidays, clinging to his Malraux-inspired title--"The Foundation"-- through all revisions. It was fully nine months later that he would come to call it "A Calculus at Heaven."

iii

Bowen and Cova, like Norman and Bea, meet toward the end of

their college years at an "endowed university," and become both lovers and self-styled surprisers of the bourgeoisie. His accomplishments as a painter of pictures that expose the fatuities of a "Society Out of Whack"--as one of his paintings is called--parallel Norman's accomplishments as an Advocate writer, and in fact Bowen too "made the university's literary magazine" and "was known as the best artist in college." Cova, like Bea, makes a point of rejecting an artist-identity for herself, basing her claims to distinction instead on her liberated social and, especially, sexual points of view.

Priding themselves on believing in nothing but themselves and each other, the fictional couple start out as "two tight kids on a red silk coverlet," and move forward imagining a future not unlike, one supposes, the one contemplated in 1943 by Norman and Bea. They hope to maintain their integrity in a society which they see as virtually dedicated to its corruption, to fashion a relationship which will function as the central "absolute" in their lives, and to cultivate fully the flowering of Bowen's artistic powers. This will, in their view, provide their lives with a stabilizing foundation.

In Norman's presentation, however, the differences between the situations of the two couples are as important as the similarities. Bowen and Cova leave college not in the middle of a war but in 1930, at the start of the depression, and their backgrounds differ sharply from Norman and Bea's: Bowen's father is a career army officer, and Cova's family operates a successful commercial

architecture^{al} firm. Most important, theirs is to be the story of promise unfulfilled, and most of the narrative is devoted to an analysis of how integrity, mutual faith, and the inner-core of Bowen's imaginative vision come undone in the face of both external and internal pressure.

Perhaps the most striking thing about "A Calculus at Heaven" is its architecture. Like the "Naked and the Dead" play of the previous September, it goes beyond short-story limits, presenting episodes that are elaborately brought together into a full-scale dramatic action. Between the, in fact, the play and the novella mark Norman's farewell to short story writing as his basic fictional form. He had written some 35 stories through the previous summer, and "No Percentage" ~~of course~~ had been a kind of pastiche of stories both old and new, but from this point forward Norman will address, with remarkably few exceptions, only longer literary forms.

although he writes many more footnotes?
misleading, especially when his magazine and newspaper columns are considered
"Calculus" is about fifteen thousand words, and is divided into nine sections in a Dos Passos-like design to present a military action on a South Pacific island called Tinde. It is April, 1942, and Bowen Hilliard, long divorced from Cova, is in command of a group of four other soldiers--one of them a chaplain--pinned down by Japanese invaders in the basement of a ruined house. Bowen's life is reviewed in flashbacks in three of the four sections devoted to him, and in the last we learn that he is now facing a death that he has gone into the army to seek. The other four people in the house appear in alternate sections to Bowen's,

and they represent socially and psychologically contrasting presences: a weak-kneed Irish Catholic chaplain, a moronic Italian prole, a simple-minded New Jersey Jewish jock, and a half-Indian career sergeant. It is this man, Sergeant Rice, who alone lasts down to the bitter end with Bowen, waiting with him as the Japanese prepare to sweep them away.

Though both men have chosen to stay the course rather than surrender, they approach death quite differently. Bowen Hilliard found that his failure to live a life of integrity as a painter and as a partner for Cova had, in the final analysis, deprived his life of dignity, and he recalls the Malraux quotation from which Norman originally conceived the novel. "All that men are willing to die for," he remembers, justifies their fate "by giving it a foundation in dignity." By being willing to die for his country, in effect, the Captain can reclaim what he has lost, though in the process he must renounce his once-beloved detestation of an America wherein--as he early-on declared--"men work and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity."

The novella's ultimate title derives from Bowen's youthful derision at how American men approach death: "They wonder what the odds are on a heaven, and perhaps they make futile, desperate bets on it, adding up their crude moral calculus." Bowen's own bet, now, is that his wasted life will be made meaningful by his death, and this is precisely the point that his companion, the half-Indian Sergeant Rice has found himself worrying about. Unlike his captain, the survivor-minded sergeant has only at the end realized that he

Chapters

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IME lightly edited

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and returned to

W.C.I.D., who was

deeply affected by

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all the adverbs I cut