

"I think," he said, "that a cosmetic deception has been brought off."

"Can we put the ball back on the playing field?" I asked, and had the passing thought--my mind seemed afflicted now by passing thoughts--that it was, after all, amazing how so many of us still spoke the way advertising people on Madison Avenue used to carry on twenty and thirty years ago. I think we are equal in some way to advertising executives--we, too, may not know whether an assertion is true or abominably fraudulent. Run it up the mast and see if it waves. Some of our ventures overseas had been dependent on metaphor.

I digress, but I did not wish to engage the enormity of what Rosen was suggesting. There was no alternative, however. I tasted my Scotch. I said, "Ned, are you suggesting that a dental technician worked on another man's mouth skillfully enough to convert those two molars in advance into facsimiles of Harlot's?"

"It's not impossible." Rosen was excited. Harlot might be over the horizon, but the game was before him. "This," he said, "is what we have so far. Hugh Montague's dental X-rays were done a couple of years ago. At his age, teeth grind down and shift. So it isn't as if someone had to find a man of the exact age and build who also had two molars identical to

Harlot's. You just need molars that are close. Obviously there would be no great problem in producing a precise copy of the gold inlay."

"Would the dentist be working for the King Brothers?"

"Yes," he said, "it would have to be KGB. Even if we could command the resources to lock in on some person whose physical specifications are near enough to be satisfactory, we could hardly deal with the rest of the job. I postulate that we are looking at a highly worked-up King Brothers special."

"Are you," I asked, "really suggesting that the KGB found some seventy-year-old Soviet prisoner or psychiatric patient and proceeded, after much dental work including possibly the extraction of all the other teeth on that half of the lower jaw, to go ahead and very carefully break the old fellow's spine in just the right place, and then mend him back to health, smuggle him into this country, take him down to Harlot's boat, carefully shoot off his head to leave no more than the two facsimile molars, after which they consigned him to Chesapeake Bay long enough to puff up the rest of the remains, and hung around through it all to nudge him back to shore? No," I said, answering my own question, "I'd rather believe Harlot is dead, and you are holding the remains."

"Well," he replied, "it would be a demanding operation. Even for the KGB. With all their patience."

"Come," I said. "It's worthy of Felix Dzerzhinsky."

Now, Rosen stood up and poked the fire. "They would never go to such lengths," he said, "unless the stakes were very large. Let's go back to the worst-case scenario. Suppose Harlot is in the hands of the King Brothers?"

"Alive, and in the hands of the King Brothers?"

"Alive and happy in their hands," said Rosen. "Happy and on his way to Moscow."

I certainly didn't wish to give Rosen any help at this point. Where would his thesis leave me? Yet, my mind with all its conditioned reflexes for twisting an hypothesis until it broke or took on form--we treated hypotheses not unlike the way Sandy Calder used to bend wire--now bent Rosen's line of thinking into the next turn, and did so, I suspect, for no better reason than to improve on his scenario. The need for superior acumen is also a passion. "Yes," I said, "what if Harlot is alive and happy and on his way to Moscow, and doesn't want us to be able to conclude whether he's alive or dead?"

I had gained a step on Rosen. We did not even have to speak of it. For Harlot to defect was as large a one-man disaster as the CIA could conceive. Yet even if it took a good

many qualified people a year or more, we could finally assess the damage--call it the melt-down--of the mess that would leave us in. If, however, we did not even know whether he was actually dead or, to the contrary, was educating the King Brothers about us--which would be the education of the century!--then we were condemned to live in a habitat where the keys would fit the locks until they didn't. This had Harlot's signature. It would be exactly in his style to leave us a corpse whose bonafides were tainted. How often had he instructed Rosen and myself in the principle. "Americans have to have answers," he told me once. "The inability to reply to a question drives us mad. Whereas the Russians look for control before they even have the answer. Of course, that does eventually breed the same unmanageable anxiety to find the answer. Contemplate where CIA and KGB are left. We cannot tolerate ambiguity. It's to our advantage, therefore, not to pick up our opponent's secrets wholly unseen, but to leave behind some kind of spoor--just enough of a trace to get them off their feed. The spoor will consume a thousand hours of investigation for every hour gained by the secret itself. Not at all routine to bring off, Harry, but no operation can prove more demoralizing to the opponent."

Rosen, blushed violently in my favorite shade. But to be in
part of what I thought of a joke that had made the rounds of
CIA just before the reported missile meeting 1959, between
Khrushchev and Eisenhower, the one that never took place
because Gary Powers' U-2 plane was shot down over Russia.
Khrushchev said to Eisenhower--didn't, said I
say--didn't, didn't--"I love you."

"Why do you love me?" asked Eisenhower.
"Because you are my equal. You are the only equal I got
in the whole world."

That was my equal. That was a confession of the word,
and we had loved him together. -10- could be love love love
under exploded.

There was everything to talk about. There might be
nothing. There might be no way to go on.

Rosen and I sat in the aura of the fire. Even as a
silence is composed of a myriad of small sounds, the gossip, to
put it so, of unseen events, so did the hearth prove equal to a
blazing forest. I was giving my attention to the
transmogrification of the burning wood. Universes curved
toward one another, universes exploded; ash thickened from a
membrane to a shroud. I could hear each fiber of the wood spit
its curse into the flames.

Rosen, slumped morosely in my favorite chair, had to be in need of me. I thought of a joke that had made the rounds of CIA just before the expected summit meeting 1959, between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, the one that never took place because Gary Powers' U-2 plane was shot down over Russia. Khrushchev said to Eisenhower--it is, need I say?--apocryphal--"I love you."

"Why do you love me?" asked Eisenhower.

"Because you are my equal. You are the only equal I got in the whole world."

Rosen was my equal. Harlot was a manifest of the Lord, and we had known him together. "How could he have done it?" Rosen exclaimed.

"I know," I murmured, which is to say, I did not.

"He brought me toward Christianity," said Rosen. "I converted because of Hugh Montague. Do you know what it means for a Jew to convert? You feel like a Judas to your own people."

I tried to search my starched soul--starched, I promise, in its likes and dislikes--to determine whether I had not been over-hard on Rosen. I had always assumed he converted to advance certain professional pursuits. Did I do him an injustice? Had I remained censorious over all these

faces of KGB men on a projection screen? The opponent looks luminous, even astral, when magnified so. I had seen faces four feet high whose light-of-eye seemed to go inward as if one were shining a flare down the dark halls of their deeds. So did Harlot's face appear to me now in the fireplace, four feet high and full of force.

Out of the silence, Rosen asked, "Do you think it would be possible to talk to Kittredge?"

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Can it wait?" I asked.

He took his time considering this.

"I suppose it can."

"Ned, she knows nothing about the High Holies."

"She does not?" He seemed surprised.

It was the quality of surprise that disturbed me. He seemed at an odd loss.

"You find that peculiar?" I asked.

"Well, she has been in Washington a good deal lately to see Harlot."

"Just old chums," I said.

Like wrestlers whose bodies have become so slippery with exertion that they can no longer hold a grip, so were we at this moment most certainly not in full embrace.

"It`s hard to believe he told her anything," I said.

I had had no inkling she was seeing Harlot. Every few weeks she would leave me to visit her father, Rodman Knowles Gardiner, who was approaching the magical age of ninety, magical I say because such common events of the day as slumber, evacuation, and alimentation could be accomplished only by charms, spells, and the endlessly repetitive rituals of the old. "What did you say your name is, girl? . . .oh, yes, Kittredge. . .that's a nice name. . .that's the name of my daughter. . .What do you say your name is, girl?"

I had been on a visit once to Oneonta, New York, Dr. Gardiner's birthplace, and now the site of his abode in a resting home. That solitary occasion was sufficient for me. There were always enough tolls in marriage without the drear surcharge of watching a senile father-in-law whom one has never liked nor been liked much by, as he takes an endless meander through the last of his time. Somewhere in the unapproachable reservoirs of his aged animal cunning, I believe old Dr. Gardiner was trying to decide just which of the seven doors of death he would choose to go through. Numbers can be as

ambivalent as disturbed beauties, and none more so than seven, the seven doors of the Keep for good luck, and the seven doors of death, or, at least, that is how I saw it: termination by such natural causes as cancer, heart attack, stroke, hemorrhage, suffocation, infection, and despair. I speak like a medievalist, but not wholly in jest--it did seem natural to me to be able over the course of a slow demise, to be able to choose one's exit--perish, for example, by way of the liver or the lungs, the brain or the bowels. So, no, I did not wish to watch Dr. Gardiner continue to deliberate before the too-patient doors of death while his daughter had to cross those great reaches of apathy between one quotidian burp and the next in a very old man, five senses just about gone, the sixth weaker than ever.

I commiserated in spirit with her each weekend she was away, and was grateful she had not requested me to go along nor even suggested that she really needed my company for so dreary a voyage. (Mt. Desert, Maine, to Oneonta, New York, is, by any mode of travel, a time-squandering trek!) And I, in my turn, loved her while she was gone, missed her, and on the one or two occasions I had profited by her absence to take a trip to Bath, felt such guilt over Chloe as to put the profit on Kittredge's side; never did I feel more devoted to her than after biting

"That's a telling point. We could move from a 10% possibility of suicide to 20%."

"Every bit helps," I said. I was wretched. The drinks had turned on me again. I could feel the first warnings issue from another monster. Once or twice a year, no more, I would come down with a prodigious headache, some royal cousin to a migraine, which would leave me next day with a short-term case of amnesia--I would be unable to remember the last twenty-four hours. Some such storm seemed to be mounting now in the tropics of my brain. Tropic of Cerebrum. Tropic of Cerebellum. "The key thing, Arnie," I said, "is to keep your medulla oblongata clean."

"Harry, you're a class act. It's what you have to offer. Please don't go off on tangents."

"The English," I said, "have one test for vulgarity. It is: Do you descend the steps properly? Glenlivet, old pal?" I poured the Scotch. Screw the oncoming headache. Some hurricanes blow out to sea. I took the drink in two nips, filled my shot glass again. "All right. Murder. Murder by our people."

"Don't dismiss the KGB."

"No, let's talk of murder by our good people. It's been on your mind, hasn't it?"

"I keep coming back to what you said," Rosen now told me.

Yes, I could feel how it had been ever since I said it.

"Hundreds of millions. Maybe more. Somebody who stands to lose a billion bucks."

"When the sums of money are that huge, individuals don't get killed," Rosen said.

"No, not individuals. Indians. Twenty or forty Indians. All gone." Was I thinking of Dorothy Hunt?

Something had happened, however, to Rosen. I thought he was having an outsize reaction to my last remark, until I realized someone was speaking to him from a walkie-talkie outside. His right hand pressed against the buff-colored ear plug and he nodded several times, then reached into his breast pocket, pulled out a black wireless microphone the size of a fountain pen and said, "Are you certain?" listened, then said, "Okay, out."

Now, Ned started to speak to me. His voice, however, was not merely small in volume, but about inaudible, for he had begun to rattle the stem of his pipe against his whisky glass in a disconcerting tattoo, a time-honored method for jamming any state-of-the-art electronics that might be tapping into the room.

its way, but, oh, my brain!--there were floors and floors to climb.

Then the name of the man did come to me, and sooner than expected. There was an undeniable pop-out in my head.

I reached for Rosen's note pad. "Are you thinking of our old friend on the Farm?" I wrote.

"PHENOMENAL!" Rosen printed in capital letters.

"Can it really be Dix Butler?" I wrote.

"How long since you've seen him?" asked Rosen aloud.

"Ten years."

He picked up the pad. "Have you ever been to Thyme Hill?"

"No," I said aloud, "but I've heard of it."

Rosen nodded, threw the page into the fire, and as if fatigued by the weight of this transaction, lay back in his chair.

I wondered at his travail. It is an odd word, but I think appropriate. Full of fear, he was reacting to it as if engaged in hard labor. It occurred to me that he was as professional in his fashion as I in mine for he must have been carrying more than one full weight of anxiety all evening. Until now, however, he had not shown the burden. Not until now. The significance of the three men in the woods redefined itself. They were not there for me. They were waiting for someone else

-11-

I could sense myself raising a barrier against every uneasy fear that passed over to me from Rosen. I wanted none of that. It was crucial to maintain some logical sense of myself as centered, professionally centered. I wanted to be able to think about Butler. There was enough to contemplate. He had always been the most impressive man, physically speaking, of any group you found him in. He was powerful; he was--no other word--handsome. In training, instructors used to tell him that he had come to the wrong place--he should have

taken his whack at Hollywood. He didn't disagree. His arrogance was ready to agree. He had, after all, given up professional football after two seasons of injuries (linebacker,--sixth round draft--Washington Redskins) to join CIA. At the Farm, we had been assigned to the same group of thirty, and he had, of course, been a good distance ahead of us on all physical levels. Since he was also intelligent, he went on to blaze a career trail in his early years in the Company. I had run with Dix Butler in Berlin in 1956, and heard of him in Guatemala in late '60 and early '61 when he was training Cubans with Howard Hunt. I had been with him once in southern Florida in 1962 after the Bay of Pigs had failed, and the Cuban population which fled over to the U.S. from Havana was riddled with Fidelista spies. It was our job to weed them out. Dix Butler kept returning one suspect's head to a stopped-up Miami motel toilet bowl until the man confessed. "It's the condign procedure for that kind of Cubano," said Butler. "Different chokes for different folks."

Now, I was attempting to recall what I had heard about him over the last ten years. He had left the Company and gone into business for himself, several kinds of business. That much I knew, not much more. If the gossip in large corporations is analogous to a river, then our whispering gallery is an

underground river. Sometimes it even reaches the surface and talk flows freely among us about the marital difficulties of colleagues, or of a caper in Kinshasha that crashed so badly they were still scraping the egg yolk off the safe-house walls. But we knew when not to talk. Then the stream went into a cave and did not come out.

Dix Butler cut his swath through the Company and came back a legend from Vietnam. After which, he resigned from the CIA, and made a fortune. Envy alone would have been sufficient to talk about him forever, but we didn't. We weren't too sure of what we were talking about. The news received could be naught but cover. He purported to be detached from us; he could be doing contract work: God knows what we really had him doing. Talk was, therefore, sensitive, just so sensitive as a tooth that will strike up a spasm if touched. So we were silent. We were tribal. Out in the great prairie (of the cafeteria at Langley) where the gossip blew, we knew to distinguish the north wind from the south.

It was acceptable, however, to speak in general terms of how successful he had become. He had purchased a blue-grass horse farm one hundred miles into Virginia, and raised Appaloosians there, or, at least, the stud-farm equipage working for him did, and Thyme Hill expanded over the years.

One heard of ten thousand acres more often now than of one thousand acres, and once I listened to talk (which I found too difficult to believe) of a training center for mercenaries somewhere in his trees. Ten thousand acres was, went the argument, fifteen square miles, just about the size of Camp Peary, our old Farm. It was a weak argument. There might be a few of his favorite Nam tiger-people housed out in those woods, but no power on American earth would dare to train a small army one hundred miles from the capital, no.

Other stories seemed to reach us just long enough to go underground again. There were weekend frolics on his grounds that owed more to the kind of whingdings we used to give in Saigon than to diplomatic Washington. Lobbyists, Senators, hot Congressmen, hot industrialists, hot corporate raiders were joined by hot ladies. In Washington, enterprising people might give parties for corporate and congressional powers, but not with hot ladies. As a credible description of any reality I could comprehend, tales about Butler entertaining the right people and thereby amassing uncountable sums would have gone better on one of those honey-and-tycoon TV dramas that live it up for an hour a week year after year by exploiting the true physics of gossip. That science calls for low-specifics-in-the-scenario, otherwise known as fairy-tales for the horny. I was wise

enough to know that the accumulation of money was too serious a process to be infested with sex. Sex was but a side-bar for the young and cocaine-inclined. While there appeared to be no shortage of cocaine out at Thyme Hill, and the ladies had to be young, the scenario was wrong. If Butler was giving the wildest parties within a hundred miles of Washington D.C., it was not to make deals, but to cover something. Something large.

A symphony might be in the works. You could calibrate the size by the gossip at Langley. The gossip kept stopping short. No stories with real nuggets came back. That was the real clue a symphony was involved. While speculation had Dix Butler running a gargantuan Venus fly-trap, I could not see that as a possibility. A Venus fly-trap might be there, but what was it covering? Dix was capable of anything. In Saigon, he had recruited his own small army of Vietnamese for improvisational hits on the Viet Cong; that army had waged a few drug wars as well. One night, very drunk, under a Southern Hemisphere moon, Butler claimed to have started an enterprise or two with the profits. These monies, he assured me, would go back to the Company. That was important.

"What is coming up?" he asked me solemnly. "I'll tell you. Harry, this war is going to undress the CIA. Sooner or

later they are going to rip off all our band-aids, and there won't be blood for the great American public to look at."

"Yes? What will there be?"

"Bat-shit. All the bat-shit we've been hiding. The great American public, and their elected cocksuckers, the Congress of these Disgruntled and Disunited States are going to cut the CIA's balls off when they discover all those tons of bat-shit. So we got to get ready. We need covert money, honey. Secret money nicely put away. Take a good look at me." He showed his capped white teeth. "I'm going to be the Agency banker."

Whether he was more or less of a banker-- our banker?-- than I might assume him to be at this moment, a Venus fly-trap created to catch key politicians and Chief Executive officers in covertly photographed positions still did not seem likely. Sexual blackmail, as an aid to acquiring information and power at home, was illegal by our charter; it was also close to anathema for the groaning board. Those 15,000 ribbon clerks, typists, experts, analysts, and programmers, that human tonnage we call the groaning board, did make up 90% of our CIA personnel; they were as conventional as Pentagon folk. High-profile sex shops were not the soup of choice for good Company people who went to church on Sunday, read National

Review, and believed we were the clean living in the land, no, nobody processed any paper that came back from Butler's peep-hole operation, even if the peep-hole was as large as a tunnel entrance. What, then, was the modus vivendi? Why Thyme Hill?

I looked across at Rosen. I do not know if it was the slow pace of my thoughts, or the calm with which I waited--I had drunk enough Glenlivet by now to be calm at my own funeral--but he, too, seemed to be back in some facsimile of composure again. He scribbled a line on a piece of notebook paper, tore it off and held it up for me.

"I've been out to Thyme Hill," was what I read.

"Did you like it?"

"I've never been to the Playboy mansion," he wrote, "but Thyme Hill must make Hugh Hefner look like a spinster having a few lady friends in for tea."

He gave a wan smile and consigned both pieces of information to the fire. I gave a wan smile back. In those awful hours when you wonder if you have spent three decades in the wrong occupation, it was my estimate that much of our work would seem ludicrous to an impartial observer. Of course, we did our work with the assumption that God had small use for impartial observers.

The fact of the matter is that apart from the real difficulties of bringing it off, we were indeed in need of a top-shelf sex-shop. The Intelligence services of other nations took such instruments of the trade for granted. Harlot had inveighed for years against our domestic bonds. In America, we couldn't begin to do what we needed to do. All too many delicate counter-intelligence operations had to be handed over at the critical point of capture and/or arrest to the FBI, and they, from our point of view, were egregious bunglers. Their power, if you believed Harlot, had not been maintained by their proficiency so much as by J. Edgar Hoover's special files. Hoover loved tidbits. He collected them. Sexual tidbits had given him a wrestler's lock on Congress and the Presidency. J. Edgar, after all, kept encyclopedic files on every Cabinet officer and Senator who had anything to do with a woman not his wife, and should the wife go in for comparable excursions, Hoover tended to have photographs of her navel as well. No President ever took him on. J. Edgar had already supplied them with too good an insight into the maverick inclinations of previous Presidents. When it came, therefore, to reducing J. Edgar's power at home, and increasing ours, his private files made a difference. The FBI was always holding aces to our kings.

We had tried to lessen the gap by bestowing a few extra duties on our Office of Security. The O of S had access to the files of the Metropolitan Police in Washington, D.C., who had an officer, one Captain Roy E. Blick with direct contact on a call girl operation in a Washington hotel, (The Columbia Plaza, if you would have the name). Blick had caught his share of significant folk in extremes of gay apparel, degradation, subjugation--I heard about such from Harlot in the days when he still maintained a clandestine but monitorial function over Rosen in Security. Poor Ned--not yet Reed--had to put in his hours with Captain Blick, which meant he had to do his best to keep Blick from drawing even closer to Hoover. ("Ah, those names," Harlot once exclaimed. "I tell you, Harry, people who work on the margins of propriety seem to have been given their monikers by Charles Dickens." As if he were an outback tribesman, repeating a sound he did not understand, he added, "J. Edgar Hoover. Roy E. Blick. J. Edgar Hoover. Roy E. Blick.") Then he sighed for Rosen. "Poor Ned. They do give him sorry jobs at Security. Catering to Blick!" And Harlot gave a wink. After all, Rosen, before moving to Security, had once been in charge of Harlot's special files. Limited they might be, but as a point of professional pride, Harlot separated himself from Hoover's working grab-bag of slurs,

innuendos, and Polaroids, and instructed Rosen not to pick up every piece of gumbo that landed on the beach. Content had to be evaluated.

Still, Harlot had powers of anticipation. A friend of Kittredge's, Polly Galen Smith, the former wife of a Deputy Chief of one of our divisions, had begun a VIP affair with President Kennedy. (VIP affair is a descriptive of the prevailing arrangements: time allotted for entering, doffing clothes, taking one's jump into bliss, showers, clothes back on, saying goodbye, is twenty minutes--"You don't become VIP for too little," remarked Harlot.)

A year and a half, however, after the President's assassination, Polly Galen Smith was beaten to death on the tow path of a Potomac canal. A possible assailant was found, tried, and acquitted. While her murder seemed to have no relation to us, the conclusion that we were not involved was not obvious in the immediate hours after the assault. Who had the lady been taking to bed, after all, since Jack Kennedy? Harlot proceeded at once to her house, and--as an old family friend--was able to console the children. Rosen, whom he had brought along, thereby managed to slip up to the master bedroom where he lifted Polly Galen Smith's diary from a small drawer in her knee-hole desk and removed the sneaky Harlot had

"Well, Harry, you could be making too much of it. A lot of people went out there. Sunday afternoon was not Saturday night."

I did not want to ask the next question, but need was greater than pride. I took the pad. "Did Kittredge accompany Harlot?"

Rosen looked at me. Then he nodded.

"How many times?" I asked.

Rosen held up his extended hand. Five times, said his fingers. He was looking at me with compassion. I did not know whether to feel insulted or to admit that I was sufficiently bruised to accept his concern. I was certainly taken all the way back to a fist fight I had one summer in Maine with a cousin two years older than me, age eleven, and too large, really, to fight. He had landed a roundhouse on the side of my nose which sent a star rocketing from one end of my inner firmament to the other; the star so dislodged my balance that I went down to one knee. Drops of blood, heavy as silver coins, plopped from my nose to the ground. The recollection added old pain to new. I had to see Kittredge.

When I got to my feet, however, Rosen looked miserable. It may have been what I needed. Irony is the armature to keep one erect when everything within is falling. I held fast to

the irony that Rosen, who had wanted me to fetch Kittredge, could not now bear to be left alone. I saw the fear in his eyes.

On the pad, I wrote, "Are you expecting Dix Butler tonight?"

"I can't be certain," he managed to say.

"Will your three men prove enough?"

"I can't be certain of that either."

I nodded. I pointed upstairs.

"I'd like you to remain in earshot," Reed Rosen said.

"If Kittredge is feeling well enough, I'll come down with her."

"Please."

I left him by the fire, climbed the stairs to our bedroom, and took out my key. When I reached for the knob, however, it turned freely in my hand, and so I was not caught completely by surprise that Kittredge was neither in bed nor in the bedroom.

"I used to be so afraid of what is in this house. But now, I'm not. When I go down to the Vault, I feel as if I've gotten on the corner of my loneliness, as if there's a friend here, after all, in the midst of absolutely endless space. When, when I come up, Harry, the rest of the house seems less deserted."

"Nothing bothers you down there?"

"Well, I suppose if I allowed myself," Kittredge said, "I could start regretting that missing his chair, but no, Harry, I feel no compunction in that place."

"You really are a lovely girl," I replied.

Now, I was obliged to remind myself how long I had come this night in carrying her to the Vault. It was as a sudden glimpse of myself--one of those rare glances by

-12-

Looking at the long light hollow where she had lain on the coverlet, I knew where she had gone. Once Kittredge gave me a great start by confessing she liked on certain occasions to visit the Vault.

"I detest the place," I told her.

"No, when I'm alone in the house and begin to wonder if I can't possibly become any more lonely, I go there," she said.

"Tell me why." Like the lonely heart of a wolf, there are few wolves in these parts. The cry came again. Now, it was as

"I used to be so afraid of what is in this house. But now, I'm not. When I go down to the Vault, I feel as if I've gotten to the center of my loneliness, as if there's a bit of land, after all, in the midst of absolutely endless seas. Then, when I come up, Harry, the rest of the house seems less unpeopled."

"Nothing bothers you down there?"

"Well, I suppose if I allowed myself," Kittredge said, "I could hear Augustus Farr rattling his chains, but, no, Harry, I feel no vengeance in that place."

"You really are a lovely girl," I replied.

Now, I was obliged to remind myself how near I had come this night to carrying her down to the Vault. It gave me a sudden glimpse of myself--one of those rare views returned by the mirror when we are not in any degree loyal to ourselves and so pass cruel and immediate judgment on the apparition in the glass only to realize in the next instant that it is our own face we are condemning. Drunk, miserable, hollow as a gourd, I could hear the silences where unseen judges gather.

The cry of an animal came through the night. It was no ordinary sound. I could not tell from how far away, but the howl came to my ear like the lonely moan of a wolf. There are few wolves in these parts. The cry came again. Now, it was as

full of suffering and horror as a lacerated bear. There are no bears near. The cry had to have been stirred by my commotion.

Twenty or more years ago, on the dirt road leading from the highway to our back shore, a tramp had been found, partially devoured, in the thicket near Gilley Butler's house. I am told he lay there with the most frightful expression of fear on what was left of his mouth. Could the shriek of the animal I had just heard be equal to the mutilated silence of the tramp? Who could know? Twenty or more years ago came down to early spring of 1962, a time when my father was looking for the right type of disavowable plane to spray poison on Cuban sugar fields. Had there been a year of my working life which had not offered one smothered howl?

Standing in our empty bedroom, my thoughts collided face to face with Damon Butler, the long-dead relative of Gilley Butler--Damon Butler, first mate to Augustus Farr, two and a half centuries dead. This unholy surprise visited me at this moment neither as a ghost nor a voice, but as an image so deep within my mind that for an instant I felt occupied by another presence: I saw what he had seen.

I made prodigious efforts not to see anything at all. I stood in the middle of the bedroom, and made--yes, I call them prodigious efforts although I did not move--made a much

compressed attempt to decide that whatever I saw in my imagination was neither a gift nor an invasion, but the simple if delayed results of an afternoon I had spent ten years ago in the Bar Harbor Library reading Damon Butler's ship journal, a most honored artifact among local library treasures. So, in my drunkenness, I tried to tell myself that the sudden vision within me now had been extracted from bills of lading, shoals negotiated, sloops for sale--the execution of the French Commodore that I was now witnessing in all its gore was but an extract from Butler's journal; it was just that I had not allowed it to return to my mind until now: What a formidable incarceration of memory! It all came back. Like a knock on the door before the door flies open.

His ship gone, his men butchered, the French Commodore was stripped of his uniform. Naked, arms pinioned, the victim spit, nonetheless, into his captor's face. In reply, Farr raised his cutlass. The blade was sharp. The Commodore's head flew off like a cabbage. Like the thump of a cabbage on hitting the deck--so goes Damon's account. The crew disputed whether the head now spoke. All agreed its mouth was moving. Several were to swear that the corpse, neck spurting, limbs churning, sought to rise to its hands and knees until Farr, in a frenzy, kicked the body over. There it lay on the deck, feet

of miles north to me. In what a malodorous place had the body first washed ashore! The dank mad smell I used to fear at the bottom of the Keep must have been the first herald of such a horror. Now, the wooden steps to the Vault were rotted and fragile. It was so long since I had used them that I had forgotten how they could groan. I might as well have been walking into a ward of men maimed by war. Each step had its own lament and some were full of outcry at the depth of their neglect. I expected to plummet into some pit of dissolution.

There were no lights in the Vault. The bulbs, as I recounted, were long burned-out. Only the open door provided a shaft of illumination. My shadow preceding me, I worked myself down, feeling as if I pushed my limbs through palisades of oppression merely to reach the cubicle where Kittredge slept. It was only when I stood at the bottom in the near to complete darkness of the inner room, light from the cellar above much reduced by the right angle turns of the entrance, that I could dare to recognize how many years it had been since I ventured here. How decomposed were the bunks.

One foam mattress had gone to powder less than the others, and, on it, Kittredge was lying. There was almost no light in the Vault, but by reflection, her pale skin was white. I could see that her eyes were open, and when I approached, she turned

her head ever so slightly to indicate that she was aware of me. Neither of us spoke, not at first. I thought again of that moment years ago when the full moon rose over the horizon from the bottom of the notch between two black hills, and the surface of the dark pond on which my canoe floated was now alive with a pagan luster.

"Harry," she said, "there's something for you to know."

"I expect there is," I said gently. The anticipation of what she would say next, however, reverberated in my head before her words. I experienced that pang one feels so rarely but so precisely in marriage--the alarm in advance of the next irremediable step. I did not want her to go on.

"I've been unfaithful," she said.

In every death, is a celebration; in every ecstasy, one little death. It was as if the two halves of my soul had just exchanged places. My guilt for every moment spent with Chloe was, on the instant, relieved of weight; my woe at the new space opened between Kittredge and me came in with a flood. The hurricane I had been awaiting in the Tropic of Cerebrum was here. Its first blow to my head came down with the long sullen smash of an ugly swell against an old wooden hull.

"With whom?" I asked. "With whom were you unfaithful?" and the royal observer in myself, untouched by hurricane,

earthquake, fire, or storms at sea, had time to notice the perfection of my grammar--what a peculiar fellow was I!

"I had an afternoon with Harlot," she said, "but it wasn't quite an affair, although it was--awful." She stopped.

"Harry, there's someone else."

"Is it Dix Butler?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "Dix Butler. I fear I'm in love with him. I hate the very thought of it, but, Harry, I'm in love with that man."

Nightmares in the shape of the living were approaching the house. As I continued to stand before her, one awful image came near again. It was myself in my car; a livid vision: I had crashed against a tree. My face looked out at me from the back of the head of the man who was smashed. Was it only an illusion that I had driven away from there? Had all of this night taken place in no more than that small part of the mind which still survived as a guide on the early roads of the dead?

Then the bottom fell out of cerebration itself. I plunged into my true fear. I could hold off one perception no longer: it was not death I feared, but the implacable logic of outraged life. Had the haunting in this Vault broken out? With the force of an infection that bursts an organ-wall to race through the body, so would my beloved Keep sink into malign fevers.

work does not keep primarily to the celebratory side of events. No matter. The memoir proved soothing for me. It enabled me to live for the last year in a thousand pages of manuscript written over previous years; in the course of such scrutiny, I re-wrote whole chapters concerning events twenty-five and thirty years gone. The work provided that indispensable membrane of purpose which could keep me apart from certain recollections. Memory may also have need of a caul.

For a year, I succeeded. More or less, I succeeded. It was a difficult year, but by the end I also managed to write that shorter manuscript, titled Omega, obviously still unfinished, which concerns my last night at the Keep. Most of the time, however, I have dwelt in the longer manuscript: my memoir, this novel--Alpha.

A price has been paid. There were nights when I could not sleep; Every event I had turned away was there to present its bill. Sometimes, the clearest warning was how cheerful I would find myself through the preceeding day. I would be breezy, efficiently and subtly manic; virtually normal. At night, however, after such days, people would appear to me. Some were alive, some were dead, but I did not think of their visits as hallucinations. Rather, as a pageant. Each person came before

notice, she said: "Oh, Mr. Libby," she said, "I'm going to miss the sound of your typewriter."

"Well," I told her, "I'm going to miss you and Mr. Lowenthal."

He was an eighty-year-old arthritic; she, a seventy-five-year-old diabetic--we had entertained no more than passing conversations for a year, but I wanted no more than that. Bless them--I could feel the worm of condescension stirring when we spoke. It was hard for me to take seriously people who had spent their years as good middle-class people. While I expected they were curious enough about my past, I did not have the wherewithal to regale them at length with the fictitious work and possible marriages of one William Madden Libby, no matter how much I could use such a trial run for practice. We made occasional conversation when we met in the hall, and that was about that. They were able to supplement their retirement savings with my rent, and I could keep privacy intact. I stayed in my room except when I grew tired of soup on a hot plate and went out to eat or see a film. I revised constantly. I was looking--forgive the contemporary presumption of this next remark--I was looking to find the parameters of my life. And there were good days when I felt neither haunted nor

invaded. All the same, I was like a boulder perched on the edge of a cliff. Sooner or later, it must go over. It did. The High Holies picked up once more, and Moscow blinked in my mind like a lit-up billboard. I made preparations, tried to study Russian, and finally went to a travel agent who booked me without great ado into the Hotel Metropole. "It's a piece of luck to get you there," he said, "why, it's almost as difficult to snag as the old National."

"Thank you," I said.

"I could place you in the new National, but you don't want that. It's all tourist groups."

"Yes," I said, "I don't want tourist groups."

Was something obvious about me? Of course, I had popped in on him, paid cash in advance for passage and processing, asked for speed in obtaining my visa--"I assume," I said, "your connections are good enough to rush one through occasionally, which I am prepared to appreciate," and indeed he did, and I paid a premium for expediting such permission in a week, and wondered if it meant that William Madden Libby was now on a KGB list which went under some such unappetizing category as Individual Tourist, Special.

Back in the Bronx, I said a final farewell to the Lowenthals. I told them I was going to Seattle. I heard her say in reply, "Well, I guess you'll have a heavy manuscript for your family to read?"

"Yes," I said.

"I hope they like your book."

"Well," I said, "I hope so too."

"Maybe you'll even get a publisher."

"Maybe."

"If you do, please mail me a copy, and I'll pay for it. I want you to autograph the book."

"Oh, Mrs. Lowenthal," I said, "I'll be delighted to send you a free one."

It was exactly the sort of conversation she would never forget. If they ever found this lair in the Bronx, they would also absorb from her how many hours I had been typing away.

Preparations completed, travelling as William Madden Libby, I left at eight in the evening from Kennedy, lost eight hours to the clock, and ten to the flight (with a transit stop in Heathrow), and landed at 2 P.M. Moscow time, 6 A.M. back in New York. All through the trip, I existed out there between hysteria and happiness. In limbo for ten hours, as full of

frenzy as a cockroach, I sat in the middle of Economy, dreading my arrival in Moscow, unable to explain why I had gotten on the plane in the first place. Like a bug flattened by a whiff of poison spray, I would tilt my chair back--using all three inches of rearward slant available to the Economy tourist--and drift in that half-stupor where mind-flow is viscous and one's legs are too massive to move. All the while, nerves jumped like flashers on an electronic game. Nausea was my neighbor. Airborne for ten hours in Economy, I was ready, debarking at Moscow, to meet any foe. I was, at least, on my feet and in action. I could stand up and talk.

I had, however, been living alone for too long. Do not ask me how I had manage to ignore the expression on the travel agent's face when he first saw my passport two weeks ago. That expression came back to me now; the first Soviet I encountered in the first glass booth of Customs had an equally incredulous expression on his face. Was I proposing to enter the USSR by way of Sheremetyevo International Airport, Moscow, holding these water-soaked credentials?

"Passport," said the guard from his glass cage, "this passport! . . .Why?"

His English was going to prove no more useful than my Russian.

"River," I tried to say in his tongue, thereby suggesting that one had fallen into the river with one's passport. I was not about to admit I had consigned the document to a washer-dryer. "River," I thought I was saying, but later, studying phrases for tourists in my guidebook, I came to recognize that I had used the words for arm and rib and fish (respectively ruk and ryebra and rubu.) Doubtless I was telling him that I had stuck my passport up my rib and given my arm to the fish--God knows what he heard. It was enough to leave my young Sovietsky critically befuddled. Like a good stubborn dog, he kept saying, "Passport--no good. Why?" After which he drew himself to full height and eyeballed me--they were obviously groomed to do that. I was perspiring as profusely as if I were innocent--which in some degree I was. How could I have failed to foresee that this puffed-up biscuit of a passport would, under examination, look desperate?

"Not good," he said. "Expired."

I could feel a long line of passengers waiting behind me.

"No. Not expired. Please," I said to him, "pazhalesta!" and reached out my hand. He gave the document over in great

suspicion and I turned with caution the faded puffed-up leaves. There! I had found the proper page. Of course not. My passport had not expired. I pointed out the date--faint, but still a fact!--and handed it back to him.

The Soviet guard could have been a Minnesota farmboy. He had blue eyes, high cheekbones, and close-cropped blond hair: I don't think he was twenty-five. "You,"--he fixed me with his finger, "you--waiting," and walked off to get assistance, came back immediately with a higher officer, a man of twenty-eight, dark hair, a mustache, same dull green soldier's tunic with tight collar and braiding.

"Why?" said the new one, pointing to my passport as if it were an execrable object.

I found the separate words for ice and water. They came into my mind like a pas-de-deux. "Lyod," I said, "bolshoye lyod. Much ice." I spread my hands as if I were smoothing a table cloth. Then I gave to the horizontal plane just fashioned one good karate chop. I made a cracking sound. Hopefully, it might sound like an ice-pond breaking up, and I plunged my hand toward my feet. "Voda. Bolshoye voda--lots of water, isn't that so?" I waved my hands in desperate strokes. A frozen swimmer.

"Ochen kolodno," the first guard said.

"Ochen kolodno. Right. Ice cold, very cold."

They nodded. They studied the passport back and forth, they looked at my visa which was clean and had the stamps it needed. They fumbled with my name aloud. "William Madden Libby?" It came out: "Veelyam Mahd-yen Leeboo?"

"Yes," I said, "that's it."

They studied a hit-list of names. Libby was not on it. (Good for Harlot!) They stared at one another. They sighed. They were not dumb. They could feel something was wrong, and it did not have to be the passport. On the other hand, should they take me off for further questioning, they would have papers to fill out, possibly a lost evening. They must have made plans for the oncoming hours since the blond guard now stamped my papers. He gave a big kid's grin. "Pardone," he said, attempting to give it a friendly Italian-French spin.

"Pardone."

The rest of the way through Arrivals showed me Sheremetyevo--a concrete airport built as a showcase for the 1980 Olympics: Welcome to the USSR. (Our Soviet walls are gray!) My bags went through Customs. Alpha and Omega, now become my two envelopes of microfilm, were stowed in my secret

compartment; they attracted no notice--the suitcase had been designed to take flat envelopes through routine inspections. I passed, after a time, through the last gate and encountered multi-lingual signs which told me to look for the Intourist guide. Instead, a cabdriver approached me, a tough, tightly-packed snarling New York-type cab-driver who reminded me of Thomas Wolfe's dictum that people in the same profession tend to be the same all over the world, as for example, cab-drivers. My man wanted twenty dollars to take me to the Metropole. Now, not yet into my seat, he announced in his workable black market English that he also wished to buy American bucks from me. His rate, three rubles for a dollar, was four times better than official exchange.

I said no. It could be a trap. I didn't like him. I certainly didn't trust him. The travel agent had warned me. One could be jailed for dealing in rubles on the black market.

The driver, however, was demanding so much of my attention that I was hardly looking out the window. I was not receiving any first impressions of Russia. Travel in a state of nerves is like passage through a tube. The racket of the car--we were in some kind of Soviet mini-flivver--impinged on me more than the

landscape. The driver's voice, "All right, you tell me, hey, how many dollars you got?" gargled in my ear.

We passed expanses of clean snow, dirty snow, and melted fields about as sprightly as the mud in the Jersey flats. Bits of Moscow began to appear, funky little gingerbread shacks by the side of the road, put up in rows but yawning individually, their paint peeling. Monoliths of high-rise housing projects came next, dirty-white on the horizon in the dirty-white snow. They looked as if the plaster had cracked on the lower floors before the trowel had been put to the top ones. The March sky was as gray as the concrete walls in the Sheremetyevo Airport. Communism was irritating me personally at this point; its simulacrum was the cabdriver, pushy, dirty, depressed, eager for loot, out of date. Could this chauffeur be some out-work of the KGB? Were they playing with me?

A banner stretched across the superhighway. A legend in Russian. Official bouquet, doubtless, of homilectic language. The name "I~~e~~enin" emerged for me out of the Cyrillic alphabet. I had seen similar banners across the highways of many a mean and outrageously under-equipped Third World Country. Zaire for one. Ditto Syria, Uganda. I didn't care. I couldn't come out of my tunnel. Moscow streets began to appear, but the side windows of

my car were mud-spattered, and sights to the front were barely visible through the slip-slop of two overworked wipers that kept drawing fans of striated salt on the glass. The driver was as sullen as muggy weather.

Now we were on a large boulevard without much traffic. Heavy old buildings--government departments, and specialist institutes--perambulated by the side windows. There were few pedestrians. It was Sunday. This was downtown.

We came to a stop in a public square before an old green six-story building. Its sign read МИТРОПОЛ . I was at the Metropole. My home away from home.

I gave the cab driver two dollars for a tip. He immediately asked for ten. He had his own peculiar psychic force which pinched some weak nerve in me, for I gave him five. My nerves, I repeat, were not what once they were.

A stocky wide-jawed old boy, equal to a retired Mafia soldier of the lowest rank, was the doorman. He had a decoration on the lapel of his gray coat--a hero of the Great War. He would not be about to show cordiality to a stranger.

Nor was he in a rush to help me with the bags. His function was to keep people out. I had to show him my travel agency voucher to get through the door. Inside, the lobby was

grim. Its palette went from stogie-butt brown to railroad coach green. The floor was an aged parquet and buckled like cheap linoleum when you stepped along it. I felt as if I had landed in one of those unhappy hotels on the side streets of Times Square which sit in the effluvia of old cigars, waiting to be demolished.

Was this the famous Metropole where, if my historic recollections proved correct, the Bolsheviks used to gather before and after the revolution? A huge marble stairway spiralled upward in right angle turns around an elevator shaft faced in wrought iron.

The woman at the registration desk was wearing a sweater and had a nose cold. She wore eyeglasses, was plain, and pretended not to notice me until I seized her attention. Her English had that unhappy accent which is reminiscent of such tortures to the spirit as ballet lessons for unpromising girls. I did not even inquire; I could see that I would have to carry my own baggage. The elevator operator, another decorated old war hero, was gruff, and the concierge on the fourth floor was a heavy blonde of about fifty with a beehive hairdo and a big tough Russian face--she looked like a mate for the doorman. She sat behind a little glass-topped desk facing the elevator, kept

anyone was following for I did not wish to show any knowledge of evasive tactics, but then I also did not feel as if I were being followed. I had put on an old jacket and wore a black knit hat pulled over my ears like a merchant seaman. It was all right. I felt like giving a great whoop.

A square away from the hotel would be, I knew, a statue to Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka, "Sword of the Revolution," great-grandfather of the KGB. Back of him would be the infamous Lubyanka. (What was it I had said to Rosen?-- worthy of Felix Dzerzhinsky.) From lectures, photographs, debriefings, I knew the Lubyanka better than any American prison--in the imaginary auditorium of my ear, I had listened a hundred times to the screams of the tortured in the cellars of the Lubyanka, and I did not know if I wanted to go near it now; thus debating, I went directly from the Metropole to Dzerzhinsky Square. Before me was the edifice itself, late nineteenth-century seven-story morgue of an office building, Lubyanka, once a pre-revolutionary business palace for Czarist insurance companies. It still had white curtains on the windows, and highly polished brass fittings on the entrance door, but its exterior wall was by now a soiled khaki-yellow. On the whole, a dismal old-fashioned structure into which and

were still waiting to visit the tomb of Lenin and see his body, preserved below, in its vault. Two thousand people two by two, were in that line, and perhaps twenty people entered the tomb each minute, suggesting that the last man in the queue might have to wait one hundred minutes in this cold, a reasonable mortification for a pilgrimage.

I began to pay attention to these Russians on the street. They all looked middle-aged. Even the young had that air of relinquishment which speaks of middle age. All the same, Red Square was a cheerful scene. To my astonishment, it was cheerful on this late Sunday afternoon. There was a shimmer to the air, a conviviality to the faces red with cold. Busloads of tourists--native Russians--were leaving, others were yet arriving. Hundreds of others walking through the Square were showing that simple happiness which comes to hardworking people when they are transported to an important place. These could have been Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses, on a ferry to the Statue of Liberty.

How much like a film it all seemed to be. The center of Red Square rose higher than the corners, and so people in the distance were only visible above the knee. Their feet had disappeared beneath the cobblestone horizon. Everyone seemed to

bounce, therefore, as they walked, even as heads bob when a crowd is perambulating toward a telephoto lens. I did not know the history of Red Square, which is to say didn't know what old great events had produced this nosegay of good spirits, but my own were up--I felt delivered from the iron clangor of the Bronx and the walls of Moscow, steeped in gloom. I was ready for one irrational instant to celebrate, I hardly knew what. Maybe it was only the joy of coming to the end of a trip. I decided to leave the Square before I became too pleased, which is to say--careless. It hardly occurred to me how careless I had been already.

I went back to the Metropole, received in the dusk an increment more of good greeting from the doorman, the elevator man, and the dezhurnaya--my floor lady--returned to my room, sat on the bed, sat on the chair next to the bed, took down my valise, opened the neatly concealed velcro to the false compartment, took out my microfilm and the small accompanying flashlight and small special lens I had also packed, set it down on the small desk I had been provided, picked up a notebook, put down my pencil, and realized abruptly how tired I was. I was weary from the cold outside, the scrambling of the hours, my whippings--about of mood, the rigors of the walk--everyone in

Moscow seemed to stride along at top pace, and I, good American, had stepped it up to stay with them. Now, I was tired with the real desolations of my mood. I did not know if I had ever felt so alone nor so dislocated.

I put the microfilm back in the false compartment and went downstairs to eat. It was not much better for my mood. I was seated among strangers at a table for eight with a rumpled tablecloth, not dirty exactly, but no more immaculate than a shirt that has been worn for a few hours. The dish available was Chicken Kiev, a rubber chicken fit for a routine political banquet with a gusher of butter that tasted like lubricating oil mixed with some sour sorrow emanating from the kitchen. The kasha was over-cooked, the dark bread was coarse, the fresh vegetable was a thin slice of tomato. Then came one cookie and a cup of tea. The waitress was a heavy middle-aged woman with weighty personal concerns. She sighed a lot. It took all of the begrudged attention she could bring to the world outside herself to keep level with her job.

After I left the table, I realized that I had supped in the equivalent of the hotel's coffee shop, an eating hall, so to speak, for guests alone. The real restaurant, designed for a more prosperous gang, was entered by two glass doors off the

lobby. Now, black marketeers and bureaucrats, accompanied by their wives, waited on line. Inside, a dance band as full of pep as some of the prom bands that used to work the dances at Yale, was hacking away, a weird bouncy band whose sound reverberated through the glass doors as if the musicians and their instruments were hyper-ventilating within a balalaika.

I went back to my room. I needed to sleep. I hoped I would get to sleep. At the door to the elevator, as I got off, my dezurnaya, under her blonde beehive, gave a real smile when she handed over my key. I understood. Already, I gave every evidence of going by her desk many times a day; I would be a regular customer. The comings and goings of her keys were her liveliest transactions. True hell. Homage to Sartre.

I locked my door, undressed, washed my face, dried my hands. The sink was cracked, the soap was gritty, the bath-towel was small and coarse. So was the toilet paper. This was supposed to be one of the best hotels in Moscow. I was furious suddenly at I knew not what. How did these people presume to be our greatest enemy on earth? They did not even have the wherewithal to be evil. What a misery was this land!

I got into bed. Sleep did not come. There was every intimation the High Holies were on their way. I decided to get

had taken satisfaction on George McGovern by way of Eagleton, poor Tom Eagleton. Jacopo Arbenz must no longer be there to breathe his last for me, nor did I wish to submit to one more indictment from Fidel Castro. Would I have to stare again into Kittredge's eyes? Tonight, it was certain I would have to make every attempt to keep the High Holies in place. I began, therefore, to recite my first sentences aloud, slowly, intoning the words; the sounds themselves came forward as forces in the unseen war of all those silences in myself that rode to war when I slept.

Alpha commenced. I tried to read by microfilm even as I recited aloud. It was my life, expressed in what good style I could muster after years of ghost-writing: Let me offer the primary fact about myself. My father is a Hubbard. That is how my manuscript began. I was ready to live with such a beginning. It might be the side of myself most useful for balance these days. I spoke aloud the first words of my account of the early career of Herrick Hubbard.

Before too long, I was back in the book again, reading by the projection of my special flashlight through the microfilm and lens against the hotel room wall, reading from the thousand and more typewritten pages that had gone into my account of the

to me once, "Your father won't admit it, but that month with the secretaries was the best time of his life."

I loved my father outrageously and thereby had a frightened childhood, worried, strained, and cold within. I wished to be the salt of his salt but my stuff was damp. Much of the time I hated him because he was disappointed in me and I did not hear from him often.

My mother was a different matter. I am the product of a marriage between two people so quintessentially incompatible that they might as well have come from separate planets. Indeed, my parents were separated soon and I spent my boyhood trying to keep two disjointed personalities together.

My mother was small-boned, attractive and blonde, and she lived, but for summer at Southampton, in that social nucleus of New York which is bounded by Fifth Avenue on the West, Park Avenue to the East, the Eighties to the North and the Sixties to the South. She was a Jewish Princess but the emphasis can be put on the second word. She could not have told you the difference between the Torah and the Talmud. She brought me up to be ignorant of every Jewish subject but one: the names of prominent New York banking houses with Semitic roots. I think

follies; she was certainly a lot better than average at giving merry dinner parties. She was also, unfortunately, the owner of a terrible reputation. She was just out of Chapin and a virgin when she married my father. So she claimed. In any case, she became somewhat promiscuous later. The Social Register dropped her a few years after Jessica Silverfield Hubbard became an ex-Hubbard, but it took another ten years before her best friends stopped seeing her. The reason, I suspect, was not her succession of affairs so much as her propensity to lie. She was a psychopathic liar, and finally her memory became her only lasting friend. It always told her what she wished to remember about the present and the past. In consequence you never could know what anyone was up to if you listened to her. I make this point because my mother equipped me, I believe, for counter-espionage, a field where we do, after all, attempt to implant errors in our opponent's knowledge. At any rate, I can hardly pretend that I ended as any good fraction of a Jew. I sometimes think the only kinship with "that herring baron," as my mother referred to great-great-grandfather Chaim Silberzweig, is that anti-Semitic slurs made me tense. I might as well have grown up in a ghetto for the size of the fury aroused in me. For I would then feel Jewish. Or, at least, I thought I did.

I'm afraid my idea of feeling Jewish was to think of the sound on the New York subway and the strain on people's faces in the rush hour, as they stood prey to those harsh and screeching sounds.

I had, however, a privileged boyhood. I went to the Buckley School and was a Knickerbocker Gray until asked to withdraw, a reflection of my serious incompetence at close order drill. While marching, I would generate headaches of such intensity that I would fail to hear commands.

Of course, the bad reputation of my mother may have been another factor, and I take confirmation for this suspicion by the manner in which my father had me reinstated. As a cold-shower warrior, he was not inclined to ask for favors for his progeny. This time, however, he called on people one saves for emergencies. The Hubbards, while a New England family, had well-placed friends in New York, and my father took me to meet a few alumni of the Grays. "It's unfair. They're blaming the boy for her," was part of what I overheard, and it must have done the work. I was reinstated, and managed to soldier my way thereafter with fewer headaches although I never knew one relaxed breath as a cadet.

I suppose people who were happy when young may recall their childhood well. I remember little. Summary disposes of the years and I collect memories by subjects. I can always answer such absurd essay questions as "What was the most important day you spent with a parent?" I would reply: "When my father took me to Twenty-One for lunch on my fifteenth birthday."

Twenty-One was the perfect place to take me. While my father did not know "one superior hell of a lot"--his phrase--about boys, he knew enough to be standing at the bar waiting for me.

I cannot swear in all confidence that the downstairs dining room has not been altered over the years since 1948, but I might bet on the possibility. I think the same model toys are still suspended from the low dark ceiling, same steam-ships, 1915 Spad biplanes, railroad locomotives and trolley cars. The little coupe with its rumble-seat and spare tire in the white slip-cover is still above the bar. Above the bottle cabinet hang the same hunting horns, cutlasses, elephant tusks, and one pair of boxing gloves small enough to fit an infant. My father told me that Jack Dempsey gave those gloves to the owner of Twenty-One, Jack Kriendler, and while I would hope the story is true, it must be said that my father came near my mother in one fell

way--he, too, could have been a psychopathic liar. He kept this tendency, however, under close lock and key, only allowing the slush to ooze forth when he wished to polish some little legend of his own devising. I think he had concluded that life was under constant bombardment, and so good feeling was always in danger of being wiped out; ergo, he gilded the stories he told. He had, by the way, a degree of resemblance to Ernest Hemingway--he was at least equally handsome--and he cultivated the same large dark mustache. He also had Hemingway's build; sporting relatively spindly legs for a man of strength, he often said, "I might have made second team All-American fullback if not for my pins." He also had a great barrel of a chest which bore a distinct likeness to the antique bronze cash register on the bar at Twenty-One. My father's heart beat with pride.

Of course, the pride was for himself. Later, I will try to explain my wife Kittredge's concept of narcissism about which she had a few new things to say. Here, if I state that my father was a narcissist, I do not wish to demean him nor suggest that he was merely vain. While he did have the complacent look of a successful college athlete, my father was a man whose fundamental relation to others was nonetheless a reflection of his concealed but endless negotiations with himself: the two

halves of his soul were far apart. The deacon and the swashbuckler had miles to walk each night before they slept; I think his strength was that he had managed to find some inner cooperation between these disparate halves. When the headmaster's son impacted with Cromwellian rectitude, was able to hook up with a venture which the conquistador could also applaud, well, the energy poured forth. My father, while not uncommonly reflective, did say once: "When your best and worst motive agree on the same action, watch the juices flow."

On this day in December, 1948, my father was dressed in what I would come to call his "battle tweeds." That once had been a suit of light brown Scotch tweed (light in hue, but as heavy and hard to the touch as a horse-blanket.) He bought his suits from Jones, Chalk and Dawson on Saville Row, and they knew how to outfit a horseman. I had seen this same suit on him for ten years. By now, patched with leather at elbows and cuffs, and became more malleable, it could still stand on its legs when taken off. It fit him, however, with a comfortable surround of dignity to suggest that these two materials--his manly flesh and that iron cloth--had grown together long enough to share a few virtues. In fact, he no longer owned a business suit and so had nothing more formal to wear until you got to his black velvet

dinner jacket. Needless to say, on such nightly occasions, he was a lady's vision. "Oh, Cal," they would say of him, "Cal's divine. If only he didn't drink so much."

I think my father would have broken relations with any friend who dared to suggest Alcoholics Anonymous was waiting for him, and he may have been right. His contention was that he drank no more than Winston Churchill and held it as well. He never got drunk. That is to say, his speech never slurred and he never staggered, but he did move through moods powerful enough to alter the electro-magnetic fields through which he passed. It is a way of remarking that he had charisma. He had no more than to say "Bartender" in a quiet tone, and the man, if his back were turned, and had never heard my father's voice before, would nonetheless spring around as if starting a new page in his bar accounts. My father's emotional temperature seemed to rise and fall as he drank; his eyes, by the shift of the hour, could blaze with heat, or install you in a morgue; his voice would vibrate into your feet. Doubtless, I exaggerate, but he was my father, and I saw him so seldom.

On this day, as I came in, he and his battle-tweeds were sheeted in anger. For practical purposes, I was not unlike one of those little wives who are married to huge sea-

captains: I could feel his thoughts. He had been busy on some serious job before lunch, and had nearly cracked its difficulty; now he was putting down his first Martini with all the discontent of interrupted concentration. I could imagine how he said to some assistant, "Damn, I've got to see my son for lunch."

To make matters worse, I was late. Five minutes late. When it came to promptitude, he was always on the mark, a headmaster's son. But now, he had had time to finish his first martini and review in his mind the unpromising list of topics about which we might converse. The sad truth is that he invariably gave off the same gloom on those rare occasions when we met alone. He did not know what to talk to me about, and I, on my side, filled with my mother's adjurations, injunctions, and bitch-fury that I was going to see a man who was able to live in whole comfort apart from her, was jammed up. "Get him to talk about your education," she'd say before I was out the door. "He's got to pay for it, or I'll take him to law. Tell him that." Yes, I would be in great haste to tell him. "Watch out for his charm. It's as real as a snake," and, as I was going out the door, "Tell him I said hello--no, don't you tell him that."

I gave a nod with one quick bob of my head and got onto the barstool next to him. Naturally, I scrunched my larger testicle by too abruptly lowering my butt to the seat. Then I sat there through the small wave of discomfort this brought on and tried to study the signs above the bar.

"Yo, Ho, Ho, and a Bottle of Rum," said one old wooden placard.

"21 West Zwei und funfzegstrasse," said a painted street sign.

"Oh," I said, "is that German, Dad?"

"Fifty-Second Street," he told me.

We were silent.

"How do you like St. Matthew's?" he said.

"Okay."

"Better than Buckley?"

"It's tougher."

"You're not going to flunk out?"

"No, I get B's."

"Well, try to get A's. Hubbards are expected to get A's at St. Matt's."

We were silent.

He shook his head. "I think you had your trouble with the Grays because of that leg."

"Dad, I was just no good at close order drill." Silence. "But I got better." The silence made me feel as if I were trying to push a boat off the shore and it was too heavy for me.

"Dad," I said, "I don't know if I can get A's at St. Matthew's. They think I'm dyslexic."

He nodded slowly as if not unprepared for such news. "How bad is it?" he asked.

"I can read all right, but I never know when I'm going to reverse numbers."

"I had that trouble." He nodded. "Back on Wall Street before the War, I used to live in fear that one bright morning my touch of dyslexia would make the all-time mistake in the firm. Somehow, it never did." He winked. "You need a good secretary to take care of those things." He clapped me on the back. "One more lemonade?"

"No."

"I'll have another martini," he said to the bartender. Then he turned back to me. I still remember the bartender's choice of a keen or sour look. (Keen when serving gentlemen; sour for the tourists.) "Look," my father said, "dyslexia is an

asset as well as a loss. A lot of good people tend to have dyslexia."

"They do?" Over the past term, a few boys at school had taken to calling me Retardo.

"No question." He put his eyes on me. "About ten years ago in Kenya, we were going for leopards. Sure enough, we found one, and it charged. I've hit elephants coming at me, and lions and water buffalo. You hold your ground, look for a vulnerable area in the crosshairs, then squeeze off your shot. If you can steer between the colly-wobbles, it's as easy as telling it to you now. Don't panic, and you have yourself a lion. Or an elephant. It's not even a feat. Just a measure of inner discipline. But a leopard is different. I couldn't believe what I saw. All the while it was charging, it kept leaping left to right and back again, but so fast I thought I was watching a movie with pieces missing. You just couldn't get your crosshairs on any part of that leopard. So, I took him from the hip. At twenty yards. First shot. Even our guide was impressed. He was one of those Scotsmen who sneer at all and anything American, but he called me a born hunter. Later I figured it out for myself. I was an instinctive good shot because of my dyslexia. You see, if you show me 1-2-3-4, I tend

to read it as 1-4-2-3 or 1-3-4-2. That's because I see like an animal. I don't read like some slave, yessir, boss, I'm following you, yessir, 1-2-3-4, no, I look at what's near me and what's in the distance and only then do I shift to the middle ground. In and out, back and forth. That's a hunter's way of looking. If you have a touch of dyslexia, that could mean you're a born hunter."

He gave my midriff a short chop with his elbow. It prof-
fered enough weight to suggest what a real blow would do.

"How's your leg?" he asked again.

"Good," I said.

"Have you tried one-legged knee raises?"

The last time we had been to lunch, eighteen months ago, he
had prescribed such an exercise.

"I've tried it."

"How many can you do?"

"One or two." I was lying.

"If you're really working at it, you would show more
progress."

"Yessir."

I could feel his wrath commencing. It began slowly like
the first stirring of water in a kettle. This time, however, I

could also sense the effort to pull back his annoyance, and that puzzled me. I could not recollect when he had treated me to such courtesy before.

"I was thinking this morning," he said, "of your ski accident. You were good that day."

"I'm glad I was," I said.

We were silent again, but this time it was a pause we could inhabit. He liked to recall my accident. I believe it was the only occasion on which he ever formed a good opinion of me.

When I was seven, I had been picked up at school one Friday in January by my mother's chauffeur and driven to Grand Central Station. On this day, my father and I were going to board the weekend special to Pittsfield, Mass., where we would ski at a place called Bousquet's. How the great echoes of the station matched the reverberation of my heart! I had never been skiing and therefore believed I would be destroyed next day flying off a ski jump.

Naturally, I was taken over no such towering jump. I was put instead on a pair of rented wooden slats, and, after a set of near-fiascos on the long rope tow up, attempted to follow my father down. My father had a serviceable stem turn which was all you needed to claim a few yodelling privileges in the

Northeast back in 1940. (People who could do a parallel Christie were as rare then as tight rope artists.) I, of course, as a beginner, had no stem turn, only the impromptu move of falling to either side when my snow plow got going too fast. Some spills were easy, some were knockouts. I began to seek the fall before I needed to. Soon, my father was shouting at me. In those days, whether riding, swimming, sailing, or on this day, skiing, he lost his temper just so quickly as first returns made it evident that I was without natural ability. Natural ability was God. It meant you were well-born. Bantu blacks in Africa, I came to learn in CIA, believed that a chieftain should enrich himself and have beautiful wives. That was the best way to know God was well-disposed toward you. My father shared this view. Natural ability was bestowed on the deserving. Lack of natural ability spoke of something smelly at the roots. The clumsy, the stupid, and the slack were fodder for the devil. It is not always a fashionable view today, but I have pondered it all my life. I can wake up in the middle of the night thinking, "What if my father was right?"

Soon he grew tired of waiting for me to get up.

"Just do your best to follow," he said, and was off, stopping long enough to call back, "Turn when I turn."

I lost him at once. We were going along a lateral trail that went up and down through the woods. Going uphill, I did not know how to herringbone. I kept getting farther behind. When I came to the top of one rise and saw that the next descent was a full-fledged plunge followed by an abrupt rise, and my father was nowhere in sight, I decided to go straight down in the hope such a schuss would carry me a good way up. Then he would not have to wait too long while I climbed. Down I went, my skis in a wobbly parallel, and at once was going twice as fast as I had ever travelled before. When I lost my nerve and tried to switch to a snowplow, my skis crossed, dug into the soft snow, and I wrenched over in a somersault. There was no release to the bindings in those days. Your feet stayed in the skis. I broke my right tibia.

One did not know that at first. One only knew more pain than ever felt before. Somewhere in the distance my father was bellowing, "Where are you?" It was late in the afternoon and his voice echoed through the hills. No other skiers were coming by. It started to snow and I felt as if I were in the last reel of a movie about Alaska, and soon the snow would cover all trace of me. My father's roars were, in this silence, comforting.

He came climbing back, angry as only a man with a powerful sun-wrinkled neck can be angry. "Will you rise to your feet, you quitter," he cried out. "Stand up and ski."

I was more afraid of him than the five oceans of pain. I tried to get up. Something, however, was wrong. At a certain point, my will was taken away from me completely. My leg felt amputated.

"I can't, sir," I said, and fell back.

Then he recognized there might be more than character at issue here. He took off his ski jacket, wrapped me in it, and went down the mountain to the red cross hut.

Later, in the winter twilight, after the ski patrol had put on a temporary splint and worked me down to the base in a sled, I was put in the back of a small truck, given a modest dose of morphine, and carried over some frozen roads to the hospital in Pittsfield. It was one hell of a ride. By now, well into the spirit of the morphine, the pain still rasped like a rough-toothed saw into my broken bone each time we hit an evil bump (which was every fifty yards.) The drug, however, gave the emoluments of a game. The shock in my bones shivered through my teeth; the game became the art of not making a sound. I lay there on the floor of the truck with a wadded ski jacket under

my head and another beneath my leg, and must have looked like an epileptic: my father kept wiping froth from my mouth.

I made, however, no sound. After a time, the magnitude of my personal venture began to speak to him for he took my hand and concentrated upon it. I could feel him trying to draw the pain from my body into his, and this concern ennobled me. I felt they could tear my leg off and I might still make no outcry.

He spoke: "Your father, Cal Hubbard, is a fathead." That must be the solitary occasion in his life when he used the word in reference to himself. Fathead, in our family, was the worst expression you could ever use for another person.

"No, sir," I said. I was afraid to speak for fear that the groans would begin, yet I also knew the next speech was one of the most important I would ever make. Opening my mouth, however, had made the pain worse. For a few moments, I twisted through falls of nausea--I must have been near to fainting--but the road became level for a little while, and I succeeded in finding my voice. "No, sir," I said, "my father, Cal Hubbard, is not a fathead."

It was the only time I ever saw tears in his eyes.

"Well, you silly goat," he said, "you're not the worst kid, are you?"

If only we'd crashed and died happily on the next turn. I was returned to New York in a cast two days later--my mother sent chauffeur and limousine up for me--and a second hell began. If I had never encountered my wife's theories, I might still have had to conceive them, for the part of me that was ready in one exalted hour to go through a meat-grinder for my father could hardly have been the poor seven-year-old boy who sat home in New York in his Fifth Avenue apartment with a compound fracture surrounded by a plaster cast that itched like the gates of sin. The second fellow seethed with complaints.

I could not move. I had to be carried. I went into panic at the thought of using crutches. I was certain I would fall and break the leg again. The cast began to stink. In the second week the doctor had to cut the plaster off, clean my infection, and encase me again. I mention all this because it also cut off my father's love affair with me nearly as soon as it had begun. When he came over to visit--after an understanding with my mother that she would not be there--he would be obliged to read the notes she left: "You broke his

leg--now teach him to move," on the strength of which he was supposed to give his best effort to coach me up on crutches.

Allowing for his small patience, he finally succeeded, and the leg eventually mended, just a bit crooked, but it took too long. We were back in the land of paternal disillusion. Besides, he had more to think about than me. He was happily remarried to a tall Junoesque woman absolutely his own size, and she had given him twin boys. They were three years old when I was seven, and you could bounce them on the floor. Their nicknames--I make no joke--were Rough and Tough. Rough Hubbard and Tough Hubbard. Actually, they were Roque Baird Hubbard and Toby Bolland Hubbard, my father's second wife being Mary Bolland Baird, but rough and tough they promised to be and my father adored them.

Occasionally, I would visit the new wife. (They had been married four years but I still thought of her as the new wife.) It was just a trip of a few blocks down the winter splendor of Fifth Avenue, that is to say, an education in the elegance of gray. The apartment houses were lilac-gray, and Central Park showed field-gray meadows in winter and mole-gray trees.

Since finding myself on crutches, I no longer ventured from my apartment house. In one of the later weeks of convalescence,

however, I had a good day, and my limb did not ache in its cast. By afternoon, I was restless and ready for adventure. I not only went down to the lobby to talk to the doorman but, on impulse, set out to circumnavigate the block. It was then the idea came to me to visit my stepmother. She was not only large but hearty, and succeeded at times in making me think she liked me. She would certainly tell my father that I had visited, and he would be pleased I was mastering the crutches. So I decided to attempt those five blocks uptown from 73rd to 78th Street and immediately went through a small palsy the first time I put my crutches out from the curb down six inches to the gutter. This small step accomplished, however, I began to swing along, and by the time I reached their apartment house, I was most talkative with the elevator man and pleased with how much pluck I showed for a seven year old.

At their door, a new maid answered. She was Scandinavian and hardly spoke English, but I gathered that the nurse was out with the twins, and "the Madame" was in her room. After some confusion, the new girl let me in, and I sat on a couch bored by the wan afternoon sun as it reflected on the pale silk colors of the living room.

It never occurred to me that my father was home. Later, much later, I would gather that this was about the time he had given up his broker's slot in Merrill, Lynch, to volunteer for the Royal Canadian Air Force. To celebrate, he was taking the afternoon off and getting in "matinee time"--his phrase--with the new wife. I thought Mary Bolland Baird Hubbard was alone and might be reading, and possibly was as bored as I was. So I hopped across the living room and down the hall to their bedroom, making little sound on the pile carpet, and then, without taking the time to listen--all I knew was that I did not wish to return home without having spoken to someone, but would certainly lose my nerve if I waited at the door--I turned the knob, and, to keep my balance, took two big hops forward on my crutches. The sight that received me was my father's naked back, then hers. They were both pretty big. They were rolling around on the floor, their bodies plastered end to end, their mouths on each others'--if I say things it's for want of remembering the word I had then. Somehow I had an idea what they were doing. Importuning sounds came out of them, full of gusto, that unforgettable cry which lands somewhere between whooping and whimpering.

I was paralyzed for the time it took to take it all in; then I tried to escape. They were so deep in their burrow they did not even see me, not for the first instant, the second, nor even the third as I backed my way to the door. Right then, they looked up. I was nailed to the door frame. They stared at me, and I stared at them, and I realized they did not know for how long I had been studying them. For heavens, how long? "Get out of here, you dodo," my father roared, and the worst of it was that I fled so quickly on the crutches that they thumped like ghost-bumpers on the carpet while I vaulted down the hall. I think it was this sound, the thump-thump of a cripple, that must have stayed in her ears. Mary was a nice woman, but she was much too proper to be photographed by anyone's memory in such a position, let alone a slightly creepy stepson. None of us ever spoke of it again; none of us forgot it. I remember that in the time it took to reach my mother's apartment, I generated a two-ton headache, and it was the first of a chronic run of migraines. This pressure had been paying irregular visits from that day. Right now, here at lunch, I could feel it on the edge of my temples, ready to strike.

Now, I cannot say that these headaches were responsible for the ongoing fantasy of my childhood, but it is true that I began

to spend many an afternoon after school alone in my room making drawings of an underground city. It was, looking back on it, a squalid place. Beneath the ground in a set of excavations, I pencilled in club houses, tunnels, game rooms, all connected by secret passages. There was an automat, a gym, and a pool. I giggled at how the pool would be full of urine, and installed torture rooms whose guards had Oriental faces. (I could draw slant eyes.) It was a warren of monstrous and cloacal turns, but it brought peace to my young mind. Indeed, I even had a hospital ward in one wing. I was Dracula, Frankenstein, and Dr. Hardy all at once.

"How are your headaches?" asked my father at the bar at Twenty-One.

"No worse," I said.

"But they don't get better?"

"They don't, I guess."

"I'd like to reach in and pull out what's bothering you," he said. It was not a sentimental remark so much as a surgeon's observation.

I shifted the subject to Rough and Tough. They were now Knickerbocker Grays, and doing well, he told me. I was tall for my age, almost as tall as my father, but they gave every promise

of becoming bigger. As he spoke, I knew there was some other matter on his mind.

It was his inclination to pass me tidbits about his work. This presented curious debits to his duty. In his occupation, you were supposed to encapsulate your working life apart from your family. On the other hand, he had formed his reflexes for security--such as they were--working for the OSS in Europe during World War II. Nobody he knew then had been all that cautious. Today's secret was next week's headline, and it was not uncommon to give a hint of what one was up to when trying to charm a lady. Next day, after all, an airplane was going to parachute you into a strange place. If the lady were made aware of this, well, she might feel less absolutely loyal to her husband (also away at war).

Besides, he wanted to fill me in. If he was not an attentive parent, he was at least a romantic father. Moreover, he was a team man. He was in the Company and his sons ought to be prepared as well: While Rough and Tough were a foregone conclusion, he could hardly swear on me.

"I'm all riled up today," said my father. "One of our agents in Iraq got shot on a stupid business."

"Was he a friend of yours?" I asked.

"Neither here nor there," he replied.

"I'm sorry."

"No, I'm just so goddamn mad. This fellow was asked to obtain us a piece of paper that wasn't really needed."

"Oh."

"I'll tell you, darn it all. You keep this to yourself."

"Yes, dad."

"One of those playboys at State decided to be ambitious. He is doing his Ph.D. thesis on Iraq over at Georgetown. So he wanted to present a couple of hard-to-get details about Iraq that nobody else has. He put through a request to us. Officially. From State. Could we furnish the poop? Well, we're green. You could grow vegetables with what they scrape off our ignorance. We try to oblige. So we put our best Iraqi agent on it, and there you are--lost a crack operator because he was asked to reach for the jam at the wrong time."

"What'll happen to the fellow in the State Department?"

"Nothing much. If a couple of us remember, well, maybe we'll slow down a promotion or two for that idiot by talking to a guy or two at State, but it's horrifying, isn't it? Our man loses his life because somebody needs a footnote for his Ph.D. thesis."

"I thought you looked upset."

"No," he said quickly, "it's not that." Then he hoisted his martini, stepped off the stool, raised his hand as if calling a cab, and the captain was there to bring us to our table which was, I already knew, in his favored location against the rear wall. There my father placed me with my back to the room. At the table to my left were two men with white hair and red faces who looked like they might have gout, and on the right was a blonde woman with a small black hat supporting a long black feather. She was wearing pearls on a black dress and had long white gloves. Across from her was a man with a pencil-thick pinstripe. I mention these details to show a facet of my father: he was able, in the course of sitting down, to nod to the two gentlemen with gout as if it would be appropriate to know each other, then froze the man in the pencil-stripe suit for the sin of egregious clothing while indicating to the woman that she was top of the breed for blonde ladies in black. My father had a gleam in his eye at such times that made me think of the Casbah. I always supposed a Levantine would come up to you in the Casbah and give a flash of what he had in his hand. There!--a diamond peeked out. That made me recollect Cal

Hubbard rolling with Mary Baird on the carpeted floor, which caused me to look down quickly at my plate.

"Herrick, I haven't seen a superior hell of a lot of you lately, have I?" he asked, unfolding his napkin, and sizing up the room. I wasn't too happy being placed with my back to everyone, but then he gave a wink as if to suggest that he had his reasons. It was incumbent on his occupation, as he once explained, that he be able to put the eye on a joint. I think he may have picked up the phrase from Dashiell Hammett with whom he used to drink before word went around that Hammett was a Communist. Then, since he considered Hammett smarter than himself, he gave up the acquaintance. (Otherwise, I believe he would have kept drinking with Dash to see who could learn more about the other. Be it said, they liked each other. They could each put down four double-Scotches in an hour and ten minutes.)

"Well, there's a reason I haven't seen a lot of you, Rick." He was the only one to call me Rick, rather than Harry, for Herrick. "I have been travelling an unconscionable amount." This was said for the blonde woman as much as for me. "They don't know yet whether I'll be the linchpin for Europe or the Far East."

Now, the man in the pencil-stripe suit began his counter-

offensive. He must have put a curve on what he said, for the woman gave a low intimate laugh. In response, my father leaned toward me across the table and whispered, "They've given OPC the covert operations."

"What's covert?" I whispered back.

"The real stuff. None of that counter-espionage where you drink out of my tea-cup and I drink out of yours. This is war. Without declaring it." He raised his voice sufficiently for the woman to hear the last two phrases, then dropped back to a murmur as if the best way to divide her attention was to insinuate himself in and out of her hearing.

Now, he recited the next items in a highly-shaped whisper. "Our charter calls for economic warfare, plus underground resistance groups." Loudly: "You saw what we did in the Italian elections."

"Yessir."

He enjoyed the yessir. I had broadcast it for the blonde lady.

"If not for our little operation, the Communists would have taken over Italy," he stated.

In school, our history teacher had told us that the Marshall Plan kept the Communists from winning in Italy. So I was

confused. My father, reading my reaction, added, "They're wrong to give the credit to the Marshall Plan. We won in Italy in spite of the money that was thrown around."

"We did?"

"In part we did. The problem comes down to the Italian ego. They're an odd people. Half sharp, half meatball."

By the way in which the man in the pencil-stripe began to pay attention, I suspected he was Italian. If my father sensed that, he gave no sign. "You see, the Romans themselves are civilized. Minds quick as stilettos. But the Italian peasant remains as backward as a Filipino. In consequence, you mustn't try to motivate their self-interest too crudely. Self-esteem means more to them than filling their bellies. They're always poor, so they can live with hunger, but, they don't want to lose their honor. Those Italians really wanted to stand up to us. They would have derived more pleasure spitting in our face than sucking up to us with their phony gratitude. Nothing personal. The Italians are like that. If Communism ever takes over in Italy, those Red wops will drive the Soviets just as crazy as they're driving us."

I was feeling the wrath of the Italian man next to me.

"Dad, if that's what you think," I blurted out, scurrying to

save the peace, "why not let the Italians choose their path? They're an ancient and civilized people."

My father had to ponder this. Allen Dulles may have said that the happiest week of Cal Hubbard's life was spent seducing secretaries at Treasury, Justice and the FBI, but I expect no period could have been equal to the year he spent with the partisans. If Italy had gone Communist in 1948, my father would probably have gone right over to form an anti-Communist underground. In recesses of his brain so secret he could not even reach them in his dreams, I believe he would have enjoyed a take-over of America by Communism. Because just think of the American underground he could have helped to set up then! The thought of dynamite Americans waging an underground war up and down our countryside against an oppressive enemy would have been a tonic to keep him young forever.

So my father may have been on the edge of saying "You bet," but he didn't. Instead, he answered dutifully, "We can't afford to let the Russians in. Who knows? Those guineas might get along with the Russians."

We had an interruption here. The man next to us suddenly called out for his check, and my father immediately stopped our conversation in order to look appreciatively at the blonde lady.

"Weren't we introduced at Forest Hills this fall?" he said to her.

"Nah, I don't think so," she answered in a muffled voice.

"Please tell me your name," said my father, "and I'll bet I recollect where it was."

"Think of nowhere," said the man in the striped suit.

"Are you trying to give directions?" asked my father.

"I heard of people," said the man, "who lose their nose by poking it around the corner."

"Al!" said the blonde lady.

Her Al, having stood up abruptly, was now putting money down on the table to cover the tab. He dropped each new bill like a dealer snapping cards, signally upset that one of the players had called for a new deck. "I've heard of people," repeated Al, and now he looked down at my father, "who stepped off the curb and broke a leg."

Into my father's eyes came that diamond of the Casbah. He, too, stood up. They each took a long look at each other. "Buster," said my father in a happy, husky voice, "don't get tough!"

It was his happiness that did the job. Al thought of replying, then thought better. His jaw did not work. He folded

his napkin as if folding his tent, looked for the opportunity to throw a sneak punch, did not find what he was looking for, and gave his arm to the blonde lady. They left. My father grinned. If he couldn't have her, he had at least broken a couple of Al's legs.

Now, my father began to talk a good deal. A victory over a stranger was kin to a triumph over rival hordes. My mother and this man Al were out there with the Russians. "There are six million soldiers in the Red Army," said my father, "and only a million of us. That's counting NATO. The Russians could take all of Europe in two months. It's been true for the last three years."

"Then, why haven't they?" I asked. I had a teacher at St. Matthew's who had just lost his job. He had kept saying he would vote for Henry Wallace in the election; he also kept giving us statistics. "Dad, the Russians had 20,000,000 people killed in the war. And they lost half their housing west of the Urals. Why would they want another war?"

He finished his drink. "Damn if I know." As the waiter sprang for the refill, my father leaned forward: "I'll tell you why. Communism is an itch. What does that mean, to have an itch? Your body is out of whack. Little things take on vast

proportions. That's Communism. A century ago, everybody had their place. If you were a poor man, God judged you as such, a poor man. He had compassion. A rich man had to pass more severe standards. As a result, there was peace between the classes. But materialism came down on us. Materialism propagated the idea that the world is nothing but a machine. If that's true, then it's every man's right to improve the machine. That's the logic of atheism. When everybody's ears are being pounded to bits, and nothing tastes right any more because we're all too tense, God becomes an abstraction. You can't enjoy your own so you begin to covet the next guy's country."

He took a long thoughtful swallow from his drink. My father could always bring a cliché to life. Many have been described as taking long thoughtful swallows of their drinks, but my father drank like an Irishman. He took it for granted that real and true spirits were entering with the fire of the liquor. He inhaled the animation around him, and if none of it was sufficiently high-spirited to qualify, he breathed back his own excitement. Emotion must never be wasted. "Rick, keep clear on one matter. There's a huge war brewing. These Communists are insatiable. We treated them as friends during the war and they'll never get over that. When you're older, you may

have the bad luck to get into an affair with an ugly woman who happens to enjoy what you offer, but has never been on daily terms with a man. She's too ugly. Fellow, you're going to have trouble on your hands. Before long, she's insatiable. You've given the taste of the forbidden to her. That's the Russians. They got ahold of Eastern Europe; now, they want it all."

He did not halt long at this place. "No," he said, "it's not a good analogy. It's really worse than that. We're in an ultimate struggle with the Russians, and that means we have to use everything. Not only the kitchen sink, but the vermin that comes with the sink."

My father was interrupted at this moment by the two white-haired gentlemen seated on his right. They were getting up to leave and one said, "I couldn't help hearing what you were explaining to your son, and I wish to say, couldn't agree more. Those Russians want to crack our shell and get all the good meat. Don't let them."

"No, sir," said my father, "not one knuckle will they get," and he stood up on that remark. The rich compact that comes from a common marrow guarded us all. Honor, adventure, and sufficient income was in the air of Twenty-One. Even I could prosper there.

When we sat down again, my father said, "Keep this most strictly to yourself. I'm going to trust you with a weighty secret. Hitler used to say, 'Bolshevism is poison.' That idea is not to be rejected out of hand just because Adolph said it. Hitler was so awful that he ruined the attack on Bolshevism for all of us. But the fundamental idea is right. Bolshevism is poison. We've even come to the point,"--and here my father dropped his voice to the lowest whisper of the lunch--"where we've got to employ a few of those old Nazis to fight the Reds."

"Oh, no," I said.

"Oh, yes," he said. "There's hardly a choice. The OSO is incompetent. We were supposed to put agents in place all over the Iron Curtain countries; we couldn't even seed it with birdfeed. Every time we thought we had a network, we woke up to discover the Russians were running it. The great Russian bear, that Golgotha, can move its armies all over the Iron Curtain, and we are without an effective alert system. If, two years ago, the Soviets had wanted to march across Europe, they could have. We would have gotten out of bed in the morning to hear their tanks in the streets. We had no reliable intelligence. That's fearful. How would you like to live blindfolded?"

"No good, I guess."

"It came down to this: we had to use a Nazi general. I call him General Microfilm. I can't reveal his name." (Some years later, I would learn it was Reinhard Gehlen.) "He was top intelligence man for the Germans on the Russian front. He would weed out the most promising of the Russians captured by the Germans, and manage to infiltrate them back behind Russian lines. For a while, they honey-combed the Red army, even worked in the Kremlin. Just before the war ended, this General, prior to destroying his files, buried fifty steel boxes somewhere in Bavaria. They were microfilm copies of those files. A voluminous product. We needed it. Now, he's dealing with us. He has built up new networks all through East Germany, and there isn't much those East German Communists don't tell his West German agents about what the Reds are planning next in Eastern Europe. This general may be an ex-Nazi, but, like it or not, he's invaluable. That's what my business is about. You work with the next-to-worst in order to defeat the worst. Could you do that?"

"Maybe."

"You might be too liberal, Herrick. Liberals refuse to look at the whole animal. Just give us the tasty parts, they say. I think God has need of a few soldiers."

"Well, I believe I could be a good one."

"I hope so. When you broke your leg, you were a great soldier."

"Do you think so?" This moment alone made the lunch superlative for me. So I wanted him to say it again.

"Not in question. A great soldier." He paused. He played with his drink. His free hand made a rocking motion on the table from thumb to little finger. "Rick," he announced, "you're going to have to pull up your gut again."

It was like coming in for a landing. My focus moved closer to my father's with every instant.

"Is it medical?" I asked. Then answered myself. "It's the tests I took."

"Let me give you the positive stuff first." He nodded. "It's operable. There's an 80% likelihood it's benign. So when they take it out, they've got it all."

"A benign tumor?"

"As I say, they are 80% certain. That's conservative. I believe it's 95% certain."

"Why do you think that?"

"You may have bad headaches but the powers-that-be aren't ready to lift you from the board. It makes no sense."

"Maybe the whole thing makes no sense," I said.

"Don't you ever believe that. I'd rather you took a dump right here in public right in the middle of my favorite restaurant, than that you descend into that kind of sophomoric nihilism. No, look at it this way. Assume the devil made a mistake and put all his eggs in one basket concerning you,"--again my father was whispering as if any loud statement of Satan's name could summon him to your side--"and we're going to remove him all at once. Excise him. Rick, your headaches will be gone."

"That's good," I said. I was ready to cry. Not because of the operation. I had not realized an operation was this near, but it had been part, certainly, of my inner horizon. I had been taking tests for three months. No, I was ready to cry because I knew now why my father had taken me to lunch and favored me with big secrets.

"I convinced your mother," he said. "She's a very difficult woman under any and all circumstances, but I got her to recognize that one of the best neuro-surgeons in the country is available for this. I can tell you in confidence he also works for us. We've talked him into putting his toe in the water for some studies we're doing on brainwashing techniques. We need to keep up with the Russians."

"I guess he'll learn a little more about brainwashing with me."

My father gave a half-smudged smile for the joke. "He'll give you every chance to become the man you want to be."

"Yes," I said. I had an awful feeling I could not explain. There was no doubt in my mind that the tumor was the worst part of me. All the rotten things in me must be concentrated there. I had always supposed, however, that sooner or later I would be able to dissolve it out by myself.

"What if we don't have the surgery? I can keep living with my headaches," I said.

"There's a chance it will turn malignant. If it hasn't already."

"You mean when they open my head, they could discover cancer?"

"There's one chance in five."

"You said 95%. Isn't that one chance in twenty?"

"All right. One in twenty."

"Dad, that's twenty to one in our favor. Nineteen to one, actually."

"I'm looking at other kinds of odds. If you're debilitated with headaches during all the formative years to come, you'll

end up half a man." I could hear the rest. "Shape up," were the words he was inclined to speak.

"What do the doctors think?" I asked at last.

I had given up the game by asking this question. "They say you must have the operation."

Years later, a surgeon would tell me that the operation would have been elective, not mandatory. My father had lied. His logic was simple. He would not manipulate me or any other family member who was arguing a point out of his own feelings; if third parties, however, were consulted, then the debate had become a recourse to authority. Since I asked what the doctors said, my father was ready to substitute himself as final authority.

Now he got out his wallet to pay the check. Unlike Al, the injured lover, my father did not snap his money down. He laid it like a poultice on the plate.

"When this is over," he told me, "I'm going to introduce you to a dear friend of mine whom I've asked to be your godfather. It's not customary to have a brand new godfather at the age of fifteen. But this fellow is wholly superior. You'll like him. He's named Hugh Montague, and he's one of us. Hugh Tremont Montague. Do not forget the Tremont. He's one of those

middle-name guys." My father laughed as if no matter how splendid a man might be, he couldn't be entirely perfect if he made a fuss about his middle name. No one my father grew up with ever had less than three names, after all.

"Yes," my father went on, "Hugh Montague did wonderful stuff for OSS while on liaison with the Brits. During the war he worked with J.C. Masterson--I can tell you that name. An Oxford don. One of their spymasters. Hugh will fill you in on all of that. The English are such ice-cold aces in this kind of work. They captured a few of the first German agents in England and succeeded in turning them. As a result, all the German agents who followed were picked up on arrival. During the rest of the war, the Abwehr was fed the niftiest disinformation about England. And, oh how the English got to love their German agents. Absolutely as much as their favorite fox-hounds, yes, they did." Here my father broke into a roar so heartily endowed with mirth he could have been laughing to compliment a superior's wit. "You have to," he added, "get Hugh to tell you about the code names the English gave their little Germans. Perfect names for peachy dogs. CELERY," said my father, "SNOW, GARBO, CARROT, COBWEB, MULLET, LIPSTICK, NEPTUNE, PEPPERMINT, SCRUFFY,

ROVER, PUPPET, SWEETIE, ZIGZAG, WEASEL, BASKET, BISCUIT, BRUTUS.

Is that, or is that not, the English?"

For years, should I fall asleep thinking of Harlot, I would have a fading sight of his face surrounded by men and women holding brass nameplates in capitals: BRUTUS, COBWEB, TREASURE, ZIGZAG, RAINBOW. As I grew ready in the last of this lunch at Twenty-One to lose a part, forever, of the soft meats of my brain, so were old ghosts bearing their code names filing one by one into the cavity soon to be waiting for them.