

Part I

Omega

On a foggy night in 1920, a ship was seen through
the fog of the Pacific coast, moving fast and
purposefully to drift into the North Star, and I thought
of the story of the Algonquin tribe who used to drift
down the coast of the Pacific coast.

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On a late-winter night in 1983, guiding my car through the fog of the Maine coast road, recollections of old campfires began to drift into the March mists, and I thought of the Abnaki Indians of the Algonquin tribe who used to dwell near Bangor a thousand years ago.

In the spring, after the planting of corn, the younger braves and squaws would leave the aged to watch over the

crops and the young, and would take their birch bark canoes south for the summer. Down the Penobscot River they would travel to Blue Hill Bay on the western side of Mount Desert where my family's house, built in part by my great-great-grandfather, Doane Hadlock Hubbard, still stands. It is called the Keep, and I do not know of all else it keeps, but the graves of a few Indians are here for some of them came ashore to build lean-tos each summer. Lazing in the rare joys of northern warmth, they would shuck clams on the flats at low tide and fight and fornicate among the spruce and hemlock when the water was up. What they got drunk on, I do not know, unless it was the musk of each other, but many a rocky beach in the first hollow behind the shore shows mounds of ancient clam shells, ground to powder by the centuries, a beach behind the beach to speak of ancient summer frolics. The ghosts of these Indians may no longer pass among us but something of their old sorrows and pleasures joins the air. Mount Desert is more luminous than the rest of Maine.

Even guidebooks for tourists seek to describe this virtue: "The island of Mount Desert, fifteen miles in

diameter, rises like a fabled city from the sea. The natives call it Acadia, beautiful and awesome."

Beautiful and awesome. We have a fjord four miles long in the middle of Mount Desert, a spectacular passage by water between promontories on either side. It is the only passage that can properly be called a fjord on the Atlantic coast of North America, yet it is but a part of our rock-hewn splendor. Near the shore, peaks rise abruptly a thousand feet to afford sailing craft the illusion of great mountains, and our finest anchorage, Northeast Harbor, is in summer, a dazzle of yachts.

"One would count on this place to be beautiful," my father was fond of remarking, "inasmuch as the Rockefellers bought up half of it. But you know they found it awesome, or why give it back?" All the same, he would worry at his conclusion. Why, indeed, had the Rockefellers given so generously to the National Park? Invariably, he came up with one answer. "It was the Abnaki Indians," my father would say. "The Rockefellers just couldn't face the bones of those Indians."

Perhaps it is the nearness of our mountains to the sea, but silences are massive here, and summers have an allure not simple to describe. For one thing, we are not an island to

attract people who follow the sun. We have almost no sand beach. The shore is pebble and clam-shell strand and twelve foot tides inundate the rocks. Washed by incoming waves are barnacles and periwinkles, rock-weed mussels, Irish moss, red seaweed, dulse. Sand dollars and whelks lie scattered in the throw of the surf. Kelp are everywhere and devil's apron wind around one's ankles. In the tide pools, grow anemone and sponge. Starfish and sea urchins are near your toes. One walks with care over sharp stones. And the water is so cold that swimmers who did not spend childhood vacations in this icy sea, can hardly bear it. I have lolled in the wild green above the reefs of the Caribbean and sailed over purple deeps in the Mediterranean, I have seen the inimitable mist of hot summer on the Chesapeake when all hues blend between the sky and the bay. I even like slate-brown rivers that rush through canyons in the West, but I love the piercing blue of Frenchman's Bay and Blue Hill Bay and the bottomless blue of the Eastern and Western Way surrounding Mount Desert--indeed, one's affection for the island even shares the local accent. As decreed by the natives, one spells it Mount Desert, but the pronunciation is Mount Dessert. The view is as fine as sugar frosting to a New Englander's eyes.

I speak in hyperbole, but then who cannot on recalling such summer beauties as the astonishing color of our rocks at water's edge. They are apricot, then lavender, and pale green, but in late afternoon, they become purple over the whole, a dark royal violet is the color of the twilight shore seen from the sea. That is our island in August. Beach heather and wild rose grow near the salt marsh grass, and white-throated sparrows spring from one decaying stump in our meadows to another. The old hayfields smell of red top and timothy, and wildflowers bloom. The northern blue violet and the starflower, the wood sorrel and the checkerberry, painted trillium and wild geranium, golden heather and indian pipe grow in our bogs and fields and on the sunny slopes of our mountains in the seams between descending slabs of rock. Down by the marshes are swamp candles and jewelweed. Once, when I was a boy (for I studied the names of wildflowers when I was a boy) I found the white-vein orchid in some swampy woods, and it was greenish-white, and lovely, and as rare as the moon entering eclipse. For all its tourist traffic come July, Mount Desert is still possessed of a tender yet monumental silence.

If one would ask how the monumental can ever be tender, I reply that such words speak of the beautiful and awesome. So am I tempted, when caution deserts me, to describe my wife Kittredge. Her white skin becomes luminous in any pale meadow; it also reflects the shadows of the rock. I see Kittredge sitting in such shadows on a summer day, and her eyes have the blue of the sea.

I have also been with her when she can seem as bleak as the March storms that strike this island. Now, in March, the fields are dun, and the snow, half-gone, will be stained in the morning with the stirring of the mud. In March, the afternoons are not golden but gray, and the rocks are rarely burnished by the sun. Certain precipices become as grim as the endless meditations of granite. At winter's end, Mount Desert is like a miser's fist; the dull shell of the sky meets a leaden sea. Depression sits over the hills. When my wife is depressed, no color stirs in my own heart, and her skin is not luminous but hooded in pallor. Except for days of snow when island lights still dance off the frozen rock like candles on a high white cake, I do not like to live in late winter on Mount Desert. The sunless sky weighs over us, and a week can go by when we do not speak. That is loneliness kin

to the despair of a convivial drinker who has not poured a glass for days. It is then that our ghosts begin to visit us at the Keep. We inhabit a fine dwelling that is hospitable to ghosts.

Our house sits alone on an island, not ten acres of spread, just a stone's throw--literally one long throw--off the western shore of Mount Desert. Called Doane, after my great-great-grandfather, I suspect we have visitations. While islands, according to my wife, are supposed to be more acceptable to invisible spirits than to such peculiarly apparent manifests as ghosts, I think we break the rule.

Out on Bartlett's Island, somewhat to the north of us, is the all-but-certified ghost of Snowman Dyer, an eccentric old fisherman. He had died on Bartlett's in 1870 under the roof of his spinster sister. Once, as a young man, he had bartered five lobsters for a small Greek tome that belonged to a classics scholar at Harvard. The work was Oedipus Rex and it had an interlinear trot. The old fisherman, Snowman Dyer, was intrigued so much by Sophocles' words in literal translation that he attempted to read the original Greek. Not knowing how to pronounce an alphabet he had never encountered before, he contrived nonetheless a sound for each character.

As he grew older, he grew bolder, and used to recite aloud from this unique tongue while wandering over the rocks. They say that to spend a night in the dead sister's house will bring Snowman Dyer's unique version of Greek to your ear, and the sounds are no more barbaric than the claps and groans of our weather. A corporate executive from Philadelphia, Bingham Baker, and his family, now inhabit that house and seem to thrive on the ghost--at least all the Bakers look pink-cheeked in church. I do not know if they hear the moan of winter in Snowman Dyer's voice.

Old Snowman may be the ghost of Bartlett's Island, but we have another on Doane, and he is not so agreeable. A sea-captain named Augustus Farr, he owned and occupied our land two-and-a-half centuries ago. There are allusions to his habits in an old sea-diary I have found in the library at Bar Harbor, and one voyage is cited "during which he engaged in practice of piracy," and boarded a French frigate in the Caribbean, took its cargo, slaughtered the crew, and beheaded their naked commodore. The commodore was without clothes because Farr had just appropriated his uniform. Then Augustus was so bold as to have himself later buried on his island--now our island--in the Frenchman's dress apparel.

I have never seen Augustus Farr, but I may have heard his voice. One night, not long ago, when alone in the Keep, I came out of a dream to find myself conversing with the wall. "No, leave," I said boldly, "depart from here. We owe you nothing. We cannot help you." As I recall this dream--if it were a dream--I shiver in a way I cannot repeat at other times. My pelf shifts on my back as if I am wearing a jacket of lizard skin. I hear my own voice again. I am not speaking to the plaster before me so much as to some room I feel able to see on the other side of the wall. There, I visualize a presence in a tattered uniform sitting on an oaken and much-scarred captain's chair. An odor of corruption is in my nose, faint but mortally corrupt. Out on the mud flats, or so I hear through the window--I do not dare to look--the sea is boiling. How can waters boil when the tide is out? I am still in my dream, but watch a mouse streak along the floor, and feel the ghost of Augustus Farr on the other side of the wall. The hair stiffens on the back of my head as he descends the stairs to the cellar. I hear him going down to the Vault.

We have a small room underneath the cellar. It was originally a dugout built by my father after the Second World War when he still owned the Keep. He prided himself on being

the first American to take in the consequences of Hiroshima. "Everybody needs a place where he can get under it all," said my father, Cal Hubbard, two years before he sold our property to his second cousin, Kittredge's father, Rodman Knowles Gardiner, who in turn gave it over to Kittredge on her first marriage. In the time Rodman Gardiner had it, however, he decided to go my father one further and so was the first man, so far as I know, in this part of Maine to have a cinder-block fall-out shelter complete with canned goods, bunks, kitchen, ventilation fans, and at the entrance, two corridors set at right angles to one another. What that ninety-degree turn has to do with keeping off nuclear radiation I do not know but there were curious fashions in early fall-out shelters. It is still there for us; a family embarrassment. Up in Maine you are not supposed to protect your life that much.

I despised the shelter. I let it molder. The old tuna cans are nearly rusted through by now, and the foam rubber of the four bunk mattresses has gone to powder. The stone floor is covered with nothing less than that old word of the slime, verdigris. The electric light bulbs, long burned out, are unreplaced.

Let this not give too false an idea of the Keep. The floor of the Vault--so the fall-out shelter came inevitably to be named--is ten feet below the main cellar which is, itself, a large clean stone chamber. The main floor and second story and full attic of the Keep are kept in reasonable order by a Maine woman who comes in every day the weather permits when we are there, and once a week when we are gone. It is only the Vault that is left untended. That is my fault. I cannot bear to go near it. If I open the door, a mad dank odor comes up from below. It is no rarity for sub-cellars to be dank, but the odor of madness is another matter.

On the night when I emerged from my dream to encounter Augustus Farr, on that night when I became convinced I was not dreaming and heard him descending the stairs, I got up from bed and attempted to follow. This was not an act of bravery so much as endless conditioning in the special art of converting one's worst fears to fortitude. My father told me once when I was still an adolescent, "If you are afraid, don't hesitate. Get into the trouble swiftly if that is the honest course." It was an hypothesis on the art of courage that I had to refine considerably in bureaucratic wars where patience was the card to play, but I knew that when fear

proved paralyzing, one sometimes had to force a move or let one's soul pay up with another spot of apathy. The honest course on encountering a ghost was clear to me. Follow him.

I tried. I got up from bed, my feet as cold as a winter corpse, and started down the stairs. That was no dream. In front of me, doors slammed in a fury. "I will not return until I do," I thought I heard a voice cry. By the time I descended to the first cellar, my resolve had run out. At the entrance to the Vault, a presence seemed to be waiting below as malevolent as any dark creature of the sea. My courage was now not large enough to take my legs down the last ten steps. I stood there unmoving, as if some part of honor would be safeguarded if I did not flee, but stood in place to accept the wrath of whatever it was. I will say it. I lived in the intangible embrace of that malevolence long enough to know that we are all more than ourselves. Then, Augustus--I assume it was Augustus--must have withdrawn into the depths of the Vault and I felt free to retreat. I went back to my bed. I slept as if drugged by the most powerful of tranquilizers--a common experience, I expect, after encountering so odious a presence. Since that time I have not gone to the Vault nor has Augustus Farr come near me.

Nonetheless, the Keep was altered by his visitation. Things seem to get broken now at an alarming rate, and I have seen ashtrays slide off tables. It is never so dramatic as in the films. Rather, it is sly. You cannot say to a certainty that your coat sleeve did not brush it off nor that the old floor does not have a tilt. It could all have happened through natural causes, or just about. Dealing with such phenomena is like trying to ascertain the facts when talking to a psychopathic liar. Things keep turning into other things. One's senses become as insubstantial as a feather all but touching one's neck. The wind outside our windows seemed quicker than ever to show its cardinal points: sinister, or saintly, soft or shocking. I never listened to the wind so much as after the visit of Augustus Farr, and the sound of oars would come to me although no oarsman was visible. Still, I could hear oar-locks groaning, and bells rang out from chapels on the main island where, so far as I knew, no towers stood to hold the bells. I would listen to gates swinging in the high winds and plaster falling behind the laths. Small beetles with shells as hard as twelve-gauge-shot came out of the sills. Every time I went through my books in the library, I could swear a few had been moved, but of course the cleaning

woman might have done it, or Kittredge, or even myself. No matter. Like a chill pool in a warm hall, Farr was about.

Yet, for all this, the Keep was far from spoiled. A ghostly presence (but for our fear that it will be with us on the last night of our life) is not always dire. Kittredge and I, being childless, had space to let in so large a house. Farr, in company with his phenonena, was, with all else, a mighty diversion, not unequal to living with a drunk, a rounder, a crazy brother.

I recognize that I go on about phantoms I cannot even swear I see. Yet, I insist. I speak of ghosts as real. Some ghosts may be real. I have a tale to tell of a night in March, yes, a tale to tell even if I cannot recall the last part of that night. It has foundered in my memory like a ship that strikes a mine and vanishes into the nocturnal deep. I retain nothing of this night now but the echo of voices I used to know. Let me speak of what I can recollect.

On that moonless night in March, returning to the Keep, I took the road from Bath to Belfast in Maine, the road that goes by Camden. In every cove was fog and it covered one's vision like a winding sheet, a fog to embrace the long rock shelf off-shore where sailing ships used to founder. When I could no longer see anything at all, I would pull the car over; then the grinding of the buoys would sound as mournful as the loughing of cattle in a rain-drenched field. The

silence of the mist would come down on me. You could hear the groan of a drowning sailor in the lapping of that silence. I think you had to be demented to take the coast road on a night like this.

Past Camden, the wind sprang up, the fog departed, and soon the driving was worse. With the shift in the weather, a cold rain came. On some of those curves, the highway had turned to ice. Going into skids, my tires sang like a choir in a country church surrounded by forest demons. Now and then would appear a shuttered town where each street light was equal to a beacon at sea. Empty summer houses, immanent as a row of tombs, stood in witness.

I was full of bad conscience. The road had become a lie. It would offer traction, then turn to glass. Driving that car by the touch of my fingertips, I began to think once more that lying was an art and fine lying had to be a fine art. The finest liar in the land must be the ice monarch who sat in dominion on the curve of the road.

My mistress was behind me in Bath, and my wife awaited me near the island of Mount Desert. I was a fine liar. The ice monarch had installed his agents in my heart. I will spare

you the story I told Kittredge about small transactions that would occupy me in Portland until evening and so cause my late return to Mount Desert. No, my business had been done in Bath, and in the merry arms of one of the wives of Bath. By acceptable measure, she did not have much to offer against my mate. The woman in Bath was pretty, whereas my dear wife was a beauty. Chloe was cheerful, and Kittredge was--I apologize for so self-serving a word--distinguished. Of Kittredge's family and mine, you have heard a little--we were only third cousins, but even our noses looked alike. Whereas Chloe was common. (I hate the word but know its hold on me.) She was as common as gravy and heartening to taste. Buxom, bountiful, good-hearted, she worked in summer as a waitress in a Yankee inn. (Let us say: a Yankee-inn-type restaurant run by a Greek.) One night a week, on the hostess' night off, Chloe was proud to serve as pro-tem hostess. I helped her funds a bit. Perhaps other men did, too. I hardly knew. I hardly cared. She was like a dish I had to consume once or twice a month. I do not know if it would have been three times and more a week if she lived just over the hill, but Bath was considerably more than a hundred miles from the back side (our

word for the back-shore) of Mount Desert, and so I saw her when I could.

A liaison with a mistress that is kept so infrequently tends, I think, to serve civilization. If it had been any marriage but my own, I would have remarked that a double life lived with such moderation ought to be excellent--it might make both halves more interesting. One could remain deeply, if not wholly, in love with one's wife. My occupation offered wisdom on such matters, after all. Did we begin by speaking of ghosts? My father commenced a family line which I continue: Spooks. In Intelligence, it is not uncommon to discover the natural fragmentation of the heart. We made an in-depth psychological study once in the CIA and learned to our dismay (it was really horror!) that one-third of the men and women who could pass our security clearance might still be malleable enough--handled properly--to be turned into agents of a foreign power. "Potential defectors are at least as plentiful as potential alcoholics," was the cheerful rule of thumb we ended with on that one.

After so many years of work with imperfect people I had learned, therefore, to live a little with the lapses of others so long as they did not endanger too much. Yet my own

defection from the marital absolute left me ill with fear. On this night of blind driving to which I have introduced you, I was half-certain I would soon be in a wreck. I felt caught in invisible and monstrous negotiations. It seemed--suspend all logic--that dreadful things might happen to others if I stayed alive. Can you understand? I do not pretend: I think something of the logic of the suicide is in such thoughts. Kittredge, who has a fine mind, full of apercus, once remarked that all extreme acts--suicide, murder, and the rest of the taboo--might be better understood on the assumption that one of two opposed motives is likely to be at the root. There is, for example, not one answer to the cause of suicide but two: People may kill themselves for the obvious reason that they are washed up, spiritually humiliated down to zero; equally, they can see their suicide as an honorable termination of deep-seated terror. Some people, said Kittredge, become so ghost-ridden, so mired in evil spirits, that they believe they can destroy whole armies of malignity by their own demise. It is like burning an infested barn to wipe out the termites who might otherwise get to the house.

Say much the same for murder. An abominable act which, nonetheless, can be patriotic. Kittredge and I did not talk

long about murder. It was a family embarrassment. My father and I had once spent two years trying to get Fidel Castro assassinated.

Let me return, however, to that icy road. There, if my sense of preservation kept a light touch on the wheel, my conscience was ready to crush it. I had shattered more than a marriage vow. I had broken a lover's vow. Kittredge and I had been fabulous lovers, by which I do not intend anything so vigorously grandiose as banging away till the dogs howl. No, back to the root of the word. We were fabulous lovers. Our marriage was the conclusion to one of those stern myths that instruct us in tragedy. If I sound like the wind of an ass in whistling about myself on such a high note, it is because I do not have the habit of describing our love. Normally, I cannot refer to it. Happiness and absolute sorrow flow together from the common wound of our life.

Let me give the facts. They are brutal, but better than sentimental obfuscation. Kittredge had had but two men in her life. Her first husband and myself. We began our affair while she was still married to him. Only a few months after she betrayed him--and he was the kind of man who would think in terms of betrayal--he took a terrible fall in a rock climb

and broke his back. He had been the lead, and when he went, the youth who was belaying him from the ledge below was pulled along. The anchor jerked out of the rock. Christopher, the adolescent killed in the fall, was their only child.

Kittredge could never forgive her husband. Christopher was sixteen and not especially well-coordinated. He should never have been taken along on that particular rock face. But then, how could she forgive herself? Our affair sat over her head. She took care of the funeral, buried Christopher, and watched over her husband during the twenty weeks he was in the hospital. Soon after he came home, Kittredge chose to get into a warm bath one night and cut each of her wrists with a sharp kitchen blade after which she lay back and prepared to bleed to death in her tub. But she was saved.

By me. She had allowed no communication since the day of the fall. News so terrible had divided the ground between us like a fissure in earth that leaves two neighboring homes a gaping mile apart. God might as well have spoken. She told me not to see her. I did not try. On the night, however, that she took the knife to her wrists, I had (on a mounting sense of unease) flown up from Washington, D.C. to Boston, then to Bangor, and rented a car to go on to Mount Desert. I

heard her calling to me from caverns so deep in herself she was never aware of her own voice. I arrived at a silent house and let myself in through a window. Back on the first floor was an invalid and his nurse; on the second, his wife presumably asleep in a far-off bed. When her bathroom door was locked, and she did not reply, I broke in. Ten minutes more would have been too late.

We went back to our affair. Now there was no question. Shocked by tragedy, certified by loss, and offered dignity by thoughts we could send to one another, we were profoundly in love.

The Mormons believe that you enter into marriage not only for this life but, if you are married in the Temple, will spend eternity with your mate. I am no Mormon, but even by their elevated measure, we were in love. I could not conceive that I would ever be bored in my wife's presence either side of the grave. Time spent with Kittredge would live forever in the sensuous sea of time; other people impinged upon us as if they entered our room holding a clock in their hand.

We had not begun in so inspired a place. Before the disaster on the rock face, we were taken with each other enormously--third cousins kissing. The tincture of incest

enriched the bliss. But it was qualified stuff. We were not ready to die for one another, just off on a wicked streak. Her husband, Hugh Montague, took on more importance, after all, in my psyche than my own poor ego. He had been my mentor, my godfather, my surrogate father, and my boss. I was then thirty-nine years old and felt half that age in his presence. Cohabiting with his wife, I was like a hermit crab who had just moved into a more impressive carapace; one was waiting to be dislodged.

Naturally, like any new lover in so momentous an affair, I did not ask for her motive. It was enough that she had wanted me. But now, after twelve years with Kittredge, ten in marriage, I can give a reason. To be married to a good woman is to live with tender surprise. I love Kittredge for her beauty and--I will say it--her profundity. We know there is more depth to her thought than to mine. All the same, I am frequently disconcerted by some astonishing space in the fine workings of her mind. Attribute it to background. She has not had a career like other women. I do not know many Radcliffe graduates who have been high-echelon CIA.

Item: On the night twelve years ago when we first made love, I performed that simple act of homage with one's lips

and tongue that 75% of all American college graduates (or is it, by now, 90%?) manage to offer in the course of the act. Kittredge, feeling some wholly unaccustomed set of sensations in the arch from thigh to thigh, said, "Oh. I didn't know one could do that!" She soon made a point of telling me I was the next thing to pagan perfection. "You're devil's heaven," she said. (Give me Scotch blood every time!) She looked no older on our first night than twenty-seven, but had been married already for eighteen and a half of her forty-one years. Hugh Tremont Montague was, she told me, (and who could not believe her?) the only man she had ever known. He was, also, seventeen years her senior, and very high echelon. Since one of his skills had been to work with double agents, he had developed a finer sense of other people's lies than they could ever have of his. By now, he trusted no one, and, of course, no one around him ever could be certain he was telling the truth. Kittredge would complain to me in those bygone days that she couldn't say if he were a paragon of fidelity, a gorgon of infidelity, or a closet pederast. I think she began her affair with me (if we are to choose the bad motive rather than the good) because she wanted to learn whether she could run an operation under his nose and get away with it.

dependably--machismo. He gave life courses in grace under pressure. The interval that Kittredge and I spent together on either side of his wheelchair is a bruise on the flesh of memory. I remember that he cried before we were done.

I could not believe it. Kittredge told me later it was the only time she ever saw him weep. Hugh's shoulders racked, his diaphragm heaved, his spavined legs remained motionless. He was a cripple stripped down to his sorrow. I never lost the image. Abominable memories may be compared to bruises, but they do not fade. They grow darker. We were sentenced to maintain a great love.

Kittredge had faith. To believe in the existence of the absurd was, for her, a pure subscription to the devil. We were here to be judged. So our marriage would be measured by the heights it could climb from the dungeon of its low beginnings. I subscribed to her faith. For us, it was the only set of beliefs possible.

How then could I have spent my most recent hours this gray March day slopping and sliding on the over-friendly breast and belly of Chloe? My mistress' kisses were like taffy, soft and sticky, endlessly wet. From high school on, Chloe had doubtless been making love with her mouth to both

ends of her friends. Her groove was a marrow of good grease, her eyes luminous only when libidinal. So soon as we subsided for a bit, she would talk away in the merriest voice about whatever came into her head. Her talk was all of trailer-homes (she lived in one) how ready they were to go up in flames, and of truckers with big rigs who ordered coffee while sitting on enough self-importance to run the Teamsters. She told anecdotes about old boyfriends she ran into at the town lunch counter. "'Boy,' I said to myself, 'has he been shovelling it in! Fat!'" Then, I had to ask myself: 'Chloe, is your butt that far behind?' I put the blame on Bath. There's nothing to do here in winter except eat, and look for hungry guys like you," at which she gave a friendly clap to my buttocks as if we were playing on a team together--the old smalltown sense that you heft a person's worth--and we were off again. There was one yearning in my flesh (for the common people) that she kept at trigger-trip. Skid and slide and sing in unison, while the forest demons yowl.

I had met her in the off-season in the big restaurant where she worked. It was a quiet night, and I was not only alone at my table but the only diner in my section. She waited on me with a quiet friendliness which was much at home

with the notion that a meal that tasted right for me was better wages for her than a meal that tasted wrong. Like other good materialistic people before her, she was also maternalistic: she saw money as coming in all kinds of emotional flavors. It took happy money to buy a dependable appliance.

When I ordered the shrimp cocktail, she shook her head. "You don't want the shrimp," she said. "They've died and risen three times. Take the chowder." I did. She guided me through the meal. She wanted my drinks to be right. She did it all with no great fuss--I was free to stay in my private thoughts, she in hers. We talked with whatever surplus was in our moods. Perhaps one waitress in ten could enjoy a lonely customer as much as Chloe. I realized after awhile that on pick-up acquaintance, which was never my style, I was surprisingly comfortable with her.

I stopped off again at the restaurant on another quiet night and she sat and had dessert and coffee with me. I learned of her life. She had two sons, twenty and twenty-one; they dwelt in Manchester, New Hampshire, and worked in the mills. She claimed to be thirty-eight (I made her for forty-two) and her husband had broken up with her five years ago.

Caught her cheating. "He was right. I was a boozier then, and you can't trust a boozier. My heels were as round as roller-skates." She laughed with enough good humor to have been watching her own pornographic romp. "I didn't really care. I was bored stiff with my marriage. In fact I cut down drastically on the sauce once I got over the shock and started to live alone."

We went home together to her trailer. I have an ability developed, I believe, by my profession. I can concentrate on what is before me. Inter-office flaps, bureaucratic infringements, security leaks, even such assaults on the unconscious as my first infidelity to Kittredge, can be ignored. I have a personal instrument I think of as average, a good soldier no larger nor punier than the average man, a dick as vulnerable as any other. It throbs with encouragement and droops with the oncoming of guilt. So it is testimony to the power of my concentration and to Chloe's voluptuous exposures (call it a crime against the public pleasure for her to be seen in clothes) that, considering the uniqueness and magnitude of my marital breach, there was only a hint of sag from time to time in the fine fellow below. I was starved, in truth, for what Chloe had to offer.

Let me see if I can explain. Love-making with Kittredge was--I use the word once more--a sacrament. I do not feel at ease trying to speak of it. Whereas, I can give all away in talking about the good cruise, Bang-Bang, with Chloe; a roll in the hay is, after all, a roll in the hay, and we were like kids in the barn; Chloe even smelled of earth and straw. But there was ceremony to embracing Kittredge.

I do not mean that we were solemn or measured. If it did not come to real desire, we might not make love for a month. When it happened, however, it certainly did; after all our years together, we still flew at each other. We were fierce. Kittredge, indeed, was as fierce as one of those wood-animals with claws and sharp teeth and fine fur that you can never quite tame. At its worst, there were times when I felt like a tomcat with a raccoon. My tongue (key to devil's heaven) was rarely in the center of her thoughts--rather our act was subservient to coming together, cruelty to cruelty, love to love. I'd see God when the lightning flashed and we jolted our beleaguered souls into one another. Afterward, was tenderness, and the sweetest domestic knowledge of how curious and wonderful we were for one another, but it was not in the least like getting it on with Chloe. With Chloe, it was old

valve-seats unsticking, gaskets about to blow, get ready for the rush, get ready for the sale, whoo-ee, gushers, we'd hit oil together. Recuperating, it felt low-down and slimy and rich as the earth. You could grow flowers out of your ass.

Driving that car, my heart in my teeth, and the road-ice in my ice-cold fingers, I knew all over again what Chloe gave me. It was equality. We had nothing in common but our equality. If they brought us up for judgement, we could go hand in hand, we were playmates. Our bodies were matched in depth to one another, and we felt the affection of carrots and peas in the same meat soup. I had never known a woman so much my physical equal as Chloe.

Whereas Kittredge was the former consort of a knight, now a crippled knight. I felt like a squire in a medieval romance. My knight was away on crusades and so I entertained his lady. We had found a way to pick the lock of her chastity belt, but to make love, I still had to mount the steps. We might see lightning and stars, yet the bedroom remained her chamber. Our ecstasy was as austere as the glow of phosphorescent lights in Maine waters. I did not see creation (and, repeat, sad truth, we were childless) rather, I had

glimpses of the heavens. With Chloe, I felt like one more driver with a heavy rig.

On a night of driving so terrible as this--sleet on the cusp of freezing--there was no way to meditate for long. Rather, thoughts jumped up before me. So, I saw that Chloe had the shape of a wife, and Kittredge was still my lady. In most affairs, a kiss could tell you of more than one soul; indeed, it could bring back every mouth you had known. It might lubricate a marriage if you had a wife who could remind you of other women as well. What was a sweet and fucky connubial union but the sublimation of orgies never embarked upon? This never took place with Kittredge. I had been missing the promiscuity of making love to one woman who might serve for many.

Needless to say, this was not Kittredge's view. Once, about a month after we were married, she said to me, "There's nothing I hate worse than the breaking of vows. I always feel as if the universe is held together by the few solemn promises that are kept. Hugh was awful. You could never trust a word of his. I shouldn't tell you, darling, but when you and I first began, it was such an achievement for me. I suppose it was the bravest thing I'd ever done."

"Don't ever be that brave with me," I said, and it was no threat. At the uneasy center of my voice, I was begging her.

"I won't. I won't ever." She would have had the clear eyes of an angel but for a touch of mist in the blue that suggested a philosopher trying to perceive objects at a great distance. Thoughtful was her look. "No," she said, "let's make a pledge. Absolute honesty between us. No transgressions of our word. If either of us ever has anything to do with someone else, we must tell."

"I pledge," I said.

"My God," she said, "with Hugh I never knew. No wonder he insisted on that awful name, Harlot! It's perfect for him." She stopped. He was, whatever he was doing at this moment, in the wheelchair now. "Poor old Gobby," she said. Any compassion she might still have for him was in this nickname.

"Why do you call him Gobby?" She had been doing it since we were married, but with Kittredge, there was a time for everything and I had never asked her before.

"God's old beast. That's his name."

"One name, anyway."

"Oh, darling, I love giving people names. At least, people I care about. That's the only way we're allowed to be promiscuous as we please. Give each other hordes of names."

Over the years, one by one, I had learned most of them. Hugh had a fine mustache, trim pepper-and-salt. It belonged on a British cavalry colonel. Kittredge used to call him Trimsky. "Just as bright as Leon Trotsky," she'd say, "but ten times as neat." Later I found out she was, for once, not original. It was Allen Dulles who first christened him Trimsky. That was when Hugh was working for the OSS in London during the war. Apparently, Dulles repeated it to Kittredge at her wedding. Kittredge had been mad about Allen Dulles ever since meeting him at a Georgetown garden party her parents took her to during the Easter vacation of her sophomore year in Radcliffe. Ah, the poor Harvard men who tried to get places with Kittredge after Allen Dulles kissed her on the cheek for goodbye.

Following the nuptials, she took to calling Hugh Tremont Montague by Trimsky. He gave her monikers in return. For the first few months together they were Trimsky and Kitoff. Then she became Kippers, then Keds (for the old sneakers) and that evolved into Ketchum, for Ketchum, Idaho (since Kittredge was

somewhat preoccupied with Hemingway--her full pedigree was Hadley Kittredge Gardiner, first name taken from Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's first wife, whom Kittredge's father, Rodman Knowles Gardiner, met in Paris in the '20s and thought was "the nicest woman ever encountered.")

It had taken its own good time for me to learn the whole metamorphosis of my beloved's names. Ketchum managed to avoid Ketchup but was transmogrified into Red--which was perfect, and stuck, since Kittredge's hair was raven-black (and her skin as white as your best white marble.) I also knew a lover's pain when Kittredge confessed that Hugh Montague and she would use Harlot and Hotsky on those nights when connubial intentions warmed their spirit. People in Intelligence shift names, I then concluded, the way others move furniture around a room.

In any event, Gobby was now the post-marital a.k.a.

"I hated," said Kittredge, "the idea that I couldn't trust Gobby's personal honesty. You do pledge, darling?"

"I do."

"In our kind of work, one must rely on honesty somewhere. Can we have honesty between us?"

"We will."

Were Kittredge's misty blue eyes searching far horizons for my misdeeds?

I passed a phone booth in a rest area, and stopped the car. I was in a panic to speak to her. Abruptly, it seemed that if I did not reach her at once, every last barrier between my mind and hers would be down. She would know everything.

What can be closer to the ages of old-ice than one corroded pock-marked aluminum phone booth on a freezing highway in Maine? I had to raise the operator and she had trouble remembering the number of my credit card. I was stamping my feet to keep warm before the machinery of the Bell Company was able to stir itself out of chilly sleep. The phone rang four, five, six times, and then I leaped with love at the sound of Kittredge's voice and, on the instant, recalled how my heart had once lifted equally with joy one dark night alone in a canoe in Vermont, when, behold! a galaxy of light lit up every ripple on the black waters of the pond as a full harvest moon rose exactly in the notch between two steep round hills. Druid certainties left their flush then on my heart. I knew a curious peace. So did Kittredge's voice now give ease to the stricken tunnels of my breath. I felt as

if I had never heard her voice before. Let no one say I did not love my wife if after eleven years of marriage I could still discover her wonders. Most speaking tones come into my ear through filters and baffles. I hear people monitoring their larynx to purvey warmth and cold, probity, confidence, censure, approbation--we are phony voices if only by a little. After all, one's speech is the first instrument of one's will.

Kittredge's voice came out of herself as a flower opens out of its bud, except I never knew which bloom would be first. Her voice was as amazing in anger as in love--she was never on guard for the turn of her own feelings. Only those who walk about with the notion (it can be modest) that they are an indispensable part of the universe can speak with such lack of concern for how they sound to others.

"Harry, I'm glad you called. Are you all right? I've been full of forebodings all day."

"I'm fine. But the roads are terrible. I'm not even to Bucksport."

"Are you really all right? Your voice sounds as if you just shaved off your Adam's apple."

I laughed as madly as an embarrassed Japanese businessman. It was her claim that I would have been a particularly

handsome fellow if not for my prominent Adam's apple. "I'm all right," I said. "I think I needed to talk to you."

"Oh, I need to talk to you. Can you guess what arrived today? A telegram from our friend. It's demoralizing. After being nice for so long, he's now in an absolutely deranged mood."

She was speaking of Harlot. "Well," I said, "it can't be as bad as that. What did he say?"

"I'll have to tell you later." She paused. "Harry, promise me something."

"Yes." I knew by her tone. "Yes," I said, "what's your foreboding?"

"Drive most carefully. There's a very high tide tonight. Please call me when you get to the dock. The water's roaring already."

No, her voice concealed nothing. Tones were flying in many directions as if she were working a dinghy buffeted by chop.

"I have the oddest thoughts," she said. "Did you just have a bad skid?"

"Never a worse," I answered. The windows of my telephone booth might be iced-up, but perspiration was collecting on my

back. How near to me could she get without encountering the real hurly burly?

"I'm all right," I went on. "I expect the worst weather is over. It feels that way." I took a chance. "Any other odd thoughts flying around?"

"I'm obsessed with a woman," she said.

I nodded intently as if she could see me. I felt like a boxer who is not certain which hand of his unfamiliar opponent he should respect most. "Obsessed with a woman?" I repeated.

"A dead woman," Kittredge said.

You may believe I took relief.

"Is she family?" I asked.

"No."

When Kittredge's mother died, I woke on more than one night to see Kittredge sitting at the side of the bed, her back to me, talking with animation to the bare wall on which, with no embarrassment, she could perceive her mother. (How much this had to do with my warped dream--let us call it such--about Augustus Farr, is, of course, anyone's good question.) On these earlier occasions, however, it was clear: Kittredge was in some sort of coma. She would be wide awake, but oblivious to me. When I would tell her in the morning of

such episodes, she would neither smile nor frown. My account of her actions did not disturb Kittredge. It seemed in the nocturnal fold of things that there ought to be occasions when those who had been near to you could still speak. Of course, her son Christopher had never come back, but then he had been smashed. His death was different. He had fallen into the bottomless abyss of his father's vanity. So his demise had been rendered numb for all. In this fashion, Kittredge reasoned.

Kittredge had Highlands blood both sides, and you have to know how Celtic a few Highlanders can be. Not all of the Scotch content themselves with devising controls for the law, the banks, and Presbyterian practice; some take a cottage on the interface between this world and the next. They do not blow those bagpipes for too little.

"Do you want to tell me," I now asked, "about this woman?"

"Harry, she's been dead for ten years. I don't know why she is trying to reach me now."

"Well, who is it?"

She did not reply directly. "Harry," she said, "I've been thinking about Howard Hunt lately."

"E. Howard Hunt?"

"Yes. Do you know where he is?"

"Not really. Some place quiet, I guess, picking up the pieces."

"Poor Howard Hunt," she said. "Do you know I met him at that party long ago when my parents first introduced me to Allen Dulles. Allen said, 'Here, Kitty, meet Howard Hunt. He's an absolutely nifty novelist.' I don't think the Great White Case Officer had top powers in literary criticism."

"Oh, Mr. Dulles always went in for superlatives."

"Didn't he?" I had made her laugh. "Harry, he said to me once, 'Cal Hubbard would be the Teddy Roosevelt of our outfit if it weren't for Kermit Roosevelt.' Lord, your father. Cal was like Teddy Roosevelt. It fits!" She laughed again, but her voice, honest as a brook full of the quick lights offered by moving clouds and pebble-bed, was in shadow now.

"Tell me about the woman."

"It's Dorothy Hunt, darling," said Kittredge. "She's come right out of the woodwork."

"I didn't realize you knew her well."

"I don't. I didn't. Hugh and I had the Hunts once for dinner."

"Of course. I recall."

"And I do remember her. An intelligent woman. We had lunch a few times. So much more depth than poor Howard."

"What does she say?"

"Harry, she says, 'Don't let them rest.' That's all she says. As if we both knew them. Whoever them may be."

I didn't reply. Kittredge's dismay, delicate but pervasive, leaped over the wire. I almost asked: "Did Harlot ever speak to you of the High Holies?" It is a measure of how much my nostrils still reeked subliminally (and criminally) of Chloe that I had lost caution, for I trusted no phone entirely, certainly not my own. While we had said nothing to get any big wind up, still one did one's best to keep all conversation under some kind of damage control. So, now I merely said, "That's curious about Dorothy," and added no more.

Kittredge read my shift. She, too, was aware of the telephone. There was always, however, her perverse sense of the wicked. If we had monitors on this call, she would give them a heaping plate of confusion. Kittredge now put in: "I didn't like the message from Gallstone."

"What did it say?" Gallstone--you may have guessed--was

one more name for Harlot.

"Well, it was hand-delivered. That awful man, Gilley Butler, was standing at my door this evening. He must have taken our dinghy and rowed across, then presented me the envelope with a raffish grin. He was awfully drunk, and acting as if the heavens would undulate should he ever smuggle me into a cave. I could see by his attitude that somebody paid him much too much to deliver it. The most awful emanation came off him. Superior and sort of sleazy all at once."

"What," I repeated, "did your message say?"

"571 days a year on Venus. Plus one on leap year. Eight months to do it all."

"He can't possibly be right," I replied, as if I had comprehended every word.

"Never."

We finished by telling each other that we missed each other, speaking as if it would be years rather than a couple of hours before we met again. Then we hung up. So soon as I was back in the car, I took a worn paperback of T.S. Eliot's poems out of the locked glove compartment. The eight months mentioned in the telegram referred to the fifth poem in the

Your shadow at morning striding behind you

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you:

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

That succeeded in coloring our wedding night. Now, after all these years, I was being asked again to live with such messages. Perhaps I deserved no less. My conscience throbbed in the gap between Chloe and Kittredge.

Yet, cruelty is conceivably a cure for tension when visited on the guilty man. (So says our penal system!) Harlot's message, sinister as the fog--"that corpse you planted last year in your garden"--enabled me to climb onto the same plateau as the difficulties of the weather. I was at last ready for each little breakaway of the tires. I could think while my reflexes did the driving, and given the fruits of our call, I had a bit to go over. I was trying to decide whether Kittredge had a clue to the High Holies. I had certainly not told her, and now it was reasonably clear that Harlot hadn't either. Her voice had been too unknowing about Dorothy Hunt. Kittredge certainly appeared to be wholly unaware that Harlot and I had joined forces on an inquiry that was delicate in the extreme, and special.

Having this much to go over, I could use the ruminative powers offered by an easier journey, and so appreciated the change in weather as I passed through Belfast, and Route 1 joined Route 3. Now, the air was a crucial degree warmer, the sleet had eased to rain, and the roads, if wet, were free of ice. I could settle into my thoughts. In the special file on the High Holies, Dorothy Hunt occupied the first manila binder.

I see the time has come, if you are to keep me company (and I have need of company) to take you into closer confidence. I do not know if I have recovered from my 450-degree skid. In the midst of that infernal revolution, I saw Langley with its seven stories flashing before my eyes. What a sight to go out with!

South of the Potomac, just below Washington, the Virginia woods were not well-treated by the profit-making of the last ten years. The wildland swamps have been drained and covered with asphalt, quartered with super-highways, studded with corporate implants--I speak of office buildings--and blind-sided by molecule-like chains of condominiums. The parking lots in summer are as bilious as natural gas. I was no lover of the development of the humid environs where I had

worked for so long. And the drive from the Langley gate out to Harlot's farmhouse was traffic-jammed for all fifteen miles; his house, a pre-Civil War small beauty when he shared it with Kittredge, used to stand alone on an old dirt road lined with maples. Now, gutted and rebuilt with a ramp to permit him to propel his wheelchair from the first floor to the second, the house was sited on an off-highway eyebrow just twenty yards from where the four-lane truck stink went through. A depressing metamorphosis.

Yet, let me tell it truly. Few occasions in my life were more momentous than the day last summer when Harlot had importuned me to work again with him. "Yes," he had said, "I need your assistance so much that I will forego my true innings with you." His knuckles, huge as carbuncles, fretted his wheel chair forward and back.

Harlot's call to new work was well-timed. At Langley I had been in the doldrums. I was sick of walking the corridors. At Langley, we had corridors not unreminiscent of the fluorescent pedestrian routes in a huge airport--we even had a wall of glass looking on the central garden. One could pass hundreds of doors on any corridor, all color-coded, leaf-green, burnt orange, madder pink, Dresden blue, designed

by a pastel-minded coordinator to bring cheer and logic to our cubicles. The colors were to tell you what kind of work was done behind the doors. Of course in the old days--let us say twenty and more years ago--a number of the offices were being run under cover, so the color of the door was misleading. Now only a few such doors were around. I was bored with that. My office door practiced no deception these days. My career (and my wife's) might just as well have been ended. In fact, as I will soon explain, Kittredge and I were not often in Washington any more, not nearly so much as we stayed at the Keep. For a long time I had been walking a treadmill of no advancement under five Directors of Central Intelligence, no less than Mr. Schlesinger, Mr. Colby, Mr. Bush, Admiral Turner and Mr. Casey, who, when he passed me in the hall either did not know me, or chose not to greet me by name, (after close to thirty years in the Company!) well, who could not see the shadow? Two former Chiefs-of-Station at two Third World republics, now back at Langley and ready for retirement, shared my office--what was left of my office. They served as my case officers--in this case, editors--for the books I oversaw and/or ghosted. They had reputations as burned-out cases, much like me. Their reputations, unlike mine, were

deserved. Thorpe was drunk at ten in the morning, and his eyes were like marbles, full of pep. They bounced, if they happened to meet your gaze. The other, Gamble, had a stone-dead expression and was of late a vegetarian. He never raised his voice. He spoke to a cell in his larynx. He was like a man who has flattened twenty years in a state penitentiary. And I? I was ready for a quarrel with anyone.

It was at exactly the time therefore when disaffection was collecting in my pores like bile, that Harlot had summoned me to his rump office at the farmhouse in Virginia where he now reigned as uncrowned Dean of Intelligence Emeritus for a baker's dozen of men like myself, still young enough to know rage that their careers were in irons, yet old enough to suffer that their best years were not only committed and gone, but everyone was waiting for them to retire. Who knows what Harlot cooked up for the others? I can tell you what he talked about with me.

We, at CIA, had gone through some considerable suffering on the exposure of the Family Jewels in 1975. Maybe a few bushmen in Australia had not heard how we labored to rub Fidel Castro out, but by the time the Senate Select Committee to Study Intelligence Activities was done inquiring, there were

very few bushmen. The rest of the world had learned that we were ready to kill Patrice Lumumba as well, and had gone in for LSD experiments in brainwashing so exuberantly that one of our subjects, a Dr. Frank Olson (on government contract) had jumped out a window. We hid the fact from his widow. She spent twenty years thinking her husband was an ordinary suicide which is onerous for a family to believe since there are no ordinary suicides. We opened mail between Russia and the U.S. and closed it again and sent it on. We spied on high government officials like Barry Goldwater and Bobby Kennedy; we had all of those activities advertised in the market place. Since we are, at CIA, a proud and secretive people, we felt not unlike a convention of Methodist ministers who are sued by a fine hotel for infesting the bed linen with crab lice. No, the Company had never been quite the same since exposure of the Family Jewels.

In its wake, many of our best men had had to go. While Harlot's activities had, in the best of times, seemed quirky for top officers obliged to face Congressional committees, they could hardly dismiss him now in the worst of times. The accumulated sympathy at Langley for his gallant perambulations

in the wheelchair would have left us with something like terminal morale.

Harlot was allowed to stay and fish the eddies. He was to work on matters that needed to attract no attention. It was generally agreed: Harlot had been left to molder.

Now, seven years later, he was exhorting me. "I ask us, Harry boy," he said, "to forgive the spears we've left in one another. There is a scandal forming up which will prove worse than the Family Jewels. I'd estimate about as much worse as Hiroshima was an order of magnitude beyond Pearl Harbor. The Family Jewels decimated our ranks; the High Holies, if not excised, will cut us right out of the map."

When he said no more, I stepped back. "I like the name," I said. "High Holies."

"A good name," he agreed. Whereupon he did a quadrille with his wheelchair, to and fro, wheel to one side, wheel to the other. He was in his late sixties by now but his eyes and voice belonged to a man who could still charge the troops.

"I can vouchsafe," he said, "that few things over at Mother K"--he rarely called it Langley--"ever perplexed me as much as Watergate. So many ducks in the White House pond. As

"Call the break-in at Watergate, Act One," he said.

"Good first act. Full of promise. But no answers. Now comes Act Two: the crash, six months later of the United Airlines plane 553 from Washington to Chicago. It's trying to land at Midway Airport and falls short in the most unbelievable fashion. The plane rips up a neighborhood of small houses not two miles shy of the airport, and the process kills forty-three of the sixty-one people aboard, plus two more on the ground. Within an hour, fifty FBI agents descend on the scene. They seal the crash off. Do you know who was on board that plane?"

"I suppose I did once."

"The half-life of your memory retains no trace?"

"Obviously not."

"Dorothy Hunt is the most significant passenger to perish." He held up his hand. "Now, of course, Watergate had not yet really cracked open. This is December, 1972, a couple of months before Senator Ervin and his committee, and quite a few weeks before our own good wallah, James McCord, is to sing his first note. Long before good John Dean." Needless to say, Harlot had a way of saying good. "Howard Hunt had, you must remember, been breaking a lot of noxious wind up White

House way to the effect that, in his immortal words, he would not be a patsy, and Dorothy Hunt was certainly tougher than Howard. In a tight spot, you'd give her the pistol." I nodded. Then I shrugged. I had worked for Howard Hunt when he was Chief of Station in Uruguay. "Still!" said Harlot, "that's an awful lot of cannon to kill one bee. Scores of people dead in order to get one! Hugely imprecise. Look for the worst job they can concoct in the Oval Room, and the White House is still incapable of mugging an airplane. After all, the White House never gave Mr. Liddy a fatal dose of the measles, not even by his own invitation, nor did they put the fatal ray on Dean, nor on Hunt, nor on McCord. None of the top people over there could have put it together even if they wanted to. So how could they give a go-ahead to something so wholesale as this plane crash in which forty-three passengers are killed and eighteen remain alive? Nonetheless, the demise of Flight 553 is cluttered with nasties. All sorts of fail-safe procedures have obviously gone wrong. The evidence in these crack-ups is always abominably complicated, but still, given the flight-recorded facts, it could be sabotage. Moreover, the White House has hardly been indifferent to the event. Egil Krogh, he of the 'Plumbers,' is made the

Undersecretary of the Department of Transportation the next day. Right after the crash! Alex Butterfield, who will later confess to the Ervin Committee that good Richard Nixon taped everything but his trips to the loo, is moved over to the Federal Aviation Administration in the next ten days. Dwight Chapin of CREEP goes to United Airlines. The Nixon palace has obviously been shaken up by the episode. Maybe the White House suspects us. After all, we do know how to sabotage a plane--they don't. It all poses a frightful question. For if that Flight 553 to Chicago was buggered in order to get Dorothy Hunt, then she had to be holding on to no ordinary piece of information. You don't demolish two-score civilians in order to terminate one lady unless the woman possesses ultimates."

"What's the ultimate here, would you say?"

"Knowing where the gods are buried."

"Hugh, hold onto your metaphors, will you?"

He laughed. I was so obviously irked.

"I always," he said, "refer to my own values when trying to solve these matters. What would the stakes have to be to take on a job like that in the abattoir? Well, I reasoned, I would embark on such wholesale slaughter only if the following

games were up for grabs: One--the target, Mrs. Hunt, knows who was behind the Kennedy assassination and I cannot afford to let that get out. Or, two: Nixon or Kissinger proves to be the highest KGB mole in the land, after all, and target has the evidence. Or three--and be prepared for this--some of us have managed to get our ducks into the Federal Reserve pond. Elements among us could lose billions a year if that piece of news comes forth."

"What has the Federal Reserve got to do with Dorothy Hunt?"

"Good Harry boy, take a look at who was in the Watergate Office Building back there in June, 1972, would you? The Federal Reserve used to have offices on the seventh floor just over the National Democratic Committee offices. What makes you think McCord was bugging the Democrats? He could have been using the ceiling of the sixth floor to tap into the seventh floor. McCord is not merely a religious monomaniac, you know. He's also talented.

"Well, conceive of how long I've been brooding on this. It's years since Dorothy's crash. Yet I keep thinking that the possibilities are worse than the Family Jewels. I keep coming back to the Federal Reserve. If some of us were

years with Howard Hunt in Uruguay yet to do, and the Bay of Pigs, MONGOOSE (otherwise known by me as weekends trying to kill Castro), then working with Harlot on the enigma of Yuri Nosenko, a stint in Viet Nam, the Nixon White House (where I was an Agency liaison for a time) and Watergate--a formidable menu.

Even so, if ever done, I could never publish it. The legal office of the Agency would never permit this book to find a public audience. I told myself I was writing a memoir for in-house perusal, but that was a misrepresentation to myself. I was writing it for the world. Such self-deception is analogous to looking in the mirror and not meeting one's eyes.

In any event, since all the Company could know by now is that my work on the KGB would doubtless never appear, I was being treated (and CIA is good at this) as one of their sad people. It is equal to being an unproductive child in a large and talented family. Indeed, I was encouraged to work on semi-sabbaticals at home in Maine for weeks, sometimes months at a time. Say the same for my wife. Yet if I was thick with resentment on the one hand, it was joy on the other to be rid of those low Virginia suburbs. Of course, I still pretended to

be taking work-papers for The Imagination of the State back to Maine, back to the Keep, but, oh, how many trips I had made lately to Langley, how many odd memos I had been hunting down for Harlot along with files I needed for purported legitimate intellectual burrowings. Administratively speaking, my need-to-know was too complex to keep tabs on. I had been around so long that they preferred to ignore me. Seen as a self-absorbed nest-builder, I was able to get copies of hot stuff out in my briefcase along with reams of papers I was entitled to withdraw. It was worth one's limbs to be caught on some of the high-temperature sheets I passed on to Harlot. The irony is that I journeyed all the way from Maine to Washington to pick up the consecrated bread, but delivered it just fifteen miles down the line from Langley to where Harlot still steered himself around in that small Virginia farmhouse once shared with Kittredge and now rebuilt with a ramp to enable him to propel his wheelchair from the first floor to the second.

Yes, we were on a mission; the High Holies. And I could just about lose my neck for that--which is to say, my job, my pension, my freedom. Yes, jail was conceivably on the horizon. Yet, not for anything could I trust Harlot's

sentiments toward me. Talk of corpses in the garden, I had signed up with him as if he were fate itself. There are more metastases in guilt than in cancer itself. On I drove to Mount Desert.

The truth is that after the strain of driving those icy roads, I was now handling the car with such unholy ease I had to wonder at the felicity of my condition. Had I come back completely from the skid? Time appeared to have divided itself as neatly as a deck of cards cut in two. Time existed before the spin of the car, and after. It seemed to me if I were to go back to that hair-pin turn where the wheel whipped

away from me, why then I might not see an empty road, but an automobile smashed against a tree, and behind the windshield--my shattered person. This mangled presence I saw with such clarity that common sense was overturned. I kept driving, but began to wonder: Had I gone over? Could the idea that I was still alive be no more than illusion? Did all perception-of myself driving a car, headlights prancing forward like the luminous forelegs of a great steed, come to nothing but an unwinding of preconceived expectations? My head would have whirled at this thought if I had not felt so balanced and blessed. An incalculable state. Was this the first hour of one's death? How natural if the thoughts compressed in our mind at the moment of sudden death continue to uncoil. If I was feeling just a touch unreal, might it not be the only clue offered that one was travelling on the roads of the dead? In the beginning, these roads might hardly diverge from all one knew before. Behold, I had certainly reached the dark highway between Bucksport and Ellsworth, and was going through Sears at night with the white houses of Sears looking as white under my headlights as the bones of Indians long dead.

On went the road. I passed Doughnut Dairy Queens and the big Bugle-burgers at Macdonalds (or whatever is their name!) The shopping mall at Ellsworth went by my windshield like light from a shattered glass, the oil-soak of the empty parking lot gleaming in new steams and mists. At twelve miles an hour I traversed the short bridge from Tremont to the island of Mount Desert and entered a cloud again. Once more, I could not see past the silver droplets of fog that danced before me in the car beams. I would have to crawl the last ten miles along the road that goes by Prettymarsh for the centerline is worn away.

The western half of Mount Desert cannot pride itself on such towns as Northeast Harbor, Bar Harbor, or Seal Harbor; our western half is not notable. In daylight, the road offers no better view than miles of second growth trees and thicket; our nearby mountains are wooded and offer few lookouts. Our marshes and ponds are likely to be covered with acid-yellow algae. Our towns--Bass Harbor, Seal Cove--are hardworking, the hamlets are poor. Often no more than four or five trailers, two or three frame houses and a cinder-block post office will squat by the highway. The back roads are unpaved and not favored too often by a sign.

All the same, knowing every curve, I was ready for the unmarked right turn off the state road onto the two mile dirt-track that leads to the wharf where our dinghy is stowed. On I drove past lobstermen's front yards, full of old tires and rusted iron of every description. All lights were out. I passed one house I never liked--it consisted of two trailers connected by a shed. A father, Gilley Butler--the man who brought the envelope to Kittredge earlier today--and his son, Wilbur Butler, lived on the premises with their mates, whelps, and assorted oafs, cold categories of description, but the Butlers would have been hung as poachers three centuries ago in England, and put in stocks right here. Now, I will not say more than that the father had had a series of savage arguments with my father, and the son, Wilbur, had done as well with Hugh Montague. In recent years, Wilbur had been a familiar to the police and the courts--he had belted an old woman around pretty badly when she discovered him robbing her trailer. I did not even know as I passed, whether Wilbur was still in the state penitentiary. I had heard rumors at the post office that he would soon be free, and I did not enjoy the possibility. On those separate occasions when his vehicle used to meet mine on our mutual dirt road, he always looked at

me with a squint of such quintessential hostility that I also spent an hour in the Bar Harbor Library on the genealogy of the Butlers. They were an old Mount Desert family, paupers and near-paupers for fifteen generations, and half of the children were dubiously christened. So I could not satisfy the suspicion that would connect them directly, if by illegitimate blood, to Augustus Farr but I did find, at least, the diary of Damon Butler, First Mate of Farr's crew, the one who wrote of Farr's "practize of piracie."

In any event, each time I drove by those two trailers tied by their slatternly shed, I was prepared for unpleasantness. The pall of old drunken nights and heavy-handed yard fights with crotch-shots, stomping boots, old blood and old puke, hovered around the broken lobster pots. Beer cans empty as clam shells abounded.

It was two long miles of graded dirt to reach the wharf. Our back roads are rutted. Along my camp track are furlongs of bramble by either ditch, and you pass many a feverish profusion of weeds that have sprouted over old battle trenches--in this case, the foundations dug for cheap homes whose walls never went up. The miasma of insufficient funds pervades the space. Bottle-green horseflies as large as

bumblebees harass you in summer and loathsome winged slugs imperil your hair when you jog. Through March, if the snow melts, the ground looks like a Bowery beggar sleeping it off. A heavy thaw introduces you to the mud of World War I. There were times when I could not traverse the two miles from the highway to the wharf without winching our jeep forward a hundred feet at a time, but tonight the mud was still crusted, the ice, mixed with gravel, gave a base, and I went down that deserted route for over a mile past small and desolate barrens, poor as the food of the poor. In one raw clearing, the skeleton of an old boat trailer lay rusted in two. Even in the dark, I knew these sights. I knew them well, and was glad to reach the last delta of lanes and tracks which went off to different camps on the shore of the back side.

At our wharf, I pulled into the car-shed we kept near the shore, but before I even shut my motor, I could hear the bay water taking its churn through the channel. The roar was louder than it had ever been. I could have been listening to the ongoing growl of an earthquake. It was then I took off my topcoat and left it in the car. It would hardly be automatic to row the dinghy across the channel tonight.

I am used to living with fear, I suffer such occupational stresses the way a good businessman worries about cash flow and his breaches of government regulations, his lawsuits, his health, and where he should be buried. No, it is worse for me. I live with a prime fear. My specific professional assignment invariably becomes my first fear. There is also, however, what Harlot used to call Queen-for-a-Day. It is the old mouth-in-throat on the day of battle.

I was now full of Queen-for-a-Day. I did not wish to row from the back side of Mount Desert over to Doane's, only a couple of hundred feet, as I have indicated, but how often had the water looked this bad? The wharf planks shook. Out there was no chop, but a horripilated race. If the dinghy overturned, I might not survive for a minute in such freezing water. Could I even swim twenty yards before my heart locked? I made the decision to call Kittredge on the battery phone we kept in the car shed. I would tell her that I must wait for ebb tide before trying to cross. Perhaps I would even drive to Southwest Harbor (our nearest town) and find a motel for the night. The thought was unsatisfactory but the dinghy was worse.

I never had to debate it, however. The batteries were removed from the phone. Now, I had a good deal to think about. To drive out to the nearest pay phone on the state road--perhaps a half hour off in this fog--would probably discover that our main phone line had been cut as well. If I wished to see her now, and I did, then I had to try the channel. Bless Harlot. Queen-for-a-Day was well-named. For with all my trepidation, there was one vein of joy. If I made it, I'd feel a lot better. And if I never got to shore at all, well, cleanse my soul of Chloe, I might be absolved between the oarlock and the ocean ground.

So, into our dinghy I got. We have several that are aged, wooden, leaky, and as seaworthy as an old sailor, but stowed on the wharf right now was our newest, a fiberglass with walnut seats and shiny fittings. While it had its vices, including the tendency of all plastic shells to bob like a bubblehead, it reacted quickly to the oars. Sometimes you need a handsome fool to take you through a storm.

I slid the boat off the wharf into the quieter churn on the lee side, leaped in myself to face the bow, slammed oars into locks, and, in a flurry, set out to cross the seventy yards of the channel before careening three hundred yards

downstream in that rapid current. After which, Doane Island would be lost, and the dinghy loose in the reaches of Blue Hill Bay, an impossible prospect on this night.

Let me say it was the purest example of rowing with one oar, blade to port, that I had ever tried. The starboard oar was not needed for much more than balance, an outrigger. I bucked up and down like a Yankee on a Houston rodeo-machine. A full splat of ice-water, heavy as the tail of a ten-pound fish, smacked me across the face in the middle of a stroke. I kept rowing with my left arm. One misjudged stroke and we'd be running downstream through the middle of the channel. The water came at me in a froth, slamming its imprecations against that stupid plastic shell. Speak of getting wet--I was drenched, I was gasping. I had a first premonition of drowning. The bow slammed down into a trough and up a wall of water, which shattered on my face, gorged my throat. I coughed, I rowed, I would have prayed, but I heard a fisherman singing in Greek. It was no Greek I knew. More fearsome than Gaelic were the sounds. They turned my head. They twisted the bow. For the second time this night, I went into a spin and lost my oars, which is to say, for one stroke I lost all sense of which blade to use. I had reversed my inner

switches--some fatal flaw within!--and went hurtling downstream, hurtling is the word, stern first downstream, and shipping water. Mad strokes with the starboard oar, both oars, port oar again--I came out of the spin. I was within ten yards of the shore of Doane, and had pushed through the channel. I was now between two large off-shore rocks.

In that placid pool, I rested. I had five more yards of water to cross, and but thirty yards left to me of the island of Doane. I was freezing and my lungs burned like a grass fire, but it would take one more effort. Sitting between the rocks, backing on the oars to keep position, how I heard the wind! I was coming back to Kittredge, to my good grass widow Kittredge, and in my mind I saw her features twist. A fury was on her face. "Go away, Harry," said the wind.

I laid hands on the oars. "Doane is where I am supposed to be tonight," I told myself with all the simplicity (and unaccountable confusion) one brings to a ticket window when purchasing a long-arranged journey, and pushed off, took five good strokes with the port oar and two with both before the bow banged into a dark ledge, caromed off, and lifted onto a strand of stone and pebble. The sound of those small rocks grinding together under the weight of the bow was as

satisfying to my ears as the crunch of a bone for a dog. I was on my land. The gamble had been eminent and worthwhile. I felt no less bombarded than the Prince of Wales after a night in World War I trenches, but I felt no less a prince. I was also heaving, trembling, and soaked to the bone.

I pulled the boat out, dragged it up beyond the last fretwork of seaweed into the tall grass at the southern point of Doane's. Given the wind, I not only turned the dinghy over, but stowed the oars beneath and tied the painter to a tree. Then I staggered up Long Doane, the main trail on the island--it is all of four hundred yards long--in the direction of The Keep which sat in the waist looking westward across Blue Hill Bay.

If the barrens on the other side of the channel are blighted and marsh-ridden, Doane has beauty. Our small forest is favored with the deep velvet of many a mossy cave. Dark green is our prevailing color in spring, summer and fall; our trails are red needle. Stands of spruce tower over hackmatack while pitch pines bend to the solicitations of the wind. They pray to the seas with one limb and raise a sword with the other. They undulate to the flight of gulls on quiet

days and shake with the passage of the geese. They stand in place with the mist on the edge of shore.

Having come so near to foundering in the dark, this is, indeed, a calm description of our island by day, but then, day and night (as well as high risk and sweet peace) are counterparts when surrounded by sea. It is the silences of an island that prevail. I had no more than to step ashore and my senses began to quiet. I could see the island as it would appear to me in daylight, saw it through every black depth of Long Doane, and knew each green chamber I approached, each porch of ledge I passed along the shore. The island was like a house. We felt as if we inhabited a dwelling within a dwelling. I am near to exaggeration, I know, but the Keep with no one but Kittredge and myself in winter would have been cavernously large if not for Doane's surrounding embrace. To inhabit a circle within a circle is to enter a spell.

What do I attempt to say? In our era of heartless condominiums, Kittredge and I still lived like a bankrupt count and countess. As real estate, the Keep was much too vast for two. Onto the first building, a two-story stone farmhouse built as a fort for Farr, my great-great-grandfather, Doane Hadlock Hubbard, attached a barn. Other

generations added plumbing and partitions. The barn served as a camp for family overflow in summer, and then there was the year when my mother brought her lavish taste to the property and managed to dragoon my father into hiring an architect to design us a long blonde-wood much-glassed living room that catapulted out over Blue Hill Bay. When finished, we looked across the water to the west and could glimpse other islands rising luminous in the dawn or slipping away like ships down the horizon into the nocturnal mist; we saw tropical sunsets in Maine. This modern room, thrust out from the second story of the old stone structure, was so reminiscent of a small first-class lounge on a well-appointed ocean liner that we came to call it the Cunard.

I was then returning to a house whose parts were so separately named as the Cunard, the Camp, the Vault, and the Keep (which last title denoted the original farmhouse, but, to preserve confusion, was employed equally for the whole.) We dwelt in the Old Keep--what else may I call it?--by winter, and inhabited everything but the Vault in summer when Kittredge's cousins arrived, and their children, as well as my cousins, and surviving half-brother and their wives, and friends with their children. Then the rites continued as

before. In boyhood, I used to spend two weeks each summer with my father on Doane. One trial of passage in adolescence had been to muster enough family madness to jump off the balcony of The Cunard into the waters of Blue Hill Bay below. That was a time-consuming plunge of thirty-plus feet which gave you ample measure of the eternal distance down. It took forever to reach the water (otherwise equal to a second-and-a-half). It was pure happiness, however, to come bubbling up to the ice-cold surface again. What virtue hummed in your blood as you swam to shore. My cousins and I were heroes to ourselves on the memorable first day that we could break out of our absolute childhood terror of taking the leap. It is just as well that my mother lived in the house no longer than it took to build the Cunard, since she would have gone to war with us for tracking our wet feet over her parquet floor as we came racing up the stairs for another go.

That had now become the first feat of summer for another generation of children. How full of sound was the house for two months! In winter, however, while Kittredge and I might occasionally use the fireplace in the Cunard and work on warm days by the afternoon light that came through its full windows, we kept for the most part to the rooms of the Old

Keep, just two of us, living in such calm and silence that each chamber became steeped in its own mood, and could not have been more particular if it had had a signature.

Sometimes I felt as if I knew my rooms in the way a farmer knows his livestock. But for fear that few would understand, I might suggest that I spoke to them, and they replied to me. Leave it at such. I make the point only to insist, for those who would believe us, that Kittredge and I were not lonely.

I, however, was still outside, and all too aware suddenly of how close I was to frostbite. The heat of rowing ashore, the glow of navigating Long Doane in the dark, the marrow of reminiscence, was gone. Abruptly, I was running. I had plunged with no warning from inner warmth to spasms of cold, and I came up to the main door of the Keep with such stiff hands, I could hardly mate the key to the lock.

Once inside, I looked about for Kittredge, but no one answered my call. I could not believe that she was sleeping in our bedroom instead of waiting up for my arrival. As disappointed as a boy who is refused a dance, I did not climb the stairs but went wandering down the hall to a mud room off the pantry. There, I stripped my wet grey flannel suit, and put on an old shirt and gardening pants with a faint but

unmistakable whiff of sweat and fertilizer, a mixed odor I would hardly applaud, but maybe I was full of the need to pay wages for the pleasure taken tonight. Or was it that I did not wish to see Kittredge in the clothes I wore with Chloe?

I put down a tot of Bushmills Irish--which required taking three steps from the mud room to the private stores in the pantry, and my shivering eased. I threw in another shot, and began to feel like a workable manifest of myself. Famous words, uttered by legions of Americans, came to my lips: Let's get it over with.

The fortitude of the whisky was watered by the stairs. The hall began to seem as long as my childhood memory of it. The door to our bedroom was closed. I tried the knob softly. The door was locked. A bolt went through my heart equal to that moment when the accused is found guilty in court. I rattled the knob. "Kittredge," I cried aloud.

I heard a rustle on the other side. Or did I merely suppose I had? My ears were confused by the wind. It was pounding and blathering on the storm windows outside, chattering, chewing like birds on a corpse. "Kittredge, for God's sake," I called out and had an image, immediate and

inerasable, of Kittredge in pale crimson bleeding waters. The bathtub, where I had found her once, was still the same tub.

I was ready then to break the door, but her voice spoke at that moment. I heard clear articulated vowels that might come from a neat old lady who is altogether dotty. She sounded exactly like her mother.

"Oh, Harry," she said, "do wait a minute. Oh, dear man, don't come in. Not yet."

If my body had suffered chills tonight, now my mind suffered the cold. Something was certainly wrong.

"Darling," she said, "I just heard frightful news. I can hardly tell you." Was it the wind? I did not know whether it was the wind. There seemed some lament in the air.

"Harry," said Kittredge through the door, "Hugh is dead. They killed him, I fear. Gobby is dead."

5.

I cried out: "Kittredge, unlock the door." On those infrequent and startling nights when she would speak to her dead mother, she would croon a tuneless lullabye. Right now, she was making some such sound.

In the silence that ensued, I descended into the fact. Harlot was dead.

"Kittredge, I implore you. Please talk to me."

"Harry,"--her voice was undeniably strange--"Can you leave me alone?"

"Alone?"

"For just a little while."

If my knock had caught the lady in bed with a lover, her panic could not have been more evident.

There was no lover, however, behind that door. Just the presence of his death. My heart followed this recognition. Death was as intimate to her fine senses as Chloe's rut on mine.

"I can't leave you here," I said, "unless you tell me more." When she did not reply, I said again, "Tell me!"

"Hugh washed ashore in the Chesapeake. Shot." She came close to halting, but went on. "Security says it's suicide. That's what they are going to announce."

"Who gave you this information?"

When she offered no answer, I knocked on the door again. "You have to let me in."

"I won't. Never now." She said this such determination that I wondered whether she had heard about Chloe? But when? It could only be after our phone call.

"I'm not sure," I said, "how safe it is for either of us to be alone."

"Safe enough." Another tone was entering her voice--that limitless anger which stirs at the obduracy of a mate.

"Kittredge, I must speak to you about Dorothy Hunt."

"No."

"Let me in. Do let me in."

"Do let me in. Oh, do let me in," said Kittredge.

I backed off. The impact of Harlot's death had not arrived for me. It seemed far away. He had inhabited my psyche since I was sixteen. But he was dead. In a day or two, they would say Harlot was a suicide. Had he rolled his wheelchair into the water, wrestled his body out of the seat, and, having kept all the powder dry, fired into his brain just before the waters covered his face? No, they would not take such a story to the public. Someone very much on the inside must have made the call to Kittredge.

I went back to the mud room, picked up the wet gray pinstripe off the hook, and carried it and my sopping blue oxford shirt and underwear to the laundry on the other side of the pantry. I did not know much about these matters, but obviously was not without an inkling that our washer-dryer might flagellate the suit. No matter. I could not live much longer

recognize my wits were asleep. A good power boat would have no undue trouble reaching here from Bartlett's Island or Seal Cove.

A cobweb in the near corner of the laundry room began to claim my attention. On the spider's back was a species of yellow face, or at least some small markings like eye-sockets, a spine of line for the nose, something close to a mouth and chin. I meditated upon these cosmic clues like a drunk who regards the wonders of a bashed-up fingernail while galaxies of the night's failure wheel about.

My suit had to be ready. Ready or not--I think the Bushmills was having its untoward effect--I opened the dryer door, pulled out shirt, underwear, vest, jacket and pants, all more muddled by now than fruit in an Old Fashioned, and got dressed.

It was at this moment that my hand went up to my breast pocket. Only my desire to account for all the events of this night can oblige me to confess the next detail. I gasped. My passport--soaked doubtless in the crossing of the channel--had been left in my breast pocket while the suit was being flung about in the dryer. Now, its official pages, as I soon discovered, were all puffed up. I had a biscuit for a document. The print was barely visible. What a stupidity! I had been

carrying this particular passport ever since I commenced the High Holies. Harlot had obtained it for me to use abroad should I have to decamp on short notice. William Madden Libby was the sweet alias Montague had bestowed--a Godawful name--but no matter, should all go wrong, it was my trap door. I kept it on me. Now, standing on the bare-wood floor of the laundry, wearing my still damp and battered suit, I seemed incapable of attaching myself to the immediate situation. That is detachment! I was in some exotic realm where the passage of time does not bring you back to your responsibilities.

All the same, I wasn't certain if I cared to knock on my bedroom door, no, not to be rejected again. Yet what other course was open? I felt no better and perhaps no worse than a man who is being asked by a superior to justify his expense accounts. How silent was the house as I climbed the stairs.

Our bedroom door was slightly ajar. Not opened, but cracked. Had Kittredge gone to look for me? It did not seem probable. More likely, she had had a small change of heart, enough to open the bolt. Of course, that did not mean I was welcome.

Before I stepped into the room, I could hear her speaking. I did not have to make out the words to know by her tone, a

little loud, a little abstract--as if addressing a deaf person--that she was talking to the wall. How I hoped it was her mother, hoped for it so devoutly I visualized Maisie Minot Gardiner before me with her white hair, strong white teeth and the parrot's voice that gracious ladies often have (as if they would not dream of using a phrase which had not been uttered first by some more appropriate person--the tones that came from Eleanor Roosevelt's throat were the first, perhaps, to draw attention to this phenomenon.)

Kittredge's mother had eyes like the purple-blue of the extraordinary tall hybrids which grew in her garden. I knew the names of wildflowers, but Maisie bothered only with brand-new species. She grew the tallest flowers, super-zinnias, four and five feet high and fabulously bright. If you put a Bonnard on an easel in her garden, the palette would have been dominated by Maisie's blooms. On warm days those blossoms swayed to their own mood much like Maisie. She was notoriously perky in her opinions. "Harry, don't be a fool about the French," she could say, "they're simply not to be trusted."

Yes, I prayed Kittredge was speaking to Maisie, but knew she was not.

"I will," I now heard my wife say, "follow you nowhere."

The door opened at my touch. It was exactly as I expected. That is to say, it was a good deal worse than my hopes. Kittredge sat in a chair facing the wall. She wore a white nightgown, no whiter than her skin, which made her look both nude and draped at once. Her hair had never seemed darker nor more lustrous. I had time to think that Cristina Gabriela Rossetti would have adored her--we must be allowed one wholly unproductive thought in every crisis. Kittredge's eyes were no longer full of mist. They glowed. It is not common for blue eyes to glow in a modestly lit bedroom, but I could have sworn that the light came from within. She was certainly oblivious to me.

"Hugh, I warned you," she said aloud. "I prayed for you. Now, I am free. I will not accompany you out of this house."

On that first time, not long after we were married, when I heard her talking to her mother, I made the mistake of telephoning from Doane's all the way to McLean, Virginia, where a psychiatrist, on CIA contract, kept his office. Kittredge had come close to not forgiving me. Ignore the damage done to her career (and mine) now that such an episode had been implanted in her file; this was the least of my error. What she could not forgive was the simple lack of respect. "I love my mother," she

said to me, "and it's a grace that I am able to talk to her. Can't you see? That was an overbearing thing to do--phone a doctor. Harry, I will think we are not suited for one another if you try such a barbarism again. You were calling my gift an infirmity."

She did not have to repeat herself around me. I did my best to mend the broken link. I had, after all, only spoken to the psychiatrist once. When he called again on follow-up, I implied that Kittredge and I had gotten very drunk together--a highly uncharacteristic state of affairs for us, I said, and her acts under intoxication had not quite squared with mine. That was how I put it, and added, "After all, Doctor, a person's got a right to veer off their bearings by a quadrant or so when a parent dies."

"Call it a quart or so," he said, and we both made a point of laughing, first in harmony, then in counterpoint. Why is phony laughter musically more structured than the real stuff?

Career loss for my wife was limited to a reference in her 201 file. A bell-ringer, that is, a notation: psychiatric help solicited. Given the number of alcoholics, divorcees, discovered homosexuals, and occasional freak-outs among us (no worse, I would warrant, than in a high pressure corporation) I

hoped the listing might not do real damage. I knew, however, that the slopes were getting slippery. Our marriage had been an in-house scandal comparable to a major running away with the general's wife.

All of this may help to explain why I now walked around Kittredge's chair as if I circumnavigated a holy man. Be certain, I did not fetch water to wash her face, nor chafe her feet, nor think to shake her, or even touch her--rather, I did my best not to dive back into some long-lost fold of childhood where I could cry out at how helpless I felt. With all the habits of a life trained to take hold of things, there was nothing to do but sit down.

She remained still for a long time. Then she began to nod her head. She said to the wall, "Why don't you tell me? Gobby, you never could bring yourself to admit the truth to a soul. But you can tell me. If you think it's important, darling, perhaps you should."

It was like a conversation taking place on a roof when someone is ready to jump and the police look to dissuade him. I suspect the dialogue on such an occasion comes to seem natural. Kittredge spoke to the wall as if, no question, Harlot was there. I confess it soon began to seem reasonable enough to me.

Our bedroom, too ascetic for my taste, too much like an upstairs chamber in a good New England inn--even the white flounces on the counterpane were professionally chaste--seemed put in no disarray by the intensity of Kittredge's words. When she ceased speaking, the room took up its white pervasive silence.

"Harry, get the fuck out, will you?"

Through all our years together, she rarely used the word. If marriage is a sacrament, courtesies are kept. But then I was not certain she had spoken. Could that have been Harlot's voice issuing from her larynx?

Kittredge arched forward in her chair. "You are covered with seaweed," she said aloud. "Oh, Gobby, pull it off. You look like you're wearing a wig." She laughed loudly in what was nearly a man's voice, and then as the laugh continued, the tone became unmistakably hearty. Some men laugh as if even the embers in a fireplace, and the wrapper leaves of a good Havana, are part of the splendid service that surrounds them. "My God," I thought, "she is laughing just like my father." Then her features took an expression to remind me of Allen Dulles, equally as departed as my father.

Once in Viet Nam, after a carouse through The Department Store (our name for the largest brothel in Saigon) I ended in a

hotel room with a young and tiny Vietnamese prostitute who procured me opium. I smoked it with a great sense of sin and vomited up my dinner with a whole sense of redemption. Afterward, the peace of the pipe came to me, and I began to hallucinate. The face of the whore became the face of my mother, and then the face of my third cousin Kittredge whom I'd been in love with for years from afar. After a while, I was able to turn the features of this Vietnamese prostitute into any woman I chose. That was one more offering from the pipe, and I knew I was having, for the first time, a psychedelic experience.

In our bedroom, however, I could not choose the face I wished to see next, nor did I have any happy confidence that I was afloat on misty ponds of somewhat controllable hallucination. Rather, each set of features came forth as if someone else's hand was there to work her flesh. Upon Kittredge's delicate upper lip grew the rough pepper-and-salt brush of Harlot's mustache. His wire-rimmed spectacles were on her nose, her full head of hair became his half-bald dome, and he stared at me. Next, he spoke. It came through Kittredge's mouth, but it could as well have been his voice. "You'll find out, Harry. She's a consummate liar."

The mustache faded with the spectacles. Her mane of black hair belonged to her again. Kittredge began to weep.

"Gobby, take me with you. Take me along. I love you. And I'm lonely here." I saw sorrow on her face, but it soon passed. Like a child declaring a quick end to the previous mood, a new expression moved over her features, a leer. It was the private look that only Chloe could offer, her come-into-my-domain leer. You would not see that turn on Chloe's mouth until you were naked against her, and the demon was parting the insulations of the flesh; the baubles were ready to gleam. Released at last!

I was feeling some unfamiliar impulses. To be walking on the avenue and feel an abrupt inclination to go down a side street, is a common impulse. Presumably, it comes from oneself. Here, I had no doubt. The suggestions coming to me now were not my own. I was like an iron filing skittering about on a plate as magnets are shifted beneath. Powerful as gods are those magnets. I felt a wish to bring Kittredge down to the Vault. It did not pass. I could not quit the thought. Whatever compulsion had delivered me over and again to the door of Chloe's trailer was now on the prowl for my wife. A wash of lust, pure as wild goat, came into my loins. The screw-grease heats reserved for Chloe were over me again. I cannot bear to

confess my next thought. Colder than Harlot was my heart: I wanted Kittredge in the Vault.

But I had invoked Harlot's name and that gave up the game. I broke into a sweat. Was Harlot asking me to bring her down to the Vault?

I left Kittredge where she sat in her chair and went down to the first floor of the Keep. There I lit the fire in our den. It was the warmest room we had. When other lights were out, and the fire was well along, then the stained wood of the old barn planks enriched the walls with the color of bourbon and brandy. One could summon the illusion that marriage-and-profession were not without their liaison to the universal hearth.

Now, however, my thoughts were as livid as the exhaustions of an insomniac. I sprawled into an old leather chair and studied the fire. I did my best to empty my mind. I had gifts for meditation; techniques, as you may suspect, to restore detachment. I needed peace in the way an exhausted general needs sleep. After twenty minutes of seeking to compose myself, I received instead the poor coin of the substitute: Apathy. On the down-side of lust, I felt as flat as the butt-end of cocaine.

It was at this moment that the telephone on the end table began to ring. That was not common at this hour. Up to ten years ago, calls sometimes came in the middle of the night. An overseas cable might have arrived at Langley which required an opinion from me, urgent enough at any rate to bring the phone into the elbow of one's dream. At this moment, however, what impressed me most was my quiet expectation that the phone was going to ring. Then it did.

"Sorry, you're not safe," she purred. "It's not safe."
She said. She purred again. "Have they come through your
doors?" she asked.

"No."

"They won't through mine."

"But?"

"While I was out looking that last drink with you. They
went through every last thing in the trailer. They got into
the stuffing in the furniture. They made love by candle
light. They took apart my car stereo. They stole my suitcase.
They dumped the whole damn house." She began to cry. She cried
like a strong woman who has just received news that a child
has been killed in an accident. -6- Sorry, I can't hear you
now. They went through what I did. I was prepared for the
worst, but they didn't want a thing. They even got my suitcase.

I knew the voice before I could utter the name. "Chloe,"
I said.

"I hate to call you like this," she began. A full
amateur's pause followed, as if only now had it even occurred
to her--"Can we talk?" she asked.

Was guilt still skewing my senses? I had the notion that
Kittredge was stirring in the bedroom. "Yes, we can talk," I
said. But my voice was low enough to assure her we could not.

"Harry, you're not safe." She paused. "I'm not safe," she said. She paused again. "Have they gone through your house," she asked.

"No."

"They went through mine."

"What?"

"While I was out having that last drink with you. They went through every last thing in the trailer. They cut open the stuffing in the furniture. They broke into my picture frames. They took apart my gas stove. They slit my mattress. They dumped the bureau drawers." She began to cry. She cried like a strong woman who has just received news that a relative has been maimed in an accident. "Harry, I sat there half an hour. Then I went through what I own. I was prepared for the worst, but they didn't steal a thing. They even put my costume jewelry in a neat pile on the bed. And my bikini panties. And my red and black bra. Right next to it, what do you think? They laid out one roach. I toked a little marijuana last New Year's Eve and put the roach at the bottom of my drawer. They laid it right next to my costume jewelry. I hate them," she said.

"Them?"

In addition, I had always thought of myself as the
possessor of a very strong will, and I could not but glory in
my life by the strength I have made to climb out of the pit.
My own spirit of myself as a power, the highest source
usually given to be what I could do with my own hands
and of my father's light, revealed by him during that time, and
in his will, revealed to me. The same was in my heart. I
could not let go and as a little girl, I was.

I remember, I was hardly ready to go into the world. I
would have been, yes, not ready. I would have been in the same
way and for something, I would have been in the same way.

In addition, I had always thought of myself as the
possessor of a very strong will, and I could not but glory in
my life by the strength I have made to climb out of the pit.

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I began to tremble, and I remember holding one hand over
the other to still the quiver. It was peculiar. There was an
unholy exhilaration about it. For hours I had been oppressed
by the conviction that I was being watched. To have this much
confirmation, therefore, was relief: I began to gulp in whole
swallows of breath as if a body stocking had been removed from
my head. Indeed, I was close to happy. I was also on the edge
of unruly panic.

In childhood, I had always thought of myself as the feckless son of a very brave man, and I could tell the story of my life by the attempts I have made to climb out of the pit. If you think of yourself as a coward, the rashest course usually proves to be wise. A sense of self-esteem now reminded me of my father's Luger, captured by him during OSS days, and in his will, bequeathed to me. The case was in my closet. I could get it out and do a little reconnoitering.

I rebelled. I was hardly ready to go into the woods. I would have to, yes, get ready. I would have to--it is the term we used for psyching ourselves when alone-- do a bootstrap.

An occupation so exorbitantly professional as mine, obviously produces a few personal powers even when one is, oneself, far from extraordinary. Sometimes, I did gain the ability to force my mind into preparing for a near-impossible occasion. Of course, this ability was an exaggerated faculty. One could also have been a contest winner on one of those now-gone television shows where you had to find the answer to a riddle while hell was popping forth on the stage and the audience roared. To clear my mind and focus my will, I confess that I liked to use a certain text from the Book of Common Prayer.

Let me say that the words were hardly said in prayer. If now, I repeated to myself the Collect for Fridays: Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you... I was trying not to shrive myself for battle so much as to return my most unruly agitations to the deep. Repeating this prayer, if need be, ten times, my prep school years would always appear before me, and the fatal-drowse-in-chapel, as we used to call it at St. Matthew's, would also return. I would "fall asleep peacefully" in someone, or in something, and awaken, after such a five or ten-second cut-out, facing in the direction my mind wished to follow. Every man to his own mnemonic! I came out of these ten seconds with the recognition that I must not sit beside Kittredge and keep guard until dawn. That might be prudent, but it was of no use for me. To sit in this chair and take care of my own life would lose my love. That is an outrageously romantic equation, but I saw it as the logic of love--which usually reduces itself to a single equation. Love is outrageous. One must endanger oneself to preserve it--a likely reason why so few people stay in love. I was obliged to discover who the prowler might be.

I lifted my father's Luger, therefore, from its case and slipped a loaded 9mm magazine out of the side pocket, inserted the clip into the handle, drew back the slide, snapped it forward, heard the round go home to the breech. To the gun lover, that is a satisfying sound, (and I was a gun-lover at this moment). Next, I stepped to our bedroom door, opened it, pocketed the key, and weapon in hand, strolled down the hall.

My father used to say that the Luger was Germany's most dependable contribution to gracious living. In profile, his captured Luger is as handsome as Sherlock Holmes, and its heft in one's palm can make you feel like a good shot in much the way a fine horse will offer suggestions to your seat that you may yet become a good rider. I felt ready.

The Keep is a house with seven doors, a mark, we often say, of the luck it is ready to bestow. We have a front door on the old house, and a back one, as well as a side entrance for the Cunard (that gives on a stairway to the beach at low tide) a door at each end of the Camp, plus the pantry exit to the woodshed, and a cellar hatch.

I took the pantry door. There was no illumination from nearby windows, and the wind was loud enough, I figured, to overpower any grating of the hinges or the bolt. So it proved. I opened and closed the pantry door without much announcement.

Outside, the dark was as massive as a cavern. I took comfort in that. The ground was wet, my steps were stilled. I had not felt so alive (in just this way) since a season near to twenty years ago accompanying a few patrols in Vietnam--in truth, I had not taken ten silent steps before I was back to whatever I learned on the few occasions I went along with a platoon on a Search and Destroy. There is much to be said for feeling alert in one's toes and fingertips, in one eyes, nostrils, ears, even to the taste of the air on one's tongue.

Yet, in the time I spent emerging from the open end of the shed, and slipping into the woods, it was evident that I was as likely to bump into some unknown party on guard, as to slip up unheard on whoever might be observing our house. The night, as I say, was black, and the wind was strong. When it blew at its best, I could take ten quick strides and never hear my steps on the wet pine carpet, nor, for that matter, the whipping of a branch. So I saw soon enough what to do. If I was to learn anything, I would have to circle the house at a distance, then, about every forty paces, work back to the lights. Done carefully, I ought to be able to come up from behind, if, that is, they were stationed in place. Or, were they prowling like me? Did I have to watch my back? I traveled in circles more ways than one.

I must have been out for a full twenty minutes before I came across the first guard. Sitting on a stump was a man in a poncho with a walkie-talkie in his hand. I saw him from fifty feet away, his attention fixed on my front door, his body revealed in silhouette by the light above the entry, and his posture was attentive, although not enormously so, not different from a deer hunter who has been waiting in a blind for a deer. His only assignment, I suspected, was to report on his walkie-talkie so soon as anyone was sighted.

I passed through a moment when I was tempted to shoot him. Raising the Luger, I lined up the dark object of his head, dramatically back-lit in my front sight, and knew I could do it--legally and spiritually. I could never remember feeling so sure of myself with a hand-gun, in truth, it was almost twenty years since I had fired one in anger and that had been in Viet Nam in the middle of a sudden and ferocious fire fight where everyone was shooting off all they had, and I, as unbalanced and blind as any grunt on combat marijuana, emptied a .357 Magnum into a bush whose look I did not like, although in contrast to the war movies I had seen, no Oriental with a lost dazed look tumbled out of the foliage, rather the bush was blasted away. Magnum force!

That had been combat mania laced with considerable funk (and pot!) and connected to nothing else in my life, but this impulse now came from the center of myself as cold and implacable as the desire to carry Kittredge down to the Vault, I felt--in a word--evil, and enjoyed it, and took pride in the way my hand did not quiver. I had never held a pistol as steadily in training. Yet I couldn't shoot him. He had to be part of a team. I would explode a situation I did not yet comprehend. Besides, the situation did not feel dangerous, not in these familiar woods, not now. The night seemed pendent, as if both of us, guard and myself, were waiting for a further event.

So I stepped back from that man with his walkie-talkie, and continued my tour around the house. I felt balanced, cool, dangerous to others, and attuned to the chill wet aromatic of the dark evergreens about me. In such a splendid state, I must have gone fifty paces around the larger perimeter I had drawn for myself before working in again toward the hub, but this time saw no one near the Camp, not by either door. On the next approach, however, moving in toward the Cunard, there where the beach stairs descended to the rock shelf, I could detect a quiver of movement that seemed to belong more to a man than a

shrub. Then I heard a poncho flap. The sound was as loud as a mainsail catching the wind. Yes, it had to be another guard.

I could hardly discern him. He was but a darkness within other darkness. The Cunard, as described, projected in cantilever above the house to give a view of Blue Hill Bay. I was hidden at this moment in the stygian invisibility of the rock shelf beneath the cantilever. To go forward could reveal me. I retreated therefore. But I was hardly out from underneath before a light went on in the long living room of the Cunard, and from my angle below I saw through our picture window the head and shoulders of a man walking back and forth, a man I knew but could not at once name. I could swear, however, that he was good Langley kin. I suppose we are as recognizable in our fashion as KGB, yes, this was one of us.

I returned to the woodshed, keeping my distance from the first guard. I was not in any particular fear for Kittredge. The stranger in the Cunard--familiar to me in that one quick look--had not appeared threatening so much as gravely concerned. Indeed, I was sufficiently sure of this perception to put the Luger in the drawer of an old cupboard in the pantry, as though everything would be set needlessly askew if I walked forward, gun in hand. The reconnaissance I had just undertaken in the woods, while of mixed returns for my ego

(since it had been good to do it, but once done, of what value?) had succeeded nonetheless in honoring my anxiety. I had determined who the visitor was--the glimpse of his face had come into focus. He was a high official from the Office of Security, and I knew him. I knew him well. Arnie Rosen. Reed Arnold Rosen. Now, in the time I had consumed in coming back to the house, he had moved from the Cunard to the den, and it was there that I came in on him sitting in my favorite chair smoking a pipe. Reed Arnold Rosen, once Arnie, then Ned, now Reed these days to friends and co-workers. I qualified, probably, as both. Arnie Rosen and I had gone through training together at The Farm, and seen much of each other soon after as assistants to Harlot. Was it twenty-seven years ago? Yes, I knew Reed and he knew me. It was just that by the measure of our careers, he had prospered a little more than myself.

All the same I had an unholy impulse to use the early nickname, Arnie.

"Hello, Reed," I said.

"Harry, you're looking fit."

I knew I was not appearing fit in his eyes. "I'm a mess," I said, "but then it's wet in the boondocks."

He nodded. "I was out a little earlier." His three-piece suit hardly showed it--English worsted and a London tailor had taken him equably through the damp.

If humans had pedigrees as finely nurtured as dogs, our best people (whether birthed Scotch-Irish, Ukrainian, Italian or Lithuanian) would have put the ethnicity behind--we look pure-bred. We are what our vocational environment has made us: American Intelligence. It grated on me a little that I who was born into a pretty good kennel, had, at this point, with my professional life awash (not to dwell on my muddled clothes) less of the look than Rosen. His neat medium-sized body and close-cropped gray hair, short sharp nose, tight upper lip (which always looked as if it were being squeezed against his capped front teeth), even his silver-rimmed eyeglasses fit the gray suit he was wearing about the way a fox-in-glove sits in the sconces of its stalk.

All the same, I was glad to see him. To find that my inquisitor--whom I now realized I must have been awaiting for months--was as civilized a top cop as old Ned Rosen, allowed me to feel collected for the first time this night. In truth, I felt--there is no end to the logic of these organizational matters--back in the Company again.

"It was a bit of a jaunt to get to your woods," he said.

How much he had improved since the old days. When we trained together, Rosen, who had been Phi Beta Kappa at Columbia, Mensa, et cetera, had also been--in a word--adenoidal. His nasal intelligence kept boring in. You cannot do that and expect to be well-liked. He was a fellow in those days to be rejected by in-groups before they even formed.

Now, he was married to a nice gray Episcopalian lady (whom, in fact, I once used to date) and had obviously learned a lot. The nasality had metamorphised into the resonance of a high government official.

"Yes," he said, "you look damp and I'm not dry."

I had had enough warm-up, however.

"Did you telephone Kittredge tonight?"

He took his pause, more in decorum than caution. "About Hugh Montague?"

"Yes."

"Harry, I didn't telephone her. I brought the news."

"When?"

"A while ago."

He must have arrived not long after I had made my call from the Bell Telephone ice-box on the coast road. So he had been here when I came back. His walkie-talkie people had heard me approaching through the woods, had heard my teeth chattering

"I'm honored that they sent you," I told him.

"I may be dishonored in the morning," he replied. "This trip is on me."

"Not authorized?"

"Not altogether. You see, I wanted to arrive quickly."

"Well," I said, "we won't be playing ping-pong, will we?"

It was out of character not to cover his delicate behind; no one knew better than Rosen that we are the most paper-haunted bureaucracy of them all. So we pay a lot of attention to getting the right paper. Every action has to be traceable to a piece of the stuff. That, at least, is established procedure. If, of necessity, we are obliged to move from time to time without a program, statute, directive, memo, or presidential finding, it is a naked feeling. Rosen had no paper.

"I hope you are prepared to get into it," he said.

"I'll do better. I'll go full embrace."

"It's quite a while since I've heard that."

On debriefing a tricky agent, the case officer may strike a deal. Information will be pooled. It is a splendid technique for speeding results but it works best for the case officer when the agent is, effectively, in custody. As I was now.

"Can't say. Not yet."

"How did you get here?" I asked. "Did you fly to Bar Harbor Airport?"

"In my plane. I have added a pilot's license to my small assortment of virtues."

"There's always something new to learn about you, Reed."

My praise, you would think, was edged, but he couldn't keep from showing his pleasure. Once after Richard Helms had rescued a few of Hugh Montague's less savory chestnuts from a Congressional inquiry, Harlot, to repay the debt, was quick to offer the Director a large compliment. "You, Dick," Harlot had said, "are so aptly named. One small craft after another to skipper through the fearful breeze." That was a little thick, I thought, but Helms, who looked as much to the point as an ice-pick, and was certainly on guard around Harlot, still couldn't keep himself from beaming at such homage to his now-masterly moniker. Later, Harlot remarked, "Depend on it, Harry, the vanity of a high official never bottoms out."

Ergo, I had gone my way to put Rosen on automatic feed. I was thinking to catch him while he was munching.

"As you were flying up here," I inquired, "you didn't stop off in Bath, Maine, did you?"

He went so far as to take his pipe out of his mouth.

"Most certainly not." He took his pause: Were we in full or not? "I must say," he added, "the thought occurred to me. We are on to your friend, Chloe."

"Was it the FBI who paid her a visit tonight?"

"Of course not. Not by way of us. She's hardly on a five-state alert."

"How about the DEA?"

"Ditto. I could swear."

"Who, then, ransacked her trailer?"

"What?" He seemed genuine in his surprise.

"She called me. In panic. By her description, it was a thoroughgoing, insulting, highly professional job."

"I'm at a loss."

"Why are you interested in her?" I asked.

"I'll tell you in a bit. In proper order. We're at the wrong place to talk about Chloe." He looked upstairs in the approximate direction of the master bedroom.

"Ned, kidding is kidding, but if we are to speak of my so-called friend Chloe, get your ass off my pillow. I happen to have coffee with her sometimes when I pass through Bath. And, I'll vouchsafe my bonafides. Chloe and I have no carnal knowledge of one another. No C.K. Not at all. But, Ned, I'm

desirous to know"--yes, the Glenlivet (after the Bushmills, after the Luger) was having an unanticipated effect; the good Scotch was making me testy--"yes, tell me, pal, what the hell has Chloe got to do with anything? She's just a waitress."

"Maybe yes, maybe no."

"Will you pretend you are not witting of her conversation with me tonight? Or do you opera-lovers claim not to have tapped this phone here in the den? Are we supposed to be simple?"

He held up his hand. I realized I was too angry. Was my guilt getting into my voice? "Ease off, Harry," he said, "ease off. Presumably your phone call with Chloe is on tape one place or another. I just didn't have the means to tap into you directly. Nor," he added, "the desire. I didn't come here to strap you to the table and whip out the proctoscope."

"Although you wouldn't mind a conversation in depth."

"Equal to equal."

"Do you know what is in back of my mind right now?" I asked.

"The High Holies."

Rosen was showing how unequal we were after all.

"Reed," I told him, "I don't know all that much about the High Holies."

work that would put us all to shame. Such bold and well-turned stuff."

I was trying to conceal my unprecedented pleasure. "Bold and well-turned," had left me outrageously agog. Just as vain as a high official.

Rosen followed up by saying, "I'll tell you in confidence that whatever lifting you've done, and I believe we have pretty good tracking on these rampages by now, still, fellow--" his voice had never been more resonant--"on my word, the sins are venial."

It was his way of saying I would do well to cooperate. Rosen himself, over the years, must have supplied Harlot with a good deal of top shelf stuff the Office of Security liked to keep for themselves. Venial sins went on all the time. In-house and out. Information slipped through the cracks between State and us, Defense and us, the NSC--yes, especially NSC--and us: We were merely good Americans on the lookout for material to send to Leak City.

Mortal sins were another matter. Mortal sins delivered the papyrus to the Sovietskys, an incomparably less humorous business. While Rosen could not be absolutely certain at this moment that I was positioned entirely on the lower end of the Venial-Mortal scale, he was nonetheless making covert promises.

Resignation from the service might be in order, he had all but said, rather than trial, discharge, prison, und so weiter. Obviously, he needed my help. The questions surrounding Hugh Montague's death were going to be orders of magnitude more vital than any of my career-sour peccadillos.

Perhaps it was just as well that I would have Ned for my interlocutor rather than some high-ranking Security baboon who would not know how many generations of Hubbards it had taken to shape the dear shabby quiddities of the Keep.

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The light from the fireplace was reflected in his eyeglasses. I even saw the logs flicker as I spoke.

"Let's take it for granted," I said, "that my separation from the service will be equitable." I do not know if my voice had something inadmissably smug in its assessment, or if Rosen had been playing me with a well-chosen fly, but now I could feel him whipping in slack.

His thin mouth took on the I-will-get-you severity of a bureaucrat about to land his trout.

"Let us assume," he said, "that close cooperation will permit separation on terms as equitable as vector guidelines permit."

It took a Ph.D. to speak the best bureaucratese. I nodded scornfully. I realized I was drunk. That didn't happen often these days no matter how much I drank, but you have to feel competitive about bureaucratese after close to thirty years in the government.

"Subject," I told him, "to conjoining your cooperative efforts with subject target, we will engineer some collateral inquiries out of the vector muck and save the pension."

I said this to get his highly domiciled little smile off his face, but he merely looked sad. I realized that Rosen was as full of liquor as myself. We had been running a small rapids on the great river of booze. Now the drop was over. The river was calm.

He sighed. I thought he was about to say, "How could you have done it?" but instead he murmured, "We're not ready to make deals."

"Then where are we?"

"I'd like your overview."

I took a sobering swallow of Scotch. "Why?"

"Maybe I need it. We're in the middle of a disaster. Sometimes you see things more clearly than me."

"All right," I said.

"I mean it," he said. I began to think he did.

"What do we have?" I asked. "You are holding a body that is Harlot's body?"

"Yes," he said, but reluctantly, as if ready to deny his own affirmative.

"I assume," I said, and I took another sip of Scotch before bringing my voice down this gravel path, "the remains are damaged and swollen by water."

"The body, ostensibly, belongs to Harlot."

We were silent. I had known it would not be routine to speak of Harlot's death in any fashion, yet was still surprised at the engorgement of my throat. Sorrow, anger, confusion, and a hint of hysteria at my own confusion, were all groping alike for a safe spot in my larynx. I discovered that it helped to look at the fire. I studied a log as it glowed into incandescence before collapsing softly upon itself, and I began to mourn Harlot--along with all else! Yet mortality, we learn from every sermon, is the dissolution of all matter, yes, all our forms flow down to the sea, and Harlot's death was entering the universe. So, too, did my throat feel less impeded.

"Keep going."

"If, however, Harlot was murdered," I said, and stopped again. Greater difficulties commenced here. I leaned disgracefully on an old CIA saw: "You don't lance a boil," I told him, "without having some idea where the drainage will go."

"Of course," said Rosen.

"Well, Reed, if Harlot was murdered, are you prepared to point east or west?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether to look for the KGB, or something closer to home." He exhaled from the tension of having carried this by himself for so many hours.

"It can't be the King Brothers," I said. "We're not about to start shooting each other."

He tapped the stem of his pipe against his teeth. What I had just said, we both knew: It would be the next thing to mutual kamikaze if we and the KGB ever began killing each other's officers, so by unspoken covenant, we didn't. Third World agents, perhaps, and an occasional European, but not each other. "No, not the Russians," I said, "unless Harlot was working a double game with them."

Rosen sighed.

"On the other hand," I proposed, "it could be us. Enclaves."

"Would you expatiate on that?" Rosen asked.

"Ever since Watergate, Harlot's been convinced that there are those among us who have been using our most classified information as a guide to buy, sell, and invest all over the world. By Montague's estimate, these covert finances could be larger by now than the entire budget for Operations."

"Are you saying Harlot was killed by Agency people who stood to lose millions of dollars?"

"Hundreds of millions. Maybe more."

I was partial to the thesis. For Harlot's sake and for my own. If he was the good sentinel on guard against internal corruption, then my work with him might take on an honorable light with one's judges.

Rosen, however, shook his head. "It's not productive to go in this direction yet," he said. "You see, you don't know the worst-case scenario. There's a hell of a roadblock in front of your thesis."

I poured a little more Scotch for both of us.

"You see," said Rosen, "we're not, in fact, sure it's Harlot's remains. Not what washed up in the Chesapeake."

"Not sure?" I could hear the echo in my voice.

"What we have purports to be Montague's body. but the labs can't give 100% probability to the cadaver. The specificities are respectable. Good fit for height and weight. On his third finger, left hand, a St. Matthew's ring. The face, however, is another matter." Rosen's pale gray eyes, usually unremarkable, now looked luminous behind his eyeglasses.

"I couldn't get myself to tell Kittredge," he continued. "The face and head were blown off. Shotgun muzzle pressed against the palate. Probably a sawed-off shotgun."

I did not wish to contemplate this image longer than I had to. "What about Hugh's back?" I asked.

"There is a severe back injury on the body we possess. No perambulative functions would be possible." He shook his head. "We can't be positive, however, that it's the Montague injury."

"Surely you have Harlot's X-rays on file?"

"Well, Harry, you know Harlot. He had all records transferred from his hospital treatment center to us. He would never allow information about himself to repose anywhere out of the domain."

"What do his X-rays tell you?"

"That's the road block," said Rosen. "The X-rays can't be found." He took his pipe out of his mouth and scrutinized the

progress of the char in his bowl. "We have a first-rate headache."

I knew one of Essex's questions was, had Harry Wilford removed Harlot's Memoirs from the shelf?

The trouble was, I couldn't give an answer. I had no recollection of ever bringing anything to Harlot from his medical file. By power of an almost total loss of memory, after thirty years of thinking, could I give a guinea bet, or two. It was not impossible that I had forgotten.

More likely was that someone else had done the lifting. I could have been only one of four or five men carrying boxes

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I knew one of Rosen's questions now. Had Harry Hubbard removed Harlot's X-rays from the file?

The trouble was, I couldn't give an answer. I had no recollection of ever bringing anything to Harlot from his medical file. My powers of on-demand recollection, after thirty years of drinking, could show a gaping hole or two. It was not impossible that I had forgotten.

More likely was that someone else had done the lifting. I could have been only one of four or five mules carrying bales

of papyrus from Langley out to Harlot. For that matter, the loss of the X-rays could be attributed to FMWP--pronounced as FoaM-WhiP--our in-house acronym for Files Mislaid Within Parameters. The CIA had been expanding for close to four decades in spite of--or was it due to?--FoaM-WhiP. One could never assume a missing file to have been filched in mortal sin. The removal was more likely to be venial--plucked to protect some officer's self-interest, or misassigned to the wrong department on its way back to the nest, or, for that matter, a young file clerk, distracted over a dubious romance, could have plunked the papers into the wrong folder, the wrong box, or now that we were computerized, down the chute on an off-key. The User-Friendly computers employed by our common folk were as ready to take you off the road as the steering wheel of a fat old four-door sedan.

In short, Harlot's X-ray files were not now available.

"We're also having some trouble locating his fingerprints," Rosen now told me. "Although that may not matter. The fish got to the tips of his fingers. Which is interesting. There is a substance--some equivalent of catnip, but solely for fish, that could have been painted on his fingertips. Which got the catfish nibbling in the desired

place. On the other hand, fish do nibble at extremities. So it could be natural causes."

He dipped into an attache case he had sitting beside him on the floor, and handed over two 8 X 10 glossies respectively of a left hand wearing a ring, and a right hand. "Would this be recognizable?" Perhaps it was the pallor of the black and white tones in the photograph, but the hands could have belonged to anyone, they were identifiable only as the puffed-up waterlogged mitts of a man who had been in water much too long. And the tips of the fingers were indeed frayed to the bone.

"I asked Kittredge if she could make any identification from this, but she became distraught," Rosen said.

Yes, distraught. The moment when I begged her to let me into the bedroom, came back in all its rags of woe. How she must have suffered at the sight of those enlargements. Harlot's hands--once so deft. Kittredge's grief became a little more comprehensible to me. It was--cruel paradox--that her torment had nothing to do with mine: Her suffering had a separate existence. This occurred to me in the way that a physicist might encounter a new and offensive proposition in his field: It did not matter how much I loved Kittredge, no guarantee was returned that she could love me. That was the

offensive proposition. Did Einstein, facing the quantum theory and a universe of chance, feel any more of an unholy stir?

I am a professional, however. It is the operative word. It was time again to remind myself. One's body must be in the appointed place. Hung over or well-rested; friendly, or boiling with bile; loyal or treacherous; fit for the task or conceivably incompetent; one is, nonetheless, a professional; one shuts off the part of one's mind that is not appropriate to the task. If what is left does not have enough to manage the job, one is still professional. One has shown up for work.

"Harry," said Rosen to help me, "not all of the face is lost."

I could hardly follow him. Then I did. "What was left for us?" I asked.

"The right lower jaw. All the teeth on that side are absent. Except for the last two molars. That checks out. Harlot used to wear a bridge on his right lower jaw anchored to the same two molars."

"How do you know about this bridge?"

"Well, my friend, we may not have his general medical records, but the dental file was found. On those X-rays, one of the two molars shows a small gold inlay. So does the

cadaver. In fact, the filling on the dead man matches astonishingly well to the Montague X-rays."

"Astonishingly well? Why not assume you have Hugh Montague's funeral to prepare for?"

"Because it doesn't feel right to me." He put out his hands in apology as if he had been debating this through the afternoon with technicians in the laboratory. I realized he might be alone in his suspicions. "I can't help it," he said. "I don't like the product we received."

He filled his pipe and lit it. I did not care to speak while he was refueling. I suppose I have been annoyed by pipe smokers all my working life. We do not have as many now in the Company as in Allen Dulles' day when the Director's old Dunhill became part of the role model for a good many of us, but how many of my hours have been nudged and impeded by a colleague's pipe?

"Can you tell me why," he asked at last, "it doesn't feel good to me?"

"It's the only path through the evidence," I said. He knew it. I knew it. Harlot had taught us: Partial evidence which leads to but one conclusion is to be distrusted. Categorically distrusted.