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IN PROGRESS

A Novel

By

Jerry Harris

B. A. Portland State College, 1965


Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

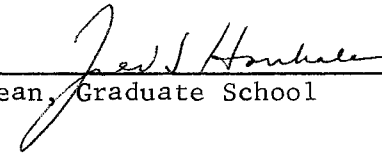
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1967

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1: Friday

Urban renewal may have got it by now, but in those days the old house was backed-up against a hill on the left side of Wilfred Avenue. Which wasn't an avenue at all, but a narrow lane whose only existence was this half-hearted attempt to sidle up that steep hillside. A huge oak stood guard in front of and above the house and seasonally excreted pitch and leaves on the shingled roof, rotting it.

Although the fine old hardwood floor and the conservative brick fireplace cried out for sumptuous furnishings, the living room looked almost unfurnished. Maybelle and Rachel had plans, of course, but at present they were making do with the hard relic of a pre-World War II couch, its red fuzz worn to bare stitchings on the arms, and a massive overstuffed chair covered with maroon corduroy, which Maybelle had sewn up herself to keep the stuffing in. Besides those two main items, there was a brown stand beside the chair, a vaguely mahogany coffee table with the glass top gone, and Sam's masterpiece, the teetering bookcase composed of chipped red bricks and warped, unfinished fir planks. He hadn't just stacked it, he had designed it, and it wouldn't teeter like that if the floor were level. The books were paperback.

Eugene Greenfield sat in the chair engrossed in the latest New Republic. Periodically he inhaled large drafts of unfiltered cigarette smoke. The exhaled smoke came from his nostrils down his tee-shirted chest until it collided with the magazine, folded back upon itself, and rolled up again across his face, even under the bent-framed glasses.

Maybelle's voice could be heard from upstairs. "Oh God, yes, Rachel. You've got to take that one! When he sees you in that your daddy will be convinced his sweet daughter is still a virgin."

Sam Patience came down the creaking stairs carrying a piece of Rachel's expensive luggage and put it down near the front door.

Gene looked up from his reading. "Must be in a hell of a hurry to get out of here. Bags packed a day ahead of time and standing by the door."

"She leaves early Sunday, works all day tomorrow, and doesn't want to spend Saturday night packing," Sam explained. "And everything has to be just right for a diplomatic mission, you know. Must observe protocol when applying for foreign aid from old dad."

"Shit," Gene said. "With aid comes all those God-awful shackles. And they won't be bruising sweet little Rachel's ankles. They'll all be hanging off you, Sam baby. Clank, clank, clank."

"Okay, I've already heard your views on the subject." Sam sat down on the suitcase and lit a cigarette.

"You don't need foreign money anyway," Gene smiled wryly and swatted the New Republic with the back of his hand, "Goddamn economy's booming. We'll all be affluent in no time. T.R.B. says . . ."

The phone rang. It was on the floor under the stand next to Gene's chair. He groped for it, irritated.

It had not yet rung a second time when Maybelle Bowers appeared at the head of the stairs shouting, "Don't answer it, Gene! Don't answer it! I'll get it." In print muu-muu, thick brown hair streaming down her back, rubber thongs slapping on the stairs, she rushed for the phone. "This is just the time of night for you-know-who to call."

Gene said, "Ump." Maybelle scooped up the phone and plopped down on the arm of his chair. Looking disgusted, he leaned on the other arm and flipped pages.

"Hello," she cooed. "Oh, hello, Mommy!" She made an I-told-you-so face at Gene. "I'm helping Rachel pack. She's flying to Los Angeles this weekend to visit her father . . . Tonight? . . . right now? Moms, the place is a mess . . . we haven't cleaned up dinner yet and . . . okay, but I warned you. See you in a little while." She waited until there was a click at the other end before she slammed the receiver down and screamed "Shit!" Her rectangular face pinched and pale, her eyes darting around the room, she said rapidly, "She's coming over. She's coming over. Right now. She's coming over right now."

Gene hung his head. "God damn it, Maybelle, do we have to do this hide-and-seek routine again?"

"Yes. Yes. She's coming. Right away." She jerked across the room, picked Gene's jacket from the couch, tossed it in his lap. Coming back, she grabbed up his muddy work shoes from beside his bare feet and the brimming ashtray from the stand, then headed for the hallway to the downstairs bedroom and the kitchen. Passing the stairway, she shouted, "Rachel! She's coming over. Mother. Coming over right now."

Rachel Dexter came to the head of the stairs. With hair in soft waves of mahogany red, just the suggestion of freckles left on her cheeks, and dressed in skirt and sweater, she looked like a high school senior, even though she hadn't been that for almost two years now.

"What can I do to help?" she asked, padding deftly down the stairs.

"Could you run some water and shove the dishes in it? If she sees four plates on the table, we'll be all night explaining it." Maybelle

was around the corner, kneeling in front of the bed. Gene's shoes were under there now, and she was adjusting the counterpane to make sure they couldn't be seen. On her feet again, she gathered discarded pieces of his clothing from around the room and stuffed them in drawers. She came back to the living room with a wool shirt, a clean pair of sox, and Gene's scuffed street shoes.

He put these things on, grudgingly, and was zipping his jacket as Sam came back downstairs wearing a rain coat.

As they started out the door Gene directed a parting shot in the direction of Maybelle, who was back in the bedroom, busy. "Goddamn shame when a man can't have any peace in his own home after a hard day's work!"

"What are you yelling about?" she answered. "You go absolutely out of your mind if you have to talk to her for five minutes."

"Christ, I don't want to visit with her! Just want some peace. Oughta tell her to stay the fuck home."

"Remember to look for her car before you come back in."

In front, under the oak, Sam said, "That, old buddy, is what I will no longer have to go through."

"Shit. I don't have to go through it. She does. Poor little wench keeps letting her mother run her through a wringer. Ought to let the nervous old bitch come in some night and catch us banging in the middle of the front room. Then maybe she'd go home and leave us alone."

They were an odd looking pair trudging down wet Wilfred Avenue. Gene, burly in his jacket, unkempt crew cut bristling; Sam, shorter and slighter in the dark raincoat. They were both in their mid-twenties, but Sam looked younger and a little bookish.

The sun, departing, shot red into ragged remnants of April rain clouds, and in that light, spring's pale green new growth turned darker, almost fluorescent. Gene and Sam went to Gertie's.

The Park Avenue Gardens Tavern, known to most of its patrons as Gertie's, was located midway between Wilfred Avenue and Portland State College. The tavern and even its current proprietess had been there before the college. The traditional patrons, the laborers who had long lived in the neighborhood, had been thinned out and moved aside by students in both the tavern and the neighborhood. When Gene and Sam came in, there were the two old men and a fat woman on stools at the bar, two students with long hair and adolescent beards back in the corner playing chess, and on the other side of the room two scholars in warm-up jackets played shuffleboard. Later, since this was Friday, it would become extremely crowded and the older people would stay home.

Gene and Sam sat in a booth, leaned on elbows, and drank the tap beer that came in twenty-five-cent pitchers. Robert Louis Holmes--tall, gaunt, engulfed in a navy pea-jacket--came unsteadily through the door. He paused, inhaled a great chestful of stale beer and smoke, and blinked happily. "Ah Charybdis, thine own Ahab hath returned," he proclaimed. Then advancing toward Gertie, "Just an empty glass, my good woman, and I'll join those two shrouded gentlemen, yonder under the black cloud."

He put the glass on the table and, still standing, picked up Gene's hand and shook it. "Good evening and how is the American Mellors, champion of the proletariat?"

"Up yours, Ahab, you're potted."

Now shaking hands with Sam, "And Portland's most patient Elmer Gantry--how many tortured souls hast thou drawn from the murky depths this day?"

"Fuck you, Ahab, you're insane."

Seating himself and pouring beer, Ahab heaved a great sigh of comfort. "Lord, 'tis good to be among friends."

"How can you possibly be so blasted this early in the evening?"

"Aye and I gave meself the afternoon off. All this week long have I done great labors for Wardbuck and Company. And under a great burden." Leaning forward and gesturing freely, he fell into his storytelling manner. "Early this week the boss man drew me aside to stand upon his carpet and said, Mr. Holmes, you haven't been getting enough results. You must be firmer, more insistent, Mr. Holmes, he says. Therefore, fiercely--fiercely, mind you--have I all this week long descended upon the beleaguered poor of this giant metropolis. Pounding on doors, I clutch up the collar whatever answers--man, woman, beast, or child--and come immediately to the point: Pay up to dear old Warbuck and Company, you dead beat bastard, or I'll have you thrown in jail, I shout. This new approach hath reaped immense results, immense! Be firm with the infirm, 'tis indeed the answer. You wouldn't believe it!"

Silence.

Ahab started again. "I sense truculence in the air. Can it be that all does not go well with the Great Social Experiment?"

"You got a dark suit?" Gene asked.

"Aye! The one I wear to the funerals of my own favorite dead beats."

"Great. That'll be just the suit to wear. Sam wants us to stand up with him."

"Stand up. In a suit? Christ, that's what you do at weddings, isn't it?"

"That's it, baby. Fuckhead's gonna take him a wife."

"But what about the Great Commune?"

"Kaput."

"That God damn Rachel. I've never trusted that bitch. Sam, when she finally moved in with you, I thought you had really accomplished something. Something I never thought you'd be able to do. Thundering Gods, not after what she had put you through! And now. What new horrors? Threatened castration? Allowed herself to become impregnated?"

"Take it easy, Ahab. She's not pregnant and I'm still whole. The marriage is as much my idea as hers. It's a matter of practicality. We both are going back to school."

"So it's back to school again, too. This is indeed the Hour of Decision. Well, hell, school's all right. 'Tis a folly we all fall into every other year or so. Why, even such a fine gentleman as old Gene here, he's been back so many times he only has--what is it now? six?--six In-completes to save him from being an official Bastard of Arts. But what does school have to do with getting married?"

"You don't understand the attitude with which he's going back to school." Gene drained his glass and poured more. "This time he's going to take all the classes they tell him to, and, to illustrate his complete depravity, he intends to complete them even. This time he's going to get a degree."

"Mary, mother of us all."

"Hey, don't give me a lot of crap, Ahab. I went through the whole routine with Gene last night. Just look at it this way. I had a birthday, I'm getting old. Great Social Experiment or not, I don't want to live in that rotting old house and work at that rotten radio station evenings and weekends the rest of my life."

"Man, nobody would be happier than hoary Ahab to see you get out of Gantryville. Even if it's to become a college prof with letters after your name. But why get married?"

"Like I said, it's a matter of practicality. Daddy Dexter has spies up here: a couple of her old high school friends, we think. He sent her a big emotional letter the first of this week. He has heard that we are living together, but he says he refused to believe that his daughter would do such a thing. Anyway he is now repentant for getting in such a huff last year when she wouldn't move to California with him. He's afraid he sent her off in the direction of bitterness and evil when he cut off the money for her to go to school. So now he says that if she'll come down to have a face-to-face talk with him, he'll let her come back if she wants to and will start sending money so she can go to school again. Furthermore, he says he knows that young ladies of her age, especially when they are alone in the world, are, as he puts it, 'highly susceptible to certain powerful biological urges.' As a result, 'they are apt to be preyed upon by unreliable and insincere young men.' In short, he says that if she has hot pants for me so bad that she can't stay out of my immoral embraces, she better marry me. Because then, of course, the embraces would be moral. If that's what she wants and if I am willing--which I will be if I am what he calls 'a decent sort'--he'll see to it that lack of money doesn't stand in our way."

Ahab listened to this with increasing distaste. His boozy geniality had become drunken disgust. "Patience, you are a God damn pussy-whipped sell-out."

"Thanks, pal, I know you'd understand."

"Let him off the hook, Ahab. You just make him more stubborn about it. I found that out last night. He thinks he can tread the line between compromise and sell-out and come through a big winner."

Ahab had his head propped on an elbow now. With his head turned away as if Sam were something unfit to be looked upon, he mumbled, "Motherfuckin' sell out."

Sam spoke despairingly, with no hope of convincing anyone, "It's not a sell-out. We'll stand up in front of a JP and get the piece of paper to make her old man and society happy. As long as we have the gut to keep the understanding between us the same, the piece of paper won't make any difference to us. But from Daddy Decker it gets money, from the doctor it gets a prescription for the pills, and from people in general no more of the suspiciously frowning foreheads that tear Maybelle up all the time. Trying to hide it is bound to start getting to Rachel too."

"A sell-out is a sell-out is a sell-out is a sell-out . . ."

Ahab now began yelling at the ceiling and traipsed on into his empty glass, oblivious of the eyes around the room that turned his way.

"Looks like we'll have to cart the old sailor home to his ailing loving arms again tonight. Christ and look how early it is. He's never caved in before midnight before, has he?"

"It's a new record," Sam said, getting up. "One more pitcher will do it. The sell-out will out."

Later, in bed, Sam said soft words to Rachel's neck. "Oh God, I like bare skin. I absolutely forbid that we should ever wear any clothes to bed."

"Mmmmmmm," she said.

To her breasts he said, "I hate your going away for even a week. Sometimes I don't think you realize how very much I need you."

"Hey, don't start that."

From under the covers he didn't say anything.

"That's better. The lover, not the sentimentalist."

Downstairs Gene had caught his ankle in the string that dangled from the bare light globe over the bed. For some time the light blinked off and on, off and on. It had happened before and he kept saying he was going to shorten the string. The first time it happened a nervous neighbor had thought it was a distress signal and had called the police.

II: Saturday

On Saturday in the upstairs bedroom of the house on Wilfred Avenue the alarm clock went off at 4:30 A.M. Sam Patience sat bolt upright in bed immediately as it began to ring. He clamped a hand on top of the clock to squelch the alarm, got out of bed, and tucked the covers back around the still sleeping Rachel.

Without turning on a light he dressed in white shirt, slacks, and sport coat. He left the collar of the shirt unbuttoned, but draped a tie loosely about his neck for later. In the raincoat again, he eased his way downstairs, then paused in the kitchen to wrap two doughnuts and deposit them, along with a can of tomato soup, in his coat pockets.

Outside it was dark and starless. The clouds had regrouped during the night to prepare for a day-long siege. Sam had to walk almost all the way downtown, about fifteen blocks, to catch his bus. Inside the brightly lit bus he was carried through the dark streets, on display to street cleaners and garbage men. The bus left him far out Beech Boulevard on the eastside.

He unlocked the door and began turning things on. First the lights, to see by, and then the main switch for the studio components, to warm them up. In the back room he started coffee brewing in the same pot he would later use to warm the soup, and gathered the night's accumulation of news copy from the wire service teletype. He came back to the announcer's booth with record albums under both arms, a stack of tapes cradled in both hands, a cup of coffee perched on top of the tapes, and news beneath his teeth.

By remote controls he fired up the transmitter, which was twenty miles away on a westside hill top. Leaning over the chair in front of the console, he opened the mike and said simply, "KRST, Portland." It was 5:40 A.M. The station did not officially go on the air until 5:59.

He signed in on the transmitter log and the program log, took transmitter readings, and made his initial entries on the logs. He set up tapes on the tape rack, cued-up records on the turntables, then edited news while drinking coffee and eating doughnuts.

At 5:59 he started the sign on tape, which included all the legal requirements, The Star Spangled Banner and A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. The first two hours were the same as any disc jockey shift in a small station: News, weather forecasts, time and temperature, some commercials, and records. The only difference was that the records were all of hymns and sacred songs.

Sam's job was that of a professional radio announcer. He was not an evangelist. This was a distinction he had tried to impress upon Ahab, but he had had little success. There were plenty of others happy to do the evangelizing. Preachers from all over the country--but primarily from the South and from California--bought time from KRST and sent their programs on tape. The tapes were played on the air and KRST's devoted listeners sent contributions to the evangelists "to keep the program on the air."

After the first two hours Sam's shift was filled with such programs. Only two of his Saturday programs were done live by local men: Hiram Dance at 11 and Young Bob Holt at noon.

For Sam, Hiram Dance was a pain in the ass. This was because Dance was an amateur. A simple-minded man, deeply religious in his shallow way, he had no sense of showmanship whatsoever.

His wife was even worse. Hiran had recently spent two months in Africa converting the natives and catching dysentary, and his wife had substituted for him on the program while he was gone. If anything could induce even KRST's most loyal listeners to turn the radio off, it was a woman screamer. When Hiram got back KRST manager Bill Edwin made him promise to keep his wife off the air and told Sam to cut the program in progress if that promise were ever broken. After all, the Dances only bought one program a week and the station had its reputation to maintain.

Hiram was a screamer too, but at least his voice was pitched lower. He would be screaming within two minutes after the program had started and wouldn't quit until Sam's frantic arm waving finally brought him back to earth, usually a minute or two after he should have been off the air. That threw Sam's schedule off for hours.

The only thing Sam liked about Hiram Dance was his warm-up ceremony. Dance always arrived a half hour or more before he was due to go on the air, and at least fifteen minutes of the intervening time was spent on his knees in Studio A praying aloud for the success of his program. Sam would watch through the glass until he went to his knees and then eavesdrop by turning the studio microphone on "monitor." What interested Sam was that Dance did what is called "speaking in tongues." He was the only one Sam had ever heard do that because such wildness was strictly forbidden on the air. "Oh Lord, help today's program to reach the ears of some poor soul lost in sin today," Dance would be saying. And

then, "Oh dear Lord, shama rama kubala sum! Shama shama rubala sum!" Sam thought that was so great he taped it once and played it back on a portable machine to a party on Wilfred Avenue.

Nevertheless, all things considered, Hiram Dance was a pain in the ass.

Young Bob Holt, on the other hand, did his stuff like an old pro and that made him a pleasure to work with.

Sam watched him park his beat Renault just a sidewalk away from the window-wall of the fishbowl announcer's booth. It was three minutes to noon, but Sam had't been worrying about him. He was always just in time.

Some Saturdays Young Bob was bald, with sun-glasses and a red golf sweater. But in today's unintermittent shower he wore his hair-piece and a dark suit beneath hat and raincoat. His cheeks always looked a little puffy and his eyes baggy, but whatever shape he **was** in, he was all Professional once he was on the air.

Sam had a couple of record albums by the Blackwood Brothers ready. With the second hand whirling toward noon, Bob stood in the announcer's booth and ran his finger down the list of songs on one of the albums. One for the early part of the show, one for after the sermon.

Sam gave the station break and started the theme record right at noon. At the same time Bob was slipping into his chair in Studio A. While Sam read the introduction over the theme music, Bob located a passage in his Bible with one eye and watched Sam through the glass with the other. Their senses of timing meshed perfectly. Sam gave Bob the usual hand signal as he said ". . . and now here he is, to speak to you today, that

young man with a message from God, Bob Holt!" Young Bob's mike was already open; there was no pause, no dead air. While Sam's last word was still hanging in space Bob was already saying, "Hello to all my friends and neighbors in the great city of Portland!"

Then he did his opening spiel which included details on the meetings he was holding five nights a week in the auditorium of the Muskrat Building, downtown. God was doing great works in those meetings and he urged all his radio friends to join him. God had revealed many things to him, so he was telling all and healing the sick.

Now it was Bob's turn for hand signals. First the alert signal. He was coming to the end of the greeting message. Sam put the needle on the Blackwood Brother's record and cued it to within a quarter revolution of where the music began. Then he started ~~the~~ turntable but held the record still with his fingertips. Bob said, "So don't forget, friends, that's the Muskrat Building at nine-seven-five Southwest Green Street, tomorrow night." Just as he was saying "tomorrow" he dropped his hand and Sam released the record. The piano introduction began the instant the word "night" was said. It was so smooth it sounded like the quartet was right there beside Young Bob.

He started speaking again just as the record ended, thanking the Blackwood Brothers for the fine song. Now the sermon. Bob always had a title prepared in advance, but the rest of the sermon was entirely extemporaneous. After ten years of evangelizing he didn't need notes or planning. About once a month he repeated his favorite title, "What Would Happen if Je-sus Came to Portland?" Only the title would be the same, never the content.

He began his sermons in conversational tones and steadily built up the intensity. He might fumble a sentence, fluff a word, or bog down a bit in "a's" and "ah's," but the message still flowed along. He never panicked. And even at the most climactic moment he did not lose control. No hysterical screeches from him.

While the next exhortation to "believe on Him" quavered in the ether, the Blackwood Brothers again burst into joyous song. There was a brief closing statement and at exactly twenty-nine minutes after noon the theme was on again. Sam told the listeners that Young Bob would be back next week at the same time, gave a station break, and at 12:30 sharp the next program, one of the taped broadcasts, was on the air.

Bob often hung around after he was off to pass the time of day. He would tell Sam of his problems with the evangelism business and he repeatedly invited Sam to come up to his apartment sometime to use the swimming pool. The business end of his enterprise didn't always go as smoothly as the radio program. He had a running feud with Hiram Dance.

Young Bob had originally been brought to Portland from the east coast to be Special Visiting Speaker at the Dance Evangelical Center. He had been a big success there, until he and Hiram disagreed over the distribution of the take--and there had been some complaints about what Bob did for recreation. As a result, Dance fired his Special Speaker. Young Bob left town for a while but was unable to find other vineyards that were as fruitful as Portland. So he returned, under his own promotion this time, to hold meetings in the Muskrat Building. He was doing fine, he told Sam, except that Dance kept spreading bad stories about him.

"I'm honest about it, Sam," he said that Saturday, "I'm a young fellow and I date. But I'm single and I don't think that should be held against me."

Sam didn't say so--it would have been professionally improper--but he had heard a story about Bob's "dating." It hadn't come from Hiram Dance. It had come from the wife of one of the other announcers at the station. She was a part-time nightclub singer and had gotten the story straight from Silver Passion, herself.

Silver Passion did the hottest strip act to hit Portland since the city council clamped down on Tempest Storm. According to the story as Sam heard it, Miss Passion was sitting at the bar at Nicentino's one night after her last show. She struck up a conversation with a nice looking young man. After a while he said to her, hey, I like you, let's ball. She said, What? and he said, Let's make it! She said okay and they went to her apartment. The fellow, of course, was Young Bob Holt.

According to the story, he often spent the night at her place during the next few weeks. She never asked him what he did for a living and he never told her until the night she complained about the inflammation on her backside. The doctor had given her a shot there to mitigate the effects of a cold. One of the trinkets on her costume rubbed against it, she told Bob, and it was becoming very irritated. Don't worry, he said, I'm a healing evangelist so I can fix that up for you in no time. Roll over.

She did and he proceeded to massage and pray over her posterior. He carried on at great length, eventually even getting around to the speaking-in-tongues routine. That's when she decided he was nuts and

kicked him out. According to the story, that was the end of the affair, except for the bewildering fact that the next morning the hindquarters of Silver Passion were as good as new.

"I'm honest about it, Sam," he said that Saturday, "I'm a young fellow and I date. But I'm single and I don't think that should be held against me. I've been preaching all my life and I don't know how to do anything else. Nobody is perfect and whatever they say against me I won't be discouraged. There's one thing I know for sure; something special happens in my meetings. It isn't anything I do. It is the hand of God. He's always there. I see him work in my meetings! And as long as he does, I'll keep going."

Young Bob wasn't preaching when he said that. He knew better than to preach to Sam. That would have been stepping across a boundary they both were aware of and respected. They were both Professionals.

"I date? I date!" howled Ahab. "You lie, Patience. He didn't really say 'I date!'"

"Yes he did. 'I'm honest about it,' he says, 'I date.'"

They were all laughing and Ahab, sitting on the floor, knocked over his bottle in what appeared to be an attempt to slap his knee. "Yes, little girl," he said, groping for the bottle, "There really is an Elmer Gantry." He found it and hoisted it high over his head. "Elmer Gantry lives!" he shouted. Finding the bottle empty, he rolled it through the puddle of spilled beer across the hardwood toward the fireplace.

Rachel picked it up and started for the kitchen to get a mop. "Bring old Aham and I another," Gene called after her.

The small gathering was, since that was the best excuse available, Rachel's going-away party. Ahab had come in late, but in two hours he had drunk gallons of beer and been the hit of the party.

First it had been necessary for him to explain why he was alone. Maybelle had set up a date for him with a girl who worked with her in the Wardbuck credit office. He had promised to take the girl out to dinner and then to the party. But, he told them, about a half hour before he was supposed to pick her up he stretched out on his bed for "just a wee bit of rest." When he woke up he was two hours late. Fortified with strong doses of medicinal wine he kept in his room for such emergencies, he went to make his excuses.

And he was good at that. With gaunt-faced earnestness he had explained that his falling asleep was not carelessness but a new attack of what the doctors could only diagnose as "Holme's Sleeping Sickness" and could not treat. It was incurable and had caused him to flunk out of school and lose several jobs.

She forgave him and said she'd get dressed so they could go to the party. "You should have seen her," he said to Gene and Sam. "She was my dream girl come true. Really dumb, and she had this great mass of bleached-blond hair all spun around her head, and these enormous breasts. Jesus, when she came out in that groovy V-necked sweater-dress, I was really sorry about her bathroom."

But it was too late to be sorry. While she was dressing he had gone into the bathroom to relieve some of the pressure from his hasty wine drinking. "The rest of the apartment was pretty ordinary," he explained, "but that bathroom was too much. The ceiling and one of the walls were

painted light blue and the other walls were pink. On the floor there was this fluffy lavender carpet. I mean really fluffy, up to your ankles. And there was a toilet seat cover made of the same fluff. I must have gone mad for a moment. The goddamn scientist in me took over. I decided I just had to see how all that fluff would hold up under a good soaking.

"Christ, how was I to know she was going to make a trip to the can just before we left? 'What kind of guy are you anyway?' she says. 'What kind of guy would piss on my seat cover?' I was lucky to get out of there with my life and lucky she didn't have anything heavy to throw at me. As I was running down the hall she hit me on the head with a roll of lavender toilet paper. I saved it as a memento." He pulled it out of his coat and held it to his nose. "It's really great stuff. It's scented!"

"No shit?" said Gene. "Let me see."

A long stream of scented lavender paper trailed across the room when Ahab threw the roll to Gene.

Maybelle was delighted. "That bitch has been bugging me around the office for months. I knew I'd get even if I got her a date with old Ahab." She kissed him on the cheek. "You really came through for me and I'm grateful."

"She is really a neat chick and I'm sorry about the bathroom. Do you think when she cools off I might be able to date her again?"

In front of an appreciative audience Ahab went on for a long time. Some of the stories he had told before, but when he was in good form they were funny anyway. He told of all the trouble he'd had with jobs, women and school because of Holmes' Sleeping Sickness and how he always went to

sea whenever things really got rough with women. He had been engaged twice--formal engagements with diamond rings and all notices in the paper --and broken them both by going to sea. The first time, right after high school, he had joined the Navy, and the second time he hired out as a crewman on a private yacht.

Then he told about how ferocious he had become lately as a bill collector, how his very name struck terror into the hearts of all Portland's "dead beats."

"Some terror," Maybelle interrupted. "you know the total amount he's collected in the last two weeks? Ten dollars. Ten dollars! You've got to get on the ball, Ahab, or they'll fire you."

"They wouldn't dare do that. It'd ruin all my plans. I'm saving my money to buy a sloop. Then I'm going to sloop off to Tasmania all by myself."

"You keep saying that. Have you ever decided what you would do in Tasmania?"

"Gonna write a novel. The goddamn Great Tasmanian Novel. Call it Moby Dick. Hell of a fine title don't you think?"

He was down to very old stories now and finally lapsed into a morose silence. Sam filled the gap by telling of his adventures that afternoon with Young Bob Holt. That's when Ahab started yelling and spilling beer. But he had calmed down again by the time Rachel came back with the mop.

Gazing dreamily at her backside as she mopped, he said, "You are a fine woman, Rachel. One of these days you'll make a hell of a wife for some fortunate chap."

"I suppose I might," she answered. "If I could find some truly extraordinary man who would be worthy of my attentions."

"You lie," he said, squinting his eyes and shaking his finger at her. "You lie in your throat, woman. You are looking for some jelly-backed son-of-a-bitch like our poor old buddy Sam. Pussywhip him into some goddamn job so he can buy you a lavender toilet seat."

"You're on to me, Ahab, but please don't give me away. Upstairs I have a hand-carved teak hope chest. Inside there is just one thing: a toilet. It's a beautiful toilet: an antique, but in good shape. Used to belong to a little old lady who only used it to go to the grocery store in. As soon as I get my hooks into Sam, I'll make him buy me the biggest bathroom in Portland County. Our wedding reception will be held there and we'll be sure to invite you." She turned on her heel and marched back to the kitchen with the mop.

"You better pick on someone your own size next time, fella," Gene told Ahab. "Maybe you won't take such a beating."

Sam followed Rachel to the kitchen. "I'm sorry," he said.

"It's all right. I knew he would feel that way about it and he only gets ugly when he's really had a lot. But he gets that way more often now, doesn't he?"

"Yeah."

They looked at each other a moment and then Sam smiled and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Anyway you handled him like a champ. I appreciate that. You really harpooned him. You're a whale of a girl."

She came close and bit his ear. "And you'll make a hell of a professor. You've already got the bad puns part down pat."

"Ahab!" Maybelle was in the bathroom, roaring with outrage.

"Ahab, how could you!"

There was a wham! as Ahab swatted the floor and started laughing.

"Why did you do it? It's all over! We don't even have a seat cover on ours!"

Ahab staggered toward the bathroom. Maybelle met him half way and started pounding him on the shoulders. He couldn't defend himself. He slipped to the floor convulsed with laughter. "But isn't that . . ." he tried to control himself, "isn't that . . . Rachel's . . . antique toilet?"

They couldn't help laughing.

III: Sunday

Sam cooked bacon, eggs, and toast while Rachel dressed. When the food was almost ready, he created the great clamor necessary to shake Gene and Maybelle from sabbath slumber earlier than usual.

At midmorning the luggage was loaded and they started for the airport in Gene's old Dodge. Sam and Rachel sat in the backseat with several garden tools, which added an element of fertilizer to the natively musty atmosphere of the tired car. Gene maintained the yards and gardens of several lush homes on Portland Heights, an occupation he had inherited from his late father.

From the front seat Maybelle turned a sad face back at Rachel. "It's not that I don't want you two to be able to fulfill your ambitions or anything, but Jesus I'll miss having you around all the time. I almost hope that you and your father will have a big argument again so that the whole thing is called off."

"It's not so drastic as all that, Maybelle. We'll still be living in the same town and still get together regularly."

"Just getting together once in a while isn't the same as living together. The kind of thing we four have had together is something few people have and probably something none of us will ever have again."

"Yes." Rachel was silent a moment. "But we all agreed from the beginning that it could only be temporary. We have to go on and Sam and I can go on together if Dad provides the money. Somehow I am sure you and Gene will be getting married too--one of these days."

"Ump. Don't tell her that kind of shit," said Gene. "You sound like one of Macbeth's witches."

"Don't worry, fella, you're safe." Maybelle frowned a little as she lit a cigarette. "I might murder Duncan to get you but I won't commit suicide. There's no rich daddy for us, so if we got married, I'd end up the working wife putting hubby through graduate school. By the time he got a Ph.D. he'd hate me for being an ignorant, uneducated bitch and I'd hate him because he would be the reason I was ignorant. No, let him go off to Yale next year. I'll stay here. I'm about ready for another go at academia myself. I'll get my own degree and have my own career."

"Sounds like a pretty shaky prognosis to me," said Sam. "Gene's acceptance at Yale is dependent on getting a B.A. from dear Old Portland State U and I haven't seen much progress on those Incompletes lately. And why you, little Queen of the May, insist you want to be a career girl, I'll never understand. I've never known any girl who so obviously like to serve her man, nor have I ever heard any chick talk more about how she is going to raise her kids."

"A girl can have both a career and children! She has to!" Maybelle was very insistent on this point. "Sure I want kids. But you can't have just that! All you have to do is look at people like my mother to see where the sweet little lady who is 'just a housewife' ends up. You go half nuts from menopause alone, and all you have for comfort is an empty house, a grumpy husband who hates you and himself because he hasn't gotten anywhere in the world, and a lot of worries because your kids have gone off and left you and they just aren't turning out the way you think

they should. My, my, you try to tell yourself, won't it be nice when there are lots of little grandchildren to look after."

"Christ, a passionate affirmation from the little lady. She will have a career! How about you, Gene? Could we have a little passion about how determined you are to matriculate in New Haven this fall?"

"Ump."

"Ump?"

"Goddamn right: ump. I'm the strong silent type. Goddamn doer, not a talker."

Rachel asked, "How much did you strongly and silently get done this week on that paper you started in a fit of inspiration a month ago?"

"Ump."

Sam turned to Rachel. "What do you see in the seat before us, lovely witch?"

"All hail, gardener," she responded in a cracked voice. "All hail, gardener, that shall be gardener forever after. All hail, gardener's wife. All hail at least six little Greenfields about the cottage."

"Shit," said Gene. "I get my predictions from Dr. Gallup."

They started out walking single file up the concourse to the gate at which Rachel's plane loaded. Then Sam switched the suitcase he was carrying to his left hand and pulled Rachel up beside him. She took his arm and walked close to him.

"That's better," he said. "Gives some comfort in this goddamn long, narrow hallway that looks like the last mile. Gives comfort especially when you have elbows as sensitive as mine: like most people's hands."

"Control yourself, fiend. You must face an empty bed tonight."

As they neared the gate Gene and Maybelle trailed judiciously behind and Sam said, "I feel like a rat, letting you go off to face that old bastard by yourself."

"It's all right. I can handle him."

"Rachel, if he tries anything, anything at all, you get out of there, right?"

"Right."

"I mean it. Don't play martyr. If he tries any of the old stuff, you get out and call me right away. I'll get money for your fare home. You don't have to take any of that stuff from him. We don't need money if it has to come that way."

"Don't worry. He won't get away with anything."

They kissed self-consciously. "Goddamn public places," he said.

"There will be lots of private places again soon."

"Yes. Private places for private parts."

"Hmph! Goodbye, lecher."

On the right hand side of the highway just outside of the Portland County Airport, there was a huge billboard with gaudy colored letters. "WELCOME HOME," it said.

WHILE YOU WERE GONE WE'VE BEEN K-HUG'N YOUR WIFE!
CATCH US AT 1333 ON THE DIAL: KHUG RADIO

"My god," said Sam as they drove past the billboard, "I think even KRST has better taste than that outfit."

"That sign bother you, Sam baby?" asked Gene grinning. "You sure you want to get married? I mean, you're going to make one hell of a husband, fella."

One of the things Sam had dreaded when the State Employment Agency set him up for an audition with Portland's all-Christian radio station was having to work under management that he expected would be fanatic. Among his initial surprises about KRST was the professional smoothness with which the station was run, and the liberalism of the management. That's why he felt pleased rather than checked-up-on when Bill Edwin chose that Sunday afternoon to make one of his occasional weekend visits.

"Edwin is a fascinating guy," Sam had told Gene one time. But Gene had been skeptical. He was skeptical for reasons of economic theory about any businessman, not to mention a nominal Episcopalian who ran a fundamentalist radio station. "Sure, I know there are things about him that are hard for you and me to stomach," Sam had protested, "but you have to respect him, if for no other reason, for doing his job damn well. That's something, no matter what the job is. What's more you can't help liking him when you are around him--as long as you are on his side anyway. I admit he's the sort of guy I'd hate like hell to have against me."

Bill Edwin came in that afternoon with his two pre-school daughters riding on his shoulders. He waved at Sam through the glass and found entertainment for the girls at the unoccupied receptionist's desk. There was chewing gum in one of the drawers and Sam could see him warning them not to be too rough when they played with the typewriter. Then Edwin disappeared into his office for a while. When he came out he was carrying a briefcase which he left with the girls.

He opened the glass door and popped his head into the announcer's booth. "I was surprised to see you here," he said pleasantly. "I had

forgotten about the shift trade. Did Randy do all right this morning?"

"He said no problem. I went over the morning log with him yesterday so he'd know what to expect."

"How are you going with the afternoon? Any questions?"

"Nope. I've worked it before."

"Good. And did you get the girl friend on the plane?"

"The loading and take-off was A-OK."

"Say, is this the same girl you were with when I ran into you downtown a while back? . . . No kidding? You know, she is a very attractive little cookie. You're doing all right, Sambo!"

"Thanks. We're . . . ah . . . getting married when she comes back from visiting her dad."

"No kidding?" He came all the way into the room with his hand extended. "Well, congratulations! By God, congratulations. I hope it works out well for you, Sam."

Edwin leaned against the console with his arms folded and his head nodding, looking at Sam. "You know, seriously, I'm glad to hear you're getting married. It'll be good for you. I worry about you sometimes, Sam. Old dad Edwin, you know. I can tell that you come in here some weekend mornings without any sleep. I can tell you're hung over. When I see you I can tell, but not on the air. That's one of the things I like. You may be hung over but you're always here when you're supposed to be and you always sound like a pro on the air."

"I appreciate the fact that you don't bug me about my private life."

"Oh hell, think nothing of it. As long as you do your job and don't get your name in the papers for rape or something, I don't care."

As your boss, that is. But I do worry about you. Listen, I'll tell you why. You know you remind me of when I was a kid your age? Would you believe that? There was a time when I sowed my wild oats, I'll tell you. But you don't want to go on like that forever, you know? A man wants to settle down after a while. It's a damn fine thing to have that wife waiting at home and some kids. And just because you've settled down doesn't mean you have to be a stick-in-the-mud, does it?"

Sam laughed. "No, I have trouble seeing you as a stick-in-the-mud, Bill. After all, there's those trips out of town every so often."

"Yes. That's true. There are those trips out of town."

A small hand knocked on the glass door. Bill Edwin opened it.

"Daddy, I have to tinkle."

"Well, you know where it is, Lambkins. In the back there."

"But it's dark!"

"All right, come on. I'll show you where the switch is."

A little while later Edwin came back into the announcer's booth, looking as if there were something he felt obligated to say. He spoke quietly. "Sam, you know those trips out of town? You know what I do nights on those trips out of town?" He snorted and wagged his head. "I sit in a hotel room and watch TV. That's right. I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but that's what I do. Sit in my hotel room, watch TV, and run up a damn big phone bill calling home."

"Listen, I'm as virile as the next guy, don't get me wrong. I get a rise like anyone when one of these half-dressed young gals goes swinging by the windows here. But I have a really fine wife, Sam. We have our rows, sure, but I couldn't have done a damn thing without her

and I don't want to take any chances. Wouldn't want to do something to foul up a good thing, you know?"

"Hell, a man doesn't have to tomcat around to get his kicks. You know how I get my kicks? Right here. Running this damn station. Doing a good job at that gives me more satisfaction than any ass I could get out tomcatting around. You know what this place was like when I took over? Old Oscar had been running it by himself. It was a pop-music station. That was back in the days when the nets were big in radio, but this place was the top independent in town and that was pretty good even then. But you know how much they were making? Nothing. Just breaking even, that's all. So when I took over I began to get the idea of the religious thing. At first we just did it in the mornings and on Sundays. The profits began to go up. So I talked Oscar into going all the way with religion. Converted him you might say! It was a pretty daring thing to do in those days. And how much profit are we making now? You can gauge it by how often you see Oscar around, and he's been in Hawaii for two months solid. He's damn near retired!

"So things are going real well now. But it still takes some doing. And when I go home at night I know I've done a good day's work, that I've built this place into one of the most successful stations of its size in the country. That's how I get my kicks, Sam."

The program that had been on the air ended and Bill Edwin was silent as Sam gave a station break, read a promotional announcement, and started the next tape. He was right on schedule. The new program went on the air exactly at the hour.

When the program change was done Bill Edwin said, "Well, the stuff we have on the air must be getting to me. I've been running off at the mouth here like I was some kind of preacher. Or more like personal testimony night, I guess. How I got saved. Ha ha!"

"Anyway, Sam, I wish you all the luck in the world with your marriage. I suppose you'll be going back to college again? You still aiming at a Ph.D.?"

"Yes, I think so. Even though my aim is a little unsteady sometimes."

"Well, that's a fine ambition. By god, we need all the good teachers we can get these days. But if you should ever decide you don't want to put in all those years in school; if you should decide, for instance, you'd like a career in radio, you let me know. I'm sure we could find you a full-time job around here as soon as one opened up. And later we could give some help getting you into radio sales and management, where the money is, you know? You've got what it takes, boy. Let me show you the ropes and you could get ahead in this business."

"Thanks, Bill. I'll keep that in mind."

"And, Sam, you be sure to send us an invitation to the wedding, hah? Don't know if we'll be able to get to the ceremony, but you can bet we'll send a little present. I'll turn the wife loose buying you something. She's great at that kind of thing. Always gets something practical, you know, but not a toaster or something you'll get half a dozen of. Last couple we knew that got married I think she got them a matching bath mat and toilet-seat cover. How about that for a wedding present, eh? Ha ha."

Opening the announcer's booth door he said, "Come, on, girls, put the cover back on the typewriter. Time to go home to Mommy. See you later, Sam. Take it easy now."

"Okay, Bill. And thanks again."

KRST went off the air at 10 P.M. Its audience--surveys showed--tended to be elderly people who retired early in the evening. Sam closed up in a leisurely fashion because on Sunday night he couldn't catch a bus going downtown until 10:45. By the time he walked up to Wilfred Avenue from downtown it was almost 11:30. There were swooping gusts of a chill wind that carried some rain, as if winter were disposing of left-over stock.

Maybelle greeted him cheerfully at the door and led him to the kitchen. Gene put down the book he was reading and opened beers for himself and Sam. Maybelle had a hot supper almost ready for Sam, and Gene sat down at the table with him to drink beer.

Sam sniffed the air and rubbed his hands together in anticipation of the meal. "Maybelle, you beautiful thing, you have obviously fixed my favorite poor man's meal."

"Right you are," she said, taking the delicacy from the oven and placing it before him. "Hamburger and fried onions. With a gigantic mount of mashed potatoes," she plopped them on the plate, "and pan gravy made with milk."

"My god my god, what have I done--or what am I going to be asked to do--to deserve this treatment."

Gene's square face was partially obscured behind a thick cloud of strong cigarette smoke. "Well, man, I told Maybelle, I says, just because his woman is gone is no reason why a man shouldn't be treated the way a man should be in his own house. Not as long as there is a woman left there to do the job."

"Ah, now don't you go taking all the credit, Gene. You didn't have to tell me. I was already fixing it before you said a word."

Sam was chewing hamburger. "You are, beyond a doubt, the greatest gal in the world, Maybelle."

"The greatest except Rachel, Sam," she said, massaging his shoulders. "That's what you are supposed to think."

"You took the thoughts right out of my head. Jesus, this is one of the great things about this place. You never know what to expect when you come home. Sometimes I come home and there is no one here. I feel like the world has gone off and left me. Other times there may be a whole houseful of crazy people just waiting for me before they try new things, crazier than they have ever done before. But tonight! Hey, this is like a throwback to the old days, before Rachel, when we first moved in here."

"Since you are hell-bent on joining the certified and sanctified of society, we have to use up all of you we can before it's too late," said Maybelle, sitting down and making a face at him. "So tell us a funny story about what happened at God's own radio station today or something."

"Hey, something pretty wild did happen today. Good old Bill Edwin stopped by--the hard, handsome giant of the business world. I told him I was getting married and, Christ, that set him off on a song and dance like I had put a nickle in the slot. He was all happy about it. He said he

had sown his wild oats when he was young, but he was glad he had settled down. You don't have to be a stick-in-the-mud just because you're settled down, he says. So I fed him back what I thought he would want; I said something about how he must live it up on trips out of town, said it just like that was my idea of how a real swinger operates. And he took it as I expected he would. But then he was out of the room for a while, had to take his kid to the can, and pretty soon he came back with this concerned look on his face--like he hadn't told me the whole truth and, you know, you're supposed to tell the whole truth to a guy who is about to be married. You know what I do nights when I'm on the road, he says. I watch TV and call home! He's all hung up on his wife, afraid he might lose her. Christ, I couldn't believe it! The chink in the robber-baron's armor. He knew it was too. You could tell he was embarrassed about it."

Gene was smirking with delight. "I'm not surprised about him, but your reaction is a little puzzling, Sam. I should think you'd be pleased."

"I don't know whether I'm pleased or displeased. But I am surprised. It's just not the way he should be. To be consistent he could be confident as hell about his wife and kind of disinterested at the same time. And then be getting casual ass on the side when the mood struck him."

"Yeah, but come on now, you have to be consistent yourself. As western civilization's last philosophic advocate of monogamy, you are obliged to be pleased with him."

"It's monogamy."

"I think my pronunciation is an accurate estimate of the situation."

"Anyway, who says I'm an advocate of monogamy? I'd say my position on the subject is more like what they call 'serial polygamy.'"

"Shit, don't pull any fancy sociological distinctions on me, fella. If that 'Love Ideal' crap you used to spout when you were chasing old Maude wasn't monagony, I don't know what is."

"That was last year. I've grown up a little since then."

"The hell you say. You don't talk about it anymore, but you've been trying to live it with Rachel."

"Is that what you think I'm doing? My god, you don't understand at all . . ."

Maybelle got up suddenly. "Well, I don't see what's so bad about monogamy." With jerky nervousness she began gathering pots and pans to wash. "I think it's a wonderful idea. Monogamy is beautiful. That's what I think. Beautiful."

With his back to her Sam was able to suppress a snort, but Gene groaned loudly. "Jesus God, woman, what's this monagony stuff from you! The only way you could qualify as even a goddamn 'serial polygamist' is that--so far as I know--you've never been in **bed** with more than one guy at a time."

"Oh! Gene Greenfield that is not fair! I have avoided other men like a plague ever since I started living with you."

"Don't keep your legs crossed on account of me, baby."

Maybelle looked distressed and Sam intervened. "And how about you, free spirit? You been getting a lot of strange stuff lately?"

"Sure. Lots." He tried to look nonchalant.

Sam and Maybelle both looked at him with amusement.

"Well . . . just because I'm not out screwing around all the time, that doesn't make me a monagonist!"

"You may not be registered with the party, pal, but you vote straight ticket."

"Horseshit! Just because I don't spend a lot of time chasing down some new chick every week does not make me a monogonist, I tell you. What would I want to do that for anyway? Just keeping Maybelle reasonably happy takes more energy than I have to spare. But if you think that some afternoon when I'm up here on the heights working and some rich bitch with hot pants wants to have a go with the gardener--if you think I'm going to chase her off with a pitchfork, you're nuts."

Maybelle had gone back to her cleaning up. "Why I wouldn't want you to, Gene. I don't want to threaten your masculine freedom. If any of the four ladies whose yards you tend ever wants to have a 'go-with-the-gardern,' don't you dare turn them down. I've heard that a young fellow like you can learn a lot from sixty and seventy year old women. Maybe you'll bring home some new tricks."

"Aw, shit." He started to get up with his empty bottle, but Maybelle stopped him.

"I'll get it, I'll get it." After drying her hands on the apron she was wearing, she went to the refrigerator for two more beers. As she put Gene's down in front of him she kissed him on the neck. "You have the cutest little old masculine freedom I've ever seen."

He swatted her hard on the bottom as she scurried away. "Get to work, woman, and leave us alone."

After that, Gene and Sam took up their conversation on politics which had been in progress for over two years. Starting with the book Gene was reading and what Murray Kempton said in his column that day, they ranged over the entire spectrum of current affairs, foreign and domestic.

Sam, with his amateur's interest and partial information, posed tentative generalizations and Gene, with his curious combination of a political scientist's fund of information and a naive revolutionary's urge to iconoclasm, tested the generalizations and countered with his own.

Later, as Sam started up to bed, he ran into Maybelle coming out of the bathroom. She gave him a squeeze and said, "Hey, it was just like old times tonight, wasn't it?" She was wearing only a robe, her hair was down, and she looked good.

"Yeah, like old times: no girl for Sam."

"I don't mean that."

"I know you don't. You are right though: it was good. And thanks for the fine supper."

"We hate to have you two move out, Sam. But I really do hope things work out well for you and Rachel. You can tell Gene does too, in his own way."

"I hope things work out well for you too. Hope Gene gets his goddamn papers written, goes off to Yale, and writes something spicy like Das Kapital for a thesis. Hope you go back to school, become the world's greatest expert on Oriental history, then get back together with Gene, and have eight or twelve kids."

"Me too. But it seems like a lot to hope for, doesn't it?"

"Oh hell no. Goddamn world's just teeming with opportunity for bright boys and girls like us."

She laughed and kissed him on the mouth. Then Sam went up to bed. It really had been a lot like the old days.

What seemed like "the old days" to them had actually begun in the fall of the previous school year. In those days Gene and Sam shared a two-room apartment in grubby, cheap Carmel Arms. Shortly after they moved out the old apartment house was condemned--"on the grounds that the only thing holding it up was the dirt caked to the walls," Sam claimed.

They were both working half-time, going to school half-time, and dissipating half-time, which added up to leaving something, usually school, partially undone.

For Gene, the major problem in life was his father. His father did gardening for a number of wealthy Portland families. He was an alcoholic and of failing health. It took much of Gene's physical and emotional energy to keep the old man and his work going.

For Sam the major problem in life was women. "I feel incomplete!" he would shout while pacing restlessly about the room under Gene's scornful eyes. "I can only be completed by an intellectual, emotional, and physical relationship of the deepest kind. I need a woman who is not only attractive enough to completely, by herself, satisfy my physiological desires, but also intellectually of such standing that her judgment alone will sustain my ego, so that I will not be concerned with what the rest of the world thinks."

He spent much of fall term that year attempting to recruit a young lady named Maude for the job of completing Sam Patience. It didn't work out. They became close friends and spent a lot of time talking to each other about themselves, but it was evident after a while that an unnamed rival had won the day. After much coaxing Maude revealed the reason the

rival remained anonymous and unseen: he was a Negro and they didn't want any trouble from people who were prejudiced. Further coaxing finally brought an introduction. Maude brought Wilson White and a bottle of whiskey to Carmel Arms one night and it turned out that the colored boy was an acquaintance of Sam's from one of his classes at school. Wilson and Sam staged a drinking bout with the whiskey. Avowedly a celebration of friendship, this glass-for-glass battle seemed in retrospect to have been an implicit test of masculinity. When Gene came home that night he found Sam stretched out on the floor with a rickety coffee table upside down on top of him and an age-yellowed doily across his eyes. He was stark naked and Gene thought at first that he was dead. Sam said he was reasonably certain he hadn't taken his clothes off until after Maude and Wilson left. He felt better about the whole business later when Maude told him that Wilson had passed out as soon as they got to his car.

The three of them became good friends after that. Maude and Wilson would drive Sam to KRST on Saturday mornings after a full night of partying and Sam would dedicate records like "Gonna Meet All My Friends at the Pearly Gates" to his "good friends, Maude and Wilson." The first time he did that they were listening on the car radio and Wilson drove into a ditch while laughing at what Sam's other listeners would think if they knew who their favorite disc-jockey's "good friends" were.

Maude and Wilson took Sam out with them several times to bars in Wilson's part of town. It was while watching them dance together in one of those places that Sam became completely convinced that he had lost Maude to Wilson. She loved the dancing and he knew he couldn't do it. So he would sit at a table, drink, enjoy the band, and be completely amazed by

the abandon, grace, and rhythm of their dancing. A couple of times Wilson tried to get Sam going with a colored girl. He would come by the table and whisper in Sam's ear, "Hey man, you see that tall chick standing over there? She's a very nice girl. You go ask her to dance, man." But Sam never did. He knew he would make a fool of himself if he tried dancing. As he told Gene, he wished that Wilson would introduce him to "some quietly intellectual colored girl, one I could get to know by talking instead of dancing, maybe a judge's daughter or something." But it never happened. Maybe Wilson didn't know any judge's daughters.

Sam didn't have much trouble getting over losing Maude. It had turned out to be more interesting than heart-breaking. Besides, before winter term was far along he was in love again. "You remember a girl named Rachel Dexter I told you about last term?" he asked Gene one evening. "The Freshman who seemed so mature and self-possessed for her age, except that she was hung up on the same kind of religion we peddle at KRST."

"Oh yeah," Gene remembered, "the good-looking baby with the freckles."

"Turns out she lives in a pad just up the street a little ways. And I have a date to go up and see her tonight."

"I thought you said she was going steady with a guy who was still in high school. Captain of the football team of something. And I thought you figured she was too young and too hung up on Jesus to screw."

"In spite of those drawbacks, things bloomed pretty suddenly today and it looks like it is now a situation that falls under Zorba's law."

It sounded like trouble to Gene, but he couldn't argue anymore if Zorba's law was to be invoked. "If a woman sleeps all alone, it's the

fault of us men," said Zorba the Greek in Kazantzakis' novel. "Woe be-tide the man who could sleep with a woman and who did not do so! Woe be-tide the woman who could sleep with a man and who did not do so!" That, according to Zorba, was the sin God could not forgive. For Gene it was one of those rare passages in a book which struck him as absolutely true --immediately, without need for reflection. It was just True, that's all. And he had sold Sam on the idea.

When he arrived at Rachel's apartment that night Sam did find a bit of trouble. It turned out that Rachel had a roommate and that the roommate was at home. Her name was Maybelle Bowers.

Although she was two years older than Rachel, Maybelle also looked like a high school girl in those days. Her hair was tightly curled and she wore print dresses with ruffles in them. To Sam's complete dismay, Maybelle sat down with him and Rachel and plunged into one of those who-do-you-know-that-I-know get-acquainted conversations. But after a while, when it became evident that the conversation was not a success, Maybelle went into the other oom, saying she had to study.

It was quickly apparent that Rachel was also anxious to be rid of Maybelle. Sam was soon kissing her passionately and caressing her breasts through her sweater. They were interrupted twice when Maybelle came charging out of her room. She would say, "Oops, 'scuse me, kids," and go to the kitchen or sharpen a pencil. Sam had his hands under Rachel's sweater and was trying to undo the snaps on her bra when Maybelle made her third appearance. This time she heaved a great sigh as she passed through the room.

Sam was extremely aggravated and even Rachel showed irritation. "Poor Maybelle," she said sarcastically, "two whole nights she's been without a date and she's lonely."

"If that's the problem, why don't I call my roommate and have him come over?"

Rachel thought it might work.

Gene was reluctant, but did decide he could sacrifice an evening of study to help his buddy out of a tight spot. His exact words were: "God damn it, Patience, if it'll help you get some ass so you'll quit moaning and groaning around here all the time, I'll come."

Sam worried some about how gruff Gene, the gardener's son, would hit it off with frilly Maybelle, but he didn't need to. After a short introductory conversation they were off for the kitchen to "make some tea" and Sam and Rachel were free to clinch without interruption for a couple of hours. From the other room they could hear Gene and Maybelle laughing quite a bit and once caught a glimpse of them all squashed up against a wall in tight embrace.

As they walked home Gene thanked Sam for getting him into an entirely enjoyable evening. "Unless my estimate of the situation is inaccurate," he said, "I could have made it with that chick tonight if you two hadn't been in the other room."

"It seemed the same at my end. Let's go back up there tomorrow night and see if we can get one couple or the other to go over to our pad."

But the next night was Saturday and Gene already had a date with Clara, a girl with whom he had maintained an off-and-on relationship for

some time. So Sam and Rachel walked downtown to the movies that night. When they returned to her apartment, Maybelle was not there.

Sam had just persuaded Rachel to remove her sweater and bra and was deep in the appreciation of what he considered the finest breasts he had ever studied, when the doorbell rang. Rachel quickly dodged out of the room to redress and Maybelle stomped in.

"I have just been on the shittiest date of my entire lifetime!" she proclaimed.

"Such language, Maybelle!" said Rachel, returning to the room.

"I don't care. That's just what it was: the shittiest date I have ever been on!" She plopped down in a chair and took a mentholated cigarette from a leather encased pack in her purse. She puffed furiously and Sam and Rachel just sat there with their hands in their laps.

After a while Maybelle said, "Obviously I am not wanted here. Where's your friend tonight, Sam?"

"He had a date."

"Do you think he'd be home yet?"

"If he is, he has probably gone to bed. He worked all day and he was already tired before he went out."

"Well, I don't care if he's in bed or not. I'll go get him up. No I won't. I'll seduce him. That's what I'll do. I'll seduce him."

"If he's not there yet you can go on in and wait if you want."

"All right," she said, grinding out her cigarette. "I'm going to go seduce him." And she was gone.

"Do you think she really will?" Sam asked.

"I don't know. I doubt it, but I've been worried about Maybelle. When we first moved in together, she confessed that she was having an affair with an assistant professor in the School of Oriental Studies at the University. That's how she happened to take that as her major. She said they were terribly in love and would be married some day, but couldn't be now because the professor's wife was ill with an incurable disease. Then about a month ago she found out that her professor was sleeping with another girl besides her--this one a graduate student in Oriental Studies--and that instead of being incurably ill, her professor's wife was having an affair with a professor in the history department. It was all a terrible blow to her, I think, although she has tried to pass it off as if she weren't the slightest bit upset."

"Did she break up with the guy in Oriental Studies?"

"No, she still goes out with him occasionally. But she tells me that her whole attitude toward sex has changed. She says sex is lots of fun, but shouldn't be taken seriously. What's the word she uses? 'Tumescence,' that's it. She says mistaking 'tumescence' for love has caused more trouble in this world than any other single error. And that the greatest discovery of her life is that you can go to bed with someone you don't even like and still have a wonderful time. In fact, if you go to bed with someone you don't like, you'll probably be friends when you get up. She thinks that if the whole world would recognize her discovery, there would be lots less hatred and unhappiness.

"Anyway, she's been going out with all kinds of guys lately. I can't really believe she sleeps with all of them, but I still worry about her."

"Wow," said Sam, laughing. "She sounds like quite a girl!"

"I think her ideas are a bit extreme," said Rachel.

It was after 4 A.M. when Sam returned to Carmel Arms that night. He was full of moral outrage, frustration, pity and worry. He wasn't thinking about Maybelle and Gene. Gene slept on a fold-down couch in the middle of the front room of the apartment. There was a commotion from that direction as Sam barged into the dark room.

"That you, Sam?" Gene asked. "Turn your back a minute and don't turn on the light."

Maybelle came padding by Sam in her bare feet, headed for the bathroom. She was partially wrapped in a sheet and was carrying her clothes. "What kind of a place is this?" she asked. "People come charging in in the middle of the night!"

When she had disappeared into the bathroom Sam sat down on the edge of the bed. Gene was stretched out on his back with his hands behind his head and a look of euphoric wonder on his face.

"Looks like you've had quite a night," Sam observed.

"Jesus, you wouldn't believe it."

"What happened?"

"Well, Christ, I was lying here, out like a light, when there was a knock at the door. I thought it must be you or Ahab so I just said 'come in, it's open' and rolled over. I remember now hearing someone say something about having come over to seduce me, but I was still asleep. I didn't wake up until I realized that there was this naked chick in bed with me fooling around. Well, man, I am usually just a one shot a night man. One shot and I need eight hours of sleep before I'm worth a damn

again. I had already exceeded myself by making it twice with Clara. I tried to explain that to Maybelle, but she wasn't convinced. So I says 'okay, baby, it's Zorba's Law and I'm willing to make the effort if you think you know some magic tricks to bring me around.' Well, it took a while, but, man, that chick knows a lot of magic tricks!"

"All right, you guys," said Maybelle, coming out of the bathroom with her clothes on and a smile on her face. "My ears are burning."

"He was just telling me what a wonderful girl you are."

Gene's feet protruded from the jumbled covers at the end of the bed and Maybelle twisted one of his toes. "You have to be with this lunk-head. Now, if you will just find me an apron and show me where things are in the kitchen, this wonderful girl will fix you both some breakfast."

As she worked on breakfast Maybelle said, "I hope you realize, Sam, that while Gene's animal magnetism had a good deal to do with it, the main reason I came over here tonight was to give you a chance to be alone with Rachel. That girl has had such hot pants for you she hasn't been able to sit still for a week. I'm sure life will be much less tense around her now that she has lost her cherry. You did take care of that didn't you?"

"This has been a very difficult night for me and I would rather not talk about it. I will just say that although I have come to 'know' Rachel much better this evening, I do not mean 'know' in the biblical sense. We had a very long talk about her tortured childhood and such things, but I have been sworn to absolute secrecy about the details."

Gene looked at Sam in horror. "Shit, man, you mean to tell me you were alone up there with that chick till four o'clock in the morning and you didn't make it with her?"

"I would rather not talk about it."

After that Gene dated Maybelle about once a week, but he continued to go out with Clara also. Although he admitted a small preference for Maybelle, he claimed that he thought of them both just as "good chicks" that were nice to have around. Neither one of them were "any big thing to him."

Then one night after he had drunk Sam and Ahab under the table at Gertie's, Gene decided to stop off on the way home to see if Maybelle was home. He found the apartment dark, but the door was unlocked so he went in. Maybelle's bed was at that moment being actively shared by a Chinese fellow named Wang. When Gene discovered this, he let out a bellow of rage, pulled the startled Wang from the bed, and in a few seconds had done him enough damage to require considerable medical and dental treatment. Gene threw Wang out of the apartment into the hall and hurled a few pieces of male clothing he found lying around after him.

When he sobered up, Gene was very disturbed with himself. During the next couple of days he tried to seek out Wang at the University, but the closest he came to finding him was a glimpse he had of the Chinese fellow's back moving away at full tilt down a crowded hallway. Finally Gene sent Wang a check for doctor bills and a note that read: "I have done you a great wrong. You have as much right in Maybelle's bed as I do --maybe more. Please do not stay away from her on my account. Come around and have a beer with me some time." But the check was never cashed and Wang carefully avoided both Gene and Maybelle. Gene was so upset with himself he resolved never to see Maybelle again. However, an emergency occurred that prevented him from putting that resolution into practice.

The apparition of a bloody and battered half-dressed Chinaman wandering around the halls of an apartment house trying to find a way out had produced an eviction notice for Maybelle and Rachel. The eviction notice in turn set off a crisis of conscience for Rachel and she accepted an invitation to move to the suburbs and stay with her high school boy friend and his parents. This left an unhappy Maybelle sitting with Gene and Sam in the University cafeteria. "I don't know what to do. I can't find another roommate in the middle of the term, I can't afford to rent an apartment by myself, and it would be absolute hell to move home with my parents."

"This is all my fault," said Gene. "And I feel obligated to do something about it. If I could afford it, I would rent you an apartment myself. Since I can't, I guess we'll have to let you move in with Sam and me."

Shortly after that the three of them moved into the house on Wilfred Avenue.

IV: Monday

On Monday morning Gene Greenfield had done something extraordinary. He had put on a tie. It was a broad blue silk tie with white polka dots. He had inherited it from his father. Normally it hung somewhere in the darker reaches of the closet, only Maybelle knew where. Since there was a knot in it, the same knot that had served his father for years, all he had to do was throw it over his head and tighten it up. He wore it with a dark green wool shirt, and the now too tight brown tweed sports coat in which he had graduated from high school. Maybelle had even put some polish on his best shoes.

All of this was in preparation for the "Annual Shit Convention," which was a pancake and sausage breakfast given at the livestock exposition building by various fertilizer concerns for the purpose of promoting their products. Gene prided himself on having among his inheritances from his father the reputation of being "one of the best shit men in Portland." "I still get calls from some of Dad's old customers," he had bragged on several drunken occasions. "'Oh, Mr. Greenfield,' they say, 'that new gardener of ours just doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground about shit. He's always either scorching our shrubbery or starving it. Even if you can't take care of all our garden work, won't you please come over to handle the shitty end of it?' 'I'm sorry,' I tell them, 'but I'm a very busy man and a man can just spread himself so thin you know'" There was more to the story, but it usually was lost in a chorus of groans and boos.

It was almost one in the afternoon when Gene returned to Wilfred Avenue to change clothes and eat lunch. He found Sam sitting at the kitchen table eating fried potatoes and eggs and reading a large book.

"You just now eating breakfast, man?"

"Slept in. Extra tired for some reason."

"The hell you say. You've been without a woman to prod you on for one day now and you've already got Holmes's Sleeping Sickness again."

"Just a small relapse. I had it whipped nearly all of last week, after Rachel and I decided we were going back to school."

Gene loaded the table with what Sam called his "cliche luncheon": a loaf of Maybelle's homemade bread, a disc of sharp cheddar cheese, butter, and a salami. He uncapped a beer with which to wash it down and brought over a cutting board and knife. He clung obstinately to the same menu day after day. He wouldn't even change when Sam insisted that he had to drink wine if he was going to do it right.

Gene chewed contemplatively and cocked his head to try to read Sam's book from across the table. "Still at it I see."

"Damn right. I'll be the best prepared student ever to warm a chair in Prof Oldcastle's History of Phil senior seminar."

"Ump. Doesn't look to me like you've gotten very far."

"It's a big book and I'm almost through the pre-Socratics. I almost hate to go on because I like the simplicity of their world. And they had guts, these guys. Courage enough to say 'this one thing is what the whole world is made of. It explains everything.'"

"What one thing?"

"They couldn't agree about that. Thales said it was water, Heraclitus thought it was fire, but Xenophanes would have it earth and water combined. Pythagoras, who was a bit more abstract, figured that everything was numbers."

"That sounds better. It's a little closer to Marx."

"The simplicity couldn't last though. Along came Empedocles, who was the first to claim that there are as many as four basic elements in the universe: fire, water, earth, and air. Even those four weren't enough to explain things for him. He added two other basic substances: Love and Strife. How about that? Love and Strife."

"You call those guys philosophers?"

"They all had their reasons for thinking what they did. Hell, even modern philosophers still look for a basic element in the universe. As I understand it, the existentialists think it's absurdity."

"They're all a bunch of blockheads or they would've come to me a long time ago. I could have solved the problem. The whole world is made of . . ."

"Never mind. I know where you've been this morning. And it won't work anymore. Philosophers won't let you get away with it. You cannot, they say, explain this complex world in such simple terms."

"Well, my attitude isn't philosophic anyway. It's religious. A matter of revealed truth. I had this dream . . ."

"No shit?"

"All right, make fun of me, you hard-hearted son of a bitch. I had the dream the night my Dad was buried."

"Okay. If you assert the authority of a day of death, I suppose I have to listen."

"Say what you want, call me an anal compulsive, I don't care. I really had the dream. The old man must have set it off himself. Last few months of his life he used to cry a lot when he was bad drunk and call himself a compost pile of human parts. The night after his funeral I had the dream. Dreamt I was going up to his shack behind the Burnwell place, just like I did the day I found him dying. Except I was all dressed up like I was going to a funeral. And instead of finding him belching blood all over the place, he was already laid out in his casket. I shut the top of it, hefted the casket onto my back, and carried him down to the graveyard myself. There wasn't anyone there, so I eased him into the hole best I could. When I was through I noticed this brown stain on my sleeve. I took out a handkerchief and tried to rub it off. I rubbed and I rubbed and pretty soon I had rubbed away the coat sleeve and my shirt and I was down to bare skin and still there was this brown stain, so I kept rubbing till my arm was gone. Man, by the time I woke up I had rubbed away half the world and it was all shit."

"You are an anal compulsive. But if you ever want to start a radio station to spread the good news of your revelation, you know who to come to."

"Better not make fun of dreams, fella. I believe it. That's one of the reasons I'm proud to say I'm one of the best shit men in Portland."

And on and on.

Agnes always called Sam sometime between the hours of 7 and 8 P.M., Monday through Thursday, which were the nights he worked the short evening shift at KRST. He was glad the Wilfred Avenue phone was listed under

Maybelle's name. Otherwise Agnes would probably call him on the other nights of the week as well.

Agnes was his most ardent fan. Or at least the most vocal. Like most of KRST's listeners, she was elderly. From her conversations it became clear that she and her retired husband lived on social security in a small eastside house not far from the station's studios.

Every evening, whether he wanted it or not, he got the story of her day. How clumsy old Fred had broken one of her best dishes and how he had put off the clipping of the hedge until it got so ragged she had to do the job herself. "And me with my arthritis!" How her friend, who used to be a registered nurse, had come over that day and they had gone to visit an old widower who was a member of their church, but whom they knew occasionally slipped into the alcoholic ways of his pre-conversion life. "I certainly hope a fine young man like you stays away from drink, Sammy. If you get the habit when you are young, you'll have to fight it your whole life through."

After her day had been detailed, Sam was grilled about his. He would hem and haw and his life came out sounding dull. One thing she was able to get from him was that he read a lot, and shortly after this confession he began to receive the Reader's Digest in the mail at the station, a gift of an anonymous friend.

Agnes kept Sam well up to date on how things went at her church: how this year's bazaar hadn't gone as well as last year's and what the new preacher was like. Once she had asked what church he attended, probably with a mind to inviting him to hers, but he had an answer for that question which worked well with her and other KRST listeners. "Oh, my

father is a retired Methodist minister," he could honestly answer, "and I'm a member of a church out on the west side near where he lives." Sam was always careful to say "a member of" rather than "go to," because he hadn't been inside that church or any other for several years.

Also in Agnes' calls were many compliments for the way Sam sounded on the air and the good job he did at the controls.

But Monday night there was something new she said and it caught his attention. The words were: "... . so we'll be stopping by in a little while to . . ."

"I'm sorry, Agnes. What was that again?"

"I was saying that Fred and I have fixed up a little present for you and we'll be stopping by the station to leave it off in just a little while. We've both been wanting to meet you in person for a long time and as I said to Fred today, there isn't any sense in putting it off any longer."

"Now, Agnes, you musn't give me presents. That's not necessary. And I'm all alone here at the station so I wouldn't have much time . . ."

"That's all right, Sammy. We won't stay a minute. 'Bye now."

Sam's fans were one of the things he often brooded about during Friday night sessions at Gertie's. It is nice to have people tell you that you do a job well. There had been a time when Sam had wanted such praise badly and hadn't got it. A few years earlier he had been a professional radio man in complete earnest. He had worked as a disc jockey in several small radio stations around the state and had hoped to work his way up, to return to Portland on a crest of small town popularity. The station managers came to appreciate him as he learned his craft, but the audience enthusiasm he ached for just wasn't there.

"So now, when I really don't care much," Sam would say while pressing a cold beer glass to his forehead, "now that the doctor says my eyes can take academic work after all and the only thing I want the radio for is a job to get by on while I go to school; now I get fans. Not for being the goddamn hippiest DJ in town, but for being that nice young fellow on God's own radio station."

The "hippiest DJ's in town" got comely little high school girls for fans while Sam got little old ladies and nuts. The big shot record spinners were paid money to appear at dances while Sam felt uncomfortable in even so disembodied a contact with his listeners as talking to them on the phone. He absolutely refused to make live appearances and was happy that his public usually got no closer than a stroll by the fishbowl windows of the announcer's booth.

KRST's listeners were even more doggedly loyal than high school rock 'n' rollers. There was one mentally retarded fellow of about 35 who would show up in front of the studio several times a week on his bicycle. He always wore a red baseball cap and never spent less than an hour at a time staring in the window. When Sam first went to work at KRST he made the mistake of letting this fellow in when he tapped at the door one Sunday afternoon. With baseball cap respectfully in hands he had spent half an hour trying to convince Sam that KRST should become the hub of a full-fledged radio and TV network that would provide many stations with all-religious programs to compete with sinful programmers like NBC and CBS. He was willing to start out on his bicycle the next morning and ride across the country recruiting stations to join this network if Sam would only say the word. He had a map with a route marked and a list of the nation's largest stations, at which he intended to call.

As Sam explained to Gene and Ahab, his feelings about fans such as this were clear and simple. He felt sorry for them, but he wanted to avoid them as much as possible. The kind of thing that upset him--and the kind of thing that always sent Ahab lurching away from the table on some disgusted pretext or another--was the lady who called one evening to say: "Sam, although I listen to you all the time, I've never called you before and I don't want to bother you, but tonight I have a brief story to tell that I thought you would want to hear. I have a friend, an elderly man, a widower, who is alone and ill and in pain much of the time. One night last week he was in great despair and had decided to destroy himself. But he had his radio on to KRST. It wasn't anything you said in particular--you were just telling the names of records and reading commercials--but the sound of your cheerful voice and the wonderful music you play changed his mind. He is alive and happy tonight just because of you. I know you are busy and I don't want to bother you, but I just thought that this would be something you would like to know."

"Hell, I don't know what to think about something like that," Sam said, just before Ahab threw up his hands and left. "I don't believe in God and I hate the motherfucking charlatans and liars and fools as much as any one, but in cases like that, that God damned station not only doesn't do any harm, it almost seems to be doing some good. I'm in favor of anything that helps hopeless people forget they are hopeless."

Agnes and Fred didn't show up until after 8 o'clock. By then the taped programs were over for the day and Sam was playing records.

He always spoke of his fans as little old ladies. Most of them fit that description. But the woman who got out of the car and came shuf-

fling toward the door was not little. She had obviously been large and robust in years past. No longer. Now she drooped. Her hair drooped to her ears, her chin drooped to her chest, her breasts drooped to her waist, her waist drooped over her hips, and her ankles drooped over her shoes. The lively, well-intentioned telephone voice of Agnes belonged to this drooping body. And behind her was what must be Fred. A tiny, trim, almost dapper man, with an absolutely hairless head and transparent skin that revealed a network of hardening but still beating blue veins.

Agnes was carrying a cardboard box with tissue paper tucked over the top. "So this is our Sammy!" she said as he let them in the front door. "Isn't he a fine-looking boy, Fred?"

"Now don't pester him, Agnes. Just give him the box and let him get back to work," piped Fred. Sam shook hands with Fred and said something about being embarrassed by their bringing him a present. Then he had to hurry back to the announcer's booth because the record which was on the air was ending.

It was an instrumental played after the fashion of a romantic ballad by a string orchestra, but the melody was that of a traditional hymn. There was a pianissimo section in the last few seconds of the arrangement. Sam slid into his chair, put on his earphones, raised a hand to Agnes and Fred for silence, and opened the mike just in time to give the name of the orchestra leader and the hymn during the pianissimo. Then, with timpani pounding, the song concluded with a great crescendo. "You are listening to 'Songs for Saints and Sinner,'" said Sam cheerfully. "Music for a Monday evening from KRST." He had already punched the button that started the tape cartridge machine. "Bing bong bing bong," went the recorded chimes.

"It is thirteen minutes after 8 P.M.," said Sam. "Bing bong bing bong," this time the chimes were followed by strings racing up the scale and whirling wildly at the top while a great baritone voice in an echo chamber intoned, "This is K-R-S-T, Portland's radio voice of the Gospel." While the chimes sounded again Sam started the number two turntable but held the record still with his fingertips. Then he released it and out of the reverberations of the last chime an unaccompanied tenor voice emerged, soon to be joined by an orchestra.

"Oh isn't he marvelous, Fred? Sitting there among all those switches and dials and lights and gauges. Goodness! I don't know how he can keep them all straight!" Her drooping chin wagged in wonderment.

"Give him the fox, Agnes, so we can get out of his way. He's busy." Fred edged toward the door.

"I'm afraid I am kept pretty busy while the records are on." While the baritone sang Sam was cuing up another record on turntable one and replacing the station ID tape in the cartridge machine.

Agnes put the box on the counter in which the turntables were set and took the tissue paper off the top. "These are just a few little things we put together for you. Here is a box of nice fresh prunes. These are maple sugar candies. Aren't they nice? They are modeled to look like maple trees. A friend of ours who lives in Maine sent them to us. Let's see, this is wheat germ. You put that on your breakfast cereal. Oh yes, and this is a jar of vitamin tablets. You only need to take one of the red ones and two of the little brown ones a day. Now these are natural vitamins, Sam, not any of your artificial chemical vitamins that do more harm than good. When there are just two boys living together and you don't

have a mother around to look after you, I know you don't eat right. So you take these home with you."

"Well, this is very nice of you, Agnes. But you should keep these things for yourselves. My roommate and I eat pretty well and . . . oh, hold it, the record is ending."

With the mike open again Sam reached up to the large loose-leaf notebook that was fixed on top of the console in front of him and quietly turned a page as he identified the tenor and his song. Then he read from the notebook: "Friends, are you looking for really economical transportation? Or maybe you would like to put a touch of good, clean adventure in your life this spring. In either case, you owe it to yourself to stop by and have a look at the fine selection of new and used machines at The Cycle Shack . . ."

KRST's listeners probably didn't buy enough motorcycles to warrant these ads, but the station owner's teenage son had a new cycle and the ads were part of a "tradeout" deal: so many ads in lieu of part of the purchase price. KRST also carried ads for fur coats and quality home furnishings.

Sam started the next record as he finished reading. Some chords of piano music sounded as he said, "That's the Cycle Shack, in the 500 block out Beach Boulevard on the east side." Then a choir began singing about the joys of salvation.

"Why, he looks just as friendly as he sounds when he's making those announcements, doesn't he, Fred? But, my goodness, Sammy, you are so pale! You must take these vitamins. I don't mean to say that you don't have a lovely complexion, but, gracious, it's pale enough to suit a girl. Doesn't he look pale, Fred?"

"Let the poor boy alone, Agnes. Come on now, let's go. He has work to do."

As Sam showed them to the door Agnes was saying, "My, I do like the music you play. It's what I like best about KRST. And it's so nice of people like that motorcycle shop to sponsor the music. Fred's been shopping for a new car. When you are out shopping tomorrow, Fred, I think you ought to at least stop at that motorcycle place and tell them we'd buy one if only we were a little younger. With my arthritis I don't think I could do very well on a motorcycle. . ."

After closing up, after the bus ride downtown, Sam walked busy streets toward home with the box of health foods under his arm. In the theater district the world still had business to do, buying pleasure or selling it, but Sam didn't. His audience had gone arthritically to rest, leaving only the implicit obligation of tomorrow night, same time, same station. As businesses thinned into homes he paced, head down, from one block to the next, from one street light to the next, in an elongated version of Jimmy Durante's TV exit. His hands were in his pockets and the health foods in the box clamped under one arm jostled and scratched, faintly threatening escape.

When he started up Wilfred Avenue, the last steep leg of the journey, he raised his head for a glimpse of the house as if to assure himself that it was still there and that the hill was worth climbing. The house was there and Wilson White's new Chevrolet Impala was parked in front. That meant that Wilson and Maude would be at the house and it meant that they were still seeing each other. A car parked along Wilfred Avenue

never looked at rest; it was a bulky insect whose headlights blankly reflected terror and whose tires fiercely exuded stickum to maintain a tenacious grip. Sam hadn't talked to Maude for over a week, but at that time it had appeared that her affair with Wilson was really over. Or at least that it ought to be.

That had been on a Sunday night--or a Monday morning actually, at 3 A.M.--when Maybelle's shouts from downstairs had goaded Sam from his hibernation and sent him, thick-blooded, weaving down the stairs to the phone. A grotesque of Maude's voice struggled to reach him, choked by sobs and despair, encumbered with mucus. "Sam, can you come over? Oh please come over right away. I'm in awful trouble and you are the only person in the world who can help me. You have to help me . . . you have to because . . . because it's all your fault." And she hung up.

Maybelle got Gene's car keys before she went back to bed and Sam went back upstairs to dress.

"What have you done that would get Maude in trouble?" Rachel asked sleepily.

"Damned if I know. She sounded like she was in terrible shape though."

"I'd offer to go along, but I suppose that would only complicate things. I can't make friends with that girl. She's harder for me to get along with than Ahab."

"She can't get used to the idea of someone wanting me as a lover. She has never wanted me that way. Only wants me as friend and senior advisor. But she never takes my advice and somehow insists on resenting you."

"Do you have to go?"

"I won't go if you don't want me to. But she obviously needs some kind of help. Probably only needs someone to pat her on the back and tell her she's a good kid.. I'll be back in a little while."

It took fifteen minutes to drive from Wilfred Avenue to Maude's. She lived in an eastside apartment, two rooms and a bath. She didn't answer on the intercom when he rang from downstairs. There was only the heavy buzz of the doorlock release that sounded like an explosion at that time of night.

The lobby of the apartment building was quiet except for the bangs and creaking of the old elevator that took him to the third floor. The faint sound of rock 'n' roll music came from her room and the door was ajar. Inside her room the air was heavy with odor. Maude, wearing only panties and a man's tee-shirt, was bent over near the bed that occupied one corner of the main toom. She was trying to lift a wooden box full of dishes. Sweat dripped off her nose and plastered her hair to her cheeks. When she saw Sam, she sat down on the floor and began to cry.

"What in the world are you doing?" Sam asked as he offered her a hand up.

She got up but then threw her damp arms around him and seemed almost ready to fall again. "It's no use," she sobbed, "it's no use."

"What's no use?"

"The box," she said, looking at him with a helpless expression, red eyes, and a haggard face. "I've been lifting it and lifting it, up and down, for three hours, but it's no use."

Sam got her to sit down on the edge of the bed to explain. He lit two cigarettes and she took a couple of big gulps from a glass of apparently straight gin that had been on the stand next to her bed.

The problem was that she was pregnant. Yes, she was sure she was pregnant and she was sure it was Wilson's and no, she hadn't told him. There wasn't anything Wilson could do.

"But what can I do?"

"You have to help me. It's your fault."

"My fault?"

"You're the one who assured me there was nothing wrong with being in love with a Negro."

"What does his being a Negro have to do with it?"

"Well, I loved him and now I'm going to have a baby. What can I do?"

"You'll have to tell Wilson and then decide among the obvious alternatives."

"What obvious alternatives?"

He explained that young ladies in her situation usually did one of three things: get married and have the child, not get married but have the child and give it away through an agency, or have an abortion. She didn't want to do any of those things.

He tried to get her to be more reasonable. "Now, what about alternative number one? Why don't you and Wilson get married?"

"We talked about that a long time ago, when we first started going together. We decided neither one of us could stand the social stigma and we didn't want to have kids that would have to go through all that."

"Now that you are pregnant, maybe you should reconsider."

"No. I wouldn't think of it. Besides it's much too late. He's been married to a colored girl for going on a year now and she just had a baby."

"He's married! Now that I did not know. But, my God, you still go dancing in those places you used to take me. How can you do that? So many of the people are his friends."

"That's just it. They're his friends. They wouldn't run and tell his wife he has a white girl friend. We often go out with Wilson's brother-in-law and his girl. No one would tell on anyone."

Sam looked very tired. They were silent for some time. Then Maude seemed to have resigned herself. "I guess I knew all along. I'll have to have an abortion, won't I, Sam?"

"If that's what you think is best."

She nestled against him and put her head on his shoulder. "You'll have to help me be brave, Sam. You'll have to help me find a doctor, too."

"I can help with the doctor anyway. A friend of Maybelle's in the Oriental studies department had an abortion recently. There's a list of several legitimate doctors at home with details about how much they charge and how to get in touch with them. You have to be careful to avoid quacks."

"Oh, Sam, I knew I could count on you!" She gave him a loud kiss on the cheek and a big squeeze. "Go get the list right now, will you?"

"It's too late now, Maude. I'll bring it over tomorrow."

"I have to have it now! I won't be able to sleep till I have that list in my hand."

"How about if I bring it over first thing in the morning? It's a long way back and forth and I'm tired. It won't do you any good to have it tonight."

"I have to have it now!" Her eyes spurted tears again. She slipped to the floor, onto her knees, and embraced his legs. "You have to get it for me now. I'll kill myself or something if you don't."

"All right. I'll go get the list and be back soon. While I'm gone you get yourself cleaned up and put some clothes on that cover you. You make me nervous running around like that."

It took him more than an hour to get home, get the list, and get back to Maude's. He had looked all over the place for the list and finally had to wake Maybelle up to find it. She didn't mind having to get up when she found there was such juicy news involved. He had to tell her the whole story and her squeals of surprise woke up Gene and then Rachel. Sam had to explain Maude's troubles three times before he could get out of the house. He was tired and on the way back to Maude's the car frequently weaved as if it were driven by a drunk.

The trip had taken so long that he expected Maude to be in an advanced state of panic when he returned. But to his surprise the situation was considerably altered. The room now smelled of pine cones and she was sitting on the bed in thin shorty pajamas drying her hair with a towel and humming.

"I finally found the list," he said.

"I don't even want to see it. Tear the filthy thing up and throw it away for all I care."

"Huh?"

"I took a nice hot bath while you were gone and what do you think? I'm not pregnant after all."

"Oh fer chrissake." Sam slumped into a chair.

"You look so tired," she said cheerfully. "I better fix you a cup of coffee before you try to drive home."

Maude went off to the kitchen and Sam half-dozed in the chair for a few minutes. When he raised his head, there were the sounds and smells of coffee perking, but no sign of Maude. He found her seated at the kitchen table with her head down on folded arms. She was sobbing heavily and silently.

"Hey, everything is all right now," he said, kneeling beside the chair and putting his arm around her.

She was in his arms again. "Oh, Sam, everything is terrible. I want so much to have a baby."

"A baby? Wilson's baby?"

"Wilson's--anyone's. I don't care. Oh, I want a little baby so bad I just can't stand it. A baby, all pink and cuddly, that I can love."

"But if you want children, why don't you get married? Why didn't you marry Wilson when you had a chance? Why do you keep going with him now that he is married?"

"It doesn't work for Negroes and whites to marry. But I love him. Besides, I can't marry anyone. I would have to give up my work on the piano, my career. I have to stay in school and keep playing."

Sam didn't try to reason with her anymore. He said soft words of comfort and convinced her to go to bed. He found some sleeping tablets in the drawer of the stand by her bed, got a glass of water, and made her take one. He tucked her in and tried to leave, but she wouldn't let him.

"Please lie down with me for a little while and hold my hand," she pleaded.

Sam stretched out on the bed, on top of the covers, and took her hand. She snuggled up to him and sighed happily. "I feel much better now. It's so good to have you here with me." After that she was quiet for a while and appeared to be asleep. Sam started to get up, but she pulled him back. "It's a strange world, isn't it, Sam? Things that happen," she said drowsily. "Who knows? Maybe someday you and I will be married to each other and have cute babies together."

He started to answer that, but didn't.

The window next to the bed in Maude's apartment faced the east and it was the first light of dawn, or maybe the smell of coffee burning, that caused Sam to awaken with a start. He had to get the car back so Gene and Maybelle could go to work. Maude woke up momentarily as he was leaving and looked at him in amazement. "My God, are you still here? Why don't you go home?" she said. And then rolled over and went back to sleep.

Maude had brought her portable stereo and the walls of the old house on Wilfred Avenue vibrated to the muddy thumps of a rock 'n' roll band. Gene was sitting in the big chair drinking gin and everyone else was dancing. Maybelle and Maude were sharing Wilson as partner. Since they danced more at each other than with each other, such an arrangement worked. Ahab was there too. His partner was a heavy set girl with enormous breasts and bleached-blond hair stacked high on her head.

"Sammy!" shouted Maybelle. "Welcome home. We're having a party for good old Wilson."

"Tremendous," said Sam.

"Hey, man, what's happening?" said Wilson with a big grin and an extended hand.

"Looks like a party for you is happening. How are you, fella?" Sam swatted Wilson's palm with his own.

"What's in the box?" asked Maybelle.

"Goodies for Wilson's party. There's prunes and maple sugar candies--I'll even let you all have a vitamin pill."

"Ah, man, we don't need that stuff," said Wilson. "It's my party so I already got some goodies."

"Right. He sent out for enough pizza for everybody. I've been keeping it warm in the oven so we could all eat with Sammy when he came home." Maybelle started for the kitchen.

Wilson followed her. "Let me pour you some of this happy water I brought along."

Ahab pushed the blonde girl in front of Sam. He bent his long frame into a deep bow. "Mr. Patience, may I present to you Miss Bonnie Mansfield, the loveliest, sweetest girl it has ever been my pleasure to escort."

"Aw," said Bonnie Mansfield.

Maybelle interrupted from the hallway. "Sam, did you hear from Rachel today?"

"No. Nothing."

"I wonder why she hasn't called?"

"Maybe she'll call yet tonight. Or tomorrow morning."

"Now, Sam, God damn it, don't start talking about stupid things like getting married. I've been telling Bonnie here how brilliant you are."

"He says I had to meet you and Gene because you are both so brilliant."

"Damn right. Greatest political mind and the greatest philosophic mind of our time. Both my buddies. It's my greatest claim to fame, along with writing Moby Dick."

Bonnie blinked heavily mascared eyes. "It must be really neat to know all about philosophy and everything. I'll bet you can tell a person's really deep-down secrets about sex and stuff just by watching them a little while."

"I think you have philosophy confused with psychology. If I were you, I wouldn't believe a word Ahab says about anything, unless he is complimenting you."

"Oooh. I'm so embarrassed. If philosophy isn't about people's sex secrets and things, what is it about?"

"Well, it's sort of about everything. I guess you could say it's about the nature of things."

"You mean like rocks and trees and animals and stuff?"

"Not exactly . . ."

"Here comes the pizza," announced Maybelle.

"Jesus, just in time," said Gene. "Sam was about to start explaining the nature of things."

Wilson had mixed a stiff drink for Sam. "You gotta catch up with the rest of us, man." The record ran out and they all sat around the living room to eat the pizza Maybelle served.

Sam sat down on the floor next to Maude. "Why so quiet tonight?" he asked. "You haven't said a word since I came in. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Sam."

Wilson said, "I don't know what I'm going to do with that girl. She been in moodsville all evening. I can't crank a smile out of her for nothin'. And here it is my big week too."

"Yeah, how about that? You never have told me what the occasion for these festivities is."

"Why, man, I have been promoted. I am no longer just a waiter, I have just completed my first week as maitre d' in the New Orleans Room of the McKinley Hotel."

"The New Orleans Room? I've eaten there," said Bonnie. "That's really a swank place."

"It must pay well."

"Sam, you wouldn't believe how rich your old buddy Wilson is becoming. But I have to be. I'm a daddy since last month. Got responsibilities. Tomorrow I am going to see a man and sign a contract to buy me a brand new house. All my own. How about that?"

"Sounds good."

"Are you going to stay with that work?" asked Gene. "I thought you were just sort of temporarily out of school like the rest of us."

"No, I'm out for good. That school scene is not for me. I found out it keeps gettin' tougher as you go along. Keeps taking up more time. You know that history course Sam and I were in together? The man gave me a "D" for that course. The man, he says, 'Mr. White, I know you can do much better than this. You must be more serious about your studies,' he

says. Why, hell, with tips, I'm gonna make more this year than that cat makes. What do I need that school scene for? It's no big thing, man. I'm doing fine."

Ahab's face had assumed the mask of disgust he usually reserved for Sam and Rachel. "Jesus, Wilson, you must be kidding. You aren't going to stay in the New Orleans Room for the rest of your life. I mean, they advertise that place as 'a little bit of the old South.' All the rich pricks in town parade in and out of there. And all the waiters, even the hat check girls, are colored."

Wilson's perpetual grin widened in his plump face. "Man, why should I care if the help is all colored? Hee, hee. Ah ain't prejudiced, you know." He rolled his eyes.

Gene tried to be diplomatic. "I think what he's trying to say is . . . well, there are people, white and colored, down in Mississippi and Alabama going on marches and organizing boycotts just to get rid of the kind of thing the New Orleans Room is all about. Ahab is just asking whether you really want to be a part of the New Orleans Room."

"Man, you're just not reaching me. What do you want to make a big thing about? I'm not down south. I'm up north here. The people at the place treat me nice. They don't give me any guff and they pay me good."

Gene started to reply, but Maude, indignantly throwing a pizza crust at her plate, cut him off, "Leave Wilson alone! He's doing just fine. He's doing a lot more for his race and for himself than those decadent trouble-makers on those marches. They aren't doing anyone any good."

"That's not true!"

"If you believe in that crap, Gene Greenfield, why aren't you out marching?"

"Because I'm not in the south. If I were, I'd be marching. But up here the problems are more complex. Marches don't . . ."

"God damn it, Gene. That's not why you don't march," said Ahab, standing up and gesticulating wildly. "You don't march because it isn't your fight. It's Wilson's fight. And that's what's so frustrating! He ought to be damn glad he's got something to fight for. Ought to be thankful he's not a WASP like the rest of us. Goddamn WASP's got everything in the whole fucking world except something to fight for. We're all a goddamn WASP generation." That phrase set off a chorus of groans and boos and Ahab sat down. He was suddenly very sad. "Wish I was a nigger so I'd have something to fight for," he said to Bonnie.

"Man, I don't dig all this talk," said Wilson, going to start the phonograph again. "Come on, let's dance!"

Gene said, "You're all screwed up, Ahab. It's our fight too. The problem is what can we do in the north that will be as effective as the marches in the south. If we could get people like Wilson to buy their houses . . ."

"You leave him out of this!" howled Maude.

Ahab looked like he was going to cry. "Wish I was a goddamn nigger." He put his head on Bonnie's bosom and she cradled it there and began to say, "It's all right, it's all right." "Why do I have to be a WASP?" he asked. "It's all right, you're not a wasp." "Yes, I am! We all are." "What's a wasp?" Bonnie asked Sam.

The music started again. Maude was fumbling in her purse while shouting over the noise to Gene. "Did you see that article in today's paper? I've got it here somewhere. It tells about those marches! You know what goes on in those camps along the road at night?"

"Isn't anybody gonna dance?"

"Yes! I am!" said Maybelle.

Maude went across the room to Gene waving the newspaper clipping she had found in her purse. Maybelle and Wilson began gyrating circles around each other. Sam finished Maude's pizza. Maybelle did not dance with the authenticity Maude had. Maybelle had enthusiasm and she was not really an awkward girl, but the total effect was that of a clumsy imitation. She would have looked good doing a fox trot or even Charleston or jitterbug. Maude and Gene's argument was becoming agitated. Bonnie and Ahab were becoming indecent. Sam went to the kitchen for another drink.

When he came back, Maybelle and Wilson were doing something they had done before when they danced that disturbed Sam. Wilson stood in one spot, twisting his trunk, his elbows bent and bouncing, and one leg extended in front of him. Maybelle had trapped his extended leg between her legs. Bending her knees she moved slowly up and down the leg, undulating to the beat of the music and swaying her head first close to Wilson's face and then leaning away again, her elbows pumping.

Maude and Gene weren't paying any attention to them. They were shouting at each other. Sam had suggested to Gene once before that he tell Maybelle to "cool it" when she danced with Wilson. "She makes a fool of herself," he had said. Gene claimed he never paid any attention to her dancing. "Christ, let her have some fun if she wants to."

Sam put his drink on the floor and went upstairs to go to bed. The door to his and Rachel's room was ajar. He was a step into the room before he realized that Ahab and Bonnie were in his bed. They didn't notice him and Sam went back downstairs.

Wilson called to him, "Hey, man, what's the matter? You aren't having any fun!"

"Poor Sam," said Maybelle. "His girl's gone and he doesn't know what to do with himself."

"Ah, come on and dance with Maybelle. She's a swingin' dancer."

"No thanks, you go ahead. I'm no dancer. I'll go referee this political battle." He picked up his drink again and took half of it with one tipping of the glass.

"You know who all these white so-called liberals who go to Mississippi are?" Maude was saying. "A bunch of rich bitches from eastern bitch schools, that's who. And you know why they go down there?"

"I don't give a shit why they go!" insisted Gene. "All that I care is that the job they're doing down there is effective."

"The job they're doing! The job they're doing is to get themselves fucked by colored boys. That's why they come! They all want to . . ."

Sam wandered away. He stretched out on the floor with his head in front of one of the speakers and found oblivion in the unintelligible lyrics of the song.

V: Tuesday

"Would a kiss help?" That's what she had said the day Gene and Maybelle met. Those were the words that really started the whole thing between Sam and Rachel.

They had been introduced early fall quarter by a mutual acquaintance, a sophomore who was both a philosophy major and a member of the fundamentalist church Rachel attended. Sam was introduced to her as a minister's son who was an incorrigible atheist and who could produce upon request and often without it innumerable blasphemously logical arguments against the existence of God. Their daily conversations in the cafeteria began because Rachel, full of freshman excitement about dangerous "new" ideas, could not resist testing the strength of her faith against Sam's satanic logic.

As this practice grew thin they varied it to include topics that were probably of more genuine immediate concern to them. Sam confided his dreams and ambitions as a philosopher and the dreams and frustrations surrounding his love for Maude. Rachel countered by telling him of her lamentable childhood.

She had lived most of it in poverty with her mother, who was virtually a whore, and separated from her father, a wealthy corporation lawyer whom she loved passionately and who so much wanted custody of her that he was constantly in court seeking it. Unfortunately he had only been able to legally establish enough of her mother's sins to prevent his having to pay child support and was unable to disprove enough of the trumped-up

charges that horrible woman leveled against him to establish himself as a morally superior guardian for a child.

While in grade school she had been "saved" and the church had become the foundation for the enormous drive she had developed toward respectability and success and away from the corruption and failure that surrounded her mother and stepfather; the corruption and failure that she saw become visited upon her half-brother, who was mentally retarded.

The custody laws and court rulings were such that she was free at age 14 to live with whichever parent she preferred and at long last she took up residence in the penthouse apartment of her father. "At first we were very close and it was wonderful," she told Sam, but the enthusiasm in her eyes was edged with something--bewilderment, maybe guilt or fear. "After about a month, though, we began to have disagreements. He didn't approve of the church I was attending any more than mother had. He not only wouldn't go to church with me, he tried to discourage me from going--to make it seem ridiculous. Also he had to be out of town a lot on business and I felt neglected." About that time she met Ted, at church. He was a year younger than her, but very mature for his age. They were "steadies" all during her last three years of high school and were still going together even though he had a year of high school left and was captain of the football team while she was in college and was finding herself "attracted more toward intellectual things . . . But that doesn't mean I could ever give up my faith in God or my love for Ted. Without the help of Jesus and the understanding of Ted, I could never have survived the last few years. You see, Sam, that's why all your arguments can't move me. I know there is a God because He helps me and guides me and in return I

have pledged my life to Him. He has promised to save me from the errors of my parents and has shown me what I must do in life to be Worthy. I know there is a God because He spoke to me, He called me."

"You mean you had a mystic experience?"

"That makes it sound too much like a 'phenomenon,' too much like something a psychologist would want to attach electrodes to and observe under controlled conditions. It wasn't like that. It was very real."

Her mother called several times after Rachel had run away to her father's. She begged her to come back. Even if she didn't love her poor mother, even if she still couldn't see what a terrible man her father was, she should come home because her little brother Benny missed her so. That angle got through to Rachel and one evening when her father was out of town she agreed at least to go over and babysit while her mother and stepfather were out.

Rachel went to her stepfather's house by bus. The parents were already gone when she arrived and eight-year-old Benny was sitting in the middle of the cluttered front room she used to clean. He had on his construction-worker father's hard hat and had an unlit cigarette in his mouth. The rumpled empty package and the other cigarettes that had been in it lay scattered about him on the floor with old newspapers, torn magazines, and several shoes. Mucus ran out of both nostrils to his mouth and he was trying to lick at it and still keep the cigarette in his mouth. His arms, neck, and face were filthy and his pants were wet. From the stench she assumed that the same pants had been wet many times before without being changed. Cleaning him up was difficult because he clung tenaciously to her neck and burbled happily. She cried as she cleaned him up and she

cried as she told Sam about it. It was the first time he had ever seen her cry and the only time he ever would.

She found clean pajamas for Benny and clean sheets for his bed. She wanted to clean the rest of the house when she got him to bed, but he cried loudly and ran after her if she left the room. They both fell asleep on his bed, their arms wrapped tight around each other.

Rachel was awakened by the odor of her stepfather's cigar. "So little Queenie did come back," he said, leaning unsteadily against the doorjamb. "That's a good thing because poor old Ben, he needs someone to look after him. It's a cinch his old lady don't and never will."

"Where is Mother?"

He hissed breath in something resembling a giggle and stumbled forward to sit on the edge of the bed. "Gisshhhh, I don't know. I was playing cards in the back room. Last time I saw her she was at the bar with a couple guys. Must've gone off with one of them . . . or all of them. Gisshh, she din't have to be so careful now that your old man doesn't have people watching her all the time. It's good you've come home, little Queenie. You're not a bitch like your ma, and old Ben, he needs someone to look after him." He patted her on the foot.

"I didn't come to stay, just to babysit tonight."

"Aw no, Queenie, you gotta stay. Have to have someone to clean up the place a little once in a while. Old Ben, he needs someone to look after him sone . . . and so do I, Queenie, so do I." He tried to stretch out on the bed beside her, but she quickly rolled over the top of Benny to stand up on the other side of the bed. Benny's grip around her neck held until it pulled him half out of the bed and his head banged on the floor.

He cried in hideous shrieks and his father called after her as she ran from the house, "I ain't gonna do nothin' bad to you, Queenie. Hell, I'm too drunk for that. Just want someone to look after me. Me and old Ben, we need . . ."

Rachel made herself walk to the bus stop instead of run and then set her jaw rigidly to keep from crying during the bus ride home. She would not make a spectacle of herself in public. Engulfed by the softness of the bed her father had bought her, with its satin counterpane and flower-spangled sheets, she cried again and for a long time. Then she lowered herself to her knees beside the bed to ask for guidance. Must she return to that horrid place to look after Benny? The Voice of God rumbled soft assurance through her whole being. No, that was not her calling. She should persuade her father to initiate action to have Benny committed to an institution and she must be diligent in her studies to become a nurse so she could be of service to many unfortunate children instead of just one. She must stay with her father because he would give her the money to go to college.

Sam listened to her story with troubled frows and tight face. "It's strange," he observed, "how our parents and our loves and our Gods get all mixed up together. It was watching what happened to my father that broke my faith and made it possible for me to view religion logically."

And Sam told his father's story. Of a doggedly devoted liberal Methodist minister forced into early retirement by the stuffed-shirt misunderstanding of his congregation. "He didn't preach fundamentalist evangelism like they do at your church," he explained. "He was too intelligent and too well-educated for that. He recognized that 99 per cent of his

congregation 'believed' in some sense or another. His job, he felt, was to exhort them by words and example to live every day as if they believed. And he didn't mean just petty things like don't smoke, don't drink, don't gamble, don't cuss; he was continually trying to persuade them that the Christian principle of love was something that must make a difference in the way they treated people, in the way they did business, even in the way they voted."

Sam's father was a small, pudgy, bald-headed man with thick glasses. However charged with exciting liberal ideas his sermons may have been, they were delivered in an apologetic monotone that put large portions of the congregation to sleep or left them all feeling only vaguely uncomfortable, rather than incensed or inspired.

. During his early years at the First Methodist Church of Westfir in the suburbs of Portland, most of the congregation considered Rev. Rosco Patience a total loss as a preacher, but a considerable asset in the other duties of the ministry. He was very good about assisting in all of the church's activities from the Women's Society to the young people's softball team. And he was very active in the community. He had given gallons of blood and served on everything from the NAACP to the Municipal Library Advisory Committee.

In high school Sam both admired his father and felt sorry for him. What his father needed, Sam thought, was less drudgery and more Barnum and Bailey technique. He resolved to take up the ministry himself and learn the showmanship his father lacked.

Sam did not share his father's passion for dogs, but he did approve of the minister's purchase of an old barn west of town with its

two acres of surrounding land. He thought it would provide much needed diversion and recreation.

There had always been a dog or two around the Patience house. In what little leisure time he allowed himself, Rev. Patience had bred and trained a succession of mutts and purebreds. Nothing seemed to please him more than a well-disciplined dog cheerfully responding to a series of complicated commands.

He loved all dogs (and hated all cats because of their "thick-headed independence"), but above all he loved greyhounds. This love had begun when, as a boy, he had worked with his uncle--now dead, but "the very best of his time"--breeding, training, and racing the animals. Even when he had become a minister of the Lord, he allowed himself, just once or twice a season, to go out to the track to watch the dogs run. Not to bet. He didn't care about that part of it at all; he just loved the swift grace of the greyhounds, with their intensely single-minded pursuit of their goal.

The farm was to be a small thing. It would only take a few hours a day to breed and train just a few greyhounds. He wouldn't race them himself. He would sell them to others to do that. "Maybe he decided to do it," Sam told Rachel, "because he sensed that a lot of other more grandiose and altruistic dreams of his would never be fulfilled and had come to realize that he would have to settle for the fulfillment of one small personal dream."

There were some grumblings in the congregation from the beginning. Not because Rev. Patience let down on his duties in the least, but because he was engaged in an activity which involved gambling. Not that he gambled

himself or even raced the dogs, but, after all, gambling is the real purpose of greyhound racing, isn't it? And the members of the First Methodist Church of Westfir, especially the lady members, were well aware of the evils of gambling. Wasn't this the man who told them from the pulpit each Sunday that the Love of Christ must be evident in every action of the Christian's life?

During Sam's last year in high school they really went after his father. Right after one of his dogs had become the hottest thing of the season on the track of the Portland Kennel Club and there was a photo-feature in the Sunday paper about Rev. Patience, the man with the divine touch in training greyhounds. It all culminated in a tension-charged church board meeting and a tactfully worded resolution suggesting that Rev. Patience should either give up his dogs or "retire" from the ministry. Rev. Patience rather quickly chose dogs.

In spite of the financial crisis that involved moving out of the parsonage and into a large tent on the farm while Sam's father built a house beside the barn and the training track, there was enough money from an insurance policy for Sam to go out of state to school for his first year of college.

He made various excuses for not coming home during the entire nine months of school, but when the academic year was over he came back because he felt there was no where else to go. He came back with poor grades, severely fatigued eyes, and a faith that had been shaken by his father's experience and then almost completely shattered by the "expanding, ever receding, universe of ideas I found at college." He stayed at home only one day.

"My mother had grown old in the time I was gone. She had been reduced to near idiocy by the combination of Dad's humiliation, the social disgrace of moving into a tent--a tent, for chrissake!--then her only son goes off to college and she's menopause age."

The new house was finished by the time Sam returned and that saved her some. "She was too much. Puttering around that house and trying to pretend that everything was just great. But the old man is the one who really killed me. He really did think that everything was great. I'll never forget him proudly showing me the barn that was full of young greyhounds by then. Cage after cage of wound-up pedigrees, slavering, yelping, whining, stinking--turned loose at regular intervals to be goaded, cajoled, and tricked into snapping around a man-made oval in an all-out, passionate chase after a mechanical rabbit. It made me sick."

"It all made me sick. He was attending regularly the same church that had booted him out, still spending every spare moment working for some goddamn committee to do this and that for or to whoever, still trotting eagerly down to the blood bank to have them suck out a pint every time they'd let him. He even showed me a picture of himself that was in the paper. There he was carrying a placard walking in between this bearded guy with droopy eyelids and a chick with long hair and leotards in the first ban-the-bomb march in Portland history. He had it tacked up on a bulletin board along with pictures of his dogs that had won races.

"I went out of my head, I yelled at him right there in his barn. 'Jesus Christ, Dad,' I howled, 'what's happened to you? Aren't you fighting back? Can you still believe in anything after what they did to you? And if you do, how can you go back and sit down beside those people while

they do what they think is worship? What can you do for anything you believe in when you have no dignity? Who cares what kind of sign a fat old bald-headed dog-runner carries down the street?' I went on and one and he just stood there with a goddamn twinkle in his eye puffing on this pipe he'd taken up since he quit preaching. He put his arm around me all father-like and he says, 'I know it all seems confusing and terrible to you now, son, and I can't explain so you will have to understand. You'll have to learn it on your own.'--How about that for paternal utterance!-- 'The things that used to matter most to me,' he says, 'have become pretty much hobbies to me now. My real vocation is here in this barn and out on that track, humble and undignified though it may be. It took me most of my life--not to recognize it--but to admit that this is what I really wanted to do. In spite of that I feel lucky. I consider any man lucky who is able to spend a significant portion of his life doing for a living something he really likes to do. He is doubly blessed if it should turn out that he is able to do well what he really likes to do.'

"'God and man, Heaven and earth, those are your hobbies! Dogs are what you live for! Roll over and close your eyes, old man, you are dead!' I yelled at him and I got out of there."

Sam had lived with friends, then got an apartment of his own. He went to a night school to learn radio announcing, worked in some small towns as a DJ, then was drafted into the Army, not to go overseas, not to fight a way, but to be a clerk-typist at the Presidio of San Francisco. By then his eyes had recovered from the rapid deterioration that had occurred in his last years of growth and he came back from the Army newly bifocaled, still befuddled, but "experienced," as he explained to the raptly attentive Rachel.

"I've learned a couple of things," he told her with conviction of hard fire in his eyes. "I've learned that the answer isn't in the mindless world of DJ's with its oblivion by adulation," he made the phrase roll with resonance, "and I've learned to give up any ideas of God. That part was a relief--like finding out the root you have been clinging to in bloody desperation wasn't really necessary to keep you from falling off the cliff. I've seen too much to believe that such a stupidly malevolent being could exist as it would take to have created this world. The whole mess is some kind of grotesque accident and if anything sensible is to be made of it, man has to do it. That's why I study philosophy," he said through lips that suddenly trembled, "I've got to find a way to make sense of it all."

Rachel quietly and deliberately said, "Sam, you and I disagree on some very important things--religion, for instance--but I want you to know that I think you are about the most wonderful man I have ever met. In some ways you are like my father, cynical and hard about people, but I wish he could be warm and human at the same time, the way you are. I wish Ted could grow up to be like you . . . only religious. Some times . . . I wish . . ."

"Wait, Rachel." Sam's voice was steady again, but sad. And his head drooped wearily. "We're good friends, so let's be honest and clear about one thing. You must not have a crush on me. It could never work. I've been around with women, too. There have been whores here and in the Army and girls in the towns I DJ'd in and in San Francisco. I've had too much experience to be able to go with a girl and not sleep with her and you are not ready for that kind of thing. Besides that, I don't marry."

I've seen too much of that, too. Marriage ceremonies are obscene gatherings where the couple stands up before friends and relatives and with phoney sanctimony says, 'We just want you all to know that we're going to start sleeping together every night and we're going to fuck.' And the relatives sit around crying or nudging each other, giggling, and saying, 'They're going to start fucking now, if they--tee-hee--haven't been already.'" He paused, waiting for the effect of it--especially of that word--to show on her face.

It didn't show. She took it without flinching. "It's all right, Sam. I understand. I almost worship you, but it's not the kind of thing that could become a crush. I know that wouldn't work."

Sam had a very big crush on Rachel, although it was some time before he could admit it. He still thought he was in love with Maude. Especially when she played Beethoven for him in one of the basement practice rooms at Portland State. And then he would begin to doubt again whether she was right for him the next time he saw her dance with Wilson.

In the meanwhile, his troubled mind was further troubled when he observed his pulse quicken in the presence of Rachel and the heaviness of his heart in her absence. She no longer met him in the cafeteria every day. Sometimes she would be there for two or three days in a row. Sometimes she would stay away for a week. Sometimes they talked warmly, intimately. Sometimes she was just polite. Occasionally he would say to her, "To hell with classes for this afternoon, let's cut out," and she would say, "Wonderful idea," and they would go downtown to a movie, or take a walk. Once she went with him to his and Gene's apartment and drank just a little bit of vodka in a glass of orange juice. Then they would walk

back to the school and under her freckles her cheeks would blush red from the fall air and Sam would gleefully tell Gene later, "I'll hate myself for it, but I just may have to corrupt that little girl one of these days." That was the only way he allowed himself to talk of her.

She called him once during Christmas break to say that she would never have been able to get an "A" in her Intro to Phil course without the notes he had lent her. Winter quarter began and for several weeks he only saw her occasionally, in the halls instead of in the cafeteria, and she was always hurrying on her way to class.

Sam's morale was low. "I am physiologically frustrated, emotionally alienated, and psychologically incomplete!" he moaned to Gene. Besides that he had received only a "B" in the first quarter of a literature sequence he took fall term. Desperately, he clung to the hope that something might yet happen between him and Maude. Manfully, he concentrated his efforts on producing what he considered to be a masterpiece of a paper for the lit course.

On the day the paper was due he sat down an hour before class with Maude in the cafeteria to proofread the finished product. He didn't get far because Maude was concerned again about the propriety of a white girl going with a Negro. It took Sam nearly forty-five minutes to convince her that whether he was a Negro or not didn't matter. "What matters," he told her, "is whether Wilson, as a man, is the right man for you." Then Maude went off to practice and Rachel appeared. She could only stop "a moment." She had to get to class.

And Sam only had fifteen minutes left in which to proof his paper. She immediately volunteered to help. He passed the pages to her one by

one and they both read it carefully. She found three spelling errors, pronounced it "a wonderful paper," and they both left for class.

A week later Sam had the paper back. He was in the cafeteria with Maude. He was haggard, unshaven, glum. He had received another "B" on the paper. The professor's comment read: "This is a very bizarre and imaginative reading of the work and is elaborately thought out and developed, However, perhaps you wouldn't have found it necessary to be so imaginative and elaborate if you had spent less time spinning unrelated generalities and more time in careful and concrete analysis of the text."

"Shit," said Sam. "I would rather have had an 'F' than this."

"It's no big thing, man." The echo of Wilson was the best consolation Maude had to offer. Besides she was concerned with more weighty things. She was afraid Wilson was going to leave her for another girl because she was so ugly. Sam spent half an hour telling her she was beautiful and then Maude said, "Oh well, it doesn't matter. The thing between Wilson and me isn't just physical, you know," and she went off to practice.

Sam sat crumpled in his chair and stared blankly at the symbols of his utter defeat. The "B" on the paper and Maude's abandoned coffee cup. Rachel silently materialized in the chair opposite him and said, "You look very unhappy, Sam."

He shoved the paper at her. "My goddamn masterpiece."

She read the comment and then looked up at him softly. His face twitched, his eyes were bloodshot. He made a shrugging motion, raised his palms and eyes upward, and stared again at the table.

"Would a kiss help?" She asked it softly and with a little grin.

"Huh?"

"I said: would a kiss help?" His eyes said yes and she said, "Come with me," and he followed her downstairs to the basement, past the bowling alley and the barber shop, around two sawhorses with a string between them, and into the tunnel that ran under the street to the new, four-story classroom building that was being readied for use spring term. She continued through the silent, deserted halls of the new building to the far end, up two flights of stairs, and stopped on the landing.

"Isn't this a wonderful place?" she asked. "Sometimes when I want to be alone I come here to study."

A small section of the sidewalk in front of the building, and of the street with cars passing, and one of the trees in the park across the way were abstracted into shimmering blotches of color in winter sunlight by the narrow pane of frosted glass that descended from the landing above to the ground floor landing below them. Faint clangs and hammerings filtered in from some great distance where work on the building was being completed.

"A couple of months from now people will be running up and down these stairs, clods of dried mud will collect here in the corners of the landing, and there will be crushed-out cigarette butts up there on the first floor. But it seems so pure and beautiful now. Smell the new tile and fresh paint."

He was obediently snuffing the air when she slid gently against him and offered up her lips. In states of maudlin drunkenness he would try many times afterward to describe it to a scoffing audience of Gene and/or Ahab. "Her lips were closed as if the only kissing she'd ever done before was kissing her parents goodnight, but they were soft, warm,

moist, and . . . and tasted faintly of coffee with cream and sugar in it."

They had been kissing for a long time before she said, "I'm not living with my father any more."

"Huh?"

"We were upsetting each other. Even he agreed it was best and he is still giving me money."

"Oh."

"I live in an apartment now."

"You do?"

"It's just up the street from where you and Gene live and I've been very lonely. I wish you would come to see me some night."

There was another scene he often tried with drunken ineptitude to recreate for his unappreciative audience. It was Rachel standing in front of the door to a woman's rest room in the new building. There was a spot of color on each cheek and one on her neck where he had kissed her and her lipstick was smeared over her lips up to her nose. The door was walnut and the spots of color on her face and neck were red, her hair was mahogany, her sweater orange, her skirt brown. She was saying, "I'll see you tonight." And he was saying, "See you tonight."

Gene enjoyed the whole thing immensely. He enjoyed repeating several times each painful detail of the story as he drove Sam to work. "Let's see. How many hours all together? You must have slept damn near four hours on the floor before Ahab and his friend vacated your bed. Then you staggered up there and crapped out again. There wasn't a sound from you

when I was home for lunch. I quit work an hour early, so I was home at four . . . Man, you must have sacked it about 16 hours!

"Sixteen hours you've been out when I open up the door and yell 'Get out of bed, you lazy asshole, you'll be late for work!' And you sit up with your eyes wide open, look me right in the face and say, 'Would a kiss help?' 'Would a kiss help?' you say, and then over you go on your belly, sound asleep again!

"Hail the new champion, that's what I say. I'm sure 16 hours of solid, sustained sleeping without having been unusually tired before it began beats any performance in the same classification Ahab has ever turned in. They may have to change the name of the disease to Sam's Sleeping Sickness.

"One thing I'm sure of. Old Ahab never woke up from anything saying, 'Would a kiss help?'"

Sam mumbled a plea for mercy. He sat slouched way down in the seat and had a pained look on his face. Occasionally he shook his head violently as if trying to clear it.

Gene said, "Seriously, fella, I have never seen you so tense as you have been since Rachel left. She's only been gone two days. Maybe she should have called by now, but it's not all that catastrophic yet, is it?"

Sam admitted he was over-reacting. "She'll call tonight either while I'm at work or later at home. Then I'll be all right."

"Bing bong bing bong," went the chimes.

"This is K-R-S-T, Portland's radio voice of the gospel," said the voice in the echo chamber.

"Bing bong bing bong," went the chimes.

"Pacific daylight time is seven fifteen," said Sam.

"Hello, everybody," said the voice from TAPE ONE of the rack of tape recorders. "This is your old friend, the man they call the Convict's Bible Boy. As I go about from prison to prison, speaking to the inmates and distributing the large-print King James Bible that your contributions provide, I often think about the conditions in our beloved country today that tempt so many men into the path of sin and error, the path that leads to these prisons. When the leaders of our government go so far away from the principles of our constitution and the teachings of the gospel that they begin to advocate abolishing capital punishment . . ."

The telephone rang. Sam lowered the monitor gain until the Bible Boy's voice was reduced to a murmur. Agnes was on the phone. "Oh it just makes me sick," she told him. "Fred bought a used car today. The first day he started out to shop for a car he bought one. He didn't shop at all. He bought the first car they showed him at the first place he went to. Oh, it just makes me sick, Sammy."

"Well, Agnes, you know how we men are. We're not shoppers like you girls. Fred must have found what he was looking for at a good price right away. The think that matters is whether he got a good car or not."

"That's the way it would have been if a bright young fellow like you had been buying, Sammy. But old Fred! He let himself get drawn in by fancy gimmicks and I'm afraid he got gypped terribly."

There was a faint pop and a rusling noise from the tape rack. Still listening to Agnes, Sam swiveled his chair around for a look. The tape containing the Convict's Bible Boy program had broken. "Hang on,

Agnes," he said politely and put the phone down. The tape was still running through the machine, but it was going onto the floor instead of onto the pick-up spool.

He turned up the gain and listened carefully for distortions in the Bible Boy's voice that would indicate any serious irregularity in the speed the tape passed over the head. ". . . so-called 'Welfare State.' The pie-in-the-sky, unconstitutional, un-Christian idea of something for nothing. That's what gets these men off on the wrong track! Why work if you can go on welfare? That's what tempts them! And if you don't get everything you want from welfare, why not steal? Now if you add the abolishment of capital punishment to this already horrendous state of affairs, I think you can see . . ." It was impossible to tell anything had happened from listening to the Bible Boy. Sam went over to the tape rack for a closer look. The break was right at the take-up reel. Everything was functioning normally except that the tape was flowing onto the floor in a jumbled heap instead of onto the reel. If he tried to repair it before the program was over he would risk a jerk or pull that would be noticeable on the air.

Sam went back to his chair and picked up the phone.

"Is everything all right?" Agnes asked.

"Well, things aren't all going in the direction they're supposed to, but I'll have to wait till later to fix that." He said it cheerfully, leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs, but he faced in the direction of the tape rack and chewed his lower lip as he listened to Agnes.

"He spent all afternoon driving me around the block, stopping and starting. He kept saying, 'You see, Agnes, I don't have to push in a

clutch or shift gears. It's all automatic!' Well, maybe the car is equipped to do that, Sammy, but I don't see how it could be good for it. He should have bought one with a clutch in it."

"Now, Agnes, You're just being old fashioned. Most cars now days have automatic transmissions." The Convict's Bible Boy murmured on and the disorderly pile of tape on the floor was becoming huge.

"Maybe that part of it is all right, I don't know. But I do know what our neighbor Mr. Wills said when Fred went over to brag to him about the car. He knows about cars and he says Fred paid much too much money for it. He says there's a book, a 'Blue Book' he called it, that lists the prices used cars should be sold at. He says Fred paid \$800 more than what it says in that book he should pay."

"The Blue Book listings are only averages," Sam explained. "Sometimes they charge more if the car is in very good shape and has low mile age. But \$800 over Blue Book is quite a bit. Where did he buy the car?"

"That's the part of it that really disturbs me, Sammy. He bought it at Voltec Motors and he have heard ads for them on your station. If anyone is going to get gypped it would be Fred, but I wouldn't think KRST would advertise people who gyp."

Sam had to get off the phone because the Convict's Bible Boy had almost completed his fifteen minutes. Before he hung up he took down the year, make, and license number of the car Fred had bought. He said he would look into it, but that he doubted he could do anything.

Sam went through the station break routine and brought in the next fifteen minute program, the Jesus for the Jews Hour, from TAPE TWO. Then he rewound the Convict's Bible Boy, carefully slowing the rewinding reel

with one hand and guiding the tape up from the floor with the other. The jumbled pile of tape easily unjumbled itself and, with the break repaired, the Bible Boy tape went back into its box to be returned to California for a fresh load of words.

Before he went home that night Sam left a note for Bill Edwin saying that he had had a telephone complaint about an overcharge by Voltec Motors and giving some of the details.

Maybelle greeted Sam at the door and gave him a kiss. "There," she said, "does that help?" She and Gene laughed a lot, but other than that the house was quiet and some supper was waiting for him.

When she got over the joke, Maybelle began to be seriously worried over Rachel's failure to phone and soon she was trying to get Sam to speculate about possible reasons for the delay. Sam wouldn't speculate and went to bed early.

VI: Wednesday

Rachel didn't offer an explanation and Sam didn't ask for one. He knew what Zorba says and, although he was vaguely uncomfortable about it, he felt this was a time when Zorba's wisdom applied.

Brief mentionings, not given as explanation but as trivial conversation, indicated that little had actually changed with her. She still went to her church. She still went with Ted. But she wasn't living with her father any more. She was sharing an apartment with one Maybelle Bowers. And apparently she had decided she was now, somehow 'ready' for Sam. Nevertheless, she didn't say anything about it and Sam didn't ask. In fact, they didn't do much talking at all. They were both quite intent upon necking.

On the evening of the day they kissed in the fresh world of new classrooms at Portland State, they were at first hampered by the presence of Maybelle and her solitude. After Gene had been rushed in to alleviate that problem, they went about the erotic stimulation of each other with as much abandon as the unexamined inner rules of either would allow in a situation which involved another couple in the next room.

And by whispered instruction and repeated demonstration, Sam taught her to open her mouth when she kissed. The first time their tongues met she shuddered and withdrew. Then she was back again with the sudden enthusiasm of the timid swimmer who has finally gotten wet. Her mouth opened as far as it could and her tongue thrashed about like a seal in boiling water. She stretched out on the davenport and pulled Sam on top

of her. They mashed their bodies together as if each were driven to get beyond the other without going around.

But there were severe limitations. Although Sam's hands glided about over most of her body, it was always with the curtain of her clothing between their flesh. Not so much as a stocking was removed. After all, there was another couple in the next room.

And finally the other couple left the next room to bring reminders of time. Sam and Rachel wrenched themselves asunder and with garbled goodbyes and promises to meet again tomorrow night, separated in a dizzy state of mindless frustration.

The next night they walked downtown together to see a movie and still didn't talk about anything except pigeons and statues, good movies and bad. By the time they were walking back to her apartment communication consisted of changing pressures in the meshed hands which swung between them and fiery glances that flashed through the darkness.

Back at her apartment the wonderfully dangerous fact of Maybelle's absence almost set them aghast. Then mouth met mouth and opened, tongue battled tongue, body mashed body. A bra was unfastened. There was lots of heavy breathing and a few whispered words, then a sweater and bra were removed. Then Maybelle came home.

The distraction of Maybelle's departure with proclaimed intent to seduce soon dissolved. With little hesitation the bra and sweater were discarded again. Much, much heavy breathing. Groans. Then she pulled his head up from her breasts and fastened it to her mouth, her hands went down to unbutton her slacks and her hips heaved upward as she rolled the slacks down just far enough to reveal a delicious dark fringe of mahogany

pubic hair. Sam pulled himself away to begin frenzied pulling at his own buttons. "Wait!" she hissed and drew his head back to her bosom. Now she taught him. Her hand educated his and then went about work of its own with great expertise.

After it had been done the way she wanted it done, Sam swayed off to the bathroom in confused embarrassment to repair his sticky pants. When he came back she was standing by the window, still half naked, smoking one of his cigarettes. He had never seen her smoke before. Sam looked for his glasses. He found them. Then he lit a cigarette. He avoided her eyes. His forehead and jaw muscles worked nervously.

"I suppose you'll hate me now," she said, her voice dramatically hollow. "I know what you think of what we just did. Perversion you call it. The high school girl's perversion."

A passionately hurt face met her blank gaze. "I feel used, Rachel. I didn't think you were the kind of person who would just use me."

She blew smoke upward and stared after it as if determined to meet the wrath of heaven with cool composure. "The trouble is, Sam, that you don't really know me. Not really. The only Rachel you know is the Rachel who goes to school. There are many other Rachels. I've counted at least seven for sure. They seem to come and go automatically and I can't do anything about it. There's a different Rachel with her mother, another with her father, there's one for Ted, one for church, one for school. Most of all there is the good Rachel and the evil Rachel. You've always tempted the evil Rachel to come out, Sam. But she was afraid to come out, too, because she knew that she was much more evil than you are

and would disgust you. Well, now she's out and you've seen her." She turned around to face him. Her eyes flashed, her nostrils flared, her forehead beamed as if it might sprout horns at any second. "Right now you are sitting there trying to hate me. Yet at the same time you can't take your eyes off my breasts. I am the evil Rachel, Sam, and I like you staring at them! I want you to!" She shook them at him, then turned sharply away, stretched a slim bare arm out to lean against the wall, lowered her haughty head, and heaved a great sigh.

Sam was agape. Then he squeezed his eyes shut in a grimace and sank back in his seat. His eyes opened again. He took a deep drag on his cigarette with his brow furrowed. He leaned forward again quickly as if he had hit upon the key to the inscrutable. "But why?" he asked. "Why do I bring out what you call the 'evil Rachel'?"

"I don't know," she said, still leaning wearily against the wall. Then she broke her pose and the mood broke with it. Walls had been about to crash down, rivers had bulged toward catastrophic flood, hell had been on the verge of spewing sulphur and brimstone over the face of the earth. But not now. Now she said, "Yes, I do know." And she picked up her sweater and whisked it over her head. She sat down next to him and dabbed out her cigarette in an ashtray. "I have never told this to anyone before. But I might as well tell you. You already know more about me than anyone else has ever known."

She took another of his cigarettes and he lit it for her. There was a tie between them again. The dark secrets she was about to confide already bound them together as firmly as a hard, satanic, lustful embrace.

Her face revealed that what he was about to hear had to be the most shocking thing he had ever heard. She spoke slowly, ominously.

"What you and I did tonight my father and I have done many times."

When Sam's face had registered the proper amount of shock, she began to speak--confess--freely. She told him how it started during the first winter she was with her father. In January of that winter Portland had one of its rare heavy snowfalls that close schools, keep people home from work, and create the festive air of a special, unexpected holiday. It was her first year of high school and she was in the process of making new friends and gaining acceptance in a new situation. That process seemed to culminate in great success when several of her acquaintances sought her out at home to join them for an evening of sledding down the closed streets of Portland Heights. The group of sledding high schoolers grew large and just when the thrill of swooping down steep streets began to wear off, Rachel became the new center of attention.

It happened when the seat of her pants ripped out. That made her the most popular girl on the hill. Packs of as many as fifteen whooping boys chased her about, throwing snowballs, bumping her into snowbanks, washing her face in snow, and stuffing snow down her front and through the parted seam of her pants. In the end she was seated regally upon a sled which, after some scuffling for the honor of pulling it, was drawn off toward her apartment house surrounded by knights in plaid mufflers and booted ladies-in-waiting. She came in shivering, soaked, exhausted. But the icy orgy of popularity had left her cheeks and eyes ablaze.

What a new and wonderful thing her father's greeting was! At her mother's house she would have been greeted with reprimands and accusations

growing out of the unquestionable knowledge that a good time inevitably involved activities that were unhealthy and done only by adults after young girls were in bed. Her father, on the other hand, was obviously pleased that she had been having a good time. At her mother's Rachel would have gone as quickly as possible to her room to protect her happiness with solitude, but her father wanted to share that happiness.

He swept her up in his arms and carried her to the bathroom, laughing and joking. He started a great torrent of hot shower water and helped her disrobe her weary limbs. He scoffed at her attempts to conceal her nakedness, calling it "false modesty" and reminding her that he was her father, "for goodness sakes." While she showered, he heated a huge woolly towel to catch her in when she came out. As she dried herself he teased her about keeping portions of her body covered, claiming she was too young to be so seductive. Aglow and giggly with the masculine approval and attention with which she had been gorged all evening, she took up the joke by arranging the towel about her in various alluring styles that parodied the costumes of television singers and dancers. Then she threw off the towel entirely and strutted about the room to receive her father's laughter and applause.

Again she was in his arms. This time to be carried, crowing and kicking, to her bedroom. The satin bedspread, the warm electric blanket, the clean flowered sheets, the completely feminine style and smell of her own room. There had been nothing so wonderful at her mother's.

He started by tucking her in, then his tucking became tickling, and when his tickling became concentrated in one spot, her spasms of laughter changed to convulsions of unabashed sexual response.

The next evening he taught her how to "tickle" him and they "tickled" every night for two weeks before a particularly powerful sermon at church led her to the resolution that they must not do that "bad thing" anymore. Her father was greatly disturbed that she would think he would do anything with his daughter that was bad. She just didn't understand progressive parenthood, he told her. She knew about the birds and bees and therefore she must know that he had not done "the truly bad thing" that might make her pregnant. She must also understand that even little girls her age had desires to do "the truly bad thing" and that those desires would get much stronger in the next few years. If she had no outlet for those desires, she might well give into one of her boy friends before she was married and end up a disgusting woman like her mother who "does it" with lots of men. But if she "tickled" regularly in her own home with her father, she would be able to resist the temptations to do "the truly bad thing" with those sex-crazed high school upper classmen. She could be sure that there was no danger of doing anything but "tickling" with her father because he was a mature, responsible man who knew what a disaster it would be if she became pregnant.

"You see, Sam," Rachel said softly, "you are not the only logician I have ever known."

She had resisted his logic, and then, after he had been out of town a week on business, her resistance broke down. A renewal of guilt brought a renewal of resistance. But she fell again. This pattern had continued all through her years in high school and through the first term of college.

"The curious thing about it," she said, "is that it produced the results he said it would, although not for the same reasons. I have always been a very proper young lady on dates with boys. In all the years I have gone with Ted we have never done more than hold hands and exchange little hugs and pecking kisses. That makes him respect me very much. But it isn't because I have any less desire than anyone else. It is because I have a horribly evil secret to keep. If I ever let go just once I knew the secret would get out and Ted--everyone--would be disgusted with me, hate me. And Ted was--is--so important to me because he loves me without getting any sex from me while my father is only really affectionate when he gets sex from me."

She had finally vowed to move away and put a final end to the tempestuous affair with her father because of something Sam had said in one of his cafeteria lectures. "I had always known that this 'tickling' was evil, but father had persuaded me that it was at least less evil than the real thing. But you convinced me that it was a perversion and therefore worse than the real thing. Anyway I was convinced until tonight. Even if it is perverted, I don't have to worry about being pregnant and I will be a virgin when I marry."

"Oh God!" shouted Sam, bursting from the couch and pacing about the room waving his arms wildly. "This is what America does to her young idealists!"

"I'm sorry, Sam, that you had to find out how ugly I am. I couldn't help it. When I moved in here I was determined to put my father out of my mind. But it is almost as if putting him out of my mind created a big blank that had to be filled. And you filled it. I found myself

thinking of you, even telling Maybelle about you. So much that it frightened me. I stayed away from you. Until yesterday.

"But now that will be over. You're disgusted with me, and I'm disgusted with myself. Now I can be good. I'll get rid of the evil Rachel if I have to kill myself!"

Sam was overwrought to the point of collapse. He must have been so intent upon what he wanted to say that he didn't realize what he was doing. He stumbled to his knees beside her and took her hand. "Oh, Rachel. There's one thing you are so very wrong about. I'm not disgusted with you. I think . . . I think I'm in love with you."

Wide-eyed, she jerked her hand away. "No, no! You can't be in love with me. You're not supposed to be." She wandered about the whole apartment, picking things up and putting them down in agitated distraction while Sam followed, insisting that he did love her. Finally she sent him away, saying that she was exhausted and couldn't talk about it anymore. She wouldn't even kiss him goodnight. It was a shattered Sam Patience who came home to interrupt Gene and Maybelle.

And that was just the beginning of the shatterings he was to suffer before he finally quit school late spring term. Not only did Rachel shatter him time and again, even philosophy broke his heart. In his spring term course in Contemporary Ethics he discovered logical positivism and linguistic analysis.

"There isn't any ethics in philosophy any more," he told Gene and Maybelle when they huddled around the kitchen table in the Wilfred Avenue house to hear why he had withdrawn from school. "There is only meta-ethics!"

"Meta-ethics?"

"Philosophers are above ethics now. An ethical judgment is something that only an idiot like a preacher or a scoutmaster would make. What philosophers do is study the linguistic form of ethical statements."

"Why?"

"Because ethical judgments are not empirically verifiable. If you can't prove something by empirical methods, they don't think it makes any sense to try to reason about it."

Sam got lots of sympathy over being jilted by philosophy. Gene thought he should change his major to political science ("I'd have to take statistics," groaned Sam), Maybelle was sure she could get him into the Oriental Studies program ("And have to learn Chinese?"), and Ahab sent him a gift-wrapped copy of Moby Dick ("Wonderful, I'll do a Ph.D. dissertation on Melville's rhetorical devices"). It was a dead end. He quit school. He quit everything except working just enough at KRST to feed himself and pay rent.

While he was still in school Sam received little sympathy but lots of advice concerning Rachel. Things like, "For Christ's sake, when are you going to tell that miserable little bitch to go fuck herself!" Sam was willing to accept all kinds of sympathy, but he wasn't taking any advice.

For sometime after the dramatic evening of her confession Rachel was cool toward him. He was not welcome in her apartment and she avoided him at school. He often spent as much as an hour at a time searching for her in remote regions of the Portland State buildings only to be told when he found her that she was too busy studying to talk to him.

One night he took Maybelle's keys away from her and marched into Rachel's apartment unannounced. "I won't let you run away from me any longer," he told her. And so they discussed the situation for some time and Sam ended up protesting his love again. He even went so far against his principles as to offer to marry her. She was shaken by his proposal, but insisted that they were too different to be able to get along and that she was going to marry Ted sometime in the distant future when they had both finished college.

A short time later Rachel and Maybelle got their eviction notice because of the incident between Gene and Wang. As a result Rachel had to face for the first time the full extent of Maybelle's corruption and decided that living in an apartment was as much a threat to her virtue as living with her father. A partially true and partially concocted account of her problems to Ted's sympathetic and sanctimonious parents got her an invitation to occupy the guest room in their home.

After this move had been made Sam sought her out at school again and insisted that she listen because he had an apology to make. He said he had forgotten how much younger she was than him and how much emotional trouble the circumstances of her life had given her. He promised that he would not try again to persuade her to love him. "Let's just be friends, The way we were before all this happened."

That worked for a while. Then on the first really warm, sunny day of spring quarter Sam talked her into going for a walk up to Wilfred Avenue to see "this great old house Maybell, Gene, and I are living in." He mixed her a mild screwdriver which she refused at first and then sipped as Sam extolled the virtues of Gene and Maybelle's situation as unmarried

cohabitants. He slipped from that to a very soft-sell suggestion that she would be welcome to join their "Great Commune" any time she wished.

To his surprise she admitted that the place appealed to her. It reminded her somewhat of her mother's house, although it was neater and she also had the feeling that the people here loved each other and were good to each other. The idea of a boy and girl living together without being married seemed to her very avant-garde and adventurous. But it would never do for her, of course, and in the last analysis, she thought it was wrong. She said this regretfully as she was getting up to go.

Sam turned her around as she started to the door, pulled her gently into his arms, and kissed her.

"Oh that business with the tongues does excite me," she said.

"One of these days you are going to have to admit that what you call the 'good Rachel' and the 'evil Rachel' are really the same girl. The evil Rachel really isn't evil, you know. She's just part of a wonderful, normal girl and the so-called good Rachel is going to have to acknowledge her just claims."

Rachel started to argue and he kissed her again.

"I really think that you and I could work something out, Rachel."

She admitted he might be right. She promised to think about it. "But I must go back to school now. Ted's father will be coming to pick me up."

He walked back with her. The spring air and the vodka. He became more and more agitated as they neared the school. "You accuse me of being a 'logician,'" he said suddenly, "but sometimes you can be so terribly cool and cautious about things. 'I'll think about it,' you say! Oh God,

Rachel, it just tears me up inside to know how little my kisses mean to you when your tiniest peck means so much to me!"

This outburst obviously upset her and she told him not to talk that way. In front of the school she asked him to go because she didn't want Ted's father to see her with him. His clumsy attempt to kiss her again was firmly rebuffed. To the amusement of several passers-by he shouted, "Oh Rachel, Rachel! You're destroying me!"

It took several weeks and another pledge to be "just friends" to get her to talk to him again. The day before he quit school he tried pleading once more and she said that although she had genuine affection for him, they would have to stop seeing each other altogether. "I don't like what this has been doing to you," she said. "I seem to destroy all the strength and brilliance you had when we first met."

That summer was difficult for the inhabitants of Wilfred Avenue. Six incompletes stood between Gene and a BA. He planned to work a year to save money before going on to graduate school, but he wanted to get the incompletes done right away. He did a lot of preparatory reading, but didn't write a word.

Maybelle also planned to work for a year to save money. She had had a terrible row with her parents because they wanted her to live at home. If she wouldn't live at home where they could keep an eye on her, they would not help pay for her education anymore. They didn't approve of her academic ambitions anyway. What business did a girl have wanting to be a college professor?

Ahab moved a cot into the upstairs and stayed for a month. He had taken a job distributing magazines to supermarkets and drug stores.

He felt that he was too old to be living with his mother any longer. He had to move back, though, after he was fired. There was a mimeographed literary magazine, full of unwholesome poetry, that kept appearing for sale in places where it wasn't appreciated. And there was the business about the centerfold photographs that were missing from Playboy and mysteriously present in Boy's Life and Today's Health. The purchasers of Playboy were the ones who complained.

Sam had no plans for the future at all. He was engaged in the active practice of what he called "utter, complete, and total nihilism." He wasn't pleasant to have around. "The only reason I don't commit suicide," he explained, "is that I get so much sadistic pleasure out of watching silly people knock themselves out for stupid reasons." Some of the time he was very studious. He was well-acquainted with all the unfavorable studies of Moby Dick. He was developing a theory about the inherent inferiority of orientals and the vacuity of their culture. He even accumulated considerable evidence that Gene's favorite for the Democratic presidential nomination was a sell-out to big business.

A party was going on the night Rachel called. Sam was drunk and arguing loudly with Gene and Ahab in spite of the full-volume attempts of Maude's portable phonograph to drown him out. When Maybelle told him who was asking for him on the phone, he staggered to his feet and was on his way to take the call when he realized that everyone in the room had stopped whatever they were doing or saying and were looking at him in silent disapproval. "Oh hell, Maybelle, you tell her. Tell her to go fuck herself."

Rachel must have been able to hear the roar of approval that shook the old house to its termite-troubled foundation. Even Rachel's former

roommate, Maybelle, had to restrain herself in order to change Sam's words to a tactful paraphrase.

The party became a celebration of Sam's recovery from sentimentality. Maybelle and Wilson invented variations on their favorite dance, Maude wanted to get a game of strip poker going, and Gene and Ahab started a list of chicks who they thought might be an easy fuck for Sam. His whole problem, they thought, was that he had been celibate too long.

People from all over the Portland State area drifted in and the place was jammed. Sam had long since crawled up the stairs and gone to bed when the party finally broke up. Gene and Wilson cleared the place with drunken threats after Maude came screaming hysterically out of the kitchen in her underwear. She had been playing cards with three guys and a girl, none of which she had ever seen before. She had just lost a two-garment hand and two garments were all she had left. She tried to declare the game finished. When the rest of the players demanded payment, she became hysterical. The three guys, who had been explaining the rules of poker as they went along, only had to put on their shoes before going out the back door. Even when the place was almost empty there was still that other girl sitting there naked, wondering what all the commotion was about. Ahab took her home.

In the midst of the exodus, Gene had fallen asleep on the davenport and Maybelle was trying to wake him when Rachel walked in carrying a suitcase. Her face was white, but there was icy control in her voice. "Is he up there?" she asked, nodding at the stairs. "Is he alone?"

Sam was still drunk, but he sat up in bed, looking very somber and nodding occasionally as she talked. She sat on her suitcase just in-

side the door and spoke quietly. "Ted and I started necking more heavily when I was living at his house and we were together all the time instead of just on Sundays. At night I would sneak into his room. His parents caught us and I didn't have any clothes on. Ted was awful. He claimed it was all my idea. They made me move out and I had to move back in with my father. He kept inventing new and more horrible ways to 'tickle.' Tonight I just packed a bag and left. I never want to see any of them again. I know you couldn't possibly love me any more, Sam, but if you'll let me stay here, I'll get a job at the hospital and pay my way. You can have me when you want me and I won't be any trouble. If you want to bring other girls here, I'll sleep downstairs on the couch. Please, Sam, I don't know who else to go to."

"Oh God, yes. Sure, Rachel. Yes. Sure." He just sat there, blinking his eyes and mumbling assent.

She undressed, folded her clothes neatly on the dresser, and got into bed. "Teach me how to make love the right way," she said. "I don't want to be perverted any more."

At eleven o'clock on Wednesday morning Sam was still in bed. Only the top of his head was visible between the end of the blanket and the pillow. His mind moved wildly over a befogged landscape of dream and memory. His body was wrapped up tightly as if he were about to spring out of bed and begin running. Which he did when the phone rang.

He pushed and clawed the door of the upstairs room open, started sprinting down the stairs, tripped over something he couldn't see because he hadn't put on his glasses, grabbed the railing, lurched around full circle, and bumbled blindly down the rest of the stairs on sheer momentum.

The phone was just beginning to ring a second time when his frantically groping arm hit the stand and spilled the phone onto the floor. The receiver skittered away to the full length of its cord. Sam sprawled forward on his belly to retrieve it and clutch it to his face. "Hello," he gasped.

"Mr. Samuel Patience, please. An urgent call." A male voice. Tense.

"Yes . . . yes! Speaking."

The words from the other end were clipped, leaving a tight fraction of silence between them. "Sam. An old friend of yours. From school. Robert Louis Holmes. Remember?"

"Ahab, for chrissake."

"Thank God you remember. Love to talk over old times, Sam, but no time for that now. I'm in the most deperate situation of my career."

"What in the hell are you talking about?"

"Sam. Don't know if you are aware of this. For several months I've been retained exclusively by the credit department of Wardbuck Department store. A plainclothes investigator. What's known in the trade as a private wallet."

"A private wallet? Oh Jesus." Sam rolled over and stared myopically in the direction of the ceiling.

"That's right. And I don't mind saying that I pride myself on being known in the circles of the profession as Ahab the Undaunted. He may be a hulking, heartless, souless brute, they say, but he's never been daunted. He always gets his deadbeat. When there's a really tough case, I'm the man they call."

"I'm pretty impressed."

"Of course. But enough of that. I'm in a desperate situation. Hard as it may be to believe, I'm at my wit's end."

"I believe."

"There's one last hope. I need a specialist. You're the only man who can help me."

"No kidding."

"According to my personal file on you, you are a native of the suburban area known as Westfir."

"Yes but that was when I was a boy. It's been days since I've been back to that old place."

"Nevertheless I have confidence in your keen memory. As I say, I'm desperate. You've got to help me. I'll be there in ten minutes to pick you up."

Sam explained that he couldn't possibly go anywhere because he had a solemn obligation to the history of western philosophy which must be kept and on top of that he expected an important phone call momentarily. He was piqued when he discovered he was making excuses to a dead connection.

Ahab didn't come to the door. He just sat in the battered Volkswagen, his long frame hunkered over the wheel, and honked the horn. And honked.. By the time Sam came out, there were three large mongrels slinking circles around the car, answering each shallow beep with huge barks. Ahab was grinning demonically and shouting defiance at the beasts through rolled-up windows.

In spite of the bright midday sun Ahab wore a raincoat with the collar turned up. He even had a stylish narrow-brimmed felt hat tight over his forehead. There was a drip of sweat on his nose.

The engine was still running and when Sam got in Ahab revved it to a mighty whine. But before engaging the gears, he said, "Listen, Sam, it wouldn't be fair to take you along on this caper without warning you. The man we are hunting is probably armed with a ten horsepower Tiny Tiller and, God knows, he is considered dangerous."

"I'll watch my step. What's a Tiny Tiller, fer chrissake?"

Ahab put the car in gear and whirled down the Wilfred Avenue hill, fearlessly oblivious of the intersection. "A Tiny Tiller looks like a small, harmless tractor, but when its various attachments are utilized to maximum capacity it is capable of mowing grass or plowing, harrowing, and raking areas up to two acres in size."

"The ultimate weapon."

"I don't want to frighten you, but all they found of the last agent who was on this case was one toe. And even it was so mutilated it would have broken your heart. You see, the Tiny Tiller was intended only for use by friendly powers. The boys upstairs are still conducting the investigation into how it fell into the hands of Richard Kripe."

"So that's the scoundrel we're after. Kripe."

"Alias Kripe the cripple. He's a Korean War vet. Twisted in body and mind by a fierce engagement in a Hong Kong brothel. He originally got ahold of the Tiny Tiller while living in Springdale, a rural community fifty miles south of Portland. The dastard claimed he wanted to start a little vegetable garden. Then, of course, he disappeared into thin air,

having taken advantage of Wardbuck's beneficent no-down payment plan. The last agent on the case, before his grotesque demise, traced Kripe to an address in Westfir."

"Why didn't you clap chains on the inhuman fink this morning?"

"Sam, the size of this thing will make you shudder. Kripe the Crip has bought off every gas station attendant in Westfir. He has agents in the county map-making department. He may even have had thirty-seven blocks of a street so cleverly camouflaged that they seem not to exist. The address we have for Kripe--from infallible sources, I must point out--is 6909 Beulah Vista Drive. However, Beulah Vista Drive terminates at a small horseradish plant numbered 3229. The service station attendants claim they never heard of any other Beulah Vista Drive. The county map does not show any other Beulah Vista Drive. It's up to you, Sam. If you, with your intimate knowledge of the labyrinthine tangles of Westfir ways and byways, can't find 6909, then I'm daunted as all hell."

"Relax. You have come to the right man."

"You mean you can help?" Ahab ~~was~~ doing seventy miles an hour out the westbound freeway and had just pulled around a truck and trailer, but he took one hand from the wheel to grip Sam's arm, and his lean face turned away from the road to drool mock emotion at his passenger. "Gee, what can I say, Sam? Except . . . well . . . thanks." By that time the little car was shimmying wildly. Ahab wrestled it back under some semblance of control while screaming about "motherfucking faulty tie-rods" and the "planned obsolescence of all modern machinery except goddamn Wardbuck Tiny Tillers, which run forever. All working parts made of goddamn diamond."

Sam directed Ahab off the freeway at the Westfir exit and through the city center on the four-lane highway which became a two-lane rural road at the western city limits.

"This is called Dolson road," instructed Sam. "There, five blocks to the north is your horseradish plant where Beulah Vista ends. Keep going out this road until you pass my old man's dog farm, then take a right at the next road, a new road called Rimrock Drive."

"Okay, Sam baby, you take care of the navigation, you wily bastard. When we get there old Ahab will handle the rough stuff with Kripe. I'll use the standard approach. A knee in the nuts and an elbow in the teeth. Get 'em down and bleeding so they know who's boss. Then they pay up, by God."

There was no one visible to wave at when they went by the dog farm. Which was just as well. Sam was overdue for a visit. In recent months he and his parents had been on terms of mutually uncomfortable civility. Every few weeks Sam would spend an evening there. After his father had given a detailed analysis of his current crop of dogs, his mother would serve everything in the freezer for a good old home cooked meal. And if he was lucky he could get out before they started asking what his plans for the future were. Things got pretty sticky then. His mother had always enjoyed being a minister's wife and although she was adamantly loyal to her husband's decision, she still had the outlandish hope that her son would provide the family with a new man of the cloth.

There were a few recently built ranch style homes along Rimrock Drive, but no connecting streets to measure blocks by. Nevertheless, approximately five blocks north of Dolson, on the left hand side, was

BEULAH VISTA TRAILER VILLAGE. "MODERN MOBILE HOME LIVING IN GRACIOUS RURAL SURROUNDINGS. ONLY 20 MIN FROM DOWNTOWN PORTLAND," declared the signboard that was next to the arch of rough-hewn logs under which they entered Beulah Vista Drive, with its rows of sapling trees and cement curbed stalls for house trailers.

This arcadian rebirth of the city's Beulah Vista Drive ended in a grove of trees that formed the boundary of the trailer court. Construction of the "village" was still going on at the far end. There must have been completed accommodations for fifty trailers, but only six were present. The second one on the left was numbered 6909.

"Oh the devious mind of the modern lawbreaker," breathed an awed Ahab. "It is absolutely the perfect hideout." He pulled up beside the gleaming new trailer and lit a cigarette with a hand that trembled. "I don't expect this one to give himself up without a fight, Sam. You stay in the car where you won't get hurt. I'll leave the keys in the ignition. If he tries to make a break for it out the back, you chase him. But in the car! You don't want to get caught on foot by a man with a Tiny Tiller."

Ahab put out his smoke, picked up his clipboard, and slipped from the car with the stiff nonchalance of a novice parachutist making his first jump. He tiptoes to the trailer door, which was open, and after a neck-stretching peek inside, rapped on the screen door tentatively, to see if it would explode.

Instead, it opened and an apparition appeared. She had a corrugated roof of what looked like stainless steel curlers under which a raw-boned jaw jutted crookedly. Long puffy white arms surrounded a jersey-clad, too short, curiously gaunt, virtually breastless trunk from which

huge hips ballooned to fill the doorway. Green slacks bagged the bulbous knobs of fat as far as her knees where roman candle bursts of varicose veins took over the job of holding things together until they folded into a set of fluffy pink house slippers.

"What the hell do you want?" Her voice was whiskey forced through gravel.

"Uh . . . Mrs. Kripe?"

"So what?"

"Well, I was . . . uh . . . just wondering if . . . uh . . . Mr. Kripe is at home."

"You know God damn well he isn't home and if that triple-titted pissant has sent you around here to try to sell me on some bleeding new gadget he wants to buy, I'm going to play marbles with his warty little balls when he does get home!"

"Uh, no, no, Mrs. Kripe, I'm not here to uh sell anything. My name is uh Robert Louis Holmes, and I'm from the uh credit department at Wardbuck and Company . . ."

"So what?"

"Well uh Mrs. Kripe, I wanted to ask about the uh Tiny Tiller that Mr. uh Kripe made arrangements to buy from our branch in uh Springdale."

"Ask what about it, for Jesus sake?"

"Well uh do you still have it, Mrs. Kripe?"

"Are you tweaking my fanny or what? Look around you! Where in the shrieking red earth would we keep the thing? What would we do with it?"

Ahab obediently turned his head this way and that and, indeed, did not see any Tiny Tillers, nor any place one might be kept or used.

"Well uh do you know where it uh is? I mean, we haven't received any uh payments and the uh Tiny Tiller has not been returned, so I was uh wondering . . ."

"Look, I went through all this with your simple-ass representative in Springdale. Fly-face brought the God damn thing home one night, I ran it around the lottwice, it wasn't worth a purple fart, so I made him take it back. Your people got things all snagged, came around saying it wasn't returned, and we turned it over to our lawyer in Springdale. It should have been all settled by now. If you have any more God damn questions, talk to our pussy-eating lawyer." She started to turn away.

"Well uh Mrs. Kripe, could you tell us the uh name of your lawyer? We haven't uh heard anything from him."

"I don't know his name. Old bleeding piles was supposed to take care of that. Call your rabbity-ass Springdale office. They have it all settled."

"Yes, m'am, I'll do that. But just in case, would you have uh Mr. Kripe call our credit office so we could get the lawyer's name? I certainly would uh appreciate it, Mrs. Kripe."

Ahab gave her his best little friendly smile and she extended a jiggly arm to ruffle his hair. "You bet, Sweetie, I'll be sure to tell him." Snap! the screen door shut and she disappeared into her gracious mobile home.

"Christ almighty," said Sam when Ahab got back in the car.

"Yeah," said Ahab, "wasn't she magnificent?" He sat there for a moment shaking his head and then began writing on his clipboard.

"She was something anyway. Is Wardbuck so fouled-up they don't know what the office in Springdale settles or doesn't settle?"

"Wardbuck is mightily befouled, but not in this case. The Kripes don't have a lawyer in Springdale and they never returned the Tiny Tiller. That fantastic woman was lying in her teeth."

"But you were so polite!"

"Sam, I didn't have the heart to crack down a lady like her. Did you hear her language? Magnificent! Why, man, in another time and place that woman would have been . . . well, hell, goddamn Emily Dickinson or somebody."

"Oh Christ. What do you tell the credit office after a fiasco like that?"

Ahab went back to writing. "Tell 'em: 'Mrs. Kripe says lawyer in Springdale is handling case. Mr. Kripe will call to give lawyer's name.'"

"What happens then?"

"He won't call and the next month they'll send me or someone else back out here. Kripe will probably have moved again and it'll all go back to the office for more tracing." Ahab took off his hat, threw it on the back seat, and unbuttoned his coat. "Holy screeching bloody hell it's hot!"

"Very uh good, Mrs. uh Kripe, but you see I'm ahab the uh Undaunted and I . . ."

"Okay, Sam, lay off will you? I mean, she was a magnificent chick."

On Westfir's main drag, between a new car dealership and a laundromat, there was a low-slung building with a facade of used brick and a neon that proclaimed it to be YE OLDE BAR-BE-QUE PITTE: HOME OF THE FAMOUS \$1.09 SIRLOIN. Sam hadn't had any breakfast and Ahab was too exhausted to go on searching for delinquent debtors without midday sustenance.

The dining room was large, open, and full of late-lunching businessmen and shoppers. There were no booths, only tables crowded together to make maximum use of the available space. Sam and Ahab stood in line for a short time before they could leave their orders with the girl beside the grill. As they went by, the cook was counting the number of sputtering hamburger patties before him, pointing a spatula at each one and mouthing the numbers. When Sam hailed him by name he looked up, returned a nod and a harried grin. That made him lose his count and he went back to the beginning, pointing and moving his mouth.

"Got sixteen," they heard him say as they went away to find a table with coffee, pie, and numbered tags on their trays.

"You should have nineteen," said the girl taking orders.

They found a table in the middle of the room that was just being unloaded of dirty dishes by a homely girl with strands of hair dangling in her face and a drooping yellow-brown coffee stain down the back of her starched white uniform. Dishes chattered in a back room, voices garbled up from all around them, piano music tinkled down from the ceiling and then was interrupted by the jarringly harsh and loud voice of the order girl calling into a microphone, "Number thirty-seven. Order number thirty-seven."

"You sure the food in this snake pit is good?" asked Ahab.

"That's what old Wayne, the cook there, told me when I ran into him downtown one day. I went to high school with him. He was one of those car nuts. The first guy in our class to own his own car, but hardly ever drove it. The engine was always in pieces all over his old man's garage while he was bumming rides out to the stock car speedway."

"Number thirty-eight. Order number thirty-eight."

"He learned cooking in the army. Under protest. He had been promised a mechanic's school. He yelled like hell about the cooking. Wrote his congressman even. They discovered it was a one-digit error by a computer that made him a cook, so he was jerked out of that school three-fourths of the way through and sent clear across the country to a mechanic's school."

"Number thirty-nine. Order number thirty-nine." Ahab hunched his shoulders as if he were trying to cover his ears with them.

"When he got out he started racing stock cars. He was a happy man. Worked in a garage all day and built and raced cars all night. Then he knocked-up a chick he met around the speedway. Should have been a perfect marriage except that after she had the kid she didn't want him to race anymore. She didn't even like him messing around with dirty old cars. Kept him away from her too much. He told her to go to hell and she cut him off--not only from herself but from the chicks around the speedway, since they were all her buddies and since they were the only kind he had the social grace to get along with. Drove him nuts. They battled over it for a couple of years, but she must have won. Now the only driving he does is a six-cylinder Rambler back and forth to work, and he is cooking for a living."

"Number forty. Order number forty."

"God! what a horrible story," spat Ahab. "He should have beat the bitchery out of her with a good old cat-'o-nine-tails. He should have . . ."

"Number forty-one. Order number forty-one."

"Any minute now I'm going to give you a demonstration of what I would have done to her. I'll demonstrate on that Gorgon-headed twat who keeps screaming over the God damned loudspeaker!"

"The wild thing about it is that Wayne claims he's happy. He had this strained, nervous look on his face, with a twitch in his eyelid, but he says to me, 'Sam, there's nothing like a family to settle a man down. Racing's all right when you're a kid but you got to be responsible when you get older. Bought me a little home,' he says, 'and I'm on salary and percentage at the restaurant.' He was walking all around me on the street corner while he said this. Made me dizzy to follow him. Then all of a sudden he stopped and he says, 'One of these days, though, my kid'll be ready for a car and I'm gonna build him the hottest thing that ever rolled.' Old Wayne . . ."

"Number forty-two. Order number forty-two."

"That's us," yelped Ahab, leaping up, almost overturning their table, and stopping conversations around them. "Oh thank the Great Who-ever. That's finally us!" He stomped to the grill, jerked the hamburger from the order girl's hands while glowering at her from under furrowed brows, bumped into people on the way to the relish table, lifted the top bun of his burger, shot catsup on it from a squeeze bottle, and barged back to sit down. Sam followed along behind him, trying to look less conspicuous.

As he sat down Sam said, "I'll be damned." His eyes were wide. "It must be true then. Did you see those two guys at the relish table when we were there?"

"What relish table?" Ahab's mouth was full of hamburger.

"That fat bald-headed one and the little one with curly hair in the blue blazer with white-buck loafers. They're sitting over there to your left. The fat one is George Block. He has the largest real estate agency in the county and the little one is Mr. Pierre who used to be drama coach when I was in high school. Someone told me he was selling real estate and I didn't believe it. I thought he would be in jail.

"He was a big deal when he came to Westfir High. He'd been in New York. Had a part in a Broadway play once. He was twenty-six when he came to Westfir and looked like he was twenty. He already had seven kids. He was Catholic. Couldn't get work as an actor regularly enough to support them so he had to go to work as a teacher. A very morose and intense little guy. All the girls thought he was 'just the neatest.'

"According to the story I heard, a couple of years after I graduated three of his drama students--not one, but three!--turned up pregnant. All claimed it was him. His wife had nine kids by then. She didn't divorce him because they were Catholic. The school fired him, but they couldn't put him in jail for statutory because there were all those kids, legitimate and illegitimate, to support. So he started selling real estate. That's the story I heard, but I didn't believe it till now."

Ahab had finished his sandwich and was attacking the pie. "Tell me, Grace, when is your novel about Westfir coming out?"

"Okay, I'll shut up. I'm sorry. It's just that this place is full of wild people."

They concentrated on eating. By now the room seemed to extend several miles in all directions. Voices mumbling, a whirr of air conditioning, dishes, pianos, and "Number fifty. Order number fifty." Something high school age fluttered by to fill their coffee cups: tight jersey and knee-length slacks both amply filled, peroxide blond, false eyelashes, "Here's a bitsy warm-up for you!"

"Oh my God," said Sam. He had been looking toward the door, chewing pie. Now his face turned the other way and a hand was up beside it. "See that woman who just came in with three kids? That is Ginny. By God, Ginny! The only girl in four years of high school I ever jilted. She had a crush on me, if you can believe that. There were lots of girls I had crushes on . . ."

"Of course," mumbled Ahab.

". . . but she's the only one who ever had a crush on me before I even noticed her. Went out with her a couple of times. All very awkward. Couldn't get her to talk, felt like I hardly knew her. All she wanted to do was neck. Then one day there were these two guys who had lockers around the corner from me. I overheard them. Real tough guys. Carried switchblades. The kind who went out behind the bus barn at noon to smoke and spit. One of them says, 'I thought you were putting the make on Ginny.' 'No deal,' says the other, 'she's all hot for that little prick, Patience, the preacher's son.' The first guy says, 'Shit, what a waste. It won't last long. That chick is looking for someone to put the meat in 'er.' 'Right,' says the other guy."

"And so, finally getting wise, you went out that night and fucked her purple?" interrupted Ahab.

"No . . . ," said Sam.

"I didn't think so," said Ahab.

"No, I had a really psychotic response. From then on I avoided her like the plague. I didn't even know why, but I would turn around and start running if I just saw her."

"Sam, you're a sweet guy and all, but when it comes to women, you do the God damndest things . . ."

"I know," said Sam. "But the next year she and one of the guys I overheard dropped out of school and got married. Those are his kids."

They had finished eating and Sam brought out cigarettes for both. He was starting to light a match when their eyes met.

"Man, let's get out of here."

"Yeah," said Sam. "I think I've had a belly-full of suburbia for today myself."

As usual when Sam arrived there was no one left at KRST except Winnie Ashton, But there was a note in his box from Bill Edwin:

Sam--called Bill Velteck about your overcharge. He traced it down. Case of overexuberance by a new salesman who hadn't made much that week. Won't happen again. Policy is not to charge old men and working girls more than 300 for their ignorance. Velteck no fly-by-nighter. Watches his rep.

He appreciates you giving the word and so do I--Bill.

Sam wadded up the note and threw it into Edwin's empty office.

"So what the hell?" he said aloud. "You want me to tell Agnes that?"

Later he went back, pick up the wad of paper, and put it in the announcer's booth waste paper basket.

VII: Thursday

Possess. Rachel liked that word and she liked the idea she associated with it and she liked the act she associated with it. When she and Sam talked about the act of love, that's the point of view she took toward it; when they made love, Sam "possessed her" and she "gave" herself to him. It was not that she was simply submissive, passive. She was plenty active. She just liked to think of it and experience it as being "possessed."

"All day long, in everything I do, I suppose I am more aggressive than most women," she said one Sunday afternoon in bed, after she had been possessed, after she had given herself. "After all the troubles I've been through, after all the ideals or things I have thought were ideals that have fallen in on me, I still have one thing left. I still have nursing. As a nurse I can relieve pain, I can help heal the sick. I can help people who are down get back on their feet. And in all the confusion I feel anymore about what's good and what's bad, I have no doubt that helping sick people is good.

"So that's why I am aggressive. Is that unladylike? I want to be in a position where I can do something I know is good. I can't help thinking of myself in terms of what I am now and what I want to be. I can't get rid of the awareness of not yet being what I want to be.

"And all the time I feel like there are so many people who will prevent me from becoming what I want to be if I let them. My mother and father, they would prevent me if I let them keep too close a grip on my

affections. The professors at school will fail me if I don't keep up on my studies. At the store people will cheat me out of my money if I don't watch out. Even crossing the street they'll run over me if I let down my guard for just a moment. All day long I feel like I not only have to struggle in order to move ahead, but I have to keep fending off things--people, mostly--or they will knock me backwards.

"You know it's funny, but at night when I'm putting in my diaphragm I always think to myself, 'What a relief, that's the last thing you will have to do today to protect yourself. All that keeping up your guard is over for today!'

"Then I come to bed and you are there and you are good to me and don't want to prevent me from getting to my goal. I know I'm safe with you and so I don't have to keep myself away from you. The part of me that is so dangerous all the rest of the time, the part that wants to quit, to give up, to let people and things just do to me whatever they want to do--I can let it out then. I can be naked in front of you. I can let you touch me and kiss me all over. And oh Sam, you could never know what it's like to a woman to spread her legs! To let you do whatever you want with the most private parts of me. To let you take me! Do it to me! Possess me!" What she said after that was pretty incoherent because both of them had been re-stimulated by her speech and Sam had taken her last exclamations rather literally.

Sam's alarm went off at 8 A.M. on Thursday of the week after Rachel left. He sat up immediately, as he always did when alarms went off, shot out a hand to the button on top of the clock which would still the ringing for another fifteen minutes, then sank back into the bed.

The night before, Gene and Maybelle had chided him into setting it that early. Chided him into a resolution to get up at "a decent hour," to shake off the tension that had been sitting on him during the day, weighing him down, forcing him into a tight ball of immobile longing. "Don't worry so, Sammy," Maybelle had cooed in her most motherly fashion. "There must be a good reason why Rachel hasn't called. In all this wide blue earth there has never been a more coolly competent young lady when she's in a tight spot--("The hell you say," interjected Sam)--and she is absolutely devoted to you. She'll contact you, she'll be back, and you'll be ashamed of yourself for going all to pieces." "So who's in pieces, fer chrissake. You brought the subject up, I didn't. I'm all right. I'm not worrying." "Then how come you sleep three-fourths of the day and wander around like a zombie the rest of the time?" "Oh fer chrissake, I'll get up tomorrow, I'll get up, if it's such a big deal." "Who made the big deal over spending all his free time reviewing philosophy this summer?" And so he had set the alarm for 8 o'clock.

Having "a thing to do in life." That was supremely important, Rachel had decided not long after she and Sam started living together. He didn't say he disagreed with her. In fact, he didn't want to talk about it at all. She didn't badger him about it, but it did become something of a sore point between them as she began to feel guilty because all he did was work to support her schooling. "I don't mind, I tell you. There are some parts of the radio job that make me sick, but I'm a ham. I like being on the air." "But you don't want to do that forever?" "No, but there isn't anything else I want to do right now. Nothing I want to go to school for, for instance. And there is something you want to go

for, so I'm happy to be able to help." Nevertheless, she became more and more concerned over his apparent lack of any real "thing to do in the world."

"I do have a thing to do," he protested when she brought it up on one of those luxurious afternoons in bed they allowed themselves on weekends. "I have just finished doing the thing that is supremely important to me in life and if you'll give me a couple of minutes to recuperate, I just might do it again." He nibbled on her earlobe.

"Now, Sam, be serious. I know that you have much grander ambitions than making love to me and being a radio announcer on a fundamentalist radio station. You may be confused and undecided about your thing to do in the world, but your confusion and all the soul-searching and anguish you've been through in recent years is all the more proof of the enormous sensitivity and intelligence that will allow you to accomplish truly great things once you get yourself focused on something. I'm sure of it!

"I remember another afternoon like this one, I think it was the last really hot Saturday afternoon last fall right before school started. You had come home from work and we had been in bed together all afternoon. We had already done it several times and we were doing it again. Instead of being intensely excited, I was in some kind of advance euphoric state. I was vaguely aware of my body enjoying it, but I had that feeling, you know, when your mind or soul or something seems to be separated from your body. As if it were somewhere across the room, watching.

"It wasn't panic or disgust or anything. It was a kind of detachment. I was aware of us on the bed doing a . . . well, very strange,

clumsy thing. Our bodies were all gooey with sweat and each other's fluids. And I was aware of you as . . . as . . . now don't take this the wrong way, Sam, but I was aware of you as a . . . a bottom. Just a big white bottom flopping up and down on top of me. I wasn't repulsed really, I just had a detached feeling of it all being strange or odd. I wondered who or what the person this bottom belonged to really was and why I was letting what was being done to me be done.

"Then it was all wonderful again. I was back inside myself and I was excited and I was about ready to . . . to be through for that time, and I knew what it was all about. That's when I realized that I was being possessed. And I had a strange, warm, wonderful, magnificent feeling of absolute assurance that what was possessing me, what I was giving up to, was not just a flopping white bottom but a great man. I knew deep inside me that even if we only lived together a while, even if we were never married, I would always be able to know with pride that I had been honored, not defiled, by being possessed by someone of great worth, someone the whole world would one day acknowledge as a brilliant, sensitive, wonderful human being.

"So I understand that your sensitivity and suffering makes you feel uncertain about your thing to do in the world, Sam. That it makes you uncomfortable to think about it now. But I also know absolutely that you will find it soon."

Sam was greatly sobered by her speech. He gripped her hand and stared somberly into space. "I guess you are right," he said. "Before you came to live with me I was disgusted with everything. I think I must have been afraid that I was nothing but a great white bottom, flopping up

and down on nothing. Now the world doesn't seem so empty and I don't have the feeling of being utterly insignificant and useless anymore."

When the alarm went off the second time Sam flinched, but this time he didn't sit up. With his head still buried face down in the pillow he groped for the clock, this time finding the button on the back that would silence the alarm permanently. His face and rigid limbs mashed into the bed as if trying to escape the sunlight that demanded its way into the room in spite of the shade drawn to block it.

"You're right. I still don't know which way to turn. I don't quite see how I can relate to the world, find some meaning in it, make some difference. But I know through you that I must be important, I must be somebody, or I wouldn't have you. Christ! Yesterday when I brought your lunch down to school. I was sitting in the cafeteria waiting for you and there you were coming toward me from across the room and I watched all the guys looking you over as you went by. There was this one great big son of a bitch especially. Had on a shirt that said "Property of the Portland State Athletic Department." He was watching you with his eyes all slitted and evil and I said to myself, 'Go ahead, you bastard, just try to imagine what she looked like with her clothes off. Go ahead and try to imagine what it would be like to go to bed with her. I don't care because all you can do is imagine and I know, fella. I know and you never will. She'll take off her clothes for me anytime I want. I know what every part of her looks like and feels like. Look all you like and try to imagine, but I know the little noise she makes and the way she squirms when I go inside her. So to hell with you, hotshot! Your big hairy dick may be the sensation of the shower room, but I'm the one

that beautiful chick spreads her legs for and that makes me a better man than you any day, you pitiful bastard!"

They were both silent for a while. Her hand was limp in his. He put his arm around her and pulled her toward him. "You really do mean so very much to me, Rachel. If I ever amount to anything, it will be because of you. I can't get along without you."

"I'm glad you're proud of me," she said, unenthusiastically. And then, "Sam, we better get up now. I have to help Maybelle with supper and I have to cover about three chapters of biology tonight."

Sam rolled over in the bed, still keeping his eyes tightly shut against the sunlight. A sudden, fierce kick with both feet sent the covers off him and onto the floor at the end of the bed. "Horseshit!" he said aloud to the sunlight. He threw himself out of bed and pulled some clothes on, rapidly, desperately. "You!" he howled, shaking his fist at the silent telephone as he plunged down the stairs. "What are you doing to me?"

In the bathroom he splashed cold water on his face. In the kitchen he banged the pot that sloshed with Gene and Maybelle's left-over breakfast coffee onto a burner and turned on the heat full-blast. He jerked a bowl from the cupboard, plopped it onto the table, and shook cornflakes into it until it overflowed.

Before he sat down to eat, he gathered up the sheets of the morning paper and cracked them open beside him. He gulped coffee and shoveled cornflakes while his eyes darted down columns of print. The pages rippled over rapidly at first, then more slowly. News, editorials, comics. Half

an hour later he was gazing blankly past the last soggy cornflakes at the latest list of leading batters in the American League.

With an exasperated snort he lurched from the table, marched into the front room, grabbed the heavy History of Western Philosophy from the top of the bookshelf, planted himself in the chair, and threw open the book. Then he was up again looking for a pen with which to underline. Then he had to go upstairs for his cigarettes. Then he was staring through idly exhaled smoke at the bookshelf he had built of bricks and boards when they first moved in. It always seemed to be teetering. Just a little. The covers of paperback books are very bright when they are new, but they become faded and dingy as they are used or even when the book just sits, unread, on the shelf.

With a sigh he put the philosophy text face down on the floor and wandered out the front door. The sun was warm and bright. Sam leaned against the oak and looked out over the city. The sky was clear except to the north where columns of smoke rose and dispersed into haze over the pulp mills. On the river a steamer emitted a noble "blurp," and down near school a jackhammer chattered a remorseless combat with obsolete cement. He could hear a truck groan and shift gears as it started up the approach to the westbound freeway. Then with a gutty growl it conquered the slope. At the foot of Wilfred Avenue a skinny-legged little girl with a pony-tail hair-do tugged her younger brother toward a waiting bus which swallowed them up and, after a great breaking of wind, rolled on. Overhead that goddamn old tree had sprouted tender new twigs and a whole crop of fresh green leaves.

Back inside he read philosophy. Slowly and with forced concentration at first.

The phone rang just as Sam was going out the door to go to work. Gene was on the other end, laughing. "Shit oh dear, Sam baby, the sky is falling on good old KRST. Have you seen the afternoon paper?"

"No. What's happening?"

"Just have a look at the paper. I wouldn't spoil it by telling you. But take your crash helmet to work with you. There will be a big crowd throwing bricks, if my estimate of the effect of this situation is accurate."

Sam hurried downtown toward his bus stop and picked up the afternoon paper at a drug store on the way. In the two years Sam had worked for KRST there had never been a public scandal involving any of the people or programs connected with the station. Bill Edwin was a prudent man. But things had gotten out of hand in the case of the Convicts' Bible Boy because there he was on the front page with big headlines and a picture. According to the story, the Bible Boy was being sued for divorce because he had beaten his wife and called her vile names. Furthermore, he had been living in a motel and carrying on an affair there with one of the volunteer workers in his evangelistic organization. Even furthermore, this volunteer worker had a truck driver husband who had found out what she was volunteering for. The truck driver had bought a pistol, gone to the motel, and shot the Bible Boy right between the eyes. The newspaper mentioned that the Convicts' Bible Hour had a substantial audience in Portland and was heard twice daily on KRST.

Sam read the story several times during the bus ride to the KRST studios. He had never met the Bible Boy because his was one of the pro-

grams that came in on tape and the evangelist had never visited Portland. Bill Edwin had met him, though, and had spoken of him as an old-timer in the business who would never be really big because he wasn't smart enough, but who did well enough to pay for his air time with reasonable regularity.

Edwin was on his way to the door when Sam arrived. He was carrying his briefcase and whistling "Jesus Loves Me." He didn't look like he had had a particularly rough day.

"Going home?" Sam asked. "I thought you'd be pinned here all evening answering irate phone calls about our old buddy, the Convicts' Bible Boy."

"I don't think there will be more calls than you can handle," smiled Edwin. "We have had a couple in the last hour. Just tell them you don't know anything more about it than what you've read in the paper. Tell them we're all very shocked and that we'll look into the report. Don't mention it on the air and, of course, don't carry his broadcast for today. Just play some music at that time and act like he never existed, you know?"

"You mean there won't be any more fuss over this than just losing a program?"

"Probably not even that. People forget such things quickly. He had a good thing going and I imagine someone else will pick it up. So we'll probably have it back on the air soon. Too bad the crazy bastard had to get himself shot, though. He was one of these guys who just never can learn when to keep his fly zipped. See you later, Sam. Got to get home for supper."

Sam did receive one irate call that evening, but the lady on the phone wasn't irate at the station for putting a degenerate on the air.

She was calling to say that she didn't believe all those lies the Communists had planted in tonight's paper. That wonderful man, the Convicts' Bible Boy, could never have done the things they said about him.

"You know all the evidence he was getting about the Governor of California being a Communist," she said. "Well, I just know that rat, the Governor, either shot the Bible Boy himself or directly ordered one of his henchmen to do it! And the Communist reporters are covering up for him by putting big lies in the paper.

"By the way, Sam," she went on, "while I have you on the line, I just want to tell you how much we enjoy hearing you on the radio. You have a wonderful voice and I know how you must love the Lord. Keep up the good work!"

During the last hour of KRST's broadcast day Maybelle called to ask if the station was going to survive the Bible Boy scandal. Sam told her what Bill Edwin had said and about the one phone call he had received on the subject. It took a while to tell because she was repeating it word for word to Gene, who thought it all quite fully. "The whole thing shakes me up," Sam said. I figure I'm a pro when it comes to putting on a radio program, but I'm damned if I know what to expect from religious people or what to think of their reactions. I wish I could make a short statement every hour on the hour declaring that I am only your friendly announcer and anything these screwball evangelists do or say necessarily does not reflect my opinion on the subject. This is such a great job! Good pay, good treatment, good hours. But I don't know if I can take the kind of things that go on around here much longer."

"Can't you get on with some other station, Sam?"

"You know I used to try. They either don't pay as much and are sloppily run or they want guys who spout cute slogans at 900 miles an hour between rock 'n' roll records or they pay lots more and want guys with more experience and more voice than I have."

"Well, cheer up, Sammy. You won't have to do it forever. One of these days you'll be a high-powered philosophy prof and there won't be any more problems."

"Yeah."

"Besides we have a little surprise for you here that just might raise your spirits right up." She added a little snicker. "It might raise something else, too."

"What are you talking about?"

"Never mind. Just a little surprise. You hurry home to see it."

"Have you heard something from Rachel? Is she there?"

"You'll see."

"Come on, Maybelle, I'm in no mood for that kind of crap. This started out to be a good day for me. I got up. I read phil like a serious student for a change. I had myself reassured that Rachel was all right and that I could make things even better between us when she got back. Now this evening everything seems to have gone all to hell again."

"What do you mean 'even better'? I thought you two had the absolute perfect relationship. You both always told me so."

"Never mind about that. Is she there?"

"No she isn't here. But we do have a little surprise for you that might be the solution to the problem of Rachel. I'm beginning to despise that girl again for giving you such a miserable time."

"For Christ's sake, Maybelle, what are you talking about?"

"You'll see." And she hung up.

In the kitchen when Sam got home he found a plate of warmed-over spaghetti and Maude. "So where is the surprise?" he asked.

"Maude's the surprise," gurgled Maybelle. "Isn't she beautiful?"

Maude was sitting at the table across from the spaghetti and next to a glass and a bottle of gin. She wore thongs, an old pair of men's levis, and a pink sweatshirt. Her head was in her hands, her elbows on the table, and long dark hair streamed over her face. She looked very morose, but her huge eyes could be seen through the screen of hair to turn up at Sam hopefully when Maybelle asked about her beauty. That was a subject that always aroused Maude's interest.

"Oh fer chrissake," said Sam, sitting down with an I-give-up shrug. "That's no surprise. Maude's always been beautiful. If I've said it once, I've said it God knows how many times. Maude's beautiful." He extended an index finger to part some of the hair away from her face and peered at her intently. "By God, yes, Maude is still beautiful." He tried a bite of spaghetti.

"But there is something more about Maude," sang Maybelle. She was clutching a glass and had obviously been enjoying Maude's gin. Gene was sitting silently at the head of the table with a smug grin and his own glass of gin.

"Never mind, Maybelle," said Maude. "Sam doesn't want to hear anything about me. He thinks I'm a joke." Tears were forming in her eyes. She started to get up from her chair. "I'm going home."

Maybelle made her sit down again. "Oh no you don't. You've been keeping us in suspense about the details of this business all evening and now we're going to hear them. She didn't want to tell us about it until you got here, Sam."

"It's painful for me to talk about, so I only wanted to tell it once. And I wanted Sam's advice. I wanted to know if he thinks I have done the right thing. But now I see he doesn't care anymore what I do."

"Please excuse me, Maude," said Sam, patting her hand. "Things have been almost as rough for me lately as they always are for you. I don't know if I could give advice on anything tonight. A very rare state of affairs for me, I realize. But I thought it over tonight and I decided I don't understand such things as women, love affairs, and religious people. All such things are insane, best I can tell. The only things I know anything about are philosophy and radio announcing. Now if you need advice on either of those subjects, I'll do my best."

"Oh it's no use." One mascara polluted tear flowed down her cheek and hung on her chin.

"Sam! you stop being so mean to her," insisted Maybelle. "She broke up with Winston earlier this evening and she wouldn't even tell us why until you were here. And then you treat her like that. I've never seen you act this way."

"Fer chrissake, Maybelle, what am I supposed to tell her about breaking up with Winston? She ought to know if that's a good idea because, she's tried it a half dozen times before. Usually just long enough to get screwed by some other guy who has caught her fancy, come cry on my shoulder about it, tell me the guy raped her, and then go limping back to Winston on a lame conscience."

"Yeah," said Gene, pouring himself more gin, "and the other guys who catch her fancy never have been Sam or me. A goddamn shame, I say."

Maude's tears spurted and streamed. "Oh how can you say such awful things about me? You're supposed to be my friends!" She pounded the table and squealed, "They did rape me! And it is serious about Winston this time. I've told him goodbye forever."

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry," said Sam softly. He took up one of Maude's hands in both of his and signaled with his eyes to Gene to pour him some of the gin. "Now tell me. Why have you and Winston broken up forever?"

"Because I'm getting old." Maude's head was down. She was pouting. "I have to change what I've been doing."

"Say! I've heard that one before somewhere, haven't I, Sam baby?" asked Gene, punching Sam on the shoulder.

"It happens to the worst of us." Sam drank some gin.

Maude sniffed back her tears. "I'm getting old and pretty soon I'll be too old to have babies. I have to find someone to marry so I can have babies."

"How the hell old are you?" asked Gene. "Seems to me like menopause is setting in a little early, isn't it?"

"I'm twenty-two, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that I am deteriorating physically. Some people get old and ugly before their time and that's happening to me. In another year I will be so ugly no one would marry me."

"Come on now, Maude," said Sam, still trying to be tolerant, "That's a bit extreme isn't it. You're a beautiful girl and you get more lovely every year. There isn't a single sign of deterioration."

"That's all you know. It's happening suddenly. I noticed it in the mirror this morning. One of my breasts has begun to droop."

"What?"

"It's true. One of them is lower than the other. Before long I'll be a dry-dugged old woman."

"Now, Maude, be reasonable . . ."

"It's true, though! One of them sags."

"I just can't believe . . ."

"It's true! It's true!"

"Here, now," said Gene, clanking a fork against his glass. "We scientists can't let you philosophers shout at each other about something like this which is subject to empirical verification. If you want us to believe one of them droops, Maude, you'll have to show us."

Maude looked at him to see if he was serious, then looked at Sam, who had a hand raised and his mouth open and was obviously about to say that empirical verification wasn't necessary. "All right! All right!" she said, pulling up the front of her sweatshirt. "See! That one. Now tell me it isn't lower than the other." She wasn't wearing a bra.

"They both look pretty perky to me," said Gene.

"No! This one droops."

"Well, maybe it does just a little. Let's see if it feels as firm as the other." Gene stretched out a hand.

Maude drew away. "You're just playing with me."

"Now God damn it, Maude, you can't get all squeamish if we're going to conduct an empirical investigation here. No, I'd say they were both equally firm."

"Really? Do you think so, Sam?" He started to say something, but she grabbed his hand and applied it to her bosom.

"Both dandies, aren't they, Sam?" asked Gene, still investigating.

"That's enough of that, Gene Greenfield!" Maybelle slapped his hands away from Maude. "You let Sam take care of investigating Maude."

Sam pulled his hand away, looking very uncomfortable. "I don't think you have anything to worry about."

She let the shirt drop, but didn't seem completely satisfied. "Well, they may still seem firm, but one of them is lower than the other."

Maybelle took one look at the disappointment on Gene's face when Maude's sweatshirt dropped and then twisted her arms behind her back to undo her dress. "If you are deteriorating, Maude, then so am I. And I'm only twenty."

"Oh God, here we go," groaned Gene.

"See there, one of mine is lower too. And I don't think I'm a bit deteriorated. Am I, Sam?" She grabbed his hand.

Maude grabbed his other hand. "Do I sag more than she does?"

Sam pulled away from them. "Look, you're both shapely as hell. Now will you keep your clothes on, fer chrissake? How do you expect me to get my spaghetti eaten?"

"I'll bet you don't have stretch marks," Maude said to Maybelle.

"Stretch marks?"

"Yes. I have them on my hip. That's another thing I discovered this morning."

"How can you have stretch marks when you've never had a baby?"

"I don't know, but I have them anyway." She unzipped her pants and pulled them down over one hip. "See."

"I don't see anything except a nice hunk of haunch," said Gene. "Let's have a closer look." He was reaching hands out again, but Maude backed away and Maybelle steared her over to Sam.

"Let Sam look. You stay out of this, Gene."

"I don't see why you have to make fun of me, Gene," said Maude.

"I don't see any stretch marks," said Sam, when the hip was presented for his perusal.

"Maybe they only show when you apply pressure to her skin," suggested Maybelle. She took up Sam's hand and began caressing Maude's hip with it.

Sam and Maude both pushed her away. Maude started crying again and went back to her gin. "Maybelle, you and Gene always have to make everything into sex."

"What are you trying to pull tonight, anyway?" Sam asked.

Maybelle was disappointed in both of them. "I think it's about time you two got together. Maude has broken up with Winston and wants to get married and have babies. You are looking for a wife, and it looks like Rachel has run out on you. Besides, Sam, you had a big crush on Maude before you even met Rachel."

"I'm not looking for a wife and Rachel hasn't run out on me!"

"Sam and I could never get married anyway, Maybelle."

"Why not?"

"I just don't think of Sam that way. Every once in a while it occurs to me how nice it would be to have such a good friend with me all

of the time, but then I just can't think of it. I can't imagine us married. It isn't right for a good friend to make love to you."

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard of."

"It's not crazy, but it is pretty complicated. Maybe it's because I read The Sun Also Rises just before I met Sam. I've always thought of him as Jake Barnes. Someone I could come to when I'm in trouble, someone . . ."

"As who?" Sam stood up so fast his chair tipped over.

"As Jake Barnes. That's the kind of friend . . ."

"Wait a minute! There is a considerable difference between me and Jake Barnes, and don't forget it!"

"I think you are a lot like him." Maude said it as if she thought it would please.

Gene stopped laughing at Sam's agitation long enough to say, "He means he has all his parts. Maybe it's time for you to take off some clothes and expose yourself a little, Sam. Almost everyone else around here has had a crack at it tonight."

"This is the most idiotic evening I have ever spent in my life," said Sam. He had given up on the spaghetti and had emptied his glass of gin. He took a long pull directly from the bottle, then banged it back on the table. "I've had it. I'm going to bed." He left the room waving his arms and moaning, "Jake Barnes, fer chrissake. Jake Barnes, the great white bottom who loves the Lord."

Maude followed him up the stairs to apologize. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"It's all right. My own damn fault what people think of me. Act like an idiot, people take you for one. Now why don't you go home and get some sleep. Better go before Gene's too drunk to drive you. And you ought to stay away from gin, Maude. You'll make your fingers too trembly to play the piano. You should always play the piano and dance. You're wonderful when you do those things, but when you drink gin you get all screwed up."

She stood silently in the doorway with tears on her cheeks.

"What's the matter now?"

"Sam, don't make me go home to that empty apartment."

"Okay, don't go home. Here is a blanket and a pillow. You can sleep downstairs on the couch tonight."

She took them and went downstairs, but by the time Sam got in bed she was back. Her tear-tortured eyes blinked like a red neon. Her dark hair rested on bare white shoulders. She had the blanket wrapped around her and was carrying the pillow. "Couldn't I stay **up** here with you? I'm so lonely." She crawled onto the bed.

"If you get in this bed you know what will happen."

"I'll just lie on top of the bed. It'll be like when you came over to my place last week, only this time I'll be on top of the covers instead of you. And we can hold hands like we did then, or you can ignore me if you want and I'll snuggle up next to you . . ."

"Oh no, Maude. No more Jake Barnes. You're a big girl, so act like one. You can go downstairs if you want, but if you stay up here you can expect to be treated like a big girl. Maybe that would be a good idea. Maybe we better put an end to my eunuch status with you once and for all." He began to pull the blanket away from her.

She didn't try to hold the blanket, but she said, "No, Sam, please don't rape me."

"Don't what?"

"Don't rape me, oh please don't rape me," she moaned. Her head was thrown back and turning from side to side, her eyes were closed, her hands ran up and down her body, her hips undulated. "Please, please, please, don't rape me, Sam."

"You can God damn well bet I won't." He took the blanket and a pillow and headed for the door. By the time he was half way downstairs she was howling instead of moaning, "Please, please, Sam. Oh please don't rape me." She could be heard all over the house.

Sam threw himself on the couch and tried to block his ears with the bedding. Then Maybelle was there. "Sam! what are you doing on the couch? Don't you hear Maude calling you?"

"Do you hear what she is calling?"

"That doesn't matter. Can't you tell she really wants you?"

"I know what she wants, but what she needs is a psychiatrist. That girl is sick, Maybelle. You shouldn't be pushing her at me or anyone else."

"I'm not pushing her. She wants you. It's Zorba's Law. You have to go to her. Otherwise it's the sin God won't forgive."

"Zorba and his God can go straight to hell."

Maybelle knelt down beside him and gripped his arm. "Please, Sam, go to her. If you don't, I'm afraid Gene will. He's lying in there swearing at you."

"Oh hell, Maybelle, you don't have to worry about Gene. Like he says, you're all he can handle. He doesn't want anyone else."

"Yes, but they want him."

"Who?"

"Girls. Everywhere. They're always trying to get him away from me. And I don't blame them. He's so damned handsome, Sam."

"He's a beauty all right. Now why don't you go up and see if you can quiet Maude. We must make sure she gets some psychiatric help."

"I can't. I think I better go perform vespers."

"Vespers?"

"Yes. Every night I go under the covers and perform a worship service over Gene's genitals. Someday I'm going to write a book recommending it to all women. Absolutely guaranteed to keep your man at home." She said this cheerfully and was gone.

"Please, please, please, Sam. DON'T!" yowled Maude and then she was silent.

Sam was beyond words.

VIII: Friday

Through the open front door polite beams of morning light put a respectful foot into the otherwise darkened living room of the house on Wilfred Avenue. A gentle breeze made its entrance at the same door and walked lightly through the house until it emerged at the also open back door with the smell of coffee and frying bacon on its breath.

In the twilight of the shaded living room the figure of Sam Patience described a concave arc against the couch. Over one arm of the couch his bare feet rested, the soles turned slightly upward and out toward the room and the beams of light from the doorway that crossed the room horizontally at the other end. Propped up by a smashed pillow, his chin rested where the other arm met the back of the couch. A twisted blanket shrouded him from shoulder to knee and broke the geometric perfection of the arc. He looked as if he had been blown there from across the room by some disasterous explosion.

The rapping at the door didn't stir Sam, but it brought Maude from the kitchen, humming and wiping her hands on the frilly apron she wore over last night's sweatshirt and levis. The glow on her hair-veiled cheeks and the easy grace of her walk expressed the bloom of optimism that comes anew with each morning to some people. To some of the damndest people.

"Hello."

The little round bald headed man in a bright sport shirt who was at the door looked like he was something of an optimist himself except

that at the moment he was embarrassed by finding Maude there to greet him. "Oh, excuse me. Is Sam . . . is Sam here?"

"Yes, he's here," she said cheerfully. "He's still asleep, but I was just going to wake him . . ." She looked toward the couch where Sam was turning over.

"Well, if he's still asleep, perhaps I should come back some other time. I . . ."

"Dad. Oh my gosh. Dad, come in." Sam blinked recognition at the sunny figures across the room. His hair swirled wildly as if he had been standing on his head and twisting in circles all night.

"I didn't mean to wake you up, son. I'll come back some other time if I am intruding."

"No, no. Come in. I should be up anyway. You're not intruding on anything. This is Maude Norman, an old friend who borrowed my bedroom last night. That's why I'm on the couch. Maude, this is my father."

"How do you do, Reverend Patience. I'm very glad to meet you."

"Oh dear, not Reverend Patience, please. Not any more. Mr. Patience, if you like. Or, even better, call me Rosco."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to . . ."

"That's all right," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "I understand."

She flashed her eyes and a smile at him. "I'm fixing Sam some breakfast. I thought it was the least I could do after he was so kind as to lend me his bed last night. Have you had your breakfast? I could easily throw on some more bacon and eggs."

"Oh I ate long ago. Old fuddy-duddies such as me, who don't have all the things to do at night you young people have, we get up at the crack of dawn, you see." He sniffed the bacon in the air and smiled. "However, it does seem to me that it's about time for my lunch." He winked at her and spoke in confidential tones. "My wife has me on a diet which won't allow such delicacies as bacon. So, if it isn't too much trouble, maybe I will have just a bite."

"No trouble at all," she purred and started back to the kitchen.

"Go on in the kitchen and sit down, Dad," said Sam in a tone that tried to emulate Maude's graciousness. "I'll see if I can slap myself awake and get some clothes on."

"Yes, come along," said Maude, returning to circle her arm around his and draw him toward the kitchen. As Sam got up, wrapped the blanket around himself and retrieved his clothes from their muddled pile behind the couch, he could hear Maude saying earnestly, "Gee, Mr. Patience--Rosco--I hope you won't think there is anything improper about my being here. It's just that last night I was feeling, oh, all lonely, I guess. You see, my parents are divorced and I live in an apartment by myself. And Sam is such a good old buddy of mine. Sometimes I think I would just go crazy if I didn't have someone like him to talk to . . ."

By the time Sam came out of the bathroom Maude and his father were engaged in a warm and enthusiastic conversation about music. She was currently working on Beethoven's Appassionata and did he like that, it is one of Sam's favorites, and oh yes, he liked it indeed, although he was more of a Mozart man himself, and in that case he must be familiar with the Concerto in C Minor, and he was, and she was particularly fond

of the second, the rondo movement, with its absolutely tragic emotions that can't be disguised by the classic structure, and she had played that one once for a recital and one of the instructors had been outraged at the way she interpreted the second movement, but she had stood right up and told him a thing or two, and "good girl" said Sam's father, by then finished with his meal and wiping egg off his chin.

"Well, son, this is quite a cook here, this young lady. I don't believe I've ever had an egg whose up side was any sunnier. Perhaps you ought to consider hiring her services full time."

"He doesn't have to rely on me, Rosco," said Maude. "There's something about Sam. Always some girl around who is anxious to look after him." She stopped suddenly, sensing she might be on an awkward subject.

"Oh you bet," said Sam.

Rosco Patience just laughed, pushed his chair away from the table a notch, and searched in his pocket for his pipe.

There was an uncomfortable silence which Sam broke by saying, "What brings you up to Wilfred Avenue, Dad? I mean, you are always welcome, of course, but you've never . . ."

"That name, that's what brought me. Wilfred Avenue." A little smile wrapped around his pipe and he snapped a match aflame with his thumb-nail. "I came searching for peace."

"Huh?"

"That's what Wilfred means, by golly. I have a dictionary at home which has a section in the back listing proper names with their derivations and meanings. I use it sometimes to find names for my dogs. Happened to notice Wilfred in there yesterday. It means the search for

for peace. I thought that was so good I had to come have a look at your domicile. I think I'll name one of my pups Wilfred. I have one that from his looks and breeding should be the best I've had--and that includes some pretty good ones, I must point out. Wilfred will be quite an original name for a winning dog." He laughed amid clouds of aromatic smoke. "Maybe I'll name one of his brothers Warmonger and we'll see which one runs fastest."

"I'd bet on Warmonger."

"Well, I wouldn't," said Maude, getting up and taking off the apron. "I'll come out to the races and cheer for Wilfred. Say, I've got to run myself. I'm supposed to take a piano lesson at eleven." She extended a hand to Rosco Patience. "I'm very happy to have met you, Rosco. I hope we'll meet again."

"And I am happy to have met you, Maude. I'm looking forward to hearing you play one of these days. You be sure to have Sam tell me when your next recital comes up."

"I will. G'bye, Sam," she said, kissing him on the forehead and squeezing his shoulder. "Thanks again for being so tolerant of my drippy mood last night."

"Oh sure, Maude, no big thing," Sam threw out Winston's catch phrase with an idle toss of his hand. "I'm glad you are in better spirits this morning."

"A charming young lady," said Sam's father when Maude was gone. "You are lucky to have someone like her so attentive to you. I sense that the argument which must have put you on the couch last night is all patched up this morning. I hope I didn't interfere with the patching up."

"Hey, you're reading the situation all wrong, Dad. Honest, the story she told was straight. She was feeling lonely and came for a visit. She's not my girl and we don't . . . well, I mean, you must have some really wild ideas about what goes on around here or something."

His father smiled in sly scepticism. "I don't pry into your affairs, Sam. You know that. But I have, shall we say, 'intuited' that there were a couple of young ladies living here with you and your friend Gene."

"What in the world gave you that idea?"

"Okay, sorry, I'm not looking for any confessions and I don't have any sermons to preach. Besides, you should know well enough that when I did preach sermons, they very often exhorted the older generation to be more understanding of the younger. After all, the things you kids do that we find so shocking are usually prompted by our own shocking behavior. When you seem to us to be breaking down morality, it is invariably because you think you are doing something more moral the the way we did it. And, by golly, a good part of the time you are. Other times, well, some things a man has to learn for himself. That's one of those platitudes that is shopworn but applicable. Maybe if I were better at thinking up fresh ways of saying such things, I'd be minister of a big church by now. Come to think of it, it's probably fortunate I'm not good at thinking up fresh ways to say platitudes."

"Anyway, Dad, the story on Maude is straight. I'm . . . going with a girl named Rachel. She is in California visiting her father. I think I've said something to you about her. The one who is studying to be a nurse."

"Oh yes, the nurse. Well, if she's as charming and lovely as Maude, then you are a fortunate fellow indeed."

"I think you'd like her. I hope to have her meet you and Mom soon. I . . ."

"Listen, Sam, I can tell I'm making you uncomfortable. I didn't mean to invade your privacy, but I do want to plead with you a little about your mother, and then I'll clear out. You should come out to visit more often. I know she's a bit tough on you once in a while, but I've been getting after her about that, and it does mean a lot to her to have you visit. Poor old gal, she's been gallant about it, but her crazy husband is a trial to her. All she knows is being a minister's wife and raising you and now both of those jobs are over and she has the feeling she's useless. And she worries about you all the time. She says, 'The only way I know he's alive is when I hear him on the radio.' She's very proud of that, I'll tell you. She's always after her old friends to listen to you."

"God, I wish she wouldn't listen to that awful station. Anyway, I know I have been neglectful, but I have been putting off a visit until Rachel gets back. I wanted both of you to meet her and we may have a couple of announcements that will make Mom happy. I think I'm going back to school and . . . we may be getting married."

"Oh ho! So it has come to that, has it? The last time I heard you on the subjects of school and marriage, they were high on your private list of deadly sins."

"Well, I guess I'm growing up or something."

"My, my. I'll tell you what. As long as you have given a preview of surprises to come, I might as well pass one along myself. Your mother wanted to be the one to tell you about this, though, so you be sure to appear surprised when she does."

"I promise."

"We're going to sell the farm."

"You mean you are giving up the dogs?"

"Oh no, far from it. In fact, plans are being drawn up right now for the best equipped training farm for greyhounds in the country. You see, it turns out that your old Dad is a very farsighted investor, a real financial wizard--ha hah! wouldn't that cause the budget committee of the First Methodist Church of Westfir to shift in their chairs. That little farm that caught my eye years ago as ideal for small scale dog training is now the last plot of land needed by George Block Realtors for their big 'planned community' housing development, to be called Westfir Gardens. Not one of those shabby low-cost developments, you understand, but something for folks with some money in their pockets. Complete with swimming pools and a nine-hole golf course.

"And oh did little, chubby, and mild Rosco make big, fat, and tough George sweat over those two acres. I think you would have been proud of me, Sam. I've become a real wheeler-dealer in my decrepitude. He'd come out to see me and huff and puff around the barn while I went about my chores. 'Jesus God--I mean, gee whiz--Rosco,' he'd say, 'I can't have a dog farm amidst a bunch of hundred thousand dollar homes!' I already had a location picked out for my new training farm, but he didn't know that. I let him think I was emotionally attached to the place and could never give it up. So he used the buddy-buddy approach, just as I

thought he would, and your mother had the excitement of going to a dinner party at the ritzy Blocks' and old George--after he told me what a great lover of greyhounds he was himself, you understand--he made several trips out to the races with me."

"You really soaked him, huh? Got a good price?" Sam tried to show some enthusiasm for his father's newly found capitalistic aplomb.

"Oh I got a good enough price all right. There was no problem about that. It was what else I got out of him that makes me happy. You see, although I'm sure he doesn't care a fig for dogs themselves, old George is quite a gambler. He's a devil in Las Vegas, so he tells me, and never comes out behind on the horses, but he has always taken a trimming at the dog track. So I gave him a few tips and he won pretty regularly and got to feeling pretty good about it. Then I took him off to the clubhouse--don't tell your mother about that!--and introduced him to some friends of mine, one of whom is a colored real estate agent from the northeast Portland area. The colored fellow and one of the other fellows I introduced him to are friends of mine from the NAACP. You see, we've had a plan for some time to try to introduce some selected Negro families into lily-white Westfir and try to break down discrimination in housing out there. Several of these families are well-to-do. Men in the professions and business. The kind of people who could afford to live in Westfir Gardens and who would be sure to get along well in Westfir once the folks there got over the shock of having Negroes for neighbors.

"Anyway, in exchange for my two acres, I got not only good money, but a promise that Block will hold out six houses scattered about Westfir Gardens until nearly all the others are occupied, and then sell them to

the Negros. There will undoubtedly be something of a stew, but I don't think many of the people will move out once they are in just because some colored people show up.

"It's just a token, certainly not a sweeping reform. But it's going to happen and it will work. Even old George is convinced of that. Ha hah! here's the clincher. One of the colored gentlemen who will be buying a house in Westfir Gardens is an ex-professional football player who is now an executive in a sporting goods firm. He has a son, just coming to high school age, who is certain to be an athletic colossus. He very likely could be the difference that will give Westfir High the state championship that has eluded them so long. And you know that community! If that doesn't win them over, nothing will!

"As I say, I know its no panacea. This little token won't establish brotherhood between the races forever. But it is a step! It is something concrete! After all the years I've preached social reform and thrown away long hours on futile projects. The thing about this one--and it still amazes me!--it is sure to work! It will work!" To emphasize the words he rapped his pipe on the table, spewing tobacco all over. His cheeks were flushed.

Sam was laughing. "I'm convinced, Dad. It sounds great."

Rosco Patience's hands fluttered about the table, raking up tobacco. "Oh dear, I seem to have gotten a bit worked up. I'm sorry. I guess I'm trying to convince you that your Dad's old idealism hasn't been completely eclipsed by such petty concerns as purebred racing dogs. Or maybe I'm trying to convince myself. Salve my conscience for getting so much joy from something as unimportant as dogs. Ha hah! I'm sure it must be some crazy thing as that, anyway."

"You don't have to convince me of things like that anymore, Dad. I think you deserve to get some joy out of life and I'm happy to see you get it, however it comes."

"Yes, yes. Well, speaking of people getting joy out of life, I'm reminded of how far I have gotten off the subject. What I meant to say about the sale of the farm is that we're coming out quite a bit ahead on it monetarily. And it would give a great deal of joy to both your mother and me if you would use some of that money to further your education. Your mother was hoping that our being able to help you would persuade you to go back to school, and now that you've decided to do that anyway, why it's just so much the better."

"I would hate to take your money, Dad. I mean, you've had so little of it, I think you should use it to get things for yourself. Put it into the training farm and a nice house for Mom."

"Oh don't worry about that. The dogs and your mother will be quite comfortable and there will still be enough to aid you. The dogs themselves are becoming more and more lucrative all the time."

"I guess the thing that really makes me feel uncomfortable about it is that I know when Mom talks about me going to school, she means I ought to study for the ministry. And I'm going to be a disappointment there, I know."

"You needn't worry about that. Sure, she'd like to see you in seminary, but you're still her only child and anything you do that makes you happy she'll be proud as punch about. If what you want to do is be a philosophy professor, you just wait! No one will get near her without hearing what a wonderful teacher you are and how wonderful philosophy is. You know your mother! Everything is 'wonderful' when things go right."

"Well, I do think that teaching philosophy is what I want to do, after all. Like preachers, philosophy profs have platitudes too, and I guess I'm learning about one of them. That you shouldn't study philosophy expecting to get all the answers. You have to like learning *just* the questions. You have to be interested in it for itself, not because . . . yipe!" The phone rang and Sam jumped up, spilling coffee. "Christ! I'm sorry. Been jumpy about phones all week. Expecting Rachel to call. From California." His explanation trailed off down the hall toward the phone.

A female voice this time. Maybelle. "Sam, have you seen Ahab today? Is he there by any chance?"

"Haven't seen or heard from him since Wednesday."

"Jesus! I thought sure he'd be there. He's really in trouble here and I'm worried about him. He went out on collections yesterday morning, but he didn't report in last evening and he didn't show up this morning."

"Did you check at his mother's?"

"She said he didn't come home last night. She thought he was probably at our place. He better show up this afternoon or he'll be fired. They may even have the police after him. They're afraid he's made a big collection and run off with the money."

"Oh hell, he wouldn't do that. I wouldn't worry about him. He's been fired before. I suppose we should try to avoid the police, though. The taverns will be open soon. I'll check around here and downtown and see if I can turn him up."

"Okay. If you do, make him get over here, Sam, whatever shape he's in. He could be in big trouble."

Sam went back to the kitchen and heaved a hopeless sigh as he sat down.

"Something missing?" his father asked.

"Yes, that was Maybelle, Gene's girl. A friend of ours, we call him Ahab, works in the same place she does and he hasn't shown up for work. He goes kind of berserk once in a while, but he'll be all right. He always survives somehow."

"You look worried, son."

"More disappointed, I think. I guess I was hoping your visit was a good omen. I was hoping that would be Rachel. She was supposed to call Monday and she hasn't called yet."

"Well, I hope everything turns out for the best. But just remember, there are plenty of fish in the sea, son. Ha hah! there I go again. Time for me to go home, I can see. Anyway, I am happy to see you thinking about your future again and I would hate to see a setback in romance spoil it." Rosco Patience stood up and started for the door.

"I don't know what will happen, Dad, if she doesn't come back," said Sam, following him. "I guess I'll go on anyway. I don't know. She's a wonderful girl and sometimes I think I don't deserve her. I haven't really done what I should to earn her love."

"Say, that's Biblical, you know. Jacob had to work for Rachel's father, Laban, for seven, in fact for fourteen years, to earn her."

"Oh God," groaned Sam, "don't mention any Jacobs to me."

"Eh?"

"Oh nothing. Somebody told me recently that I reminded them of another Jacob. It wasn't a very nice comparison."

"Well, don't let these things get you down, boy."

"I'll try not to."

As he went out the door, Rosco Patience put a folded piece of paper in Sam's shirt pocket. "That's to be sure you don't think I was kidding about what I said today. I wrote it while you were on the phone. It's yours and there will be more. I hope you will use it for school, but whatever you decide to do, it's yours."

When he was gone Sam pulled the piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and unfolded it. It was a check for a thousand dollars.

Friday was Sam's day off. His night for supper at normal hours and beer at Gertie's. Over pork steak, potatoes and gravy, fried apples, and green beans, he told Gene and Maybelle of his new wealth. "It's not exactly enough to retire on, but when school starts I'll be able to get by working only on weekends at KRST."

Maybelle wished aloud that her parents were as tolerant as Sam's. Instead of giving her money, they kept insisting that she move home. "They have the money to help, but I'd have to give up sex to get it," she said.

"Shit," said Gene, "you make me take you over to their damn church every Sunday to teach Sunday School. What more do they want?"

"But, Gene," protested Maybelle, "I keep telling you, I like to teach Sunday School."

And Sam told about his odyssey through numerous taverns in search of Ahab. No one had seen him, but in nearly every place there was someone Sam knew who wanted to buy him a beer. "All kinds of guys I've known

over the last few years at Portland State. They all seemed to have some big deal going for them they wanted to crow about. You remember Baines King, the guy who was always crying about how no one respects sociologists? He has an assistantship for graduate work at the University of Nevada at Reno. How about that? Sociology in Reno, fer chrissake? And didn't I introduce you to Bill Tillotson once, Gene? He graduated this spring with a double major in phil and math. Now he's programming computers for the city and has realized his great ambition in life. He rented a farm south of town and bought a cow. Some chick is living with him down there and he's grown a beard. I told him don't rent a farm, buy it. You'll have a goldmine in property values one of these days. He says, hell, all I want is to have fresh warm milk straight from the tap and raise my own turnips. The one who really killed me was Willy what's-his-name? The harmless looking little guy who went to high school with Ahab and used to be a pizza cook while he was going to school. Remember? He came to one of our parties with some beautiful chick he had just met and the chick ended up in a corner with Ahab hearing how cozy it would be sailing to Tasmania in a little sloop built for two. Well, he got a job through civil service as a diplomatic courier in the Far East. He'll be flying around everywhere from Hawaii to Korea carrying packets of top-secret documents. The job requires him to stay single. And he had just come back from a tailor's where he was having a suit made especially so that it wouldn't bulge when he wears his shoulder holster."

"I always thought Willy was kind of sexy in a quiet little way," observed Maybelle. "I knew he'd amount to something someday. What was his last name?"

A couple of hours before dinner Sam had been alone, finally, after the parade of old friends, sitting in a downtown tavern he had never been in before, almost drunk, and holding a fistful of nickels which he slid one by one into a metallic throat in exchange for repeated performances by the wispy voice and trumpet of Chet Baker of a minor key arrangement of "Look for the Silver Lining." When the nickels were gone, he had come home and had slowly worked his way through a few beer fogged pages of the philosophy text.

After supper, in the living room while Maybelle did dishes, trying to get started on their usual after dinner topic, Gene asked what Sam thought were the chances of a civil rights bill getting through congress this session and Sam said, "You know the thing about it that really tears me up?"

And Gene said, "I don't know about you, but what really tears me up is the goddamn southern Democrats who don't vote with their party and the fucking so-called 'liberal' Republicans who do."

"No, I mean about the money from Dad."

"What tears you up about that?"

"She didn't have to go at all. Rachel. We wouldn't need her old man's money. My folks can help all we need. Jesus! especially if we got married. If she thought it would speed up the arrival of grandchildren, Mom would take in washing to help us if she had to. Only it never even occurred to me. They haven't had any money to spare since Dad quit preaching. I didn't think they ever would have again."

"You should have known better than that. What have I been telling you? As long as the administration continues to practice something that

half-ass resembles Keynesian economics, the boom will continue. No more depressions. Hell, not even recessions. You can make money doing almost anything these days. Even at gardening. Shit, if I were to go to work at it--hire some help, set up a little shop . . . GREENFIELD LANDSCAPING. I could make a bundle. Sometimes I think I might do it."

"You're not serious."

"No, I guess not. Hell, I'm a political scientist, not a garden-er."

"Then why don't you write those papers so you can get into graduate school?"

"I'm going to write them, God damn it. If I didn't have to spend so much time listening to you and Maybelle bitch at me about them . . ."

"Okay, okay, forget it."

"Besides that, I'm lazy."

"Un huh, you bet. Anyway, I wish to God I had never let Rachel go see her old man. I could have provided the money. She didn't need her father and now she must be in some terrible mess."

"Look, Sam, I don't know what could happen to her on a visit to her dear old daddy, but . . ."

"I'll tell you about that sometime. It'll make you sick."

"Okay, but if you think something is wrong, why don't you call her? You have the old boy's name and address and God knows even in Los Angeles there couldn't be more than one L. Creighton Dexter. Now that you're so damn affluent, you can afford the call."

"I'm almost afraid to call. As you know--as you've told me often enough--one of my less attractive character traits is a tendency to get--

what would you call it?--'over involved' in my love affairs. She's not as vocal about it as you are, but Rachel doesn't like me to be that way either. I'm afraid if I show my worry by calling her, the response would be, 'Oh did I say I would call Monday? Well, there just isn't anything to report yet.' And all the time there would be something in her tone saying, "Sometimes you are such a little man." No, I'm going to wait it out, damn it. And I'm not going to hang around the phone waiting. Like tonight. She knows we go to Gertie's on Fridays. If she wants to talk to me, by God she can call there!"

"Jesus Christ. Patience the touch guy."

When Maybelle finished the dishes, they walked down to Gertie's. Or at least Gene and Sam walked. Maybelle, between them, with arms hooked to her companions, skipped. At first she skipped because it had been a fine day, because the sunset was lovely, and because the brisk movement caressed her limbs and face with warm air. Then she began to worry aloud about Ahab again. Her head drooped to study the sidewalk and her movements slowed. As she was talking, she accomplished a seemingly impossible feat: she was skipping pensively. "Old Ahab will probably be pissed at me for saying he has drinking problems. But I had to make some excuse or they would have called the police. I promised them he'd show up Monday. I know they'll fire him, though, whether he shows up or not."

They sat around a long table back in the corner. Gene sat at one end playing chess with Robert Right, who used to live in the east and who was now the local avant-garde artist. He said that the Beat Generation was passé and, inspired by rumors of what was happening in Greenwich Village, he was busy learning welding and collecting old automobile parts

from which he intended to construct sculptures. In these days he was the only living person they knew who had smoked marijuana. He kept promising that a supply of it would be coming in soon and he'd let them try it.

Gene was winning the chess game. He always won.

At the other end of the table with Sam and Maybelle was Mrs. Right, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate in English from Columbia, who worked as a librarian to support her husband's artistic struggles. And Brick. Brick never said anything, but he was a fine fellow. He was the son of a ranch hand from the eastern part of the state and even when he was in town instead of riding freight trains he didn't live anywhere. Sometimes he stayed in flop houses downtown and at other times he slept in odd corners of various apartments in the Portland State area. He lasted longer than Robert Right in the chess games with Gene and at parties, when he was very drunk, he came alive. If someone provided a guitar, he would play and sing endless choruses of protest songs. Once at a party in Gene and Sam's old apartment on the third floor of Carmel Arms, after 132 choruses of "It's a Bourgeois Town," some girls got to admiring his physique and to demonstrate it or from shyness--it was unclear which--he crawled out of the window and did a handstand on the ledge. He had been out there ten minutes when they finally pulled him back inside. "'Scuse me," he mumbled, "musta gone t' sleep." A couple of the girls wanted to curl up in the corner with him that night, but he was too bashful and kept moving around.

Maybelle was sitting between Brick and Sam and when she wasn't drinking her favorite concoction, a mixture of light and dark beer with 7-Up, she was squeezing Brick and telling him what a fine fellow he was

or patting Sam on the leg and telling him that Rachel couldn't possibly desert him because he was such a neat guy. Occasionally Willa Right would say something like, "Gee, your hair is getting long, Maybelle. I wish mine would get that long," but Maybelle wouldn't talk to her. After a while she whispered in Sam's ear, "Do you see how Willa keeps looking at Gene? I'm going to have trouble with her one of these days. She wants to go to bed with Gene." "Nonsense," said Sam, "Robert would beat her with a crankshaft if she said more than two words to another guy." "Yes, but she's ready to take a beating to get into bed with Gene. She wants him bad, you can tell. Look at her!"

Ahab's return from the missing was musical. He came in in a conga line composed of him and two sailors. They were singing a bawdy improvisation on "Anchors Aweigh" and they continued it while bouncing around the room until Gertie herself came from behind the bar to remind them, with a tolerant smile, that singing in taverns was prohibited by city law. Then she gave Ahab and his blue-suited companions each a glass and they drained away what was left of the two pitchers sitting on the long table in the corner.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I wish that you should become acquainted--familiar, if you will, with my two dearest friends, Red and Joe, noble stalwarts of the Royal United States Navy. This," said Ahab, pointing to the red-haired youth whose hat he was wearing, "is Joe. And this," pointing to the dark-haired one with the pimpled forehead, "is Red." They were both young, probably under twenty, with mawkish grins and bright little eyes.

"Hee, hee, Bobby Lou," giggled the red-headed one, while slapping

Ahab on the back, "you got our names mixed up agin. Ah don't know why you cain't keep 'em straight!"

Robert Right said, "Welcome, Sailors, to Portland, the unhailed bastion of love and anarchy on the west coast."

"Sit down and have a beer," suggested Gene.

"Thankee kindly. Ah will set down, but ah already got me a beer," said Red, gazing wonderingly at the already half empty glass in his hand.

"An' we already been welcomed to Portland," added Joe.

"Hoo boy, have we! An' it ain't no bastard of nothin', mister. This here is one bee-utiful town fer sailors. Pussyport, USA, man."

"Hey, Red, look at this one!" Joe was pointing at Robert Right, who, with kinky blond hair beginning in the middle of his head and hanging in shaggy curlicues over his collar and perfectly rimless glasses and a rose behind his ear, was not the sort of thing they had seen at sea.

"Whooee! You shore do have some crazy mixed up friends, Bobby Lou."

Ahab was still on his feet. He was circling the table admiring his friends' uniforms with the rapt wonder a connoisseur has for a newly discovered masterwork or a teenager has for his first car. "There are sailors all over town," he said. "They're from the destroyer that's anchored in the river and they're on two-day shore leave."

"That's right. Good ol' Pussyport." Red looked hungrily at the pitchers the plodding old gal Gertie hired to help on weekends was bringing in their direction.

"Ahab, where have you been?" asked Maybelle. "Don't you know you're going to be fired?"

"**Maybelle**, my love, these nautical gentlemen and I have been yachting!"

"Hee, hee, that ain't what ah call it, Bobby Lou."

"With Ahab the Undaunted at the helm, we rode the good ship Annabelle Lee all the way down to the sea and back. Over the billows of industrial waste known as the Portland River we coursed. And what a ship is the Annabelle Lee! A fifty-footer. And yar. Yar!"

Gene pleaded for a sane version of what had happened and got an explanation from Red. "See, we jist got off the ship yestiddy afternoon and we was in this tav downtown gettin' oiled up to go look fer some pussy. Up comes ol' Bobby Lou here actin' like he was the Mayor's official greetin' committee. He says he was an old sailor an' all, so we says we heerd this was the best pussyport in the USA and where should we go tuh git started, old sailor? He says he didn't know nothin' about that an' that we must be wrong 'cause all the pussies in Portland is awful prudes. We says, not when yet wearin' bell bottoms, boy, an' then we showed him. We no more 'n got two blocks down the street when these two girlies went drivin' by in a big caddy convert. We give 'em the ol' heighdy-ho! an' screech! they come to a stop an' says, hop in, sailors, yet jist what we need. They didn't want to take ol' Bobby Lou, but we tol' 'em he was a sailor too an' so they tuck us down to this here mariner where one of their daddies had a big boat. An' they says, there, you show us how to drive it and we says we din't know nothin' about that kinda boat, but ol' Bobby Lou, he says he kin drive it an' so he did an' the nex' thing we know, me and Joe was down below with these two girlies an' they opened their daddy's booze box an' we no more 'n' got goin' on that when they turns out the lights an', hoo boy, that was some voyage!"

"We'd be well on the way to Tasmania by now," said Ahab, "except for that crazy chick waving a gigantic gaff hook at me and threatening disembowelment if I didn't turn back."

"They thunk we was jist goin' in circles in the river. Man, when they peeked out a porthole an' saw the ocean, ah was sure ol' Bobby Lou was a gonner. They'd a made him walk the plank if anybody else woulda knowed how to drive the boat." Red paused for the split second it took him to suck down half a glass of beer and then spoke in lewdly hushed tones to Gene, who was sitting next to him, "Man, them two pussies, they kep' wantin' tuh play this here crazy game called 'tradzies.' You jist git goin' with one of 'em an' man this here alarm would go off an' you'd haf to pull out an' . . ."

"Do you realize Wardbuck almost sent the police out to look for you?" Sam asked Ahab as Red continued the log of the thirty hour voyage.

Ahab's lip curled sneeringly. "Don't give a fuck what them fuckers do. I quit working for them."

"It'd be nice if you told them you had quit," said Maybelle. "They think you've run off with a big collection. If I hadn't told them that you have a drinking problem and that I'd find you and sober you up, they'd have sent the police after you."

"Hah! wouldn't that be great, though, if all I had was a drinking problem? Something physiological like that?"

"Anyway, you have to go in Monday morning at least long enough to turn in your book and tell them you quit . . ."

"I'm never going back there! I hate them."

"I'll get fired if you don't."

"Of course. You don't want to work for Wardbuck anymore, Maybelle. Everybody who works for them is evil."

"Oh come on, Ahab."

"I'm serious. I never really understood till yesterday why I was such a lousy bill collector, why I always felt sorry for the deadbeats. I always tried to figure it out in terms of complexities. Educational level, environment, the necessity for legal contracts to be honored, all that shit. Complexities! That's what I get for going to school. Just muddles things up when it's all so simple. The deadbeats are good people and Wardbuck's people are evil." He took off Red's sailor hat and then jammed it back on his head. "Great gibbering Christ, you should have seen the people they wanted me to collect from yesterday. One old guy, hunted all over the goddamn southeast area for him, finally found him in a little shack down by the railroad tracks. Really weird inside. Everything neat as a pin, but not much to keep neat. A hot plate, an old table, a cot, one chair, and a huge color TV set in an oiled Walnut Danish modern console cabinet. He was sitting in front of the TV with the picture and the color all out of whack. He was watching a soap opera and there were tears in his eyes when he came to the door. Shattered remains of what must have once been a giant of a man. I got almost tough for a change because I hate soap operas. Told him if he didn't make a payment, I'd have to repossess his TV right now. What a bluff! The TV was bigger than my car. But he was all worried and apologetic. Scurried over to the cot and pulled a dog-eared five dollar bill out. Said it was his last, didn't know how he'd eat, but I should take it. Said he'd make a full payment just as soon as he got his social security straightened out. It stopped coming

several months ago, he said, and he didn't know why. Promised he'd go downtown tomorrow and see if he could find somebody to ask about it. Jesus, I felt like a shit. I took his five dollars.

"Next collection was in the northeast area. No trouble finding it. Big old run-down house. Everything about it was worn out. Even the grass was worn off the yard. Big old colored lady comes to the door. Looks like she just stepped off a pancake package. Mrs. Washington was her name. Sixteen little pickaninnies in assorted shades standing around with their mouths open watching me. She'll be able to pay for the clothes as soon as Mr. Washington comes home. When will Mr. Washington come home? Don't know. How long has he been gone? Can't say. Look, lady, I says, since I already felt like a shit, do you really think he'll ever come back? Oh yes. Yas, suh, he'll be comin' on home one day real soon. Why do you think so? Come here, she says, beckoning me closer. Ssshhhh. Now don't tell anyone, she whispers. He's on a secret mission. It's very important. Ssshhhh. Musn't tell anyone. All very secret and important. But he'll be back real soon. Then we'll pay. I says, Mrs. Washington, don't you ever pay Wardbuck a frigging penny. And here, I says, take this, it's a present. I gave her my clipboard and the five bucks from the TV collection and, man, that's it. I quit right there." Ahab leaned back in his chair, pushed the sailor cap down over his forehead, and drank a glass of beer in four swallows.

"Gene, baby," shouted Ahab toward the other end of the table. "We're having a party at your pad tomorrow. Okay? An all-day-and-all-night party to celebrate my discovery of the difference between good and evil."

"Sounds great, man."

"We'll invite everybody. I'm buying the booze. Going to sink my entire savings account into Cutty Sark. Should buy about six bottles. Hey! we'll be able to get so good, we'll never be evil again."

"Sounds tremendous."

"What about good and evil, Ahab?" asked Sam. "I don't get it."

"Sam, baby, sometimes you are so dense. Don't you see? Those people aren't bothering anyone. They're not making any trouble. It's things like Wardbuck that make the trouble. They're the ones who hurt people. The deadbeats are good. Wardbuck is evil."

Sam didn't look satisfied.

"Christ, you philosophers, you won't believe light even when somebody shines it right in your eyes. Now you take my buddies Joe and Red. They're just going around making the girls of Portland happy. That's all they care about . . ."

It was eleven o'clock when Sam returned, alone, to Wilfred Avenue, but he made the call anyway. The Los Angeles operator found a number for L. Creighton Dexter without much trouble. She rang and rang for the full infinity of one minute, but there was no answer.

Sam was sitting on the couch studying his own cigarette smoke when Red burst into the room with a look of desperation on his face and Gene panting at his heels. "Hey, man, where's that crazy Bobby Lou? He been here?"

"Haven't seen him."

Joe and Robert Right came bursting in from the back. "The sonna-bitch din't come out thissa way."

Red cursed and threatened Sam with violence if he didn't tell the truth. "You swear he ain't been here?"

"Honest injun. What's the matter?"

Ahab had disappeared and he still had Red's hat. The sailors were due back aboard their ship at 5 A.M. and if they didn't return in full uniform, there was all sorts of hell to pay.

So another search of taverns for Ahab began, this time by a task force of five. Red and Joe had become grim and suspicious drunks. When the task force broke into combat teams, it could only be into two teams because the sailors didn't trust the civilians out of their sight. They suspected them all of being part of an insidious and widespread plot to subject Red to military discipline. "I've been away from the Army for a long time," Sam told Gene as they guided Red through a succession of dim, crowded, and noisy beer halls. "I had forgotten how important a hat can be." Red worked quickly, he was pushy and surly, he peered intently at anyone under a sailor's hat. There were lots of them, but they all had the rest of the uniform too. The task force was lucky to complete the tour without combat.

After an hour of searching they met Joe and Robert Right and Gene suggested they go back to Wilfred Avenue because he thought Maybelle had something in her wardrobe that vaguely resembled a sailor's hat. Maybe it would do to get Red back on board his destroyer in the dark.

On the way back Red alternated between describing the various extra duties and missed liberties he would get for reporting back out of uniform and describing the various tortures and mutilations he would perform on Ahab if he found him. Nevertheless, it was Robert Right's hackles that rose highest when they found Ahab sitting in the living room.

Ahab was on the couch with his arm around Willa Right. The arm was not amorously engaged, however. It was the only available means by which Ahab could keep himself propped up enough to drink from the bottle of Thunderbird wine which was in the hand on the end of that arm.

"Hi, ev'bod-dy," said Ahab, groggily. "Where y'been?"

"Get your God damn hands off my wife!" Robert Right tried to make a lunge at Ahab, but the others, even Joe and Red, held him off.

"It's all right, Robert," said Willa, getting up and leaving Ahab to grope for balance on his own. "I found him. He was asleep in the rest room at Gertie's. He didn't even have the door latched."

"You found him where?"

"Take it easy, Robert," said Maybelle, coming from the kitchen with glasses in her hand, "I've been with them all the time."

"Oh goody, her sh th' grasses." Ahab had struggled to his feet and was extending his bottle to them. "C'mon bud-dies, have s' wine. Soon's the lick store opes, gon' write beeeeg check f' Cutty Suck."

"Ah don't want none of yer liquor, Bobby Lou. Ah jist want mah hat. Now give it here!"

"No, no. Lemme wear it little longer." Ahab held the hat on his head with both hands. The bottle was still in one of the hands and wine was pouring into the hat.

Sam was the only one who heard the timid tapping at the door. It was Brick. Brick didn't say anything, but Sam invited him in.

Red and Joe were trying to corner Ahab who was wobbling away from them, still holding onto the bottle and the hat. Joe caught him first and gave him a shove. Ahab bounced hard off the wall. Thunderbird spouted

here and there and Maybelle got to Sam's bookcase just in time to keep it from crashing over. Ahab was on his face, still holding onto the hat.

Joe was trying to tug the hat out of Ahab's grasp when Brick was suddenly there, turning him around, and smashing him to the face with a roundhouse right. Joe's nose broke with a terrible crack and blood spattered across his startled face and flowed onto his uniform. Brick was after Red when Sam, Gene, and Robert restrained him. Ahab, seeing his buddies the sailors under attack, threw the bottle at Brick.

After things were settled as much as they could be, Sam left. Joe's nose was in bad shape, but he and Red were so frightened and fed up with the civilians on Wilfred Avenue that they refused Gene's offer of a ride back to the ship. Ahab was quite disturbed by their departure. He pleaded with them to stay for the big party tomorrow and he wouldn't let Gene take him home either. He flopped down on the couch and moaned and wailed about the Annabelle Lee and the sailors and the Thunderbird all being gone. When Willa Right patted him on the head and tried to quiet him, Robert slapped her and pulled her toward home by the hair. Brick was in the worst shape of all. He almost collapsed when he saw what he had done to Joe. Maybelle helped him upstairs to Sam's bed, undressed him like a baby, and held his hand while he talked and talked for a long time about what an awful fellow he was. Gene went to bed and Sam left.

He went downtown and sat through most of a triple bill at an all night theater. The first feature was an old black-and-white gangster picture starring Richard Widmark as a cocky young crook who got in trouble with the gang and after a long chase, betrayed by all his friends, harrowed, bedraggled, and terrified, was shot to death in an alley by the police.

In the second feature an older, technicolor Richard Widmark, a harrowed, bedraggled and terrified good guy, but a coward, was chased across deserts and through frontier towns by a gang of vicious bad guys. After they killed his girl, he finally stood up to them, shot them all, and rode off alone. In the third film, a cool and competent, but aged, Randolph Scott was halfway through the process of saving the railroad for the lovely daughter of the murdered owner when Sam had to leave. It was time to catch his bus to work.

IX: Saturday

After the first couple of hours of records on Sam's Saturday shift there were two hours consisting of four twenty-nine minute taped programs. By employing an old wind-up alarm clock he had stashed in the back and the couch in Studio A, Sam was able to take four naps of twenty minutes each during those programs. He would get a program on the air, cue up the next program, get his logs up to date, and turn the monitor up loud so that silence or strange noises would, or might, wake him if something went wrong. Then he would carefully set the alarm clock for five minutes before the program was to be over and go to sleep on the couch. Although it was highly unlikely that Bill Edwin would ever come in that early in the morning, those naps were somewhat dangerous. If he slept through the alarm, or the tape broke and he didn't wake up, or someone important called . . . But none of those things ever happened. He didn't nap every Saturday, of course. Only in cases of special fatigue created by a tough week and a night of hunting for mad ex-bill collectors and being hunted by cops and outlaws. Besides, this weekend he knew that Bill Edwin was out of town.

Sam was still groggy when Hiram Dance arrived. He kept dozing off at the control board while Dance was on the air and he nearly slept through the closing cue. He could almost do Young Bob Holt's show asleep, but he didn't have to because by then a lot of day old coffee on a very empty stomach had him wide awake. "When are you going to take me up on

that invitation to come have a swim at my apartment, Sam?" "Gosh, Bob, it seems like something always comes up. But one of these days. I promise." He never would, of course. Sam's professional principle on such things was never to mix his private life with his radio work. It was a very practical and prudent principle and he had never deviated from it. Before today.

But this was the weekend Dr. Billy John Harquist came to town. Billy John was the king of the communist-baiters. His "Crusade for a Christian America" was a large enterprise with headquarters in Dallas, Texas, and his taped programs were a daily feature on KRST. He was in Portland that weekend to hold three big Christian America Rallies. Because he was a major account, the details of the rallies were important courtesies for KRST to attend to. That was Bill Edwin's job, however, not Sam's. It was only by chance that he became involved.

Bill Edwin, as always, had done his job well. On Friday, before he left town, he had greeted Dr. Harquist and his associates at the airport and made them feel at home in one of Portland's finest hotels. Among the other arrangements he had taken care of was the recruiting of an able pianist to play for group singing at the rallies. That's the part Sam got mixed up in.

During the last hour of his shift, a few minutes after one, Maybelle called to urge him to hurry home because Ahab had just gone out, checkbook in hand, to purchase a large store of Cutty Sark. They had phoned quite a few people and it looked like Ahab's good and evil party would be a great one. No, she hadn't heard anything from Rachel. "That good scotch is beginning to sound like a miracle drug to me," said Sam.

"It won't take me more than two hours to drink myself into a very sound sleep. But maybe I better not. Rachel might show up out at the airport any time now." "That's it," said Maybelle, "I'll bet she's planning to fly back into town unannounced with all sorts of good news to surprise you with."

After Maybelle hung up, Sam tried again to place a call to the L. Creighton Dexter residence in Los Angeles. Again there was no answer. He asked the operator to keep trying and gave her the Wilfred Avenue number in case there was an answer after two when his shift ended.

At 1:35 the phone rang again. It was the mother of the girl who had played piano for the Christian America rally the night before. She had promised Mr. Edwin she would call to let him know if her daughter would be able to play again tonight. Her daughter wouldn't be able to.

Sam called several other members of the KRST staff to see if they knew anything about the arrangements for a pianist. They didn't, but they all acknowledged that it would be a black eye for KRST if Billy John were faced with a full hall and an empty piano bench tonight. Sam called Billy John himself at his hotel. The great man didn't know what the situation was either and he would certainly appreciate it if Sam would do all he could to insure the presence of a pianist. He was very supplicatory.

Sam turned the control board over to Winnie Ashton as soon as she arrived and spent the last few minutes of his shift calling some of the local evangelical big-wigs, asking them to help him dig up a pianist. There was an air of rivalry in their replies, but a couple of them admitted knowing prospects and promised to have those prospects call Sam at the Wilfred Avenue number.

On the streets between Sam's bus stop downtown and Wilfred Avenue people were happy. Clusters of women gabbled in and out of skyscraping stores that groaned with merchandise. Patient-faced men with benign smiles walked unrestrainable children and leashed dogs while watching knees pop up smiling from under hems of this year's shorter skirts. Huge cars glided by, rumbling proudly of their power, each piloted by tanned young men with eyes glazed and sinewy elbows thrust out open windows. And for each tanned young man, a tanned young lady, trustfully pressing the treasure of her body's first bloom against the gaunt hard shoulder of her triumphant conquerer of many horses. In the park the sunlight was dazzling, and spring breezes still chased away the oppressive humidity of summer.

Wilfred Avenue was being serenaded once again by Maude's portable phonograph. The battered machine, probably a little surprised at itself, was grinding out not the rock that was its mistresses' pleasure nor the classics that were her work, but an old Tommy Dorsey recording, with trombone tones so pure they could break a sin-sodden heart and the voice of a very young Frank Sinatra, full of frail dreams and hopeful innocence. leading the Pied Pipers through a chorus of "There Are Such Things." The recording was one of Sam's treasures, secreted away from dusty shelves in the backroom of a small town radio station, still bearing on its black label the white inkstamp: FOR DEMONSTRATION ONLY NOT FOR SALE.

Wilson's nimble dark bulk in melted union with Maude's long white limbs and a smooth fox trot. They could do that, too. "Hey, man, what's happening?" said quietly with a flash of happy teeth and half-lidded eyes and not expecting an answer. Maude's face up from her lover's neck and a

small smile said, everything is fine and I'm happy, oh so happy. Maybelle languishing on Gene's lap in the big chair, her arms around his neck, her eyes on his face. A chessboard at Gene's feet and Brick on the other side of it, studying. Bonnie, blatantly blond and balloon breasted, sitting blankly on the couch with Ahab's haggard head in her lap. Gene's head back on the chair, both he and Ahab blowing slow clouds of cigarette smoke and while waiting for Brick to make his move, discussing an appropriately poignant subject. A faded hero. Adlai Stevenson. Ahab saying, regretfully, something about compromises.

"By God, old Sam," went the greetings. Ahab bobbed up and with mock gentility fingered a cube of ice from the metal bucket on the floor plock! into a flowered jelly glass and eased scotch over the cube up to the brim. "Join us in the joys of a slow drunk on good scotch."

"Aye, Sam, it's good to have you aboard. And I wish ye had been aboard the Annabelle Lee with us yesterday. I wish ye all had been there. That's a life I tell ye." Ahab contemplated the ship on the Cutty Sark label. "Wouldn't that be something? Captain of a crew of hearties setting out from the old isles in a sturdy ship bound for the new world. And a hold crammed with scotch! Great barrels of it. Aye, or a whaler, from Nantucket. A whole world to roam, the elements and mountainous fish to battle. Say there's work! Work a man could be proud of. And to be Captain, on the bridge rumbling orders, every man aboard responding immediately with trust in your wisdom. Hey, man, now there's an honest kind of power."

"Did you ever run a plow?" Gene asked. "I mean a real by God plow, with a horse? We used to have a little place when I was a kid,

before Mom died. Dad was already gardening for rich people and already drinking. But we had this place with an old horse, half blind he was so old, but hooves as big as your head. There's your honest power. Not commanding men, but prodding that big shit-eater along and it felt like you were slicing open the earth with your bare hands. To make it feed you. Think what it must have been like when all this country was really wilderness. Get out of bed in the morning with the itch of God in your shoulders. A whole fucking world to clear and plow."

"There's too much civilization in me, I guess," said Sam. "Your lost dreams are just corny, mine are absurd. My yen for power came standing behind the pulpit of an empty sanctuary, imagining it full of people waiting on what I had to say. Not 'string up the mainsail' or whatever you say to a ship's crew, but waiting to hear how to live their whole damn lives. After that one went bad, I got the same feeling looking at a radio control board. All those unseen ears and a barrage of sounds at your fingertips to please them, to inform them. Ha hah! I guess I'm still looking for something to give a crowd. Now I'd like to teach them. The great ideas, the great mysteries, the great problems of the whole of western culture."

Brick sucked a deep breath and looked around as if seeking permission to speak. "D'ja ev' ride a horse?" he blurted and then looked again from face to face. His head drooped back toward the chess game. "D'ja ev' try break a wil' one?" he added and then moved a knight.

Gene leaned forward over Maybelle's legs to consider the changed situation on the board at his feet. Maybelle rested her chin against his broad back and said, "Did you ever hold a baby?"

"Women are luckier than men . . ." Sam began and then was interrupted by the phone.

He turned off the phonograph and pleaded for quiet before he answered. There was some grumbling from Maude, but everyone sat, concentrating on their drinks and finding out what kind of call could be important enough to bring Ahab's good and evil party to a dead stop.

"Mr. Patience, please."

"Speaking."

"Mr. Patience, this is Agatha Shivvers. Reverend Clyde tells me that you are looking for a pianist to play for Dr. Billy John Harquist's meeting tomorrow night."

"Well, Mrs. Shivvers . . ."

"Miss Shivvers."

"Miss Shivvers, Dr. Harquist needs a pianist for tonight and tomorrow night."

"Oh dear, I couldn't possibly play tonight. I have another engagement."

"You're sure you couldn't get free for tonight? Dr. Harquist and KRST would certainly appreciate it."

"No, I'm sorry, Mr. Patience. I can't."

"Well, let me take your name and number. We may still need someone for tomorrow."

Then, of course, Sam had to explain how he had become obligated to find a pianist for the famous crusader. "Jesus humping Christ," said Ahab. "I never thought it would come to this. They have him pimping for a bleeding Commie chaser."

"A pianist. Oh my God, a pianist! Why didn't I think of it before? A pianist!" Sam's eyes were fixed upon Maude.

"Oh no you don't," she said. "Not a chance in the world. I wouldn't go near one of those meetings to save my life and I wouldn't even play hymns when I was a devout little church-goer in high school. No, no, no!"

"Come on, Maude. For old Sam? All you'd have to do is play a couple of hymns. You'd have a ball."

"Absolutely not. I don't even know any hymns."

"You're good enough. You could sight read them better than these old maids can play."

"No, no, no, no!"

The wheezing honks were from Robert Right's many-colored clunker, now parked in front of the house. Robert was trying to tug something out of the trunk and Willa was asking for help by blowing the horn. It was soon sitting in the middle of the living room. A rusting automobile rear axle, resting on one oversized inflated truck tire and thrusting upward a smaller, ragged, flat tire. "I felt that I should present a work of art in honor of Ahab's good and evil party," said Robert.

"It's beautiful," said Ahab.

"Thank you."

"What is it, man?" asked Wilson.

If my estimate of the situation is accurate," observed Gene, "It's an automobile axle."

"It's a sculpture," protested Robert.

"It can't be a sculpture," said Maude. "It's real."

Robert raised impatient eyes toward the muses. "Naturally it's real. That adds all the more meaning. And it's here, in this house, in this room, in this day and age, arranged in the way it is arranged. All that infuses this simple object with profound meanings."

"Sure!" shouted Maybelle enthusiastically. "It's a phallic symbol."

"Looks like it's had a hell of a workout," mumbled Gene.

"I call it 'Shooting for the Stars or Hey, Buddy, Can You Spare a Pump?'"

"You're not serious?" said Bonnie, blinking.

The phone rang again and the silence Sam asked for was full of whispered explanations to the Rights of Sam's project and of their muttered disbelief.

"Mr. Patience. On your call to Los Angeles, we still haven't been able to reach your party."

"Would you keep trying, operator? At least a couple of times in the next hour?"

"Operator? You going out of town for pianists?"

"No, that's about something else."

"What something else, Sam?" asked Maybelle.

"Rachel. I am trying to get her in L.A. Find out what's happened."

There was a moment of silence. Several people were looking at him sadly. As if his parents had died or something. "She's probably on the airplane back by now, Sam."

"How about some sounds, Maude?" said Robert. "Let's wail some."

The rock 'n' roll started. Sam went to the kitchen and found half a pot of coffee to warm up. He made a sandwich of Gene's salami and cheese.

Ahab, coming back to break out another bottle, found him sitting at the table, forehead supported by an elbow propped hand, working on his third cup of coffee, lighting a cigarette from the stub of another. "Look at you, Sam. You're a mess. Everyone else is drinking good booze, dancing, talking, having a good time together and here you are all alone, all shaky from coffee, all tight ass over whether some charlatan will be able to put on his medicine act, all beat up because that worthless chick has jilted you again. Why, Sam, why?"

With a look of exasperation, Sam started to reply, but didn't. He just ran a hand through his hair and sighed.

"We've got to bust you loose from all this! Come on, Sam, join the party. A bunch of Winston's friends just showed up. It's too good to miss. There is this wonderful colored chick trying to teach Brick how to dance. She shakes it at him to show him how and he turns redder than she is black. Bust loose, man, bust loose!"

Sam went back to the living room because the phone was ringing. It was harder to get quiet now.

"Sam, this is Reverend Clyde. Did Agatha Shivvers call you?"

"Yes, she . . ."

"Oh fine, then it's all settled, eh?"

"No, she said she could only play tomorrow, not tonight."

"Was it for tonight you wanted someone? I must have misunderstood you! That is too bad. We have a prayer meeting of our own tonight, you know. I'm sorry I couldn't be . . ."

"Gene, you old son of a bitch! Good to see you!"

"Ahab, you fart! How are you?" There were squeals of only slightly suppressed mirth.

"Eh? What was that?"

"Thanks a lot for trying, Reverend Clyde. Goodbye."

The laughter broke out in earnest when Sam hung up. Gene and Ahab were leaning against each other, holding each other up, spilling their drinks, laughing.

"Bastard," Sam said, but he was grinning and sat down on the couch to refill his jelly glass.

Wilson sat down beside him. "No luck on the pianist yet, man? Hey, I don't know if it would work, but that chick who just came in, the one over there teaching old Brick to dance, she's a swinging pianist, man. And she plays church hymns, too."

"Jesus, I hate to say it, Wilson, but this prick who is doing the preaching has a big southern following. I doubt that his services are, well, integrated."

"No kidding? Okay. No big thing, man. Just trying to help." He grinned, shook his head, and did his best eye-roll. "Hee, hee, I tell you, man, they don't know what they're missing. They ain't never heard hymns till they heard nigger hymns, man. No sir!"

The next telephone call was from the operator again. "Your party in Los Angeles still does not answer, sir."

The doorbell was ringing. Ahab went to answer it.

"Would you please try again around six, operator?"

"How do you do?" said Ahab to the girl at the door.

"Hi! I'm Lela Yllvisaker. It sounds to me like you are having a party, so I think it is time I met my neighbors." And she walked in. She was small and her face was almost that of a little girl. She had very blond hair braided into two little pigtails. She had deep dimples. Her light cotton dress was almost little girl style, but the body in it, though compact, wasn't that of a little girl. She spoke with great animation. "I live just across the street, up above in the housekeeping room. I just moved in yesterday and I don't know anyone here. I have a job as a waitress starting Monday. In the fall I'm going to go to Portland State. You people look like students, so I thought I should meet you."

"My name is Moby Dick," said Ahab, shaking her hand. "This is a good and evil party and you are welcome to join us, whichever you are."

"I'm glad to meet you, Moby. Wow! a good 'n' evil party, huh? Well, I'm sure I'm as good 'n' evil as anybody." She winked, did a little windup, and punched him on the shoulder.

"Let me get you a drink and introduce you to everyone."

"Wow! drinks, huh? I don't know if I should have one, but I will." Another wink and an exaggerated gulp. "I'm only eighteen, y'know." This time she caught him on the other shoulder with a left hook.

"That's the age of consent, my dear, so here's your drink."

"Mighty white of you, Moby."

"Of course. Now I'd like you to meet Tom and Eva." Ahab took her up to Winston and Maude. "Tom and Eva, this is Punch Yllvisaker."

"Wow! that Moby is really crazy, isn't he?" And around the room they went, Ahab improvising names ad nauseam and "Punch" all dimples and exuberance.

Sam was on the couch taking sips of scotch and coffee alternately and losing a battle to stay awake.

"Now, last and least, Punch, I'd like you to meet Elmer, here, who is not only one of the great thinkers of our time and a famous radio personality, but has lately become quite a show biz entrepreneur. If he looks a little beat, it's because he's trying to swing a couple of big deals this afternoon. There is a local group of well-healed art lovers clamoring for a performance by a name pianist. He can't get Horowitz or Rubenstein on the phone, so he may have to settle for Brubeck. And he's trying to arrange a return engagement in his bedroom by a lovely and intelligent slab of ice. Hey, Elmer! wake up. Shake hands with Miss Deus ex Machina. Sit down there by Elmer, Miss Machina. She dropped in just in time, don't you think, Elmer? I mean, just when you were looking for new talent."

Sam extended a hand to the girl who was now seated beside him.

"Welcome to the party, Punch."

"Wow! you must be some guy, Elmer."

"My name is Sam. One of the most important things you'll have to learn if you are going to be our neighbor is that Ahab lies. Lots."

"He does!" She clenched her fists and looked fiercely at Ahab while throwing a quick wink at Sam. "And I thought he looked like such a nice fellow."

"I am a prince," said Ahab. "But since I see that I am to be defamed by this company, I shall not deign to remain." And he walked back to Bonnie, who had been watching his attentions to the newcomer with increasing discomfort.

"Well, I'm going to stay right here because I want to tell you a secret, Sam. My name isn't Deus ex Machina. It isn't even Punch." She jammed an elbow in his ribs and when he jumped and looked at her in surprise, she was innocently gazing off across the room. Then she laughed, looked at him again, winked, wrinkled her nose, and jabbered on. "My name is Lela Yllvisaker, but you can call me Punch if you want. You can even call me Deus if you want." She clutched his hand and mimicked a love-starved face and voice. "Just call me! Anytime, day or night. I don't care. Just call me once in a while, willya, huh?"

"Okay, okay, I'll call you Punch," said Sam, laughing.

"Wow! that'll be great! But I'm not going to call you Elmer, because Sam is my favorite name. Ever since I was a little kid I've been nutty about people named Sam. I remember once in Norseburg . . ."

"Norseburg? Are you from Norseburg?"

"All my lovable life."

"I lived there for a while. About three years ago. I worked for KNOS . . ."

"Wow! then you are the one! You . . ."

The phone was ringing again and Sam was up, turning off the phonograph, demanding quiet.

This time it was Reverend Willy, proprietor of the Wings of Grace Campground, the oldest permanently established tent meeting in Portland.

"Do you have a pianist for Harquist yet, Sam?" he asked. "Well, I think I have just what you need. I don't suppose a Mrs. Stephens has called you? I didn't think she would. She's very timid about her playing these days, but she used to be one of the best in the city. She played for Billy Cracker's Crusade when it came to Portland a number of years ago. She has played for many big time events. Maybe you better call her. She listens to KRST all the time and she began to get all flustered when I mentioned your name. I think she's afraid to call you."

Mrs. Stephens spoke in very hushed tones even before Sam told her who he was. Then she was so hushed he could hardly hear her. She couldn't possibly. She hadn't played in public for years. But when he explained how desperate the situation was, how late it was getting, and how much he and KRST and Dr. Harquist would appreciate it, she finally gave in. She admitted that she and her daughter had been wanting to go hear Dr. Harquist anyway, but that they didn't have any way to get to his meeting. No way at all? No. Finally Sam had to volunteer to pick up her and her daughter, escort them to the meeting and home. It was getting late and he hadn't been able to find any other pianists.

Sam was so tired he could hardly stand up. Ahab could tell that, but he still couldn't resist giving him a bad time about borrowing his car. "Why not use Gene's car? The shitmobile would be perfect for the job." Then he agreed to let Sam use his car if he would take Punch along with him. "I'll bet she'd love to go see the evangelist. Wouldn't you, Punch?"

"Wow! I sure would. I love evangelists. Never missed the ones who came to Norseburg."

"No, no, you don't want to go," said Sam. He began to wearily pull himself up the stairs. "Listen, I've got to get some sleep. I've got about an hour before I have to go to pick up my pianist. Please, for Christ's sake, someone wake me up in an hour."

He threw off his clothes and was asleep as soon as he was under the covers. Then he was awake because someone, Punch, had her forehead and nose pressed against his. She was kneeling on the bed, her knees and arms straddling him.

"So this is your room, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Just wanted to be sure I knew where it was so I could wake you when your hour is up."

"Great."

She still had her forehead and nose pressed against his. "Hey, Sam?"

"Yeah?"

"You remember that request show you used to have on KNOS?"

"Yeah."

"The one where us high school kids were supposed to open junior charge accounts at the department store because then Swingin' Sammy would play our requests and dedicate them to whoever we wanted."

"Biggest flop ever. Only two people opened accounts and they didn't buy anything."

"I was one who opened an account. Remember the girl who requested 'To Know Him Is to Love Him' and dedicated it to you?"

"Yeah. Must've been someone making a joke."

"No, it was me. All the other kids said you were square, but I thought you were neat."

"Thanks."

"I still think you're neat, Sam." She gave him a peck on the lips and then jumped off the bed. "I'll call you when your hour is up. Don't worry." And she was gone.

Mrs. Stephens was a little old lady. She was a widow and lived in a shrubbery enclosed cottage on the east side with her unmarried thirtyish daughter, Miss Stephens, who was an apprentice little old lady. She met all the requirements except age.

Sam opened the car door for them and introduced them to Punch. Punch was dignified and gracious in her greeting. Mrs. Stephens and her daughter stared at her with sweet envy, then crawled, creaky jointed, into the back seat of Ahab's Volkswagen.

Sam had been unable to talk Punch out of coming. While he slept, she had gone back across the street to her housekeeping room, brushed her hair out, and put on a conservative blue dress and a black summer coat. She had pledged a solemn oath of good conduct and Sam didn't know about the scotch she drank while waiting for his hour to pass. On the way across town she sat half off the bucket seat in Ahab's car to get as close to him as possible. He rolled down the window to let in the neon green night air and, with his elbow perched on the window ledge, answered an endless stream of questions about himself. She kept repeating "wow!" to all he told her and hit him frequently on the leg with a clenched fist. But softly.

Sam was still asleep and Ahab had answered the phone when the operator called to say there was still no answer at the L. Creighton Dexter residence in Los Angeles. Ahab told her that just from the sound of her voice he could tell she had the shapeliest clitoris in all Portland and tried to make a date with her.

From Mrs. Stephens' house they had to go back to the west side and downtown to the American Legion Hall. "Oh, I'm so excited," said Mrs. Stephens. "Now I know how the old fire horse felt when they brought him back from the glue factory because the fancy new engine had broken down. I'm happy I'm still needed, but I don't know if I can pull the wagon anymore."

At the entrance to the auditorium Sam spoke to a young fellow who was setting up a stand from which to vend Billy John Harquist books, records, and bric-a-brac. Instead of directing them to his leader, as Sam asked, he sent them to Dr. Nathan, who was Dr. Harquist's number one henchman and a Southern aristocrat from the top of his silver-white head to the tip of his highly polished shoes. A Southern aristocrat who had been impressed by the costumes in a high budget production of Guys and Dolls. He wore a light green double breasted sport coat--not the old-fashioned double breast, the modern revival of it--slacks and shirt of the same shade of powder blue, a white tie, and black and white shoes.

Although he greeted them cordially, he didn't look upon Mrs. Stephens with a great deal of enthusiasm. She was a very little old lady. And she was obviously quite nervous. Dr. Nathan took her to the piano to fill her in on how the program was to go. She ran through "Onward Christian Soldiers." She could play well enough, but it didn't sound quite

right. Dr. Nathan drew Sam aside and said he was worried about her. She trembled so. Sam explained that he had done the best he could under the circumstances.

"Well, we'll git by," drawled Dr. Nathan. Then he went on to say that as long as Sam was there surely he wouldn't mind helping with the collection and book selling during the meeting. They were a little short handed.

Sam was trying to stutter his way out of that when they were joined by a gal who looked, cliché or not, like a lady wrestler. "I'm the pianist for tonight," she said with assurance. "KRST sent me."

After several minutes of explanations it became clear that Bill Edwin had known all along another pianist would be needed for the second night of the Christian America Rallies. It had all been arranged for a week. The Lady Wrestler climbed onto the piano bench and pummeled the Christian Soldiers for all they were worth. "She's perfect," Dr. Nathan told Sam. "You'll have to explain to the little old lady."

Sam explained with as much diplomacy as possible. Mrs. Stephens didn't seem too hurt. She and her daughter had wanted to hear Dr. Harquist anyway, she reminded Sam. "Well, 'tis back to the glue factory," she said to her daughter in what was supposed to be a cheerful voice as Sam ushered them to a seat about halfway back and on the middle aisle.

Sam sat down with Punch up in front. The hall filled while the Lady Wrestler won all the falls in her match with the piano.

Dr. Nathan took the podium to open the program. In a stident tenor voice he coerced them through several verses of "Christian Soldiers" and then, hand over heart, lead the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

" . . . ONE NATION, UNDER GOD . . ." There was a pretty good crowd. Not a Billy Cracker or an Oral Bobbs stadium full, but a good solid five hundred souls.

Dr. Nathan told Billy John Harquist's life story and many deeds. The son of a dirt farmer who elevated himself in the world by means of correspondence school academic degrees, a golden speaking voice, his own bootstraps, and the support of good folk like yourselves. Now, of course, he is internationally prominent. Who could forget, Dr. Nathan wanted to know, the time when Dr. Harquist, in spite of insidious State Department interference, unleashed from West Germany one hundred thousand pigeons, each bearing a Bible tract, in the direction of the Eastern European satellite countries? This, Dr. Nathan hinted, was the effective cause of the Hungarian Revolution and if it weren't for the United States government's cowardly, in fact traitorous, refusal to intervene, all of Eastern Europe would be free by now. Thanks to Dr. Harquist's pigeons. And now here he is to bring his message to you, the people of Portland.

Billy John Harquist would have been handsome if he weren't so fat. But he was still a young man, not yet forty, and he carried his testimony concerning the sin of gluttony well. It was healthy fat and had the effect of adding weight to his plain folks approach. And it could shimmer with righteous indignation beneath his well-tailored chocolate brown suit.

He began speaking calmly, dealing out fact supported shock after shock supported fact almost off-handedly, then building in intensity as it became time to take the collection. With the kind of enemies he had-- the National Council of Churches, the pinko press, the Supreme Court, most of Congress, the State Department, the Administration, the Communist Party

of the United States, the Mafia, the Red Chinese, the Soviet government in Moscow, the United Nations . . . You could see why he needed a lot of money to carry on his crusade.

While the offertory prayer was spoken, Sam stood before the great man's podium along with two righteous looking young men who were with the Harquist organization. "And Lord, we'd like to give special thanks this evening that we were able to have with us this fine young man, this good servant of yours, Mr. Sam Patience from radio station KRST . . ." When the smattering of applause broke out behind him, Sam almost dropped the collection plate he was holding. It seemed to come from the back of the auditorium. And there was one voice, a familiar voice, repeating "Yea! Yea! Yea!" along with the clapping. Ahab?

Dr. Harquist's brow furrowed, but he went on with the prayer. It suited him just fine that the kid was popular, but applause during a prayer is not quite proper.

Sam went down the middle aisle fielding plates from both sides while the young crusaders covered the outer aisles.

It was Ahab. In fact it was the whole good and evil party, minus the colored members and Maude, who thought the idea of going to the Rally was silly and had stayed behind to dance.

As the collection was taken Billy John led the assembly through "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." And Ahab led the group from Wilfred Avenue in calls of derisive encouragement to Sam. Even Brick had been clapping.

Mrs. Stephens and her daughter each put two dollars in the plate. As Sam moved beyond them, the calls from the back became audible over the

singing. "Atta boy, Sam!" "Go get 'em, baby!" "Rake it in, you old crusader you!" The people around them had stopped singing and were looking on with expressions ranging from puzzlement to rage. Sam tried to catch Ahab's eye, to mutely plead for mercy, but all he could catch was a gleam of blank ardour, a humorless dedication to what was being done. On the right, at the outer edge of the crowd, Dr. Nathan was beginning to walk toward the back, peering toward the commotion, jaw set, eyes squinting.

Sam handed a collection plate to the first man he came to who was sitting on the outside. "Would you take over for me, please?" Ahab was sitting on the outside too. Sam clutched him by the elbow, said "Come with me," and Ahab was two steps down the aisle toward the door before he realized what was happening.

"Hey, man, we can't leave yet. Goddamn meeting's just getting started." He tried to pull back but Sam held on and kept moving. "Jesus Christ, Sam, the fun's just getting started, we can't leave."

Although Ahab was considerably bigger than Sam and could have stopped if he had made a determined effort, he had consumed enough scotch to make equilibrium alone a considerable problem once Sam had him moving. Sam held onto his arm and kept him moving until they had gone out of the hall, through the vestibule, and were in the street. Then he dropped the arm and Ahab tried to go back into the building, but Sam blocked his way.

"Look, Ahab, old buddy, if I weren't obligated to give that poor old lady a ride home, I'd just say let's go find a bar, have a drink, and forget it . . ."

"Don't give me any puke about poor old ladies, Sambo. The old

bitches in there are the kind who would be dropping H-bombs on people if they had their way."

"Please, Ahab, lay off. I don't want to lose my job. Especially not this way."

"Sma! you've got to quit that job. Look what it's doing to you. Christ Almighty we came here to get on Harquist's ass, figuring you'd get a big kick out of it. Then there you were passing the fucker's plate for him. What's happening to you?"

"Let me get out of this mess tonight on my own, please. Come back to harass Harquist tomorrow."

"To hell with Harquist now! You're the one we've got to look after. Come on, Sam, you've got to go back in there with me and bust loose, man!" He started for the door again and Sam shoved him back. For a moment Ahab was saddened. "God what's going on? My best buddies are all the time shoving me around anymore." Then his eyes lit up with fierce supplication. "Sam, don't you see? I'm trying to save you!" He made another lunge at the door.

That's when Sam hit him. Hit him after a fashion anyway. It started out as a ferocious haymaker, but along the way Sam seemed to realize what he was doing and tried to stop the punch. Ahab saw it coming and lurched backwards drunkenly. What it finally amounted to was a grazing blip on the mouth, but it cut his lip some. Ahab stumbled over his own feet and sat down on the sidewalk. Sam, surprised, looked at him sitting there, then turned around abruptly and went back inside.

The collection was over and the crowd was bellowing religious-political songs with bursting conviction. Having fattened it with their dollars, they were a part of the crusade now, sink or swim.

The delegation from Wilfred Avenue looked quizzically at Sam, as if he had been gone for a long time and they weren't sure they knew him. He stopped just long enough to whisper fervently, "Please keep quiet," and returned to his seat. Punch kept buzzing questions in his ear, but he wouldn't answer.

The singing stopped and Billy John took up a red paperbound book. Over the years of his ministry, he explained, he had written many articles and pamphlets, but until recently he had never had time to do a full length book. The need for such a book had become cryingly evident and he had devoted what was to have been his vacation time last year to writing it. It was now available in limited supply at a dollar a copy or three copies --give the extras to your friends--for two dollars. It was called A Communist or a Christian America: Which Will It Be? And inside they would find, in much greater detail than he could give them tonight, all the hard terrifying facts about the deterioration of American society that has made a Communist take-over imminent and a dramatic program to halt the deterioration, to prevent the take-over.

Sam, his face drawn and blanched, stood before the podium again as a prayer was said over a mound of the pulpy red books. Then, along with Harquist's helpers, he started down the aisle once more with a stack of books under his arm. As he took the first dollar Harquist began to speak again.

"Friends, as the books are being sold, I have a few special words I'd like to say tonight. With American schools in the terrible state they are in today, with pinko textbooks and teachers who are Commies, dupes, or fellow travelers, it is small wonder the younger generation is

as far down the road to perdition as most of them are. Often as we go about the country on this crusade we have groups of confused, misled college students show up at our meetings, not to listen, not to allow the practice of free speech, but to heckle and boo and try to start fights. I think you are all aware that such a group is here tonight. Now, as I say, we're used to such people, and we're certainly not afraid of them, let me assure you. We can handle them. But I'm sure it gave your hearts the thrill it did mine to see that tonight we didn't have to. Because tonight we have with us a young man who is not misguided, a young man who is not afraid to stand up for his God and country. He handled the situation quietly and calmly and I think we all owe him a vote of thanks and appreciation. Let's rise up and give him a big hand."

People beamed at Sam and applauded proudly. Some of them edged forward to be sure they could buy their books from him. Others shot scornful glances toward the back of the room.

While Harquist was speaking, Sam had been watching Gene. What happened now depended on his response. Gene was softer than Ahab. He saw Sam's begging eyes and kept quiet, but his face worked angrily as more and more heads cranked around to glare vindictively at him. When the applause began Gene leaped to his feet with everybody else, applauding defiantly at his accusers. A jerk of his head brought Maybelle, the Rights, Brick, and even Bonnie to their feet too. They were all applauding Sam, whose face turned scarlet, whose lips were tight as he silently sold books.

As the applause began to die out, Harquist leaned forward over the podium, jowls quivering, finger on an extended arm wagging at the

the back of the room. He was hot on the scent and ready for the kill.

"And to those of you who came here tonight to make trouble, let me say this. If you have the courage--let me say plainly--if you have the guts to sit there quietly like dignified adults and listen to what I have to say during the rest of this meeting, I'll bet that one or more of you, thanks to the example of young Sam Patience, that one or more of you, like so many others before you who have come to make trouble; one or more of you will find your way to the Lord tonight!" Applause broke out again.

"One or more of you will find your way to the Lord and your lives will be transformed!" he shouted as his audience clapped and said "Amen! Amen!"

That was all Gene could take. Now he was on his feet. "All right!" he roared and the audience was hushed by his audacity. One hand on the back of the chair in front of him, shoulders and head hunched forward, finger jabbing back at his antagonist. "All right, we'll stay and hear your spiel. But let's make this fair. You want dignity, okay, let's have a debate, nice and formal. You talk about guts, you look like you have plenty of them, let's see how they stand up under a little questioning. Let's talk about foreign policy, let's talk about economics. Let's go into the morality of the Welfare State. I'm even willing to start on your own religious grounds. Let's talk about the Sermon on the Mount, and then, by God, let's talk about foreign policy!" Gene's breath came in great heaves, his face twitched.

Harquist smiled calmly and he leaned folded arms on the podium.

"By cracky, friends, there's one thing you will always find in the youth of America, one thing we can always be proud of about the youth of America; they have spunk!" Dr. Nathan started applauding and the rest of the

audience picked it up. Harquist, with a broad smile now, chuckling, waved his hand at Gene. "Aren't I right? Isn't that good old American spunk? You bet it is, friends!" As the Amens and applause died again he became earnest once more, though still calm. "Yes, we can certainly be proud of our young people's spunk." A little louder, "I'm sorry to say we can't always be as proud of their manners." More applause and Amens. Billy John waving it down. "But we must be tolerant of the impatience of our youth. So let me take just a moment more to explain a few things to this young man. Now I've spent the last twenty years of my life studying the Bible and all aspects of government and history. I have travelled all over the globe talking to leaders in government and religion. There isn't one argument, there isn't one genuine fact you can produce tonight I haven't heard before many times. And I have already spent many, many long hours talking to young people like you and I'll spend many, many more hours doing so because that is the mission to which God has called me. But I'm not going to debate with you now."

"Because you are a coward," shouted Gene.

"Wrong! If I were a coward I'd have quit this business long ago. You see, in all your impatience you have forgotten common courtesy to the rest of the people here. Most of them are older than you. All of them have had a belly full of pinko arguments for soaking the taxpayer, of traitorous reasons for appeasement, of Godless excuses for immorality and sin. And they didn't come here tonight to hear more of that tripe!" Great torrents of applause and Amens.

"But I have time for you, young man. If you are sincere in your questioning, I'll make time for you. If you have, as I say, the guts to

sit there like a gentleman and hear the rest of what I have to say tonight and then still have questions, if there are still things you don't understand, you come up to me after this meeting is over and I'll explain them. If you really want to know the truth, I'll tell it to you and I don't care if it takes all night to make you understand!"

That was the end of it. Gene was still talking back, but applause drowned him out and he sat down and wasn't shouting anymore and Billy John turned and walked away, victorious, from the podium and Dr. Nathan burst into song and the Lady Wrestler picked it up by the second bar and the crowd was bellowing it and buying books. Sam made trip after trip back to the front for more books. Mrs. Stephens and her daughter wanted three copies apiece. They were waving bills at him, but he wouldn't take them, he just tossed a handful of books into their laps. He ignored the row in which Gene sat, passing with his eyes averted. The side pockets of his suit coat bulged with great wads of bills which he dumped into the gaping money bag Dr. Nathan held waiting when he had at last reached the back of the hall. The book selling over, he sank back into his seat to have his hand taken up by Punch and pressed with pride.

Then Harquist really cut loose. He had only been warming up so far. There were Communists everywhere, except in the FBI and the military. They were everywhere and they would take over if something isn't done. By the time he had enumerated case after case of appeasement, creeping socialism, Commie encroachment, moral and political corruption, lies slander murder rape committed against good Christians; the audience was convinced that they, this little klatch of perhaps the only righteous souls left on earth, were in imminent danger of being raided by a band of Molotov cocktail hurling Bolsheviks.

"Now everyone may not understand the full extent of it, but everyone is aware today that things have gone wrong in this country," says Billy John. "And our so-called best minds have gone to work on the problem. They've come up with plans to throw taxpayer's money away here and programs to pound tax dollars down a rat hole there, and all the while the Supreme Court goes on ruling in favor of Commies and the Administration refuses to allow the military to stand up and fight to win--we wouldn't want to give those Commies a good licking because it might hurt their feelings, it might make them unhappy!"

"But you don't have to be an egghead, you don't have to teach at Harvard to see that there is one solution to our problems that none of these 'great thinkers' has suggested. The one solution they've overlooked is Jesus! The one solution that will really work isn't fancy enough and doesn't cost enough tax dollars. But that's the only way, my friends, we'll ever prevent this great country from going Red. We must turn our hearts and minds on Him!"

Billy John embellished that theme for the last five minutes before the altar call. He stroked the string of gratuitous salvation, there for the asking, until hot globs of frustration choked the throats of his listeners. He had made them feel the problem, feel the red shackles all but clasped about their necks to drag them off to work camps. It's going to happen if we don't watch out! And the frustration formed, like indigestion, in the entrails. But here was the purgative, the answer they had, for the moment, despaired to find. It was so obvious all the time, so simple, so righteous, so economical! The frustration balled in their throats now, screaming to be disgorged. If it is there for the asking,

give it to us! What can we do, where can we go to spit out this boiling evil and be clean?

To the altar.

And they came, the dowdy hausfrauen, their gaunt husbands, necks creased by the lashes of defeat, and their terrorized offspring, faces streaming righteous relief, dreamwalking to the majestic harmonies of "God Bless America." A full fourth of the audience felt within themselves blight of sin or surge of conviction sufficient to drive them to their knees before Harquist and God to purge or repurge, to dedicate or rededicate. And the others, too shy to come forward like Mrs. Stephens and her daughter, or fully dedicated before tonight and more convinced than ever of their own wisdom, roared the song to reassure the convertees that they were right, right!

When the last straggler had bent his knee and the song had ended, the still unsated Harquist called for one more chorus because he knew, he said, that there was at least one more soul in this hall tonight who truly needs to come forward and who has not yet found the courage. "Come now!" he commanded. "Isn't there one more who will join the fight, one more who will dedicate himself to God and country."

Everyone knew the victory after which he lusted. Would he have it? It would not be Gene, his bristly head shaking sadly, seeing voters attached to strings and drawn toward future polls by demagogery. And not Maybelle, whose mouth swarmed with saliva to spit in the face of her man's maligner. Not Robert for whom truth was an automobile axle. Not Willa, whose God was art and therefore her husband. Not Brick, who knew he was evil, but was too intelligent to be a pawn for Harquist. Not Bonnie,

whose God was a husband and whose eyes had more often been on the rear door where her latest prospect had disappeared than on Harquist. Was there, then, some peripheral plum for the harvester's basket? Not Sam, whose emotional responses were jaded by having heard such messages materialize from a thousand spools of magnetic tape and whose every nerve was now doggedly fixed upon nothing more than enduring this terrible hour.

"No one? Not one more soul who will give in to the burning need to kneel before God and join the ranks of the righteous?"

The half glances of the singers bent toward the back of the room, but the murmuring figure who reeled from her chair and fell upon dimpled knees came from the front row, from the chair next to Sam's. "Oh wow, I will. I'll go. Wait for me. Oh wow, me."

Miss Stephens sat in front with Sam on the way back to her east-side home. She was trying to get him to join in her raptures over what a powerful meeting it had been. She would say, "The way he made that beatnik fellow quiet down! Didn't it make you goosepimple all over? You could tell he was a beatnik right away because he was sitting next to that sickening bearded scum." And Sam would say, "Uh." And she would say, "We were so proud of you! Gracious me! We didn't even notice that you had done anything until Dr. Harquist pointed it out. You were so quiet and manly about it!" And Sam would say, "Well . . ." Several times his hand clutched involuntarily at the inside pocket of his coat for the cigarette package there. His lungs screeched, but prudent radio announcers who work for religious stations don't smoke in front of their fans and

always carry peppermint life savers with them. That was something he had learned from Bill Edwin without having to be told.

Punch was in the back seat breathing some of Sam's peppermint into Mrs. Stephen's bosom. She was sobbing and humming "God Bless America" and saying things like "Wow! I fell so much better now. Wow!" While Mrs. Stephens said, "There, there, my dear. There, there."

As he walked Mrs. Stephens and her daughter to their door, Sam apologized again for the mix-up about the pianists. "Oh don't give it a second thought. We wouldn't have missed this evening for anything. We're so happy to have had this chance to meet you. Say, won't you come over and have dinner with us some evening, Sam? And bring Miss Yllvisaker with you. Poor thing. You come over anytime you want. Just give us a little call a few minutes ahead of time and we'll fix up the best vittles in the house. Won't you come over some time?"

"We'll see. Can't promise anything, but we'll see."

Punch had moved to the front seat and she dropped her head on his shoulder as soon as he sat down in the car again. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm fiiine," she sighed.

He lit a cigarette immediately and as soon as he was around the corner stopped the car and tried to consume it all in one scorching, dizzying drag.

Punch kept trying to hold his hand. When he pulled it away, she said, "I hope I didn't embarrass you, Sam. I'm sure Dr. Harquist was happy."

"I guess I should have told you before we went more about the way I fell about meetings like that. I'm not a goddamn believer, you know."

"Boy! I was beginning to wonder. I didn't think you were before we went there and then wow! when you hustled your buddy Moby Dick out and Dr. Harquist started talking about you . . ."

"Call him Ahab. Not Moby Dick, fer chrissake. Robert Louis 'Ahab' Holmes. Damn him."

"Silly!" Her elbow needled his ribs again. "I know it isn't Moby Dick."

"Oh. Anyway, I'm sorry if my apparent involvement in Harquist's horseshit . . ."

"No. It's me who should apologize. I should have warned you ahead of time. I always get converted at meetings like that. It never fails. Everytime I go to one. Only this time, before we got there, I was determined not to because I didn't want to embarrass you. But then when Dr. Harquist said such nice things about you, I guess I just got carried away."

"Yeah. Carried away." Sam put Ahab's car in gear and moved into traffic. "I guess we better go back now. See if I have any friends left."

"You have me, Sam. I'm your friend. Do you 'spose there's any of that whiskey left? Wow! I've never been converted on whiskey before. When I was a little kid I used to get converted without anything to drink, except soda pop maybe. Then in high school I discovered it was more fun on beer. But the whiskey . . . an exaggerated gulp wow!"

The house on Wilfred Avenue wasn't a very cheerful place. Maude's phonograph was still there, but she and Winston and their friends were gone. Gene and Maybelle were there. Also Robert, Willa, Brick, Bonnie,

and the last bottle of Cutty Sark. They were all sitting in the vague light of one small lamp, glum, heads held in hands like failed idols they knew were useless but couldn't bear to part with.

"Wow! what a gloomy group. Come on, you guys, get your chins up off the floor. Geno! boy, you were really neat. I never saw anybody stand up to a preacher like that all by himself. You ought to be proud of yourself. You ought to be celebrating."

"Fuck you!" snapped Gene.

"Ooooooh," said Punch, hurt. "Don't talk about such a nice thing in such a mean tone of voice." She began to fill glasses for herself and Sam.

"Where's my Ahab?" murmured Bonnie.

Sam said, "Bark at me, not her, Gene. I'm the one who got us all into that mess. I've never been so humiliated in my life."

"Fuck you too. I don't give a running shit what you did. That's your business. I don't even care about the fact that that fat fart made a baboon's ass out of me. It's just that because I let him do it, because I couldn't stop it, he turned that whole auditorium full of people into wild-eyed reactionaries and sent them out drooling to vote for every neo-Nazi who gets his name on the ballot. Some political scientist I turned out to be."

"Oh fer chrissake, Gene, he didn't change anyone's mind. They were all with him when they came in."

"He didn't huh? What about your pug-nosed lady friend here?"

"Wow, you're really a worry wart, Geno. He didn't change my vote because [wink] I'm too young to vote. And if it will make you feel better, I promise to vote for whoever you say when I'm old enough."

"Where's my Ahab?" mumbled Bonnie again.

"Jesus, what kind of chick are you anyway?" asked Robert. "You just got converted less than an hour ago, now here you are guzzling scotch and carrying on like nothing happened."

"Boy, I'm really disappointed with you guys. You take everything so seriously. Big tough guys with no imagination. I'll bet you don't even cry in sad movies. Everybody ought to get saved by a travelling evangelist every once in a while. It's good for you. You can get all worked up about how evil you are, you go up to the altar and get saved, then it's all over. There's no obligations. That's the beauty of it. No obligations."

"Come on, now. I saw that white-haired guy who looked like a card shark taking your name and talking to you afterward. Someone here in town will be after you in no time."

"You're the silliest guy I ever met, Axle. [wink] Do you think they asked for my identification or something? As far as they know my name is Samantha Dick. Besides that all they did was give me a pamphlet and an envelope so I could send in ten dollars if I wanted to become an official Christian America Crusader. But, too bad, I don't have ten dollars to spare [wink]. Wow! you guys get so serious about a guy who comes to town to put on a show. You put your dollar in collection and you get a good cry. That's cheaper than going to see Gone With the Wind!" Robert Right's eyes were appealing to the muses to protect him, and Gene and Sam were smiling as she finished the tirade with a big gulp. She probably would have gone on to tell about how much she cried during Gone With the Wind, if Bonnie hadn't bolted up from her seat, arms flapping, bosom bouncing, howling at Sam.

"What did you do with my Ahab?"

"He didn't come back with you after the meeting?"

"No! No! We haven't seen him since you took him out."

"Oh my God. Well, come on, Bonnie. It's probably hopeless, but we better go look for him."

"I'm coming too!" said Punch. "I'm disappointed in Moby. He left when the fun was just starting. I'll have to get after him about it."

"Hey, Sam, what did you do with Ahab?"

"Christ . . . I'm afraid I sort of hit him."

Bonnie went into boozy hysterics. "Oh no! Poor Ahab! He's probably lying in a gutter somewhere bleeding. How could you! He wouldn't do anything to you. He always said you were the greatest guy around." One of her false eyelashes was swept away by a gush of tears and came to rest on her upper lip.

This time Ahab wasn't hard to find. A few blocks down from the American Legion Hall was Water Avenue, which ran parallel to the river and along which were a number of taverns with nautical names. Ahab had been in several of them since Sam left him sitting on the sidewalk. He had come out of the last with a bottle of Thunderbird in his hand and a monomaniacal gleam in his eye and he was weaving down the middle of the street in great unsteady strides when his own car stopped directly in front of him.

"Fer chrissake, Ahab, get in the car before someone runs you down."

"Sam! Oh thank the great Whoever. Sam, old matey, you're jus' the man I was starting out to look for."

Bonnie burst out of the back seat and, although she was having

some trouble navigating herself, helped him toward the car. "Oh, Ahab, your lip's all puffy. Are you all right?"

"I'm wonnerful, Bonnie me love. Jesus, what's that on your lip?"

Bonnie tried to pull Ahab into the back seat with her, but he insisted that he must sit in front because he had to talk to Sam. Punch, afraid Ahab was coyly plotting physical revenge on Sam, refused to get in back. When the car finally started off again, Bonnie found herself frustratingly alone in the back while Punch's round bottom rested in her lover's bony lap.

"Wheee!" said Punch, taking a sample sip of Ahab's wine as Sam began working his way through back streets toward Wilfred Avenue while grumbling that all this madness would land them in jail yet.

"Ahab, come back here to little me," whined Bonnie, pulling at his arm.

But he jerked it away to clutch Sam by the shoulder while shouting gleeful garble about having found "a way to get both of us out of the terrible mess we're in."

"Okay," said Sam, "fer chrissake, calm down and tell me about it."

"There were these two really great old merchant seamen in the tavern--under the sign of the Double Anchor!--grisled old guys, with barnacles on their jowls. They told me how we could join the Merchant Marines in San Francisco, how we could get on a ship that would be stopping in Australia. Lord Almighty, we can do it, Sam! We don't have to wait till I save enough to get a boat of my own. See, all we have to do then is jump ship in Australia and from there! . . . from there, old mate, the passage is for a pittance, a slum skimmer's grubby pittance, and there

we'd be at last! Free on the time spared, sun dappled shores of Tasmania!"

"Oh God," groaned Sam.

"Listen, Sam, all we need to do is to dip into the money your old man give you gust a little to get us bus fare to San Francisco and to cover the pittance, the screeching pittance it would cost us to get passage from Australia . . ."

"Jeez, Moby, cut that out will ya?" interrupted Punch, voice full of tried patience as she pulled Ahab's hand from under her dress. "What are you trying to do? Get me all charged up?"

"Hey, Punch! you're my kind of chick. Never did like girls who wore girdles."

"Now cut that out!" Giggling, she doubled him over with a well aimed elbow to the solar plexus. "Wow! what an idiot you are." She pulled Sam's hand off the gearshift onto her knee. "I don't let just anybody mess around with me, you know," she said to the gasping Ahab.

"Stop the car! Stop this car!" screamed girdle bound Bonnie while beating Sam on the back of the head with both fists. Sam stopped. "Are you really going off to sea and leave me all alone?" she demanded of Ahab.

"Aye, lass," he said, reaching an arm back to pinch her cheek roughly. "This sad night is the last for many a moon that hoary Ahab will find haven in your buxom harbor. On the morrow Salty Sam and I are off for Tasmania.

"Harbor, my ass! You bastard, you made me promises!" She hit him with her purse.

Ahab tried to protect himself. "I? I? Oh no, lass. Ahab never makes promises."

"Take me home," she demanded.

Blëary with fatigue, Sam tried to follow the directions to her apartment she gave him amidst moans of lamentation and the torrents of damnation she hailed upon Ahab. Everytime she told him to turn, Ahab would leave off trying to make peace with her to argue that she was directing him wrongly and that they should go exactly the opposite way. Everytime he tried to shift gears Punch would grab his hand and put it on her leg. At the same time and on top of it all Punch had discovered what a lovely noise she could make by blowing, hoof! hoof!, across the top of the half empty Thunderbird bottle.

"Goodbye, my love," Ahab called when Bonnie left the car. "I'll write ye long letters of passion from Tasmania. Then ye shall unnerstand."

"The hell I will," she growled. "Shoulda known better than to be sweet talked by the kind of bastard who'd pee on my toilet seat."

Things were quieter then. "I'll tell ye the truth, mates," said Ahab, wagging his head. "She wears a padded bra."

Sam sought Wilfred Avenue and, between slugs of the Thunderbird he too had started drinking, tried to convince Ahab that he wanted to go to school, not Tasmania.

The air had grown heavier and during the last few hours, clouds had been blown in to gather over Portland. As they arrived at Wilfred Avenue a few lazy drops plopped against the Volkwagon's windshield.

The Rights had gone, but Robert's sculpture remained. Brick had retired to a corner and Maybelle was ministering to him with her reserve store of blankets. Gene was firmly dedicated to killing the scotch or himself, whichever came first.

Ahab lurched toward the Cutty Sark immediately and took a long pull straight from the bottle. "Here," he said to Gene, "haf s' Bird f' chase. 'S great. Hey, Gene, I'm gon' Tasmania at las'. Jist got to get Sam an' his Daddy's money t' go wif me. Don' you thin' Sam sh' go Tasmania wif me?"

"Shit, yes. He could convert the natives."

"The only place I'm going is to bed."

"Wait," said Punch. "I want you to dance just one record with me first." She pulled a disc from the pocket of the coat she had taken off. Then Maude's phonograph droned "To Know Him Is to Love Him." Punch threw herself into Sam's arms and happily pushed him into shuffling about the room.

Ahab thought it was a great song and staggered about trying to sing along with the record. That's when he got sick. His groans of agony resounded through the open door of the bathroom.

"Wow! when you guys drink around here, you don't mess around, do you?" said Punch.

"Aaarrrg!" said Ahab.

"Guess we all have to pay for our sins," mused Gene as Ahab's ashen face emerged again. Gene looked queasy himself.

"Not me," winked Punch. "I'm saved."

"I'm going to bed," said Sam.

"Woncha even see me home first?" Punch put a finger in her mouth and mocked bashfulness.

Sam said he would and Punch had to say good night to everyone. She lifted and shook Brick's limp hand, but got no response. She hugged

Maybelle and told her how proud she should be of Gene's bravery, even if he was too serious and a little silly about things. Gene apologized for having snapped at her and she kissed him on the forehead. Ahab's long frame was stretched out on the couch and spilling over on all sides. He was very pale. "In case I don't see you before you leave for Tasmania, I want to wish you luck, Moby." He mumbled something about not shaking his hand so hard. "Hey, Moby, what are you going to do in Tasmania?" "Write novel." "Really? Wow! that sounds neat. What's it going to be about?" "'Bout great white whale who doesn't bother people till they get him riled, then . . ." Ahab's face became paler by still another shade and he jumped, stumbled, crawled back to the bathroom.

"Gee, now we'll have to wait till it's written to find out how his novel comes out." Punch pulled her coat over her shoulders and she and Sam went to the door. On the porch they could hear thunder grumbling somewhere far to the south. Not threateningly. More as if it resented having to exert even that much effort. Warm air whirled a few fat drops of rain and everything smelled new. Punch put her arms through the sleeves of her coat and asked Sam if he didn't think he should get a coat. He was too tired to care. Then she asked him to button hers for her. With arms clasped behind her back, with dimples, winks, gulps, and a sly smile she insisted he button it. "Oh fer chrissake," said Sam. There were three large buttons. Over her bosom, over her middle, and over her pelvis. "Wow! you're really a neat coat buttoner, Sam. Must be hard work though. It makes you breath so hard."

She kept stopping as they crossed the street to try to catch rain-drops in her mouth. "I really have a neat set-up over here," she said.

"The landlady and another old woman, both of them deaf as trees, live downstairs and I'm the only one upstairs. I even have a separate entrance. See!" She pointed at the steep flight of stairs that labored up over the porch from the side toward the door with a stained glass window that opened into a gable.

Sam stopped when they got to the stairs and just before she grabbed his head in both hands and kissed him, she said, "Wow! I'm sure happy I finally got to meet you in person, Sam." As he turned to go she caught his hand. "Do you know that when I was just a little high school girl in Norseburg, I used to take off my clothes and lie on the bed naked while I listened to you on the radio? Wasn't that silly?"

"Pretty silly all right."

"Wouldn't you like to come up and see my room? I don't have everything all fixed yet, but you can tell already it's going to be cute."

"Some other time, Punch. I've had so little sleep in the last couple of days. I can't see anything right now."

Quietly she said, "If you're so tired, my bed is closer than yours now, you know." He was saying no and starting to turn away again. She pressed his hand to the top button of her coat and said, "It would be like getting saved by a travelling evangelist, Sam. No obligations afterwards. No obligations at all."

"There are always obligations." He started back across the street, hurrying.

"Hey, did I say something wrong?" she called after him. "Hey, I didn't mean to make you mad, Sam." She followed him back across the street. "What did I do wrong?"

He closed the door behind him, but she opened it and called to him as he started up the stairs. "Hey, I'm sorry, Sam. What did I do? Whatever it was, I didn't mean to."

"Punch, you didn't do anything wrong. I'm not mad. I'm just tired. Now go home like a good girl. I'll see you later."

Gene, in his underwear, coming out of the bathroom where he had been sick, overheard them and caught a glimpse of Punch's hurt face as she closed the door and left. "What the hell's going on. Sam, how come you're back over here? How come you sent her home? Aren't you going to . . ."

"No," said Sam wearily, "I'm not."

With a low groan Gene went back into the bathroom and came out pulling on his pants. "What's the matter?" asked Maybelle, coming from the bedroom.. "If Sam won't do it, I'll have to!" cried Gene. Barechested and barefooted, he went out the front door. A gust of warm, rainy wind sliced through the cigarette haze in the room.

"Thar she blows!" howled Ahab in his sleep. "She blows! She blows!"

Maybelle began crying. "He's gone to that awful girl! Sam, how could you? Oh, but it's not your fault. She was after him all the time. You saw the way she played up to him all night long!"

Sam sat down on the stairs and propped his elbow against his knee and his cheek. "Take it easy, Maybelle. He'll be back."

"Maybe it is your fault. It's Zorba's Law and if you hadn't broken it, he wouldn't be over there. Oh! you can hear him pounding on the door from here. What will happen if he gets her evicted?"

"Her landlady's deaf."

It was raining harder and Gene was dripping when he came back in and threw himself into the big red corduroy chair.

"Pull, me hearties, pull!" wailed Ahab. "Snap yet livers, boys, damn ye, pull!"

Maybelle came running with a towel.

"She wouldn't let me in." Gene looked like he would weep.

"Christ, does it break you up that much to get turned down?"

Gene's head rolled wildly on the back of the chair. His teeth gnashed. "God! Sam! won't you ever learn anything? If you can't act like a man, at least you ought to know me better than that!" His head dropped into his hands and Maybelle busily daubed at his glistening back. "It's just that I feel so sad. What a terrible, shitty night this has been. All those poor people with Harquist working them over like a brain-washer. I couldn't do anything to help them! And now that poor little girl. I couldn't help her either! But you could have! If you won't help the people at least you could have helped that little girl. She wanted you, that's all. Wanted to give you the greatest pleasure a man can know. She needs you! And you left her there, all alone in anguish and guilt in that little room. God! she looked all grotesque through that twisted glass in the door. When I came up it looked like she was kneeling by the bed. Let me in, I said. I want to show you that all men aren't bastards like him. Go away, she said. Go away, I'm praying to Jesus that Sam will forgive me."

"Harpooner!" screamed Ahab, writhing in his sleep. "Fling it, lad! Oh fling it true!"

"Fer chrissake," said Sam. He closed the door to his room behind him.

In the corner Brick huddled, blinking sleepy, terrorized, unbelieving eyes.

"Come to bed, Gene," urged Maybelle. "There's a girl here who wants you. There's a girl here who needs you. It's me, Gene, I need you. I won't ever turn you down either. Any time, any place, Gene. I need you all the time."

"Oh God, I don't know if I can. I feel so awful. I don't know if I can."

X: Sunday

On Sunday morning, while the skies dripped and the evangelists, missionaries, and preachers droned, Sam Patience didn't sleep. Although still fatigued, he adhered to his more normal routine which included a pot of fresh strong coffee and a book, in this day's case The History of Western Philosophy.

There weren't any live programs on Sunday morning and Sam usually reigned a solitary sovereign over the full resources of radio station KRST until Winnie Ashton relieved him at two. But this morning, as early as 10 A.M., he had a visitor. Robert Houis Holmes, disdainer of brake linings, managed his tortured import to a metal grating stop beside the fishbowl windows and uncurled himself for a dash through the rain to the shelter of KRST's well-appointed studios. He looked less hung over than Sam felt.

"Avast, matey, there's no time for idle palaver. I've come to urge ye this one more time to throw off the shackles of drudgery and corruption and join me going down to the bay in busses."

"So you are really going? This morning?"

"Aye! By bus if you're with me, by thumb if you're not. I'm on me way to leave that noble landcraft yonder, die Pequod, in me mother's loving care, and then I'm off. Without it, unfortunately, the dear old lass would starve to death for lack of access to the grocery store. Besides, she paid for it."

"Even if you hitchhike, how will you be able to eat?"

"There's two dollars left I didn't get time to drink up yesterday. That's get me soup until I'm snug aboard a victual laden merchantman out-bound for Melyourne. But, hey Sam, some on now! Think what a tremendous thing it would be if you were to walk in there right now, cut off that damned program, open the mike and say, friends, I've just learned as a certain fact that there is no other god but Poisedon, may He bless me, and that the motherfucker you've been listening to is a habitual liar and thief. And just leave. Walk out a free man! Oh it would be to the credit of your soul, Sam."

"Almost I am persuaded."

"But it is obvious you're not persuaded. You think I'm crazy, don't you? Well, I'll convince you yet. When you see that I have indeed written the Great Tasmanian Novel, then you'll hie to my side, a johnny-come-lately, begging forgiveness, asking to be appointed official Great Tasmanian Philosopher. Will I take you in? Of course. 'Tis never too late to receive grace. And we'll bring Gene along, make him the beneficent absolute dictator of the island, charged with transforming it into a real utopia, complete with income tax. And Maybelle. Make her the official Great Tasmanian Earth Mother . . . oh hell, I'm going anyway. Whatever comes of it." With a sigh he sucked in his lean belly, tightened his belt a notch, and started to go.

"Wait a minute," said Sam and went to the back room where his sports jacket hung, weighted by the newly important check book. There was a sack there, too, along with his can of tomato soup for lunch. In the sack were some dried prunes, several maple sugar candies, and the

bottle of vitamin pills. He gave Ahab the sack and a check for a hundred dollars. Over Ahab's protestations of refusal Sam insisted that it be considered his tithe to a religion in which he wished he could believe. Ahab left wishing Sam "the blessings of the Great Whoever, the diety in whose tow is swept even Poisedon, the earth shaker. And what's more," he said, "you may be sure of tenfold repayment of this loan. When my ship comes in, as it's bound to do."

At 10:35, after having given due consideration to the sleep of others, even those who tormented him, Sam tried again to reach the L. Creighton Dexter residence of Los Angeles by telephone. When there was no answer, he asked the operator to keep trying even if it took all day and night.

Ten minutes later the phone rang. It was Bill Edwin and he was laughing. "I flew back into town this morning and I just talked to Harquist's man, Nathan. In all sincerity, Sam," he giggled, "I want to thank you for your efforts last night. I really appreciate it. That's the kind of loyalty a man seldom gets from his employees, you know? But listen, Sam, next time be a little more careful, will you? Nathan says you damn near killed the whole, ha ha, show."

"Well, I must admit the little old lady was a pretty shakey pianist, but . . ."

"Oh hell, it wasn't that so much. What upset them is when you took it upon yourself to quiet the hecklers."

"That upset them?"

"Sam, Harquist eats those kind of guys for breakfast. He was disappointed because none showed up for his Friday night meeting. His show

isn't really complete without them, you know? The people don't get their money's worth. And then when you, ha ha, took the steam out of them so damned quietly and efficiently, Nathan could have shot you. Hee, hee, what did you do with that guy you took out anyway? Ha, ha, give him a fat lip?"

"Oh my God. I'm sorry I . . ."

"Don't worry about it! Nathan says Harquist managed to create an incident anyway and that it turned out to be one of his best performances. Hee hee, God, Sam, I'm sorry to be laughing at you like this, ha ha, but when I think of you, the young professor, passing that fat slob's collection plate . . . And Nathan says, thanks to you, they sold three times as many books as usual! And then when . . ." There was a bang at the other end of the line. Edwin was laughing so hard he must have dropped the receiver. Or fallen off his chair. "'Scuse me. But when I think of your girl, hee, hee, going up for the, ha ha, altar call . . . Was that your fiancée?"

"No."

"Ha ha, what did I tell you! That's what you get for tomcatting around, boy."

"I'm sorry I made such a mess of things, Bill. It was a pretty terrible evening for me. If I had it to do over again, I'd tell Harquist to play his own damn piano."

"Now, Sam, don't take it like that, you know? I really do appreciate the extra time and effort you put in on the thing. Listen, Sam, I do hope, for God's sake, that you had sense enough when you were selling those books to dip in for a little something, five or ten, to cover the night's troubles. You did, didn't you?"

"Well, I . . . I gave the little old lady some free copies of the book, but I didn't think . . ."

Edwin was in hysterics. "You gave the . . . ha ha, but you, hee hee, didn't . . . oh my God, ha ha, oh Jesus, ha ha . . . Sam! you better be a college prof because, hee hee, I don't think, oh boy ha ha, you'll ever, hee hee, learn. . ."

At noon Sam warmed his soup and left a couple of red spots on the pages of the philosophy text. At 12:15 it was the phone again. Maybelle. "I thought you might be worrying about it so I thought I'd let you know that we haven't had any phone calls from Los Angeles or from the airport."

"I wasn't worrying about it. I figured if you had, I would have heard about it. How is everyone this afternoon?"

"I think we'll recover. Don't know what happened to Brick. As usual, he left without a word. Ahab got up surprisingly early. Did he stop to see you? It looks like he's really going through with it. I'm a little worried about Gene. He's still in bed and all he does is groan when I mention breakfast. At least that means it was a bigger drunk than usual."

"I'll bet he'll still be pissed at me."

"Oh Sam, you know Gene better than that. Last night before we went to sleep he mumbled something about giving you a good talking to, but I don't know. He wouldn't ever say so, but I have the feeling that you can do things that are so wrong by his rules he would never forgive anyone else, but when it's you--instead of getting mad, he ends up worried maybe he's wrong himself."

"How about you? Can you forgive me for the whole mess?"

"Sam, forget about it, will you? I'm in pretty good shape. I managed to wake up as early as nine long enough to call someone to take over my Sunday School class. Second week in a row! They think I'm backsliding. Oh, by the way, speaking of that, your little friend Punch was over a while ago. She really is pretty cute after all. She came over to apologize to you for whatever she did . . ."

"Nothing, fer chrissake, nothing."

"Anyway, when I told her you were at work she made me turn on the radio so she could hear you. She was helping me clean up the bathroom and listening to KRST so intently I was afraid she'd get converted again right there with a mop full of barf in her hands. But no, she was just making sure she didn't miss hearing you give the station break. Wow! Doesn't he sound neat? she says. Then, when the next program was on, she started asking a lot of questions about you. I didn't know you hadn't told her anything about Rachel, you sly dog. So I ended up telling that whole story. Do you think this Rachel is going to come back and marry him, she asked with her lip all trembly. I don't know, I said. Well, if she doesn't, I'm going to set my cap for Sam, she says. Then, as if I were your mother or something, she says, would that be all right, Maybelle? All right with me, I said. Wow! Maybelle, she says with a big smile, do you think I'd have a chance with him? Don't know, I said, never can tell about Sam and women. But it's worth a try."

"Why in the hell did you tell her that?"

"I didn't want to kill any prospects for you, sport. Hey, tell me the truth, Sam. Is Rachel coming back or not?"

"I don't know much more about it than you do, Maybelle. But she'll be back. Even if the worst thing I can think of has happened. I'm confident she'll recover and come back."

"You're really sure?"

"Pretty sure."

"What's this worst thing you can think of that could have happened?"

"I'll tell you about that sometime."

Sam's study was interrupted only by the occasional duties of his job until 1:20 P.M., when the phone rang again. He put down the book calmly, leaned back in the swivel chair, and picked the phone off the hanger as if he knew exactly who it would be.

"Hello, Agnes, I thought you were due to call."

"Oh Sammy, I knew you'd want to know that your plan worked perfectly. In fact, it almost worked too perfectly. Why the way Fred's strutting around here today . . . my, you'd think he's the snappiest businessman in town."

"But he did go through with it and it worked?"

"I had to coax him and coax him, but he took the car back to Veltech Motors yesterday afternoon and, just like you said to do, he told them there was something wrong with the automatic thingamajig."

"Transmission."

"Yes. And he says the man who sold it to him drove around the block in it and listened and listened to it. He said it sounded fine to him and Fred said no, no there's something wrong. And so they took it in the garage and tinkered with it. But, like you said to do, Fred kept insisting it didn't work right and that they had tried to gyp him. So

finally, this man took him in his office and said, all right, it works fine now, but maybe it is a little more worn out than we thought. We'll reduce what you have to pay on your contract by 300 dollars. And, Sam, you'd be disgusted if you could hear Fred tell about this part. He puffs up his little old chest and he says, I looked that guy right in the eye and told him he better cut the price 500 dollars or I was going to take the whole thing up with the Better Business Bureau. Such pride! I never. The man fixed the contract for 500 less and Fred thinks he's so smart I could hardly get him to wash the dinner dishes."

"Let him enjoy his success, Agnes. These days it seems like a fellow doesn't get many opportunities to do something he can really feel proud of."

"Oh you men! You always feel so sorry for yourselves and you always stick together. Land sakes."

After the 1:30 station break Sam went back to his book for the last few minutes before Winnie Ashton arrived. Sam was making good progress. There was a noticeable thickness between the front and his bookmark by now. If he kept at it, he would complete it and have time for some intensive study of a major figure before Fall Term started.

"Maybe 'progress' is the wrong word. I don't know.