Lost and wanted things

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LOST AND WANTED THINGS

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For Joanne
... the thought of beaver streams and canyons opening
sweet to the eye and squaws who had comforted him and gone
on, joining with the lost and wanted things. Popo Ashia,
like running water.

--A.B. Guthrie, Jr., *The Way West*
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As soon as he woke up, Larry Bejan swung his left arm through a cautious circle. Then a second and a third one. He grinned; there was no pain. Sitting up in bed, he hunched his shoulder and made several throwing motions. Still no pain. His arm was all right after last night's game, not even tight.

Bejan lay back down to savor the dream he'd just woken from. In the bottom of the ninth with two outs, he's pitching a no-hitter against his old teammates, the Giants. Willie McCovey is up. An overhand curve and a knuckle ball are two quick strikes. The third pitch, another knuckler, doesn't dance and is smashed right back at him, fracturing his jaw. As blood from his mouth spreads over the front of his uniform, he scoops up the ball and makes a perfect throw to first for the final out and a 1-0 win, thanks to his own seventh inning homer off Ron Bryant, his ex-roomie. The overflow crowd of 60,000 goes wild. He tips his cap before passing out on the mound.

"McCovey, fuck." Bejan leaned over and rummaged under the bed until he found the bottle of vodka, which he guessed would last three more mornings. "Hey, Sally," he yelled.
"Bring me up some orange juice."

"I'm doing my hair."

"Come on, Sally. My head feels like it's gone through a pitching machine all night."

"So dry out for a change. You'd be amazed at the difference."

"Fuck you," he muttered to himself.

In a few minutes Bejan heard the refrigerator door and was pleased not to have to get up. He poured two substantial shots into the juice Sally brought him, ignoring the reproach that flared in the black eyes she'd inherited from a Scaghticke grandmother. "Just a little pick-me-up, that's all."

She stared at him without answering. Wet ends of her bleached blonde hair, usually lacquered into place, poked out from under the towel on her head.

"Why don't you buy yourself some wigs?"

"Because I don't have the money and because I like doing my own hair."

"What are you doing it now for anyway? You don't start work until six."

"There's a private party this afternoon and Big L wants his best waitresses."

"For what? The after-dinner tricks?" Bejan couldn't deny himself the dig. For a long time he'd suspected that Sally was a call girl for Big L but had promised himself not to say anything until he had some proof.
As she turned to leave, he called her back, trying to sound sorry without actually apologizing. "Come on, Hon, I was only kidding. What time is it anyway?"

Sally held her breath for a second before answering. "It's almost noon."

"When'd you get home last night? You were out cold when I came in." Bejan knew this was just the opening she wanted.

"Two-thirty. Then I waited up another hour for you. Did you go to Johnnie's after the game?"

"Yeah, I tried to play some rags but they kept holler- ing for that honky-tonk crap so I finally quit. There wasn't much of a crowd anyway so we played cards until about four-thirty."

"How much did he give you?"

"Fifteen. But I didn't play very long."

"I suppose he won it all back."

"No, just a few bucks."

"I've never known you to lose just a few bucks, Larry."

Bejan decided he'd given her enough of a lead. "You should've seen me pitch last night, Sal. Six innings and the big W. That's number eleven so far this year. They got five hits and a run off me but I made eleven strikeouts. I even fanned Rymer, their best hitter, with four knucklers. They were really jumping."

"That's nice, Larry. Too bad South Side Cement doesn't pay like the Giants did."
"Yeah, too bad."

"So when are you going to do something for money again? We can't live like we used to on the pay I make. We can't even live like we do on the pay I make."

"Stop worrying about it, huh?" Bejan mentally punched himself. He should have known what would happen if he mentioned his pitching.

"Well, you obviously don't. If you did, you would have saved some of that money you made."

"If I remember right, you spent it as fast as me."

"I didn't know it would end so quick. I thought you were set for life."

There were tears in her eyes. Bejan knew they were fake but they still got to him every time. He made her sit down on the bed and rubbed her back.

"I'll make that big money again, Sal. My knuckle ball's going to wow 'em at Fenway. If it breaks like it did last night, Tom Yawkey'll sign me on the spot for forty G's."

"Those days are gone, Larry. Why won't you just get a job that pays you something?"

"Because I know I can pitch again. Why do you think I've kept on throwing ever since I left Waterbury? My arm's really come along good. I've got that knuckle ball down now and my other pitches are better too." He blew on her neck.

"You're a dreamer."

"So?"
"You can only dream by yourself."
"Come off it, Sally. You always come back."
"Not the next time."
"You couldn't leave this." Bejan patted his crotch.
"God, you'd think it was the only one around."
"No, just the wildest."
Sally laughed although Bejan could tell that she tried not to. "Sometimes I wish I hated you," she said.
He reached around her and began to untie her bathrobe.
"Come on, Honey, be a good girl and it'll show you some of the tricks it can do."
"Stop it, Larry. My hair's all wet."
"So what? That doesn't have anything to do with it. At least not the hair that's wet."
She laughed again as Bejan pulled the robe down off her shoulders.

After Sally left for work, Bejan drove to the Denton Square A.C. He slipped his membership card into the slot and the locked door opened for him. The place was empty except for the bartender.
"Hi ya, Bots."
"Hey, Black Jack."

Bejan went out back as usual to weigh himself. Adjusting the rider on the old platform scales, he found he still weighed only 187\(\frac{1}{2}\) pounds, despite the special candy he'd been eating to increase his appetite. Almost six-foot-three, he
needed at least another twenty pounds to put everything he wanted into the ball and to get back up to his weight in the majors when he was in top shape. There was a Harvey Wall-banger waiting for him when he went out to the bar.

"How's it going, Bots? Kind of quiet this afternoon."
"I'm not complaining. How about yourself?"
"Me either."
"I hear you beat Plaszkiewicz Plate Glass last night."
"Like I told my wife, we really smashed 'em."
"You'll be right back up there yet, Black Jack."
"I'm trying but I sure as hell wonder sometimes."
"You keep on like you have this summer and you won't have any trouble." The bartender took a slip of paper from his vest pocket and handed it to Bejan. "This girl Barbara called for you three times today already and wants you to call her the minute you get here."

"That pig, fuck. What's she want so bad?"
"Your guess is as good as mine, Black Jack."
"She's no skimpy once-a-day girl, that's for sure."

They both laughed as Bejan wadded up the paper and threw it on the bar. "If she calls again, tell her I haven't been in."

"Sure thing."

Bejan asked for some french fries and took his drink into the large room that doubled as banquet and dance hall. He sat down at the piano and began to pick out the "St. Louis Rag," which he'd heard the day before for the first
time. He played only by ear; sheet music was a puzzle to him.

In a few minutes Bots brought him the french fries and another drink. "I forgot to tell you the kid from Lennie's came by awhile ago so I put on a fin for you."

"Thanks."

Bejan fooled with the rag, remembering how in Waterbury the numbers runner who came to the field was a girl. She wouldn't tell anyone her name so they called her Sexy Sixes. He met her in a bar one night and wasted an hour and more than five bucks on her before he found out she was queer. She certainly didn't look it. Bejan never told anyone but somehow it got back to the team, who teased him about it for the rest of the season. There were no secrets in baseball, not even in the minors.

After hurting his arm with the Giants, Bejan spent a dismal season at Phoenix before going to Waterbury, where he learned to throw the knuckler from Mackerel Eye McNiff, a twenty-eight year veteran of the minors. His arm improved but not fast enough. After two years he quit. During all that time he'd expected to be called back to San Francisco or else traded. In August he gets the word that Pittsburgh has bought him for their final drive toward the pennant. He makes nine saves in thirteen appearances during the rest of the season and adds three more in the Series against the Orioles, including the last game at Baltimore's Memorial Stadium where he pitches the final one and one-third hitless
innings before a crowd of 75,000, who give him a standing O
as his new teammates hoist him onto their shoulders. Waving
to the stands, he tells the players to circle slowly around
the infield before going to the dugout, where they finally
dump him into the arms of a smiling Danny Murtaugh.

"Pittsburgh, fuck." As he waited for someone to come
to start a poker game, Bejan switched to "The Easy Winners,"
his favorite Joplin rag because it was a challenge to play
well and it somehow reminded him of himself on the mound.
He tried once to explain the feeling to Sally but she
couldn't see any connection and he wound up feeling foolish,
afraid that she was laughing at him.

When a couple guys stopped in to play pool, Bejan
talked them into some penny-ante until the three-thirty
crowd arrived and the real game began. He felt great, eat-
ing, drinking, and playing cards with the same gusto that he
pitched. At seven o'clock when Danny Delbrado, who was go-
ing to catch him at the field for a while, showed up, Bejan
had won over $150 and devoured order after order of french
fries and steak sandwiches, washing it all down with more
Harvey Wallbangers.

Delbrado brought his nephew Nick with him. "This is
the kid I was telling you about, Black Jack. In three years
of high school ball, he's seventeen and four. He wants to
pitch professionally after he gets out. He was in town for
a few days so I told him to come along, maybe he'd learn
something."
"Sure. I'm glad to meet you, Nick. What do you throw most of the time?"

"Fastball, I guess, but I try to throw everything."

"Yeah, it's good to be versatile but you should have some specialty too. Ever since I hurt my arm I've been trying to develop a good knuckle ball, just because it's the easiest thing for me to throw. I'm getting it pretty good now too, maybe good enough to pitch again. But I don't know. It's a funny pitch."

"I saw you pitch twice against the Mets at Shea Stadium."

"Did you?" Bejan grinned. He liked this kid.

"Uh-huh. How long did you play with the Giants?"

"Three years. They brought me up from Springfield in August '66 when they had a lot of injuries and I was sent down to Phoenix in July of '69. I already had twelve wins then and could've got twenty-five easy, especially with the expansion that year."

"Let's go, Black Jack," Delbrado said.

"Wait a minute. Go comb the crumbs out of your mustache." Bejan turned back to Nick. "My best year though was '68, nineteen and nine. Only Marichal was better that year with a 26-9 record but my ERA was lower."

"Come on, for chrissake." Delbrado interrupted again. "You can talk at the field. I got a heavy date later."

"Who, that two-ton Galento I saw you with last week?"

"Cut the shit and let's go."
"Sure, Danny. I'm just kidding. The big mitt's in the car. I even put another sponge in it after you complained so much last time. You two go get it. I'll be right out."

As soon as they left, Bejan took two greenies with the last of his drink. He saw the bartender eye him. "Fuck, Bots, I want to look good in front of the kid, you know."

At the field Bejan ran wind sprints between the out-field foul lines while Delbrado put on the catcher's equipment. Afterward, he told Nick to stand beside the mound to watch him. "I always make Danny dress up. I can't pitch as well to someone without all the gear. It must be perspective or something." He yelled to Delbrado. "Hey, have you got your metal cup on?"

Delbrado rapped his crotch with his knuckles.

"Sometimes the old knuckler gets a little wild and I don't want to break anything," Bejan said to Nick. "If Danny's not on his toes, maybe I'll ring the bell for you."

He laughed as he began his windup. After a dozen throws he had the feel of the ball and was throwing it well.

"Why do you do that before every pitch, Mr. Bejan?" Nick asked.

"Do what?"

"Scratch your shoulder like that. I remember you always did that when I saw you too."

"Do I? I don't know. Just a habit. You know, my hand was too small to really get the right grip on the ball with just my thumb and two fingers so I had to use all of them."
I had an awful time at first but now I think I throw it a little harder than most knuckle ballers. Of course you throw it too hard and you'll put on some spin, which you don't want either. They should break nice and sharp like these."

Bejan threw six knucklers in a row down the groove. The greenies were working. His fear that he'd lost the knuckle ball each time he began to pitch had disappeared. Even the sliders and fastballs and occasional overhand curves didn't hurt his arm too much.

At the tryout camp at Fenway they send out Fisk to catch him. That in itself means something. His knuckle ball is jumping all over. Eddie Kasko, obviously impressed, walks out to the mound to watch him. Forty G's, fuck, they'll offer fifty and probably go to fifty-five if he holds out. Another one cuts the inside corner just above the knees.

"You ever see anything like that before, Eddie?"

"My name's Nick, Mr. Bejan, but I never did, that's for sure."

Bejan looked up. "Yeah. Sorry, Nick. I guess I'll take a break. Why don't you pitch a few and I'll see if I can give you some tips."

While Nick was throwing the ball, a Cadillac pulled up behind the backstop. The owner of Johnnie's On the Spot got out and limped to the foul line with the aid of two canes. Bejan was irritated at the intrusion.
"What's the matter, Johnnie? You afraid I wouldn't show up to play piano tonight? You'd think we had a contract or something."

"I tried to call you at the A.C. but Bots said you were over here. I thought I better tell you right away about today's hit. It's pretty bad."

"Keep throwing, Nick, you're looking good." Bejan ran over to Johnnie. "Fuck, haven't you got better sense? Not in front of a kid."

"Fifteen thousand," Johnnie said. "We can handle it O.K. but there won't be much left."

"What the hell are you talking about, fifteen thousand? You told me you never took anything over twenty-five or thirty bucks. That's the kind of money I always made out of this deal."

"I never do. This was an exception. I figured we had it in the bag. Now this guy wants it tomorrow so we better have a meeting tonight to decide what to do."

"Pay off. What else? But don't look at me, Johnnie, I haven't got two bits to put up."

"Maybe you won't have to. I know a couple guys from Waltham who might like to buy in."

"There's enough already."

"That's up to everyone."

"If this guy'd lost, we probably never would've heard about it. Maybe you should take care of his win too."

"If you want to make any accusations, Black Jack, make
them at the meeting. See you at the club." Starting toward
decide to put up some money ourselves, your wife could prob-
ably get your share from Big L."

"Fuck you, cripple," Bejan muttered to himself as he
ran out to the mound. "You're still looking good, Nick.
You keep on improving and I wouldn't be a bit surprised to
see you in the majors. Let me know when and I'll be glad to
talk to some of my friends about you."

"I will, thanks."

"I won't be able to throw anymore tonight. Something's
come up and I've got to go." He paused. "Would you like
the ball, Nick?"

"The ball?"

"Yeah, you know, a souvenir. I'd be glad to autograph
it for you."

"Sure, I guess so."

Bejan grinned as he took out a pen and signed his name
on the ball.

At the meeting at Johnnie's, the two new men were added
to the book by a vote of four to one. Each of them would
put up $7500 for the same share that had cost Bejan only
$1500 four years before. He argued against them even though
he had no way of raising the $3000 that would be required
from each of the present partners to remain solvent. Right
after the vote, Bejan drove back to the A.C., where he lost
all his earlier winnings at seven-card stud and then sulked over Harvey Wallbangers for the rest of the evening. He tried to call Barbara every half hour but there was no answer except for wrong numbers. "The best fuck in Brockton," he said each time. "No wonder she's not there."

Sally wasn't home either when Bejan arrived about one-thirty. He flopped down in front of the tv with some vodka that he found in the hassock. While watching Joan of Arc with Ingrid Bergman on the late show, he heard a car drive up and saw Sally get out and hurry inside.

"What are you doing home so early?" she asked.
"Now I have to explain what I'm doing home early."
"Didn't you play at Johnnie's?"
"What do you think, he's got me under a fucking contract or something?"
"You usually do, that's all."
"Didn't feel like it tonight."
"I'm sorry I asked."
"Who just dropped you off?"
"One of the girls."
"In a Continental?"
"It was Carolyn. You don't know her. Her husband took it home from the garage where he works."
"So where's your car?"
"It wouldn't start. I think the battery's dead."
"A mechanic too. How much'd you make in tips tonight?"
"Enough."
"I bet you did. From Mr. Continental?"
"Go to bed, Larry, and sleep it off."
"Give me twenty-five bucks."
"I don't have it."

"Don't lie. You wouldn't turn a trick for less than fifty. Come on, just twenty-five. I don't care where you got it."

"If you want it so bad, earn it yourself. You haven't done a day's work since that baseball clinic you ran in the spring. Why don't you go see Big L? He'd be glad to help you."

"I bet he would. He always needs bus boys. I wouldn't take shit from that pimp."

Bejan jumped up and snatched Sally's pocketbook from the chair where she laid it. He pulled out two one-hundred dollar bills. "Tips, huh, Baby?"

"I borrowed that from Big L, Larry. We didn't even have enough money to eat for the rest of the week. Though you're not sober long enough to know anything about that."

"You're so fucking sure I don't do nothing. Listen to me, Baby, I got irons in the fire."

"So you can burn yourself?"

"Just today I was working on a deal to make a tv commercial."

"For what? Second-hand rubbers?"

"Very funny, Sally. And that guy who edited my baseball diary says Dell sounds interested. When I'm back in
the majors, it'll sell like wildfire. I'll be the comeback of the year, of the century. As soon as the Sox sign me at that tryout camp, I'm on my way."

"Stop playing games with yourself, Larry. You're on your way nowhere. When are you going to realize that and get off your ass and find some kind of job that you can do?"

Doubling up his fist, Bejan lurched forward. He slipped on a throw rug and fell to his hands and knees. Sally grabbed a table lamp and shattered its porcelain base on his head.

When Bejan awoke he was lying on the examining table of an emergency room. His head pounded the way he remembered it had after a day of working a jackhammer as a kid for three dollars. He needed almost twenty stitches for his cuts but there was no concussion. After being held overnight for observation, he was released the next day.

During the taxi ride home, he grew increasingly uneasy about facing Sally. He knew he'd have to apologize. She wouldn't have hit him if he hadn't gone for her first. Bejan could accept the blame for what was his fault but he still chafed at the idea of apologizing.

The apartment was empty when he got there, and he thought Sally had probably gone to work early again until he found her note.

Dear Larry,

I'm sorry. I waited at the hospital until the doctor told me you were alright. All in all, I think
it's better I leave before something worse happens to one of us. This time it's really for good for all the reasons we've gone over too many times.

Love,

Sally.

P.S. I'll get the rest of my things later.

"Fuck you, quitter," Bejan muttered. He threw the note in the wastebasket. "I'll send you a copy of my new contract. Then eat your heart out for all I care."

Before leaving for the tryout camp on Friday afternoon, Bejan cemented on a false mustache and goatee, that he'd bought for the occasion, afraid he wouldn't even get in the park if he was recognized. He also wore the same sox he'd worn at his first major league win.

In the dressing room he took two greenies after deciding against three. As he laced up his cleats, he could feel his strength collecting in his left arm. It was a good sign and helped put him at ease as well as boost his confidence. He trotted to the bullpen with sixteen other hopefuls and drew number fourteen from the hat. That had been his number at Springfield, another good sign. Everyone pitched until the coach had seen enough, usually after half a dozen throws. Most of them couldn't have made the little league.

At the start of his turn, Bejan remembered not to scratch his shoulder before each windup. The motion for the first pitch was too fast, his arm lagged, and the
instant before his release, which was rotten, he knew he
couldn't throw the knuckler anymore. The ball spun into the
dirt at the catcher's feet. He tried to slow down to keep
pace with his arm but the next few pitches were still too
low. He was thinking too much, fighting his body, not letting
his arm move naturally. The coach would tell him to
sit down before he pulled everything together. After sev-
eral more throws, however, his knuckle balls began to break.
He knew he was back to scratching his shoulder each time but
he tried not to think about it. The less he thought, the
better his pitching became. Finally his arm found the
rhythm and Bejan knew he had the knuckler with five out of
seven in the pocket.

"Do you know how to throw anything else?" the coach
yelled at him.

You bet your sweet fucking ass I do, thought Bejan, who
nodded and threw a perfect overhand curve. There was some
pain in his arm but he barely noticed it. He threw two good
fastballs and a decent slider before returning to his knuck-
ler, which jumped around like a hooked fish. The coach
motioned him to sit down.

After the last man had pitched, the coach sent everyone
except Bejan back to the dressing room. "I want Kasko to
take a look at you."

Bejan went out to the mound while Kasko and the pitch-
ing coach watched. His arm hurt a little as he walked
across the infield but he was more aware of how this walk
felt in front of 42,561 home fans. After several warm-up pitches, he was able to shut out the silence of the empty stadium, conscious only of his determination to get the batter out. He threw almost all knuckle balls for four strikeouts, a walk, and two pop flies before Kasko waved him to the sidelines.

"You always throw it that consistently?"

"Most of the time. I'm still working on it though and sometimes it's a little unpredictable."

"That's the kind of pitch it is. You usually throw it that much?"

"Yeah, I try to. Especially when the batter doesn't expect it. I want them to expect it every pitch."

"Like when?"

"Like three and one."

"Well, let me ask you this. A couple of the boys here thought you looked like Black Jack Bejan out there. It's hard to tell under all that hair but you are about his size."

Bejan didn't know what to say. He felt ridiculous.

"The reason I ask is because we do need someone for short relief work and you might be all right."

"Yeah. I'm Bejan. But I was afraid you wouldn't give me a chance if you knew who I was."

"I don't care if you're the Boston Strangler as long as you do the job. Why don't you stick around and I'll get back to you in a little while."
Before showering, Bejan slipped behind an empty row of lockers and removed his disguise. He turned the water on extra hot for his arm, which was beginning to throb and tighten up. Still, he was sure it was nothing that diathermy and cortisone shots wouldn't take care of. He was back in the big time, under a real big-league shower again. Closing his eyes, he let the water wash away the past four years of doubt and frustration. Everyone at the banquet falls silent as he stands to accept the trophy as "Comeback Player of the Year." He's proud without being ungrateful. He tells them how he kept plugging away, pitching in the Greater Boston Industrial League to perfect his knuckle ball when everyone else had given up on him. That knuckler had done it all. The emcee interrupts the applause to read a telegram announcing that Lawrence "Black Jack" Bejan has been named winner of the Cy Young Award. Bejan had never enjoyed any shower more. Afterward, he read the Sporting News and even "Pitching for the Master" until Kasko returned.

"You shaved while I was gone."

Bejan grinned.

"We talked it over, Black Jack, and here's what we can do. You go out to Pittsfield for the rest of the season and we'll see what happens. For the time that's left this year, we couldn't offer more than, say, eight thousand."

"Eight thousand." Bejan's astonishment rose in his voice like a high pop up.
"Look, Black Jack, this is a gamble as it is. How old are you anyway?"

"Twenty-nine. But my birthday was just last month."

"And how many pitchers do you know much over thirty?"

"But that's the beauty of the knuckle ball. Besides being hard to hit, it doesn't take anything out of your arm. I could last for years."

"You might and you might not. It's a risky pitch and to take you on the strength of that alone is sticking our neck out already."

"I'd have to give up some things here in Boston that would cost me. Could you make it twelve?"

"Not a chance. I offered you the max right away because I know you're not the kind to fool around. We'll see how you look at Pittsfield and if it's promising, we'll work out a new agreement next year that's fair to both of us."

"Could you guarantee me some kind of minimum for next year even if I didn't get called up?"

"Black Jack, you know I can't. You'll have to either take the eight or forget it."

"I'll take it."

"Good." Kasko pumped his hand. "Come by tomorrow afternoon with your lawyer and we'll have a contract ready for you to sign. Can you be in Pittsfield Monday morning?"

"That's pretty soon, but I guess so."

"Good." Kasko shook his hand again. "See you tomorrow."
The cash angle hadn't panned out as Bejan expected but at least he was on his way back to the majors. He called Sally at work. She wouldn't talk to him until he told one of the other waitresses to tell her that he was signing with the Red Sox. When she did get on the phone, Bejan lied to her about the money, saying they hadn't come to terms yet but that it would be substantial. He was only going to Pittsfield to get back into shape. Because he was leaving so quickly, she agreed to meet him after work.

When he hung up, Bejan felt elated despite the money. He'd go to Pittsfield and fucking wow them so they'd have to bring him up before the end of the season and pay him what he was worth. He was also anxious to see Sally, to let her know that he was disappointed in her but that he still forgave her. Maybe she'd go home with him for the night. He was whistling as he left the park.

A boy of nine or ten met him at the player's entrance. "Hey, Mister, are you a baseball player?"
"Yeah, as a matter of fact I am."
"You play for the Red Sox?"
"I'm going to but I used to play for the San Francisco Giants."

"What's your name?"
"Black Jack Bejan."
"Who's that?"

Bejan took a bubble gum card of himself out of his wallet and gave it to the boy, who looked back and forth from
the card to his face.

"This ain't you," he said finally. "This guy's got a crew cut and you got hippie hair."

"Yeah, that's me. My hair's just grown since then."

"It is not. I bet you don't even play baseball."

"It is too me."

The boy threw the card on the ground and stepped on it.

"Hey, stop it." Bejan grabbed him by the arm. "Don't do that to my picture."

"Let go of me. You ain't even that guy."

Bejan took the boy by the shirt and lifted him up until they were face to face. "I know who I am, kid, so fuck you." Then dropping him on the sidewalk, he began whistling again and walked off.
Afterwards, Jeffrey led us to a pine grove near the collapsed wall of the fort. We ate our picnic lunch there beside a brook that spread out into a miniature delta and disappeared in the mud flats below the high-water mark. This pamphlet says it hasn't been used since the War of 1812. It looks it, you said. "He's muttering to himself again. The War of 1812." You made enough sandwiches to feed twice as many as the three of us, but that didn't matter; we were famished from walking around the fort. The egg salad even had pieces of stuffed olive—at least in the sandwiches you gave me. I never could understand your not liking olives, not even in a martini. For years my mother laughed about the time I was three and almost choked on one. She held me upside down, banging me on the back, until it fell out and rolled across the floor. George Washington came here in 1775 to inspect the 257 Colonial troops (mostly Maine minutemen) under the command of Colonel Isaac Parker. Jeffrey misjudged and knocked over his plastic glass full of milk. A ribbon of white ran toward you underneath the bed of pine needles and you jumped up, ready to scold. Instead, we all looked at each other and started to laugh, Jeffrey
the loudest in childish relief. How easily his problem was
solved, his life made right again. "I know that doesn't
necessarily mean he's coming to, but I thought you'd want me
to tell you. I'm sorry." After picking the pine needles
out of his glass, I held it while you poured him more milk
from the Thermos. I stretched out on the soft ground, read-
ing the pamphlet and eating. There were five thirty-two
pound cannons, eleven eighteen pounders . . .

Suddenly I realize I'm in a bed, not on the ground.
"He's opening his eyes, Doctor. You'd better come
right away."

Someone slams down a phone and hurries toward me. My
eyes won't focus well but I know it isn't you, Roberta.
This woman is wearing a long white gown.
"Where am I?" I ask.

She puts her hands on my shoulders as though I'm trying
to get up. Doesn't she know how the bends paralyze your
body? I couldn't move if I wanted to.

"It's all right. You're going to be all right now.
Just lay back and relax. The doctor will be here in a
minute."

"But where am I?" I feel frightened that I don't know.
"There's nothing to worry about. The doctor will be
right here." Her grip on my shoulders tightens.
"I'm not trying to get up. Just tell me where I am."
"Shh. Take it easy until the doctor comes."
I don't understand even though I try. The answer remains beyond me like the ocean floor unseen through murky water. I can't make the connection I know is there.

I must have made a sudden movement because I feel her hands bear down on my shoulders again and she speaks to me as if she is soothing a restless child. I see her better now. She's blonde and very light, not like you, Roberta, although she looks about your age when I saw you last. You had just turned twenty-eight, a woman, not the girl I married six years earlier. She isn't looking at me but at the other side of the bed, where a capillary tube carries blood from my arm to the back of some electronic gear.

"What's that?"

"Some machines to monitor your vital processes."

There must be thirty consoles stacked in tiers, each one probing some secret process deep within me, flashing its answer on a digital read-out or oscilloscope. Another needle in my forearm is connected to an i.v. bottle suspended above the bed. She's too busy checking my insides to tell me what I'm doing here.

Eventually the doctor comes. He is also wearing a white gown with a mask pulled down around his neck. Although he looks too young, he sets about examining me with the efficiency of a single-hander going over his craft before the trans-Atlantic race.

"What am I doing here, Doctor?"

"Take a deep breath and hold it." Fingers tap, the
ice-cold stethoscope sounds my chest and as much of my back as he can manage without rolling me over. "Now let it out."
A pinpoint of light into each eye, each ear, my throat.
"Say ahh."

"Was I in a diving accident?"

"Does this hurt?" His hand, squeezing like a lobster claw, kneads my abdomen—my stomach, intestines, whatever else of my guts that's important. It's impossible to get an answer from him as he works down each leg, lingering over the knee joints, flexing both ankles, twisting each toe. The nurse hovers, ready to be of immediate assistance, and tries to keep me quiet at the same time. When the doctor finishes, he sounds like a marine surveyor assuring the prospective buyer that the hull is still sound except for a plank or two.

"I'm glad I'm in such good shape, Doctor, but won't you tell me where I am and what I'm doing here?" I want to smash the translucent glass in front of my eyes and see beyond it.

He hesitates but can find no dodge. Like a ship in ballast, his professional pose rides poorly in his eyes, which avoid mine.

"Of course you want to know. You have every right to, but I think we'd best leave that to another day. I'll prescribe a long talk for us tomorrow after you've had a good night's rest." He slaps his palm with the stethoscope.

"Right now that's the most important thing for you. You'll
feel much better tomorrow, I guarantee. For now I'll just tell you that you're in Massachusetts General Hospital and doing fine."

After the nurse gives me a shot to sleep, I lie awake for a long time, for what seems hours, straining to remem-
ber, unable to find any comfortable position except flat on my back and even that grows unbearable after a while. Fi-
nally I drift off into a semiconsciousness somewhere between sleeping and waking. It is in this transitional world of
the mind that the water begins to clear.

I took care of everything that last day, even worked from a checklist so I wouldn't overlook the smallest detail. Property to you, Roberta, far away by then. Roberta Drury, Mrs. Bartlett Drury. Whenever I sent you a check, I could never bring myself to add the Mrs. to your name on the en-
velope. A trust fund and some stocks and bonds for Jeffrey. What else did I have to give him? And there was still plenty of insurance money left over to take care of me and my upkeep for as long as necessary. Everything was in or-
der.

I locked the apartment and mailed the key to my lawyer on the way to my appointment. Everything would be ready when I got there—the styrofoam container, ice, chemicals, the necessary people. The doctor who was in charge and would sign my certificate had explained the procedure to me many times. First ice and salt to lower the temperature while the body was prepared, the blood removed and replaced
by a kind of antifreeze, which was also pumped into the body cavity. Then dry ice and finally liquid nitrogen at -321°F. I had only to consign myself. But the murkiness returned and no more of the ocean floor became visible. I must have driven on; I must have gone through with it. Yet I couldn't remember. It was like amnesia, remembering everything up to a certain point before the blow on the head but not the blow itself. Still, they must have done it. Everything depended on it. It was only a matter of time before a cure would be found, but my time was in terms of months, not nearly enough. In the future they could cure me, even rebuild me if necessary. They would know what to do. I had only to consign myself. A little ether, it was that simple.

Where are the two of you now, Roberta? Both rotted back to the elements of sea and air inside your indestructible coffins? Oxygen was your friend only when you were alive; when you died it became your enemy. That was why I put my trust in nitrogen—my enemy in life, my kindest friend in death. But not real death either, only a temporary suspension. That was how I outlasted you, endured while you crumbled. No matter how I loved you, I had to cheat you just as you did me. What was your message, Roberta? Did you have one? If you had told me, I would have brought it.

The next day I do feel better but that concerns me less than what I remember from the night before. I can scarcely
wait for the doctor. In the meantime I tell the nurse.

"It all came back to me last night. At least most of it. I can't believe I'm really here."

"You really are."

"Have many others come back before me?"

"I don't know." She busies herself with my chart.

"What about my relatives? Have you notified them? How long has it been anyway?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what year is it then?"

"You'll have to ask the doctor."

"Can't you even tell me what year it is?"

"It would be better for you to talk to the doctor."

"Did you find all my medical records in the safety deposit box? What about the leukemia? Am I going to be all right now?"

"You'll have to discuss your medical problems with the doctor."

"I must be all right. You wouldn't have been able to bring me back if you couldn't cure me. Everything seems so advanced. It's incredible."

"Isn't it though." She continues jotting notes on my chart.

"I can tell you all about the things that went on in my own time."

"Uh-huh."

"And I can't wait to see everything now, the changes."
It's unbelievable. When will I be able to leave here and see things for myself?"

"That's up to the doctor."

"What about newspapers or tv or even a radio to help me get ready? But you probably have something better than any of those."

"You'll have to ask the doctor."

"Well, when is he coming?"

"He'll come as soon as he has time. Now please be quiet, will you. I'm trying to get your chart up-to-date."

I try to imagine what it must be like, how everything has changed, but with little success. All I can picture is what I remember from my own life. I have to laugh because this is my life too and I'm still only thirty-one no matter how much time has passed. Without leukemia, there's a whole lifetime ahead of me. How different that sounds from months, especially now.

"What's the average life expectancy?" I ask.

"I don't know." Her answer grates on my good mood like a keel on a sandbar.

"For a nurse you sure don't know much, do you?"

She doesn't even look up but I refuse to let her upset me. The first place I'll go when I get out of here is down to the pier to see how the old outfit has changed. Maybe they won't still be there if nobody does that kind of salvage work anymore. As if that mattered to me. I won't need a job. I'll be too busy explaining to people what things
were like in my time. After that I'll go to the house where we lived and see what it looks like after all this time, find out who lives there now. It might even be a relative, but I remember that's not possible since Jeffrey moved to California also. Suddenly I feel as scared as I did on my first dive when I realized that there was only myself to depend on, no one else.

My enthusiasm slips away with the hours as I wait. The nurse removes my i.v. and gives me solid food for the first time. My stomach reacts like a dinghy in a rough sea and I throw up all over the bed. Otherwise I spend my time making imaginary designs with the ceiling tiles and trying to piece together everything that has happened to me.

The doctor finally calls in the evening. The nurse says he apologizes, but that he was tied up in surgery all day with two emergencies beside his regular schedule. Even now he's late to an important staff meeting for which he's the chairman. He's sorry that my questions will have to be postponed again, but tomorrow as soon as possible he'll give me all the time I want. After a little while the nurse gives me a shot to sleep.

The beach at Ogunquit was nearly deserted so late in the season. We had it to ourselves except for half a dozen people, none of them in bathing suits. The tide was coming in, only an hour or so from being high. The three of us walked along the beach, close to the waves, but not too close
because Jeffrey said they scared his feet. If only I could have expressed my own fear so easily. We stopped and took off our shoes, dangling them around our necks. Between our toes the sand felt wet and cold. We each took one of Jeffrey's hands and began to run. When he could no longer move his legs fast enough, we lifted him up and swung him through the air. He shrieked, afraid and delighted both. After putting him down, we walked along in a silence that grew until I felt it would consume me. A tenseness settled between us as Jeffrey ran ahead to search for shells and buried treasure. There was no one else near us; the cottages along the ocean front were boarded up for the winter and the other people had become tiny specks far behind us. Cautiously, I teased you about going swimming until you said you would if I did, and we undressed in front of each other like two nervous kids—it was the first time I'd seen you naked in over a year. The water was cold as only the North Atlantic can be and we went in just up to our knees. On the beach Jeffrey ran around in circles, not sure what to do, before he timidly began to take off his clothes too. Your body looked so thin and firm, Roberta, almost unyielding. There was no fat around your middle, not even any stretch marks on your stomach or hips. When Jeffrey was born, he weighed eight pounds while you had gained only twelve altogether. Seeing your small breasts with their nipples erect, I began getting an erection too and I plunged into the water up to my waist, embarrassed, so you wouldn't see. But you
knew and came to me, pulling me back to the shore. Jeffrey yelled that he was naked too and ran over to us as we lay down on the sand. In a minute he went back to his digging and we made love with the waves lapping around our bodies. I never knew you so good, so passionate before, Roberta. Not even the cold breeze cooled you and I thought you were going to come until suddenly you stopped and turned your head away, embarrassed as I was before, unwilling to let me comfort you. Couldn't you tell me or didn't you want to? If you had only tried I might have understood. We lay there until Jeffrey tired of playing and brought us our clothes. By then we were almost too numb to move and we had to help each other dress. Walking back along the beach, we were silent. Even Jeffrey was quiet, happy with the shells he'd collected, but it was a different silence now, not from tension but from relief. At that moment I didn't care what you had decided, only that you had. At the car Jeffrey refused to give up any of his shells and loaded them into the back seat. Then we drove around Ogunquit until we found a motel open so late in the year.

The nurse wakes me early the next morning. I must wash quickly; there is someone to see me. She won't say who, only that I better get going. The disappointment of not talking to the doctor the day before and being awakened early don't put me in the mood for an unexpected visitor, but the nurse, ignoring my protests, hurries me along.
Ten minutes later the man enters, wearing a wrinkled gown over his street clothes. His square face admits nothing but I dislike him for the tuft of black hair protruding from each nostril.

"Mr. Jensen." A voice of authority. "You are Alexander Jensen?"

I nod as the nurse takes a front-row seat in the corner behind him.

"Good. I want to talk to you for a few minutes. The doctor says you are strong enough now."

"Who are you?"

The question upsets him. His Adam's apple bounces as he swallows. "That is nothing that concerns you." His mouth attempts a smile but fails. "You were a deep-sea diver. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Until you became ill, that is." He waits for me to comment but I don't. "You were married, had one son and were later divorced," he says finally. "Correct?"

"Yes."

"I see. What about your medical history up to the time of your illness?"

"What about it? I was never sick before that."

"Were you ever under psychiatric care? Nervous breakdown, emotional problems associated with your divorce perhaps, anything like that?"

"No. Absolutely not."
"What about your family? Parents, grandparents, siblings, your son. Did any of them ever exhibit those kinds of problems?"

I narrow my eyes at him but he doesn't seem to notice.

"Were you dissatisfied with your life, Mr. Jensen? Did you possibly aspire to goals beyond your capabilities? Didn't you attempt and fail to obtain a degree at the night school of Northeastern University?"

"What are all these questions anyway? Nurse, tell the doctor I want to see him about this."

The man's head bobs like a swimmer in a lifejacket as he comes close enough for me to smell stale tobacco on his breath. "I'll ask the questions. You please answer them."

"What's going on here?"

"I think you should cooperate," the nurse calls from the corner.

The man turns and nods. "Yes, thank you. I think so too."

"I don't have to answer these questions and I'm not going to. At least not until I know who you are."

Again the man attempts an unsuccessful smile, this time nearly a sneer. "Come, Mr. Jensen, I'm only asking you a few simple questions."

I turn on my side without answering.

"The doctor has approved my coming here and I must insist that you cooperate. Did you aspire to goals beyond your capabilities?"
I roll out of bed and lurch toward the man but I catch only his gown, which I rip away as my legs buckle under me. He pins me to the floor and it's only seconds until two orderlies lift me onto the bed and hold me face down while the nurse sinks a needle into my hip.

We were almost home. Yours and Jeffrey's, it hadn't been my home for over a year although I came weekly to see Jeffrey and even more to see you. We'd been quiet for the past fifty miles or so while Jeffrey slept on the back seat, clutching his favorite seashell. I wondered how he did it. You broke the silence as we turned onto 128. I've made up my mind, Alex. I've decided to let the divorce go through. Bart Drury has asked me to marry him and I'm going to. But I thought we had such a nice time this week, the three of us. We did. I'm glad Jeffrey and I came because when you first asked me I was going to say no. It's the nicest week we've ever spent together and it will always be one of my best memories. Then why can't we try to work things out? Because it wasn't real. It wasn't the kind of life we'd have to live all the time. But why couldn't it be? Have you forgotten what it was like already? And what about me? Don't you think you're what I want most? Right now you do because you're lonely, but too much has happened for things ever to be good again. They could if you'd let them. I've tried but it doesn't work. It did this week. I won't always be that woman who made love with you
on the beach. Keep me as that pleasant memory rather than 
everyday reality. I forgave you long ago, Roberta. Why 
won't you forgive yourself? Besides, I still won't mend 
your sox like your mother did and I leave just as much hair 
as ever in the bathroom sink. I'd nag at you for not help-
ing more with the housework, and Jeffrey would fuss because 
you wouldn't play with him when you're trying to read. My 
period still makes me bitchy and I'd ask you to leave me 
alone when you wanted me the most. I still cry and can't 
say why, that it's nothing, just me. And then you'd get mad 
like before. Things would be nice for a while but then 
they'd go back to the same old way. No, they won't, Ro-
berta. Not if we don't let them. (You sighed and put your 
hand on my shoulder. I thought you were crying but I wasn't 
sure in the darkness of the car.) I wish that could be 
true. You don't know how I wish it, but we both know it 
can't. No, I don't know that at all. I only know that 
you don't want to try. My mind is made up, Alex. I'm 
sorry. Please, Roberta, don't go through with it. Even 
if I didn't want to, you know I'm too much of a chicken not 
to now. I don't care about all that, Roberta. All I want 
is you to give us another chance. I'm sorry but there 
aren't any more. Don't do it. (I was becoming hysteri-
cal, like second-rate soap opera.) I could stop you if I 
went to court. You probably could, but only for a little 
while. But I know you wouldn't anyway. That would just 
make it harder for everyone. What about Jeffrey? He's
our son. Please, Alex, don't drag Jeffrey into it. He's been used too much already. And that was the last time I saw either of you. There were no more weekly visits before you left; Jeffrey may have asked a few vague questions about me but he was still too young to understand very much or care. After bringing you home, I went to a bar and got drunk, but that only made me feel worse because I kept remembering the time I introduced you to him.

Waking, I sensed the difference before knowing it for sure. The bed I was in, the room—they weren't the same ones as before. There was no needle in my arm or instruments or nurse. Solitude filled the room like stale cigarette smoke. I found that I was wearing pajamas instead of a johnny. Beside the bed were a pair of slippers my size. I was still weak but I could walk slowly, carefully.

The room itself was large and pleasant with none of the disinfectant smell of the hospital, more like a studio apartment. There was a print of "Breezing Up" on the wall. Curtains were drawn across the room's single window. I hurried as much as I could to open them and see outside for the first time but there was no window, just the blank wall. I went over to the door, painted on like a stage set, not a real door at all. Twelve years of diving had taught me to stay calm in tight situations. There was no apparent danger; I'd been in worse spots than this before.

The room was well furnished and bookshelves filled with
books of all kinds stretched along an entire wall. Someone obviously knew I liked to read. At the other end, an alcove was fitted out with a sink and hotplate, a small refrigerator stocked with my favorite ale, and shelves of snacks. I found cards and games for one person to play in a built-in cabinet along the back wall. A noise in the adjacent cabinet, which turned out to be a dumbwaiter, interrupted my search. There was a tray of hot food, the first I was able to keep down since the intravenous feeding was stopped.

I read that evening until the clock on the mantel struck eleven. (I felt it was night although I had no way of knowing for sure.) Already dependent on the shots to sleep, I lay awake for a long time. If they wanted to play cat and mouse with me, I could play too, and better. I would outwait them. Sooner or later they were bound to appear. They couldn't keep someone like me hidden away for very long; too many important people would know and be clamoring to see me. I could wait the few days until they came around. In the meantime there was plenty to keep me busy. They'd contact me soon. They had to.

Monday morning I pull into your driveway shortly before six o'clock. Jeffrey greets me at the door and leads me to the kitchen where you are fussing over my favorite omelet. I thought you'd be hungry, you say, busying yourself in order to avoid my smile of thanks. It looks as if you've been up for hours; Jeffrey is dressed and ready to go, your suitcase
and the picnic lunch are both packed, your hair is fixed and
your makeup spare but skillful as always. You’re wearing
the black negligee I gave you on our first anniversary be-
cause I said it matched your hair and eyes and complexion.
I see you the first night you wore it, and you blush now as
you realize I am staring at your slender outline against the
early morning light. You tell me to watch the omelet while
you go put on a robe. Content, I pretend, almost sucess-
fully at times, that we always eat breakfast like this, that
we are just an ordinary family leaving for a week’s vaca-
tion. I think you are pretending too, Roberta. But going
to the bathroom after we finish eating, I glance into your
bedroom and the lone pillow on the double bed reminds me it
is only a game after all. Life is just one game or another
anyway. Why not this one? If we play it long enough and
well enough it will become our life. Jeffrey tags along and
watches in fascination as I urinate. He acts as though he
wants to say something but he doesn’t. Before leaving, we
do the dishes, which I wipe and put in their familiar
places, and I can’t help but remember our arguments when you
would ask me to do this a year ago. How differently I see
things now. Jeffrey runs back and forth between the kitchen
and front porch until we are ready to leave. He has already
piled the back seat with toys he wants to bring, but I don’t
mind. Yes, how different from a year ago. The ride to
Maine passes quickly as we find conversation easy, and it is
still early when we cross the mouth of the Piscataqua. The
sea never fails to excite me in the same remarkable way it did when I was a boy, even though I have worked with it now for more than a decade. Indian summer is upon us and the day is sunny and warm, perfect for the start of our trip. Jeffrey is fascinated by the tugs and fishing boats, by a nuclear submarine and a rust-streaked freighter flying the Liberian flag and discharging salt for the coming winter, even by some lobster pots, which he has never seen before, and we stop to look at them. I explain how they work and buy one from the owner for him. Jeffrey beams and his only disappointment is that I stow it in the trunk. Every time we stop after that, he has me open the trunk to check on his new toy. You say it will make a good coffee table when he's tired of it. We see a sign for an old fort and follow the dirt road out through a sea marsh to the tip of a narrow spit of land. Jeffrey leads us through a series of dank underground rooms, connected by low brick-vaulted passageways, to the last one behind the cliff above the sea. There are rifle slits through which Colonial soldiers may have fired at British ships, but now Jeffrey, kneeling on the wide granite sill, counts the islands in the harbor for us. Six, one with a lighthouse. We climb the worn stone steps into the warm, bright sunlight, and you clutch at my arm, your long black hair blowing in the wind, as we walk along the outer parapet, one hundred feet or more above the sea. Jeffrey stays on the inner walk, where he says he can see better. He is also ready to eat, but we go up to the fort's
blockhouse first, exploring its rooms and clambering up its circular wooden stairway. As we look out at the harbor again from one of the upper windows, you suddenly put your arms around my neck and kiss me, while Jeffrey loops one arm around your leg and the other around mine.
THE RIVER OF HEAVEN

My alarm rings at 2:45 but I silence it and doze off again. I dream that I am scaling the front of Kaédé's house to retrieve a jewelry box that she has thrown onto the roof. By the time I wake and climb the bamboo stairs to the observing stage on my own roof, it is already quarter past three.

I remove the dew-sprayed tarpaulin from my telescope, a ten-inch reflector I built myself four years ago, and adjust its mounting, while a chorus of grasshoppers—the graceful, bright green hataori—serenades me from the field behind my house. Ji-i-i-i, chon-chon! Ji-i-i-i, chon-chon! The air has been purged of its pollution by yesterday's typhoon and is now pure and cold and smells only of the sea. The night, like an immense and perfectly ground lens, seems to focus all space and time to the very spot where I stand. Overhead I see the tremulous ice-blue light of Venus; below me the lights of Shigoda fan out in a semicircle around the bay, but they do not possess the smallest fraction of the beauty of those that glimmer above.

After wrapping myself in a heavy blanket against the chill of the damp air, I wipe the ocular with the tail of my
silk neck scarf. The diagrams and equations of science fall away like the coarse robe of a beautiful woman as I quickly scan the sky in greeting to all my friends there. I linger a moment or two longer with some of my particular friends such as Altair, the Herdsman, and his beloved Weaver-maid, Vega, separated by the Amanogawa, the River of Heaven, and eternally destined to meet only one night each year on the festival of Tanabata. Of course there are also those stars I do not like and try to ignore as my telescope sweeps over them. But there is work to do, tonight especially. The sky is so transparent I see many deep-sky clusters and nebulae that approach the light-gathering limit of my instrument. Even η Andromedae readily resolves into its quartet—the magnificent blue and orange double with their companion, a close white binary.

Systematically, I begin to search the sky, dividing its great black dome into right spherical triangles. The stars and cold salt air exhilarate me. My whole life draws meaning from these few brief hours before dawn.

A short while ago one of the other postal clerks asked me, "Why don't you belong to any of the employees' clubs, Tanabe? What do you do with all your free time? You live by yourself, don't you?"

"I am a student of astronomy and I am building a new sixteen-inch telescope, which is considerably larger than the one I have now. But of course my evenings are quite short since I must rise by three o'clock in order to observe
until dawn."

"Why don't you come to one of our baseball games and have some fun for a change? You could at least cheer for us."

"Thank you, but astronomy is my fun."

"How can getting up at three in the morning be fun? What do you do it for anyway?"

"Why does a person do anything worthwhile? Why do athletes train for years to compete for only a few minutes at the Olympic Games?"

When I could not satisfactorily explain the reasons for my interest in astronomy, he turned to Kaédé, who was eating lunch at her bench three rows away. "Hey, Kaédé, do you need another recruit for the girls' cheering section?"

I blushed and looked away as Kaédé glanced up.

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you don't want to cheer, we can always use a water boy." He laughed as he walked away to join the other clerks for their lunch period of joking and games, while I hurried outside, away from Kaédé. I did not really mind as I have other more constant friends.

Finishing the northern half of the sky, I direct my telescope below the zenith. As I search the first imaginary triangle above the southeast horizon, a nebulous phosphorescent ball just west of α Hydrae refracts pale and fuzzy through the eyepiece. At first I think it must be some ghost image, a wisp of cloud or possibly a reflection of
light from Shigoda, since I can distinguish neither a spurious disk nor diffraction rings. Suddenly, however, my thirteen years of observing converge to convince me of what I see. My heart leaps and I feel clammy in the cold night air. I lock the telescope in place. The object is still there, glimmering like a ship's running light through a thick ocean fog. With my red-shaded flashlight I examine the star charts; they are empty at the point where my telescope is trained. One more look assures me that the object is truly there.

There is no doubt in my mind as I hurry down the stairs. Fallen leaves from the twin maples crackle underfoot as I run across the courtyard to my bicycle. Furiously, I pedal the five long miles through the deserted streets of Shigoda to the post office where I awaken the night-duty telegraph clerk. SEPTEMBER 19. 4:30 AM. NEW COMET? MAGNITUDE TEN. 0845. MINUS 0837. YOSHIYURI TANABE. SHIGODA.

Within a half hour the Tokyo Observatory wires me its one-word reply: CONFIRMATION. This means that the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in the United States has verified my sighting at its Australian field station. Not discovered previously by someone else, the comet is mine. Officially designated 1969j, it will be everywhere referred to as Tanabe. I can scarcely believe it, my own comet after more than four thousand nights of observing. Songs forgotten since childhood spring to my mind and I sing loudly as I
pedal home, my only regret that I will not be able to see my comet again for almost twenty-four hours. By keeping busy I know that time will pass more quickly.

To fill up the morning at the post office, I sort three sacks of packages from the northern part of the prefecture even though they are not my responsibility. I work through my lunch period, eating as I tie up the last of the morning mail and prepare the pouches for the flight to Tokyo. A few of the other clerks eye me disapprovingly but no one says anything, at least not until someone brings in the afternoon edition of the Shigoda Sun. The story of my comet is on the front page—not headlines but still the front page—along with my school picture. I am surprised at how little I have changed in the ten years since I was fifteen.

"Is this true, Tanabe?" a clerk asks me, pointing to the story.

"Of course," I answer. "They would not print it otherwise."

"How did you find it?" someone else asks.

"By watching the sky every clear night."

"Just what is it you found anyway?"

"It is not confirmed yet but some preliminary calculations which I performed this morning lead me to believe that this comet is a member of a large sun-grazing family, possibly a fragment of an enormous comet or even a planet that was disrupted during the early life of the solar system. This particular comet is traveling in such an orbit that it
will almost certainly plunge into the sun."

"What's so important about this meteor anyway?"

"It is a comet not a meteor"--I do not choose to explain the difference--"and every astronomical discovery, major or minor, contributes to our understanding of the solar system and ultimately the universe."

"Maybe the Emperor will give you a medal for it," someone in the back says.

"Or a promotion."

"How much money are you going to get for discovering it?"

I ignore such remarks.

The clerks crowd around my bench and barrage me with their foolish questions. Kaëdé asks the most intelligent one about the method for estimating the speed of the comet. This is the first time she has spoken to me in the four months she has worked here, but my heart does not leap as I thought it would. Still nervous, however, I catch myself fumbling with my silk scarf more than once as I answer her. I try to keep my tone cordial without forfeiting the proper formality, until the clerks can think of no more questions and leave me alone as before. Kaëdé smiles at me as she returns to her bench. Even though I try not to, I cannot help but enjoy this role as minor hero in the eyes of the clerks, who whisper among themselves and glance in my direction for the remainder of the afternoon. By tomorrow I know that it will all be forgotten.
When I reach home that afternoon, the courtyard is as full of news reporters as it is of maple leaves. Earlier, my aged aunt with whom I live had chased away several of the reporters as she knew I would not wish to speak with them. They swarm about me like sand fleas, buzzing their questions at me, but I make my way into the house in silence. I am determined to make statements only to reputable astronomy publications even though I know my words will be diluted and distorted by the popular press. But that will not be my fault.

The excitement of the discovery has exhausted me and I go to bed as soon as I finish eating, primarily of course in order to rise even earlier than usual. I do not fall asleep again the next morning and by five of two the telescope is ready but my comet has not yet arisen. I pass some time watching RR Sagittarii which is just now at a maximum but it seems forever until my comet appears. Finally it does. Comet 1969j. Tanabe's comet. Many magnitudes dimmer than Venus, my comet is yet more beautiful, an iridescent opal against a backdrop of black velvet. It changes moment to moment from a delicate bluish white to yellow tinged with green. I sit transfixed at the eyepiece until my comet is obscured by the light of the rising sun, and during that time she tells me many things. She tells me that her name is Komachi. Komachi, more lovely than Venus.

The outward pattern of my days remains unchanged but within I think only of Komachi. I become forgetful. One
morning I nearly leave for work without putting on my silk scarf; another I take a wrong street on my way to the post office and for the first time I am late for work. Whenever I am out-of-doors during the day, I stare at the place where she will meet me at night. Can it be the sky is a keepsake from my love? My nights count only as hours for watching as Komachi steadily brightens on her voyage eastward toward Virgo where she will meet the sun. I become haggard and ill-tempered from too little sleep but it is more important that I spend the short time we have together on the roof rather than in bed. Kaédé asks if I am not well and fusses over me at work. The chief clerk of my section takes me aside to speak about the surge in missorted mail from my bench. He is very kind and patient, asking if he might help me in any way. I apologize and promise to concentrate more on my work, but my mind ever wanders back to Komachi.

As the two maples in the courtyard shed the last of their crimson leaves and the stars continue their unending spiral, Komachi, streaming out a twenty-million-mile tail behind her like a strand of seaweed, rises later each night and sinks lower and lower toward the horizon until she eventually disappears into the sea. That morning when I leave for the post office I notice that the maple trees are bare at last and the earth is spumed with a light frost. From then on I hear of Komachi only from the Tokyo Observatory, whose people are very kind in keeping me informed of her progress. I stare at the daytime sky where I know she is,
but it is different now that I can no longer see her at night. Often during the long hours of darkness when there is no sleep for me, I walk along the outer cliffs above Shigoda, scaring up nesting gulls and waiting for Komachi to immolate herself in the sun.

... Like seaweed entwined
My love and I used to sleep,
With a love as deep
As the frond of the seaweed,
But how few such nights
We two were joined together . . .

Near the end of October I receive a telegram from the Observatory telling me that the comet, executing a hairpin turn of almost 270 degrees, has escaped the gravitational pull of the sun. I am ready to dance about the telegraph office despite the people there, when I feel my joy congeal like blood in an open wound. Komachi has swung around the sun and is returning in almost the same direction from which she came. She did not plunge to her death after all. It is like watching a corpse rise from its bier as if from a nap.

I do not open the subsequent telegrams from the Observatory but in about two weeks I read a small item on the back page of the Shigoda Sun that my comet has reappeared above the southeast horizon in the early morning sky. My heart writhes between yearning and betrayal until I finally go up to the observing stage for the first time since Komachi disappeared. I spend three consecutive nights there without uncovering the telescope. On the fourth I can resist no
longer. She is hovering a little above the sea, more resplendent than I remember her, pale blue with an ever-increasing tail, yet also different somehow, changed by her passage about the sun. **When the white jewel shines in pure transparent splendor ... Proud in a world where she has no peer.** Komachi, my Komachi.

Throughout the lengthening nights of November and December I watch her opalescence fade and grow more frail as she crosses Corvus and Crater on her way toward Antlia below the horizon. Winter, always a dismal season in the North Pacific, begins to hang in the air like a tapestry of gloom, but I wrap myself in additional blankets and continue my vigil at the telescope until at length she disappears completely. It is bitter cold and there are flurries of snow the night I lose Komachi. I have one final glimpse of her among the clouds, a faint glimmer of goodbye from one hundred million miles away, and then she is gone from me forever on her journey into the void beyond the solar system. I do not move from the telescope until the sun rises high in an empty sky.

As before, work at the post office occupies my days, and occasionally I spend the lunch period with Kaëdé when I am unable to avoid her without appearing rude. She tries to persuade me to attend folk dancing with her every other Wednesday but so far I have found the excuses not to. Usually I pass the long evenings reading, having grown fond of early Japanese literature, the Manyoshu in particular. My
aunt sometimes plays the samisen for me although she says
that she no longer plays as well as when she was young. My
new telescope lays unfinished in the workshop and it is a
rare night now that I go up to the observing stage. The
stars do not seem such special friends anymore and I find
the sky a lonely place.

Now and then when I do arise to observe the eclipse of
some variable star or perhaps a particularly fine meteor
shower, I am gripped with longing, the pain of my own desire
as well as that winnowed from the countless ages before me.
My telescope turns to that place where Komachi disappeared,
where I know she is, hurtling away from me still, even
though I cannot see her.

But if I could become a star,
The star of Tanabata:
Then crimson leaves of maple
Might bridge the River of Heaven,
And carry my true love across;
Colored strings bind my fond desire
To her pretty heart.

I wind my scarf and blankets tighter about me but they
are like fishnet against the biting wind off the Pacific,
although I am more chilled by the thought that sometime,
perhaps a millenium from now, when my bones have long been
dust, she will not be able to resist the sun any longer and
will return again into the solar system. Then someone else
with his eye on the heavens will know my Komachi.
YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

David Burne was just tight enough not to mind the reception. He disliked meeting his public face-to-face, preferring instead one of his books as go-between, but the relief of wrapping up his three-day stint as Visiting Author had worked him to the pitch of, if not outright cordiality, at least indifference. His final lecture went rather well, he thought, in spite of nearly knocking his mug of Scotch and water off the podium with one of his sweeping oratorical gestures, as he reiterated the writer's obligation to write for the masses rather than other writers or the educated elite. In his scramble to save the Scotch, David made a back-handed grab any shortstop would have been proud of, but he knocked his speech onto the floor. Dropping to all fours, he scooped up the pages and then spent several minutes getting them back in order, a job made more difficult by the lack of any numbering system. All of this drew more applause than the passages he read from his soon-to-be-published sixteenth novel, Abeyance at Appledore, the story of a lower-class family from Maine and their search for the American dream. The final ovation, while not uproarious, was gratifying.
David was pleased with the prospect that in less than twelve hours he'd be leaving Stratham, this small liberal arts college where he'd graduated twenty-one years before. Scheduling a visit to northern Vermont in the middle of winter bordered on insanity. The plow rolls were already too high to see over and someone said it was snowing again, that the Old Farmer's Almanac predicted a nor'easter with twenty more inches. After flying to New York to lunch with his agent and publisher, he'd be home in Westport by late afternoon. He was hoping the copy of Keaton's "The Goat," which he'd successfully bid for from an estate auction, would be waiting for him. Then David remembered that Dr. Herrinbach's party still remained before he could leave and his spirits plummeted. This was undoubtedly the sorest trial of the entire three days. His indifference toward the fifty-odd people waiting for his autograph veered back toward disdain. Instead of a smile and a handshake, he'd rather have given them all the slip.

Halfway through signing one of his novels, he spotted the "mystery maiden," as he'd named her, standing by herself in a corner and wearing her customary Snoopy sweatshirt and patched dungarees. A book was clutched in her hands. David brushed back a shock of graying hair and craned his neck to see if it was one of his. The dust jacket didn't look familiar but he was too far away to be sure. She'd been to every one of his talks, a record of stamina if nothing else, her remote blue eyes fastened on him like fingernails in
flesh. She reminded him of a little girl waiting in line to see Santa Claus, yet too shy to go near him when her turn finally came. If David smiled at her, she looked away. From her expression, he could never decide whether she were listening intently or planning how to disguise leftovers for supper. Still he found her attractive, even compelling, and her face had floated around him in the darkness as he waited to fall asleep the previous two nights. If she were only ten years older, he told himself, he'd gladly expend his remaining good years on her and settle for her company after that.

Meanwhile he wrote his first name twice and was beginning it a third time when the book's owner, the college's head librarian even in David's time, snatched it out of his hand.

"Do you mind?" she asked.

"Not at all." David looked at what he'd written and moved closer, assuming a confidential tone. "That actually is my name. My mother stuttered when she told the clerk who was filling out my birth certificate." For an instant he thought the old woman might be a brown belt; she seemed poised for a karate chop to the larynx. "I'm only kidding of course. Actually, as I was writing I had this flash about a man whose name determines his character. What effect would the same first and last name have on a person?"

"You could call it Lolita."

David wagged a finger at her and laughed. "How would
you know about that?"

"Not all dirty books aren't worth reading, Mr. Burne."
Tucking the book under her arm, she walked off.

At the end of an hour there were only two people left
at the reception—the girl, who hadn't budged from her cor-
er, and a boy David remembered from the Senior Workshop
because he kept asking about "marketing" manuscripts,
agents, publishing houses, and royalties. Each of them
waited for the other to speak first. Finally David smiled
at the boy, whose impression as a know-it-all was increased
by his dishrag handshake.

"You probably remember me from Senior Workshop, Mr.
Burne."

"Yes, I certainly do."

"I feel like we're old friends."

"Do you?" Herrinbach must have given up trying to
teach grammar, David thought, smiling quizzically at the
boy. "And why is that?" Contempt skimmed the top of his
voice like a loon over water.

"You read the Green Mountain Review, don't you, Mr.
Burne?"

"I glance at it occasionally."

David hadn't seen a copy since Volume II, Number 3,
when his first published story appeared. The best thing
about it, he recalled, was the title, "Call It Sleep," which
he lifted from an obscure '30s novel that had unfortunately
reemerged recently as a big seller.
"Well, I was Louis in Steve Eberhardt's story, 'The Eight-Sided Room,' in last fall's issue. What did you think about that story?" The boy's smile was smug.

"Was that the one about a ten-year-old math genius who stabbed his parents to death with a compass?"

The boy's smile disappeared. "No. It was about a college student's fight against drug addiction."

"I may have read it." David shook his head thoughtfully. "But I don't seem to remember it at the moment."

"You'd remember this one if you read it, Mr. Burne. Dr. Herrinbach told Steve it was one of the best stories a student ever wrote during his thirty-seven years of teaching. How about that?" There was renewed hope in the boy's voice.

"That's high praise indeed but Dr. Herrinbach does tend to exaggerate on occasion. At least he did when I was a student and he doesn't seem to have changed much since then." David glanced at his watch. "And speaking of the good doctor, I must be getting over to his house. He doesn't think the Visiting Author deserves the honorarium unless he survives one of his faculty parties. Sorry I can't talk longer. It was nice seeing you again and I'll be sure to take a look at 'The Eight-Sided House.'"

As the boy left, David looked around for the "mystery maiden," but she was gone too. "Bastard!" he muttered at the open door.

The party turned out worse than David anticipated.
He'd at least expected the Scotch and a few unattached women to salvage the evening. Dr. Herrinbach provided neither. For some reason he'd decided that David's drink was bourbon and saw to it that his glass was always full, while the women were all faculty wives. David was certain he couldn't have created a more boring bunch of people on paper.

As he took the seat of honor—a leatherette recliner—the literary inquisition began. For an hour and a half his work was compared and contrasted with everyone from Boccacio to Philip Roth, with stops at Restoration Drama, Fanny Hill, and the Tropics along the way. During the first lull in the conversation, David excused himself to go to the bathroom. The bourbon didn't agree with him and he was feeling woozy.

Just as he was tucking himself back into his underwear, the bathroom door opened and one of the women came in, the tall buxom redhead he'd noticed on the fringe of the circle gathered around him. From the way she talked to the man beside her, she obviously wasn't his wife, and David matched her with the athletic-looking professor who was, he recalled, the department's Pope man. After locking the door, she bent over the sink, which was opposite the toilet, without seeing David and began to splash cold water on her eye, which was irritated from something in it. Her skirt was so short that a good part of her lime green bikini pants were exposed.

David hadn't seen such a nice ass and thighs without the aid of a Longline since a nineteen-year-old coed had
befriended him after his lecture at Vassar several years before. But this woman was even more admirable because she was fifteen to twenty years older.

He realized that it would be necessary for him to do something soon and he began to zip up his fly. The noise of the interlocking pieces of metal, however, was enough to alert the woman, who spun around, still bent at the waist, spraying water all over the walls as well as David. She remained like a ballerina in a difficult dance position for an instant before straightening up. The two of them stared at each other several seconds from their respective six-foot heights before David broke the silence.

"Why isn't your make-up smeared?" he asked.

"Because I don't wear any. Why isn't your zipper done up?"

David finished zipping his fly and then awkwardly put his hand in his pocket as though it should be out of sight.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," she said.

"No."

"Good. I wasn't sure whether you were just beginning or finishing up."

"All done. I was just leaving when you came. Quite a nice party, isn't it?"

"Quite."

"Are you enjoying the discussion?"

"Not as much as you seem to be."

"Aren't you literary-minded?"
"More literal-minded."
"That was very good." David chuckled. "Are you by any chance the Pope man's wife?"
"No. As a matter of fact I'm the Romantic's wife."
"What luck for you."
"You're even more charming than you seem."
"You must be Mrs. Manning."
"Yes, although I'm known as Dr. Cordulack-Manning professionally. But under the circumstances, call me Sophie."
"You don't look like a Sophie."
"It's short for Sophronia, one of my father's old Greek girlfriends."
"What a lovely name."
"Thank you. My father thought so too."
"It fits you very well. Please call me David. Are you on the faculty here, Sophie?"
"Yes, David. In Chemistry."
"Is that right? I've never met a woman chemist before."
"There's a first time for everything. I've never met a writer in a bathroom before either. At least not one I liked."
"You just said there's a first time for everything."
"So I did."
"It's too bad you weren't teaching when I had to take my science requirement. I might have become a nuclear chemist instead of a writer."
"But how fortunate for the masses that I wasn't."
David noticed her bloodshot eye and raised his hand to her cheek. "Why have you been crying, Sophie?"
"No reason, David. I'm just a cryer."
"You don't look like one."
"Or a Sophie either, but I am."
"Why don't we sit down on the bathtub and you can tell me about it. Sometimes it's easier to talk to strangers."
"I hardly feel as though we're still strangers but I think I'll stand anyway."
David put his hands on her waist, and Sophie quickly grabbed the insides of his elbows with surprising strength for a woman.
"Go ahead and tell me," he said.
"The same old story. It would just be boring to a person of your sensibilities."
"Not at all. I want you to tell me."
"It's nothing really. Just Hal Bailey, the department Chaucerian. He won't leave me alone. He makes passes at me right in front of Manning, who is of course too drunk to notice."
"No wonder you're upset, Sophie." David squeezed her waist, moving closer at the same time.
Sophie tightened her grip on his elbows. "You are so understanding, David."
He tried to pull her against him and kiss her, but she held him away.
"Not in Dr. Herrinbach's bathroom. Haven't you any respect for your former professor?"

Just then there was a rap on the door and David jumped back; he'd forgotten that someone else might want to use the bathroom.

"What about my room at the Inn?" he whispered.

Sophie looked down at the floor. "Oh, I don't think so. The desk clerk there would recognize me."

"I'm in room nineteen. You could use the back stairs behind the bar."

"So you found them too."

Someone rapped again.

"Won't you come? Please?"

"This is so sudden."

"But I have to leave in the morning."

"Well, I suppose I could. Manning will be conked out by the time I get him home."

"Please come. I'm sure it would be pleasant."

"Oh, so am I."

There was a louder rap. "Are you in there?" someone asked.

"Look, I'll go out here." David started toward the window. "Then I'll come in and say I went out the back door for a breath of fresh air."

Sophie grabbed his arm. "Don't be silly. You'll catch your death of cold. Besides, it's only Bailey." She pulled him to the door and threw it open. "Next!" she said,
sweeping out arm-in-arm with David past the college student who was tending bar at the party. Back in the living room, she explained that she'd cornered him in Dr. Herrinbach's study and had been discussing his style with him.

After another twenty minutes of the same kind of discussion as before, David excused himself because of a severe headache and his early plane to New York. As everyone crowded around him at the door, Sophie stood in the very front.

"I haven't had such a nice time since I was nineteen," David said, glancing at Sophie, "and that's a hell of a long time ago." He noticed her wink at him as he went out the door.

For almost an hour David searched out old haunts around town. He walked by his old fraternity house which was now the ROTC building, the Little-Bit-of-Heaven Cafe whose owner served green beer every March 17 and dyed his hair to match, College Woods where he regularly laid his American Lit instructor until they got into an argument in class about Hester Prynne's libido and he received a C for the course. Wandering along the empty, half-forgotten streets, David felt the past crowd him much closer than he liked, yet at the same time he felt more content than he had reason to. He knew that had to do with Sophie. The snow was becoming heavier but the increasing prospect that his flight out of Montpelier in the morning would be canceled was not particularly unpleasant. Although determined that he wouldn't,
he was beginning to enjoy this trip after all, his first one back despite the hand-written invitations from the class secretary every five years.

By the time the church clock struck one, David's head was feeling better even though the bourbon hadn't worn off, and he started back to the Inn-on-the-Green. Icicles hung from his mustache and the lining of his nose was pinched from the cold, but he warmed to the thought of himself sitting in front of a roaring fire with some Usher's and Anna Karenina, which he was rereading for the seventh time, before Sophie came to redeem the evening. Tolstoy had always been his favorite writer and David even went so far once as to enroll in the Berlitz School just to learn to read him in the original. Russian verbs made a quick end of that project, however, and he went back to his English translation, deciding that it was pretty good after all.

After brushing the snow off his overcoat in the foyer, he tracked white footprints across the new indoor-outdoor carpeting. Someone stood up and crossed the front parlor toward him. It never rains but it pours, David thought, some voluptuous young English major wants to seduce me in order to do a searingly intimate portrait for the Green Mountain Review. He was wondering how to tell her gently that better stuff was on the way when he recognized her eyes. Despite having changed into a flowered dress, that showed off her long legs and was too tight in the bust even though she wasn't particularly big, she was still holding
the same book.

"Isn't it past your curfew?" he asked.

"No one has a curfew anymore."

"What a shame my college days weren't twenty years later."

"Not really. I don't know of a man yet who's stayed overnight."

"That's what I mean. You would have known me. But that's another matter. I suppose you've come at this ungodly hour for me to sign that book."

"Please."

"It's never too late for one of my readers, especially one as pretty as you." David took the book and read its title—If Not For You, his first published novel. "Where did you ever find this? It's a wonder the pages haven't disintegrated."

"I bought it from one of those places that locates out-of-print books."

"They probably charged you a mint for it."

"Fourteen dollars."

"That's more than I earned in royalties from it."

"It's my favorite of all your novels."

"Well, thank you, even though that doesn't say much for the next fifteen." David lowered his voice. "Actually it's my favorite too. It's the only novel I ever wrote for myself. With the others, I always had to worry about topping the one before it. Maybe I should tell my publisher there's
a heavy demand for it on college campuses and that he should reprint it in paperback."

"The thing I like best is that it's dedicated to me."

David smiled involuntarily. "To you?"

"Yes. Have you forgotten who that is?"

"Regan?" He needn't have asked; it was no longer possible for him to mistake those eyes. David seldom felt himself lose control of the immediate situation but when it happened, he was at a complete loss to know what to do. As he wondered if he should kiss her or not, she put her hand on his.

"Yes, I'm Regan," she said quietly.

How could he have not guessed? "Would you like to come up to my room?"

"Unless you want to sit down here."

"No. I think I'd like a drink."

"You look as if you need one."

David smiled at her. "You're your mother's daughter, all right."

Pouring out two Scotch and waters, his own a double plus a little extra from a shaky hand, he examined her face, so much like her mother's, and wondered how he failed to recognize her eyes or mouth or her nose with its wide bridge and freckles. Although taller than Lynn, she had her figure and David was sure he would have recognized her if he hadn't been so sober every time he saw her. When he realized he was staring, he hurried over to give her the drink. No
woman had made him this nervous since he met Suzanne Pleshette, who played the title role in the film version of his novel *Beryl*.

"If you don't like Scotch, I could have something else sent up."

"This is fine, thanks."

"I don't stock much of a bar when I travel. Just Scotch. You can almost always find water. Except one time when I was in Texas during a drought."

"It's all right, really."

"If you're sure."

"Positive."

"O.K. then. I thought I'd light the fireplace when I got back. Would you mind?"

"No, that would be nice."

David welcomed another chance to collect himself and was able to prolong the operation quite a while as none of the kindling was very small and the newspaper supply was limited by the fact that the *Stratham Sentinel* appeared only weekly. He finally sprinkled a little Scotch over the wood and paper, which blazed up and then settled down to a small persistent flame.

"There's an expensive fire," he said. "Talk about your money going up in smoke. I never was much of a Boy Scout. I failed to make a campfire with damp wood so many times that the Scoutmaster finally slipped me a can of lighter fluid so I'd pass. It must be some kind of block because
of my name."

When there was no excuse to putter with the fire any longer, David sat down in an old wingback. "This certainly beats Herrinbach's party. Two hours was more than I could stand."

"Don't you like Dr. Herrinbach?"

"He's all right. Why do you ask?"

"Just things you've said the past few days. And then I heard you mention him again tonight to Andy Swinton."

"Andy Swinton?"

"You know, Louis in 'The Eight-Sided Room.'"

"My friend Louis. How could I forget him? Why'd you leave there before I talked to you?"

"I guess I chickened out at the last minute."

"I'm glad you decided to come back. It's not that I don't like Herrinbach. We just never saw eye to eye on anything. Before I graduated, he took me aside to give me some fatherly advice, as he called it. 'Burne,' he said in that squeaky bird's voice of his, 'you have a certain amount of God-given talent that the other writing students don't have, and I am extremely disappointed to see you waste it on such filth.' He still has the same old tune. Tonight he was explaining why Lowry's Ultramarine works twice as well as my novel Tanker without half the smut. Which probably isn't saying much for either one of us, but as far as I'm concerned, the real difference is that I wasn't driven to the dock in a Rolls Royce."
"Why did he invite you then?"

"Because I'm the famous alumnus, his one graduate who made a name for himself. Who else could afford the good doctor so much literary mileage?" Again David mimicked Herrinbach's voice. "I started this man on the road to success."

Herrinbach had not particularly wanted David to come to Stratham, but he felt an obligation to invite the writing program's best-known graduate and even felt a little guilty at having neglected him for so many years. His proposal had caused a deep division among the English faculty, many of whom felt that a popular writer such as David did not fit the scope or caliber of the Visiting Author program. No one voted against him, in deference to Dr. Herrinbach, but there were nearly as many abstentions as assenting votes.

"So why did you come?"

"To get in a little skiing."

"I get along with him fine. He's always so anxious to help people with their writing."

"He always did like young girls, but you'd better not tell him who your old man is or you won't get along with him anymore."

"You really sound as though you have something against Dr. Herrinbach. As if you don't want to admit you might owe him something."

"And you sound as though you're taking Psych 101."

"No. Abnormal."
"Well, I don't have anything against Herrinbach and I certainly don't feel that I owe him anything. Whatever I got here, I worked for. Besides, if he's as great as everyone keeps telling me, why has he spent all these years at a hick college in Vermont? Why hasn't he moved on to some big money?"

"Perhaps he's more interested in the people in this department than in big money."

"Perhaps."

Both of them were quiet for a few minutes before David got up and poured himself another double. He put a bigger log on the fire, turned on a table lamp, and shut off the overhead light before sitting down again.

"Cozier," he said. That reminded him of Sophie and he hoped she wouldn't come until Regan had left.

"Are you working on another novel now?"

"Yes, a long one, almost six hundred pages. In fact, I'm supposed to fly to New York tomorrow to see my publisher about it, but if this snow keeps up I'll have to go by dog sled."

"What's it about?"

"A man who's charged with a murder he didn't commit and how he loses his family because they think he's guilty too."

"That sounds interesting. What's the name of it?"

"The working title is A Candle of Understanding."

"That's really nice. Is it from something?"

"The second book of Esdras in the Apocrypha. 'I shall
light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out."

"How much have you written so far?"

"I've finished the first draft but parts of it need quite a bit of revision. Two of the characters gave me a lot of trouble and I'm still not sure what to do with them. A teacher here told me once that characterization is like riding a bicycle. After you get the knack of it, you'll never lose it. But I've found that no matter how well you ride, you're still apt to fall off occasionally."

"How long did it take you to write six hundred pages?"

"Oh, I started it two years ago but I took time off to revise Abeyance at Appledore and write a play."

"You were talking about a play when I saw you on the 'David Frost Show' last year. In Memory of Melanie somebody or other."

"Melanie Merrill. It holds the record for the shortest run on Broadway last season. About two-thirds of a night."

Lapsing into silence again, David fingered the rim of his glass while Regan looked around the room. He wondered why she'd come. It couldn't be money. Even though Lynn had never asked him for a cent, after he began to earn money from his writing, he'd given her a financial settlement, which increased yearly with his income. He got himself another drink; Regan was still nursing hers.

"Did the English Department get this for you?" she asked.
"Yes, they do things up big at Stratham. Two rooms and a private bath, which is right over there by the way. They even pay half my bar bill, which probably costs them more than the two rooms and bath. I feel like I'm at a duty-free airport the way I'm stocking up at these bargain prices."

"I've never been in the Inn-on-the-Green before. It's really nice."

"You're to be commended for not knowing about the back stairs, Regan."

"What back stairs?" She looked at him quizzically.

"Nothing. So you like going to school way up here in God's country."

"I love it. It's small enough to know everybody but big enough to have good professors. I feel I've learned a lot about writing since I've been here. I brought one of my stories that I'd like you to read if you would."

"Sure, I'd be glad to. What do you do beside write stories?"

"I'm learning to play the Dobro."

"Really? I hope it's nothing you can be arrested for. What is it?"

"It's an unamplified steel guitar."

"What kind of music do you play on it?"

"Bluegrass. We want to start an all-girl bluegrass band."

"I thought that only grew in Kentucky."

"It does but they've been exporting it lately."
David hadn't the vaguest idea what she was talking about. "It sounds like you're taking care of someone's lawn. Well, what else do you do beside play the Dobro?"

"I'm on the ski team this year."

"So that's it. You came here to get in some skiing too."

"Not really. My guidance counselor in high school suggested five or six colleges with good English departments where she thought I could get in. Stratham was the only one that offered a bachelor's degree with a concentration in writing, so here I am. And I suppose because you went here too. You've done more for me than I can ever thank you for."

An inquiring smile spread over David's face.

"What I mean is the money for me to go to school."

"Your mother said she wasn't going to tell you. And I didn't even know what college you were at until tonight."

"I knew that Daddy... I mean, my stepfather didn't have the money to send me here. He made Mom tell me anyway. He said it wasn't right for me to think he was paying when really you were."

"Maybe he's not so bad after all."

"He's certainly been good to me and all the other kids too, the ones from Mom's first marriage as well as his own."

"Of course he has. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. How is your mother, Regan? My lawyer tells me whenever he talks to her but I haven't seen her for a long
time." The portrait of Lynn as a member of the court of Louis XIV unexplainably flashed through his mind. It had been painted by a friend of his while she was pregnant with Regan. David hadn't thought of it since Lynn sent it to him and he put it in the attic.

"Mom's fine. I told her at Christmas that you were coming as this year's Visiting Author. She didn't think I should see you."

"I'm certainly glad you did."

"She didn't tell me not to, just that it wouldn't do either of us any good."

"It's funny how I noticed you all the time I was here, but I never imagined who you were. The only picture I have of you is the one I brought you to have taken on your first birthday. From that to seeing you now is quite a shock. It's like that old Wonder bread commercial."

"I'm sure it must be. As I said, I saw you on tv and Mom has two shoeboxes full of pictures and clippings and book reviews that she showed me. So you weren't as much of a shock for me."

"But shocking nonetheless."

David refilled their glasses and stirred up the fire before adding another log.

"How long have you known about me, Regan? And how? I can't imagine your mother would just tell you for no reason." David hadn't imagined that at all and wondered why he said it.
"It was kind of by accident when I was thirteen. Mom sent me up to the attic after a blanket, but I looked in the wrong trunk and found her copy of If Not For You. I'd never heard of you or the book then but I knew that the dedication meant me because you'd written something to Mom on the same page. When I asked her about it, she said she guessed I was old enough to know. So she told me."

"Did she let you read it then?"

"Yes. She didn't think it was a very good book for a girl my age, but she finally decided this was a special case. After I read it, she told me that things had really happened the way you described them."

David had wanted to include everything in that first novel but as he wrote, he discovered that he understood very little of what had happened between him and Lynn and what he did understand he couldn't get onto paper.

"Yes, I suppose they did," he said. "In some ways though, the novel has become more real to me than what it's about."

"Mom said she never loved anyone else the way she loved you. She tried to tell me once why you never married her but she couldn't. Why didn't you?"

David felt the heat from the fire on his face. He could say he'd felt trapped by Lynn's goodness, that he reacted to it in the worst way he could, that he came to resent the ready-made family from her first marriage. His writing was a constant source of irritation between them.
too. Contributing almost nothing toward household expenses, he seldom hesitated to spend what little money they did have on magazines and periodicals, few of which he ever read. They were necessary, he told Lynn, to keep him abreast of his contemporaries, an assertion that never failed to amuse her. He wrote mostly at night because it was quiet but also because he knew it annoyed her. Then he would complain that the children, including Regan, kept him from sleeping during the day while Lynn worked as a waitress. They both ignored the growing friction between them, letting it burst instead into hostility beyond their understanding, into something whose causes were too far submerged ever to find and set right. After he left them, running away like an adolescent, he quickly discovered there was no romance on a tanker carrying jet fuel to South Korea either. At first he hated Lynn and Regan for what he'd done to them. But that wasn't completely true; he loved them as well. He could say those things but they weren't the answer. Ultimately he didn't know either, perhaps it was partly that Lynn had wanted him to so badly.

"I can't tell you, Regan."

"I shouldn't have asked. I'm sorry. It's just that I've always wondered. I've read If Not For You at least a dozen times to find out why, but I never have."

David got up and went into the bathroom. When he returned, he looked as fresh as he had earlier in the evening. He poured himself another drink and stirred the fire, which
was beginning to die down a little.

"Where's that story you brought? I probably ought to read it before it gets any later. I might not be able to see the print much longer."

Regan handed him the story from her pocketbook. "I think it's my best story so far but I want your honest opinion about it."

"An honest opinion is usually appreciated about as much as a kick in the groin. I don't want you to dislike me before you even know me." He read the title, "'The Complete Wedding Party.'"

"It's about a girl who grew up in an orphanage and how she tries to find her real parents when she gets older."

"I'll be glad to read it although I can't say I'm much of a critic."

"I want to know what you honestly think. I really do."

The story was fairly long and took David over half an hour to read. The Scotch was beginning to affect his concentration, but he was more impressed than he wanted to be, having expected something similar to the other workshop pieces he'd read. It was nearly as good as some fiction being published and far better than anything he'd written at her age or for several years after. If this was a true indication of her ability, she could make a good writer some day.

When he finished, Regan was standing by the fireplace, absentely tracing outlines with her finger on the intricately
figured wallpaper, a habit of Lynn's that annoyed him extremely. His first impulse was to yell at her to stop until he remembered it was Regan, not her mother. David could scarcely believe he wasn't twenty-three again.

"Since you want an honest opinion, I'd have to say it's a better than average workshop story, but there aren't enough details to make the characters alive instead of just two-dimensional representations. As she's presented, the girl looking for her parents is too uninteresting for me to care whether or not she ever finds them."

"Dr. Herrinbach told me that characterization is the weakest part of my writing."

"But that's exactly what you have to do well to succeed with this kind of story. Nothing unexpected happens. The story moves in a straight line to the finish, which is sentimental because it's not plausible. Do you think that such a happy reunion between a man and a daughter he's never known or apparently wanted is realistic?"

"He is her real father."

"Is he? It seems to me there's quite a difference between him and a real father."

"Dr. Herrinbach thought I did a good job with this story."

"Will you stop bringing up that jerk?" David was as surprised by his words as Regan and he realized he must have drunk more than he thought. He could see that she was upset. "I didn't mean to sound so harsh, Regan. It's just
that the good things always make the bad stick out that much more. And you should also keep in mind that I'm comparing your story to published ones so naturally yours is going to suffer. It's been a hard day. The bourbon I drank earlier didn't agree with me very well. Try to bear with me because there were a lot of things I liked about it too. Your style is really fluid, very readable. Some of your little descriptions reminded me of Virginia Woolf.

"You don't need to humor me."

"I'm not. There are details in your story that impressed me very much. Like this one. 'She gathered the material of the skirt into folds like ribbon candy as she basted it to the plain, white bodice.' Or this. 'His voice had the texture of cooked oatmeal.' Those are nice and could have only been written by a woman."

"Now you're patronizing me just like the other writing students."

"Not at all. I got fifteen hundred dollars to say nice things to them. No one's paying me now."

"You don't lie very well anyway."

"I didn't have to. They believed what they wanted to. You seem interested in writing but they just want to play at being writers."

"I am."

"Well, it might take you six or seven, even ten years but you could probably do it. That's how long it took the writers I know, including myself. Not that we were that
much better than anyone else, we just wrote while they sat
around and talked about the great things they were going to
write someday. It just depends what you want out of writ-
ing."

"I want the satisfaction of writing well."

"Considering your age, you should have that already."

"But I've only written short stories. I want to write
novels and have them published."

"Believe me, Regan, there's more satisfaction in writ-
ing one story up to your own standards than in publishing a
hundred novels for the reading public."

"That's easy for you to say."

"And I'll tell you something else too. There's more
satisfaction in loving someone than in all the words you
could ever write."

"How would you know about that?"

"Because I do."

"You sound like the priest giving out marital advice."

"Who could be better qualified? You always have to see
the truth of a situation from the outside."

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"How fortunate for you."

"All you need is to see one of your novels on the 39¢
table. That's a year or more of your life and God knows how
much of your soul that they're selling for 39¢."

"Why do you keep torturing yourself then?"
"I don't want to see you waste even a minute of your life, Regan. Do something useful with it. You'll never know how fast it slips away until it has. There are thousands of people writing and only a few of them will ever make it. Even they'll be disappointed when they find out what that is."

David waved the story toward the fire but Regan snatched it out of his hand.

"I better go," she said. "It's late and you said you had a hard day."

Helping Regan on with her coat, David purposely avoided looking at her eyes. They were too much like Lynn's eyes, which told him more than he wanted to know. "Maybe you'll visit me in Connecticut this summer. That is, if your mother wouldn't mind."

"Is that where you live, in Connecticut?"

David recognized the contempt in her voice as his own. It was a weapon Lynn never had. "Yes. Just outside Westport in a big old Colonial on the Aspetuck River."

"It must be very nice."

"It is. I couldn't live anywhere else even though it's way too big. There's just me and my housekeeper and eighteen rooms. Maybe you'd come and help fill it up. You could bring your Dobro."

"Maybe."

As David bent forward to kiss her, he stepped on her foot and she jumped back. "I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?"
"No, I'm all right. I have to go. Goodbye."

"Goodnight, Regan."

After shutting the door, he fixed himself another drink, shut off the light, and sat down in the remanent glow of the fire. It was several minutes before David relaxed enough for his mind even to begin to pick through everything that Regan released, things he thought were locked away in his novels forever. Lynn was right as usual. He wondered how much Regan had believed of what he told her. She said he didn't lie very well. But what was he trying to tell her and how much of it did he believe himself? He hoped in the morning he'd find it all didn't matter even though now he knew it did.

David dozed off and on until the fire had died out and there was only the glow of the coals left. Darkness filled the room, bringing with it the same familiar face. But not quite the same, this time the face was Lynn and Sophie as well as Regan. He wondered why Sophie didn't come, perhaps Manning hadn't passed out after all. They would have had a pleasant time. He remembered her thighs and ass but they belonged to the coed at Vassar. They all spun through a landscape of disjointed memory with a hundred other women he'd known for a night or a century. Then the face became Regan again and waited as another face floated out of a far-away tree. It was a teenage girl, his character who was causing trouble in the novel. As the two merged into a single laughing face, David knew he needed a pencil to make
some notes and thought he'd found one, even though he fell asleep without moving, while outside the storm grew worse and the wind hurled snowflakes noiselessly against the windows of his room.
THE EINSTEIN AWARD

The 1936 fall semester began with a coming-out party. Dr. Marcus's neatly chalked invitation read: LAB MEETING TODAY AT 2 P.M. INTRODUCTION OF NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS. Since he'd never done anything like this before, those of us returning from the previous year knew it was really the debut of Herschel Carney, a seventeen-year-old with the IQ of a genius and a grasp of physics that most of us couldn't begin to imagine.

Our guest of honor was wearing a new wool suit, obviously picked out by a mother with foresight. It bagged about him like a loose sail and was set off by a necktie, knotted somewhere between a four-in-hand and a granny, with a picture of the sun setting behind Bunker Hill Monument. Underneath a mound of carrot-colored hair, his angular face was made even sharper by a hooked nose and high, prominent cheekbones. His eyes down, Herschel kicked at a floor plug while Marcus recited his credentials. Graduation at fourteen from Boston Latin after two years of study. An S.B. in physics from M.I.T. three years later.

Herschel had been in an electrodynamics course with me the previous year but he never spoke to anyone or asked any
questions in class. All I knew about him for sure was that he carried his books in a Ready Rise flour sack and that he was a whiz in mathematics, although I'd heard how Marcus outmaneuvered several of the Ivy League schools to keep Herschel at M.I.T. for his graduate work. It all sounded like the stories my uncle, a scout and former infielder for the Red Sox, used to tell about different clubs trying to sign some high-school pitching ace. There was also a rumor that Herschel had published a paper on the three-body problem when he was twelve but no one ever checked. I guess we wanted to believe he had.

After the meeting Marcus called Herschel and me to his office. He was already whittling on that semester's project -- a ball inside a cage from a single block of wood.

"Jim, I want Herschel to take that other desk in your office. I'm sure that two graduate students in physics can repair a broken leg." He paused for us to laugh but Herschel never did. "That's the quietest place for him to work and you can also acquaint him with the operation of the laboratory."

I nodded.

"He won't need any bench space. In fact, maybe you should take that desk, Jim, and let Herschel have yours since you don't need one as much as him. He'll be doing calculations on the electromagnetic field of the electron and writing up a project he did last year with Dr. Fallon for his master's thesis."
Herschel was beginning his doctoral project right away while the rest of us had worked at least a year on apprentice projects for the master's degree. After coming to the Institute from Boston College, I'd spent my first year on electron diffraction, one of Marcus's many peripheral interests. Now I was waiting to take my qualifying exam and get my doctoral assignment.

"I'd like to see you do more with that diffraction," Marcus continued. "You've already come so far that it would be a shame to waste all your work when another year would probably finish it. Maybe we could even get a paper out of it." He turned to Herschel. "Jim did some beautiful work on thin metal films last year. Have him show you his diffraction patterns sometime."

Herschel glanced over at me but didn't say anything.

"I'd really hoped to get started on the research for my Ph.D., Dr. Marcus."

"Don't worry, there's plenty of time for that." He waved his Swiss Army knife in the air. "Plenty of time."

As we were leaving his office, Marcus called me back. "Jim, I want you to keep an eye on Herschel. Even though he is a genius, he's just a boy. Tell the fellows in the lab not to bother him."

"I will, Dr. Marcus."

"You be careful with him too. He's extremely sensitive about his background. I've talked with his parents a number of times. They're nice but they're old-fashioned Europeans."
"All right."

"And one more thing, Jim. Do you think your uncle could get me four good seats for the double-header with Philadelphia? We're having company down from Hanover that weekend."

The next day the lab buzzed with the news that Herschel's real name was Herschek Karni, that his parents had fled from Poland before World War I, and that he lived with them and two older sisters in Dorchester, where his father ran a cobbler's shop. There was supposedly another boy also who died from Tay-Sachs disease. If Herschel knew he was the object of so much talk and speculation, he didn't show it.

Everyone pumped me for information about him but I knew less than them. The two of us shared my office for three months before I found out that while most boys I knew were idolizing Babe Ruth and Gene Tunney, Herschel dreamed of meeting Albert Einstein. That was all he told me about himself until one day he wadded up his morning's work and threw it against the wall.

"Tell me," he said, his eyes igniting like sodium in water. "Do you own your own automobile?"

Only his seriousness kept me from laughing. "I can barely afford carfare from South Boston every day."

He shook his head. "Neither do I. My father drives me to school in his old Dodge. It's so old it even has wooden
spokes. I make him let me off at the other end of Harvard Bridge and walk across. 'Why should I buy another one?' he says. 'This one will last longer than me.'"

When he finished talking, Herschel took out a new piece of paper and quietly resumed his calculations. Never before had I heard him speak so much at once or with such intensity. Usually he shuffled in and out of the office with a remote look in his eyes, which I took to mean that his brain was continually engaged in some kind of mathematical computation. I wondered how he thought about things, if his way of thinking differed from an ordinary person's, and I even asked him about it once but he couldn't understand what I was trying to get at. I couldn't understand anyone liking the drudgery of math for its own sake. In my junior year at B.C., I managed to get C's in "Techniques of Theoretical Physics" with the help of two novenas and some tutoring and could, when forced to, apply a certain amount of mathematical theory to my experiments, which were the real fascination of physics for me.

I finished my project on metal films during spring semester, although in the end Marcus decided it was worth only a short note to the Physical Review rather than the full-length article I'd hoped for. He was too involved with Herschel's work then to have much time for anyone else's. Still I was happy to see my name in print and even happier to finally begin my doctoral research, which turned out to be the electron diffraction of some gaseous halogen
compounds. That was fine with me since it required the design and construction of a major new piece of equipment. I showed Herschel how to solder wires and machine parts while in return he helped me with my preliminary calculations.

Just before the end of the school year, Marcus announced his annual party for the laboratory. Herschel panicked. What kind of party? Was he expected to come? Did everyone bring girls? What should he wear? I tried to calm him, explaining that it was only an informal get-together and that last year it had been a lot of fun. The one house rule was that physics discussions were forbidden.

"Then what do you talk about?" he asked.

"Anything you want. Whatever interests you besides physics."

He looked anxious.

On the night of the party I arrived at Marcus's house a half hour early with the case of liquor that I got for him wholesale from my cousin. Herschel, dressed in the same suit and tie as the first day of school, was already there with Mrs. Marcus, while her husband was still upstairs getting ready. They both looked uncomfortable and Herschel quickly pointed out that he'd misunderstood and come an hour too soon. Leaving him to me, Mrs. Marcus excused herself to take care of last-minute details.

Herschel deliberately avoided any mention of the lab so that our conversation was dragging badly by the time Marcus
finally tramped down the stairs. A stout man, he was heavy on his feet.

After a few minutes of small talk, Marcus turned to Herschel. "I was talking to Phil Franklyn at Harvard this afternoon." He stuttered a little at first as he did whenever he had something important to say. "He's giving a talk at Princeton next week and he asked me to go along. Would you like to come with us?"

Herschel blanched but his eyes blazed the way they had when he told me about his father's automobile. I'd never seen him look so disturbed. After a moment he shook his head.

"Thank you very much but I wouldn't be able to go."

I bit my tongue.

"All right. Just thought I'd ask. Would you like to see my woodworking shop in the basement, Herschel? You can come too, Jim, even though you saw it last year."

When we came back upstairs--Mrs. Marcus yelled for us to wipe the sawdust off our shoes--several other people had arrived. I maneuvered Herschel into a corner while Marcus greeted them.

"Are you out of your mind?" I asked him.
He just looked at me.

"Say something, Herschel."

"I thought we weren't supposed to talk about physics."

I ignored his wisecrack. "What's the matter with you? Is it money? Do you need some money to go? I've got almost
forty dollars I could loan you."

"Thank you but it's not money." His face seemed even sharper than usual.

"Well, what is it then? Ever since I've known you, you've been telling me how much you want to meet Albert Einstein. Here's a chance dropped right in your lap and you pass it up like a dull lecture."

Herschel looked me directly in the eye. "Which is exactly why I can't go. When I meet Professor Einstein, it will be on my own terms, the very best terms I'm capable of, and not as Irving Marcus's special graduate student."

Nothing more was said about Princeton. Throughout the evening I noticed Herschel eyeing the various drinks people mixed themselves, but he stayed with the unspiked punch, probably, I thought, on strict orders from home. He also tried very hard, although often unsuccessfully, to join in the discussions about baseball, Roosevelt, the situation in Europe, the current batch of American writers. He'd faithfully read my newspaper every day since hearing about the party. Just before 10:30 Herschel said quick goodbyes to the Marcuses and hurried outside. I caught him on the porch.

"Are you going already?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is your father coming after you?"

His reply was barely audible. "Of course."

"Why don't you wait for him inside?"
"I'd rather wait outside."

He was gone by the time I realized my thoughtlessness. I watched him disappear down the lighted street to head off his father's Dodge.

Problems with my new diffraction apparatus prolonged my experiments an additional year so that my thesis wasn't finished until the spring of 1940. By then Herschel was completing his first year as an instructor at the Institute. He already had his own lab with a group of three graduate students and the promise of three more the next fall and possibly a postdoc. His thesis had been the basis of an important paper with Marcus on the electromagnetic field generated by the electron and he had nineteen other papers published or in press within the year. Herschel was obviously on his way to that great career everyone had predicted for him.

I saw Herschel rarely after he left our lab and so I was surprised when he showed up at my oral exam. Wearing a smart new suit that stood out from the academic tweeds, he smiled and flashed me the high sign. I hadn't the faintest idea what he meant by it.

My defense went rather well until one of the other young instructors, complete with pipe and elbow patches and radiating disdain like beta rays, limply raised his arm.

"Your approach to this problem seems primarily experimental, Mr. McInerney, which is of course interesting in
itself, but it seems to me that your treatment is limited insofar as you have failed to utilize some of the powerful mathematical tools at your disposal. For example, you might calculate the self-energy of the electron by introducing field strengths rather than potentials into the Hamiltonian. I would appreciate your deriving this type of expression."

I looked at Marcus but he only rolled his eyes. As I was preparing to plead ignorance and throw myself at the mercy of my committee, Herschel stood up and waved in the direction of my antagonist.

"I'd like to answer that if I may."

Suddenly he was filling the blackboard with mathematical notation, explaining each step as he went along. When there was no more room, he asked everyone to remember the first part, erased it, and proceeded to the final expression. I could see why students liked Herschel as a lecturer. He was fast but thorough. It was hard to believe this was the same nervous kid who only a few years earlier had been racked with diarrhea minutes before his first graduate seminar.

"I think you'll find that agrees with Dr. Rückert's results in Zeitschrift für Physik. October 1939." As he sat down, Herschel muttered loud enough for the whole room to hear, "You're not the only one who can read German."

There were no more questions and I felt sure I'd passed with no trouble. Herschel was among those who stayed to congratulate me, but he brushed aside my thanks.
"It wasn't anything," he said. "I just happened to remember that article. Besides, I know you would have done the same for me if he'd given me a schematic and told me to build the circuit."

My postdoctoral appointment with Marcus began in the fall and was little different from what I'd done as a grad student except that now I got paid for it. As the senior laboratory worker--my sixth year--I became Marcus's unofficial assistant with no real authority or duties. I answered questions and solved problems that weren't worth Marcus's attention, repaired equipment, and kept an eye on things in general. Although he never said so, I knew Marcus appreciated my efforts because it reduced a significant intrusion on his time.

One day while I was discussing conflicts over the use of the microwave spectrometer with Marcus--he was carving animals for his grandchildren that year--Herschel burst into the office, a daffy grin on his face. It was the first time I'd seen him since my oral. He hurried us outside where he proudly pointed out a 1935 Hupmobile.

"I bought it yesterday. It's no Cadillac but it runs well and only cost me seventy-five dollars. I'll take you for a ride."

Marcus and I squeezed in with me straddling the gear-shift and off we drove to Harvard Square, while Herschel, not a particularly good driver, chattered nonstop about the
car's merits. The engine sounded as though it had a bad rod but I didn't say anything. He was still talking when we got back to the parking lot.

As he was leaving us to go to his own lab, Marcus stopped him. "I've been meaning to drop by your office, Herschel. Reed Abbott asked me to give a talk on the point-electron model next month at Princeton. I told him you could do a much better job than me. Would you like to?"

Herschel's manner changed as abruptly as the two poles of an alternating magnet. "I'm sorry, I doubt that I could get away just then." He turned and hurried off down the hall.

Marcus looked after him. "Did you know that he's paying back every cent of scholarship money he received here? That was one of his conditions for accepting the job."

"He told me, when you asked him to go with you before, that he had to meet Einstein on his own terms."

"What terms are those?"

"I guess he wants to do something Einstein will know about."

Marcus shook his head. He put his arm around my shoulder and started for the lab. "All right, Jim, what are we going to do about that micro spectrometer?"

When my postdoc ended the following June, Marcus finagled me a second year's appointment which I never completed. I was drafted early in 1942 following the attack on Pearl
Harbor, and after OCS I spent my military career in an Army lab, working on an improved hand-grenade casing. My particular research unit was distinguished by contributing absolutely nothing to the war effort although we got as drunk as anyone on V-E and V-J days.

After my discharge in 1946 I dropped in on Marcus but the war had dried up his research money. He suggested I see Herschel, who was already an associate professor and doing well moneywise even though the draft had emptied his lab of grad students except for two 4-F's.

Herschel hired me on the spot as his lab chief, an expanded version of my earlier position with Marcus. Much heavier than when I saw him last, he'd also acquired a kind of nervous kinetic energy that kept him in constant motion even while sitting down. His hair was beginning to recede in a widow's peak and he wore much thicker glasses than before. His right eye twitched erratically. He was evasive about his work during the war although he occasionally quoted statistics on the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He never once mentioned the annihilation of the Jews in Europe. I was sure he'd been connected somehow with the Manhattan Project.

For the next several months I prepared for the expected avalanche of students in the fall and helped the two still in the lab. I also managed to squeeze in a few experiments connected with Herschel's work on the electron although he thought I did far too little along that line. After fall
registration there were twelve new graduate students and three postdocs, more than twice as many people as Herschel ever had before the war and one of the largest groups in the department. Of course he had no idea of the logistics necessary to run a group that size and remained cloistered with his computations, leaving me to organize the entire lab myself. After I prodded him at least half a dozen times, he wheedled us some additional lab space and I managed to acquire six more desks from storage late one night. Mostly I tried to keep people out of each other's way.

Herschel had enough ideas for three times as many students and couldn't understand why seventeen people weren't turning out the work of fifty. Every day he asked me why there wasn't more data from the lab. Because he worked ten and even fourteen hours a day, he assumed everyone else should too. He rarely came into the lab anymore, outlining each person's daily protocol to me on the basis of progress reports I collected the previous afternoon. In fact, Herschel never spoke to a student at all, unless there was a problem I couldn't handle. Not a very frequent occurrence, I must admit.

Also that fall Herschel was made a full professor at the age of twenty-seven, the youngest in M.I.T.'s history. His teaching load was reduced to one graduate-level course per semester plus the electrodynamics seminar in the spring, and he was spared from any undergraduate courses although technically he should have taught at least two during the
year. With the large number of students in the lab and, I thought, his increased academic stature, Herschel decided he should have a secretary. He hired his sister Belcia. There were a few whispers of nepotism around the department but she did more work for less money than anyone else would have.

Because Herschel claimed a typewriter would bother his concentration, Belcia was settled in with me. She was one year younger than Herschel—for some reason I'd always thought his sisters were both older—and she had the same sharp face but thank God a much smaller version of his nose. Her hair, always pulled up into a topknot, was more auburn than Herschel's. Surprisingly, she was quite attractive.

Since receiving his doctorate, Herschel had averaged over fourteen papers a year as well as numerous short notes, all part of his attempt to develop a coherent theory of the electron. In the mid-forties he published a paper which became a classic as soon as it appeared, a rigorous analysis of the discrepancy between the observed magnetic moment of the electron and that predicted by quantum mechanics. At the time, I suggested an idea for a more precise experimental determination using the method of molecular beams, but Herschel dismissed it as being less important than the projects he wanted to pursue. My own guess was that he was pushing for the Nobel Prize although he never said so of course. Herschel talked to me as little as anyone except for the morning and afternoon briefings. Our friendship
became lost in his frantic drive for results. I was afraid a nervous breakdown would be his only reward.

One afternoon in the office, Belcia and I suddenly heard Herschel shouting in the laboratory. He had someone--I couldn't see who--backed up against a bench and was looming over him, yelling in his face.

"So you have time to waste, do you? Time to sit around and talk. That must mean you need more work to do. Believe me, I have plenty to keep you busy. Don't think you can come into this laboratory and automatically expect a degree at the end of four years. Now get busy. I don't want to see you wasting time again."

Herschel was storming back to his office by the time I crossed the lab. I'd never seen the fellow before.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Don't look at me. I got a work order here to replace wiring in this laboratory. I was asking where it is, when all of a sudden this nut starts hollering at me to get busy. I don't know what his trouble is, but it's no good, that's for sure."

"Get to work or get the hell out of here and don't come back," Herschel shouted, his face redder than his hair. He slammed the door to his office. Belcia hurried in after him.

"Maybe you'd better come back some other time."

"I just came to replace some wiring."

"Tomorrow, O.K.?”
"Makes no difference to me. It's your wiring. Just so long as that nut leaves me alone."

Promptly at 5:30 that afternoon I delivered the progress notes to Herschel. Belcia was still there but she left when I came, and I briefed him on the day's work as usual.

"I want to talk to you for a minute, Jim."

I sat down, something I hadn't done in Herschel's office for weeks.

"I want you to keep a closer watch on the laboratory. Everybody should be working at one hundred percent efficiency. I do and I expect nothing less from anyone else. This isn't a social club."

"No one expects it to be but you've got to be reasonable, Herschel. Everybody does their share of work. I'll vouch for that."

"They do? What about that student I spoke to today?"

"He wasn't a student. He was an electrician from maintenance to fix the line along the south wall that's been out for the past week."

"I don't care who he is. Everyone in this laboratory works to capacity or they don't stay. That's all there is to it. Now how much have you done on that electron-positron field experiment?"

"Nothing yet. We haven't had time to get started on it."

"Nothing? What do you people do out there all day? Don't you have four students exclusively on experimental
work?"

"I'm supposed to but you've given every one of them some theoretical project to do. Tucker has that thing with the Yukawa field . . ."

"You don't have to tell me what projects I assign. I told you last week to get that thing started. What the hell are you waiting for? Someone else to do it so you won't have to bother?"

"What's the matter, Herschel?"

"You. That's what's the matter. You don't do what I tell you." He jabbed a finger at his eye to stop its twitching.

"I mean with you. Aren't I still your friend, Herschel? Won't you tell me what's troubling you?"

"I pay you to run this laboratory so that I won't have to. I have enough to worry about right here." He waved at the mess of papers littering his desk. "If we both do the job we're supposed to, then neither of us will have to worry about the other."

I stood up. "Is that all, Herschel?"

"No. I'm afraid not." He squirmed in his chair even more than usual. "I've heard rumors around the department about you and Belcia."

"Me and Belcia? What kind of rumors?"

"I only want to know if they're true or not."

"I haven't heard anything about us. What can I say?"

"So you don't deny them."
"Of course I deny them. All I meant was I haven't heard any rumors myself but whatever they are, they're not true."

"Perhaps I better move Belcia into my office after all, even though that would be inconvenient for me. If these rumors aren't true, then I want you to stop them."

"If there are rumors, Herschel, how can I stop them?"

"That's up to you."

I was halfway out the door when he called me back.

"And get that goddamned positron field started this week."

Back in the office, I found Belcia sitting at her desk. She was staring at her typewriter, her eyes red from crying. I was about to shut the door and leave her alone when she looked up and forced a scant smile.

"Come in," she said. "I'm all right."

I stood by the door, not knowing what to say, while Belcia repinned her topknot, which had become loose. When she finished, she swiveled her chair around to me.

"You look as though he bit your head off too," she said.

"Not really."

"Who was that person Herschel was yelling at?"

"An electrician. He came to replace some wiring. We'll probably be lucky if we ever get it fixed now."

"I feel I should apologize for Herschel since he is my brother."
"You don't need to. It's not your fault."

"He's always had a temper but he used to control it better. Now he just flies off the handle whenever something doesn't go right. He's been much worse since Papa died."

"I didn't know your father died. Herschel never told me that."

"It was just a few months before I started working."

"I'm sorry, Belcia. Why do you suppose he didn't tell me?"

"It almost seemed that Herschel thought Papa got sick on purpose. He refused to go to the funeral and he wouldn't even speak to the rabbi when he came to the house. Afterwards, he wouldn't let us touch any of Papa's things. They're all still in the same place. Except for the car. Herschel said he sold that. Sometimes I get the feeling that he expects Papa back, as if he just went on a spree or something, but that when he comes back, it will be all right again.

"You don't have to explain, Belcia."

"No, of course not. I'm sure you have enough troubles of your own without listening to ours."

"That wasn't what I meant at all." I thought she was going to cry again and I took her hand. "I only meant you don't have to if you don't want to. If you want to tell me, I'm glad to listen."

"No, I shouldn't and I'm sorry. It's just that I don't have anyone to talk to. I can't talk with Mama and ever
since Manya has come back home, she won't talk to me
either."

Belcia drew her hand away. Her long, pale fingers were
as smooth as the wax tapers at church.

"Herschel would really explode if he came in and caught
us holding hands," she said.

"Yes, he probably would." I felt my attempt to comfort
her had been clumsy and that I'd only embarrassed her.

"Did he ask you about the rumors that are circulating
about us? He said he was going to."

"Yes. But I haven't heard anything like that. Have
you?"

"I don't think there are any, Jim. Herschel imagines
them."

"He probably heard some of the students kidding about
us being in the same office."

"I doubt there's even that much to it. I don't know
how he gets these ideas into his head. To this day he won't
let me go to the market near our house because he thought he
saw a clerk there wink at me once."

"Well, he certainly sounded as though he heard some­
thing."

Belcia stood up and began straightening out her desk.
"I'd better get ready to go. Herschel doesn't like to be
late for meals."

"I'm more than glad to talk to you anytime, Belcia.
Please don't think I'm not interested."
"Thanks, Jim." That time she gave me a real smile.

The next day Belcia apologized to me for her behavior and said it wouldn't happen again. It didn't. In less than a week Herschel had a small storage room off the lab cleaned out and converted into an office for her. After that I seldom saw Belcia except about laboratory matters.

A friend who graduated with me from B.C. worked at the Watertown Arsenal and was always prodding me to apply there. He was sure that I could get an astronomical G.S. rating with my degree and research experience. Although I didn't want to work at the Arsenal, my friend did start me looking around, something that had been in the back of my mind for a while anyway. Eventually I found a small engineering firm in Everett that wanted a physicist for an expanding R&D program in high-energy nuclear equipment. The pay was better of course and I liked the people, but somehow I felt it would be disloyal to Herschel.

This was the decision I was trying to make early in 1949 when Herschel called me to his office one day just before noon. At first he just sat and grinned at me without saying anything. I thought he must have finished up a tough relativistic-invariance problem he'd been working on for several months.

"Marcus just called me," he said. "Guess what."

"He's carving you a model of an electron."

He laughed so much at my poor joke that I knew it had
to be something important. "Better than that. Oppenheimer called him from Princeton this morning. They've established an annual Einstein Award and I'm getting the first one. For my work on the magnetic moment."

"That's fantastic, Herschel. Congratulations." Shaking his hand, I thought of all of us who'd worked hard on that project.

"The presentation is at Princeton." His grin consumed his whole face. "By Professor Einstein himself."

"You're kidding."

"No. Oppenheimer told Marcus that it was scheduled for March 14, Professor Einstein's seventieth birthday. Can you believe it? You'll come with me, Jim. We'll drive down together."

Herschel kept me for more than an hour, recounting his dreams of meeting Einstein and delaying my lunch. "It's funny, do you remember how many times Marcus has asked me to go to Princeton with him and I'd always refuse? I must have known something like this would happen sooner or later. That work on the magnetic moment is the best thing I've done too. I'll be able to meet Professor Einstein on the best terms I could have ever hoped for."

The ceremony at Princeton was on a Monday. I suggested to Herschel that we drive down the day before, but he thought that would be wasting time. Instead, he picked me up at five o'clock Monday morning in his '46 Buick Straight Eight. I was surprised to see Belcia wrapped in a blanket
on the back seat. Neither of them had mentioned that she was going. Herschel wasn't in a particularly good mood so I slept until we stopped in Providence for breakfast. He came to life in the diner, enumerating the questions he wanted to ask Einstein, even showing me the list he'd compiled to be sure not to forget anything. Back on the road, however, he fell silent again until we were nearly to New Haven.

"I've been thinking, Jim, Professor Einstein may not have had anything to do with my getting this award. Someone else set it up in his honor. He may not think my work is any good at all. Maybe he doesn't even know about it."

"Of course he does. It's a beautiful piece of work and there's no reason Einstein should think otherwise."

"Yes, but you know how he feels about quantum theory."

"You wouldn't have been picked if he didn't approve."

"Maybe."

"I'm sure you two will get along just fine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, Herschel, don't be so snappy," Belcia said.

"I only meant he's probably as impressed by your work as everyone else and that you should have a lot of fun talking with him."

Herschel didn't say any more so I asked Belcia, who'd been crocheting ever since it was light enough, what she was making. She said it was a tablecloth for her mother but seemed as reluctant to talk as Herschel. I watched the
dreary late winter scenery go by until we were almost into New York City.

"I've been reading some of Felix Ehrenhaft's papers on sub-electrons," Herschel said suddenly.

"Whose papers on what?"

"Felix Ehrenhaft. He was an Austrian physicist in the early 1900s who disputed the electron as the fundamental unit of charge."

"And what did he think was?"

"He reported the measurement of smaller charges on minute test bodies. I want you to read over his papers this summer and repeat some of the experiments."

"You didn't want me to bother measuring the magnetic moment by the exact same method that will probably earn Polykarp Kusch a Nobel Prize, but you want me to go fishing for sub-electrons."

"I'll decide what experiments will be done and what won't. Anyway, I was sure that you'd enjoy building the micromagnet Ehrenhaft used."

"I thought Millikan already settled this in 1909."

"Ehrenhaft claims that Millikan biased his results by using charge averages so that the electron would turn out to be what he expected. Besides, no one knew exactly what an electron was at that time."

"But you know what one is now."

"Mathematically, I think I'm getting close. There's no reason why a number of smaller charges couldn't interact to
produce the apparently discrete charge that we term an electron."

"That's insane, Herschel. You just mentioned how Einstein feels about quantum theory and here you are throwing out one of its most basic postulates."

Herschel looked displeased as he pulled over and told me to drive while he looked over his speech again.

The fuel pump broke outside of Newark and we had to be towed to a garage. The repair job itself took only thirty minutes but before it could be fixed there was a two hour wait for the part, which could have been even longer if I hadn't speeded things up with an extra ten-spot. Belcia stayed in the back seat and crocheted while Herschel, suffering an attack of diarrhea, ran back and forth between the men's room and me to check on the car's progress. He blamed each of us in turn for the mishap--it was my bad driving, his own stupidity for not having the car checked before we left, Belcia's perennial bad luck. When he threatened to take a taxi all the way to Princeton, Belcia finally got out of the car and walked him up and down the street until we were ready to leave. I'd never seen her outside the lab before and she seemed especially attractive without the white lab coat she always wore.

My wild driving got us to Princeton about 2:30, a half hour after the award ceremony was to begin. We double-parked in front of the auditorium, where we found Marcus, who was making the introductory speech, pacing the steps.
"Where in God's name have you been?" he stuttered. "You're almost an hour late. They've stalled as long as they can. I was getting ready to accept the award for you."

He hurried off toward the stage and within a few minutes he was at the microphone, puffing a little as he announced the presentation of the award. Always a good speaker in front of audiences, Marcus was superb as he recounted their long association beginning in 1932 when Herschel was thirteen. He summarized Herschel's career in physics and described the work that had won him the award. At the end, Herschel was onstage, shaking his hand.

Still caught up in my determination to reach Princeton on time, I forgot about Einstein until Belcia asked me if that was him at the side of the stage. He was sitting with Oppenheimer and looked exactly like the photographs I'd seen of him, although I half expected him to be wearing a sweater rather than the gray business suit he had on. I did try to see if he had any stockings on though. Even from the back of the hall I could tell that his dark eyes weren't focused on anything I could see. I understood the descriptions I'd read of those eyes as he casually solved impossible problems in his head. I wondered if the steps fell out one after another for him or if he simply saw the complete solution at once.

After reading his short speech, Herschel nodded at Oppenheimer--they seemed to know each other--and then turned to Einstein, who stood up with the help of his companion.
They looked at each other for six or eight seconds before Oppenheimer touched Einstein on the elbow. The old man started, gave Herschel the award, and shook hands with him. Oppenheimer helped him back to his seat and Herschel sat down with them as someone else went to the microphone.

Belcia and I worked our way around the outside of the hall so that we were at the foot of the stairs when Herschel came down from the stage. He flashed the medal and cashier's check for $5000 at us but he didn't seem as ecstatic over meeting Einstein as I'd expected. It was probably just that the realization hadn't hit him yet.

After Herschel, Marcus came down the stairs helping Einstein. Oppenheimer was behind them, the most conspicuous because of his height. He was gaunt and very intent-looking and seemed to swing his long, gangly arms more than was necessary. The three of them walked over to us.

Marcus handled the introductions. "Professor Einstein, Dr. Oppenheimer, this is Herschel's sister Belcia and this is his number-one man in the laboratory, Dr. Jim McInerney."

Both of them nodded and Belcia smiled, but I summoned what little nerve I had and put out my hand, unable to pass up the occasion to tell my grandchildren that I'd actually shaken hands with these two great men. Oppenheimer acted somewhat annoyed but Einstein smiled at me like a little white-haired boy.

"I was very pleased to see that Dr. Carney's work is as sound experimentally as it is theoretically," he said. "You
deserve an equal measure of credit for reminding Dr. Carney that his abstract theories are grounded in a physical world. That is unfortunately a frequent oversight of us mathematicians."

"Thank you, Professor Einstein." I was so flabbergasted that I couldn't think of anything else to say. Our eyes met as he turned away, and for an instant I feared they would suck me in but at the same time I wanted them to. It was very much the same feeling I had looking down from the top of Pilgrim Memorial at Provincetown the first time.

"What you were saying earlier is true, Dr. Carney," Einstein continued. "Scientifically, that is, but you cannot ignore the other considerations. There are always human beings involved whether you wish they were or not. We must never let ourselves forget that. Although perhaps some of us need to learn it first before we will be able to remember it."

"Professor Einstein, I think we ought to go over to the reception," Oppenheimer said, taking his arm.

It seemed that Einstein was receiving a dignified version of the bum's rush as both Oppenheimer and Marcus hurried him off.

"Would you mind driving back without me, Jim?" Herschel was trying hard to appear calm, but his agitation was obvious and not the kind that the realization of a lifelong dream would arouse.

"No. Of course not."
"I'll come back later in the week with Marcus."

"Fine. Stay as long as you want. I know what this means to you. The lab will manage until you get back. Belcia and I could leave right now instead of after the reception and get home by midnight."

"Belcia." He looked at his sister. "Yes, her mother would worry if she was too late."

Herschel started off after Oppenheimer's head bouncing above the crowd as Belcia and I went outside and found a ticket on the Buick.

At first we had trouble talking and only managed some stiff conversation about the award ceremony. I wanted to ask her if she noticed Einstein's eyes or the way Herschel had acted but for some reason I couldn't. The extended periods of silence were even more awkward and I had the idea she was thinking about our talk that day in the lab. I didn't feel that I should mention it if she didn't, even though it was the reason for our uncomfortable situation. When we stopped to eat supper I found out that she liked to ride and I offered to take her up to New Hampshire, where a friend of mine owned horses. She didn't accept although she didn't refuse either.

It was dark when we started driving again and we were able to talk more freely. The topic of the rumors came up---I don't even remember how---and we ended up laughing about it. That cleared the air between us as readily as an electrical storm leaves the smell of ozone behind it. I forgot
all about the undercurrents I'd imagined back at the auditorium.

"Why have you stayed with Herschel so long?" Belcia asked.

"Because I like the work."

"That's not why. You could do that kind of work a lot of other places. Why don't you teach and have your own lab?"

"I'm not the type to teach."

"But there must still be other jobs that would be better for you than this one."

"I suppose so." Belcia seemed to be waiting for me to continue. "Actually I have looked around a little. There was a job up in Everett but I didn't take it."

"Why not?"

"Well, this award for Herschel came up and I didn't want to tell him while he was so elated. God knows he's that way little enough."

"Do you really think it would have bothered him that much, Jim?"

"Sure. After all, I've worked with him for three years and we knew each other ten years before that. We shared my office when he first started graduate school."

"What about now that the award ceremony is over? Will you take that job?"

"I haven't had a chance to think about it lately."

"Please don't think I'm trying to tell you what to do. I just don't want to see Herschel squeeze you dry too,
that's all."

By the end of the ride home, I felt that Belcia and I knew each other far better than after all the months we'd worked together in the lab. It was nearly 2a.m. when we finally pulled up to the apartment house where the Carneys lived. Belcia had gotten lost in the dark and we had to go into Boston and drive back out on Blue Hill Ave, the only way she was absolutely sure of.

She was quiet as she gathered up her handbag and blanket. The dim streetlight revealed a hidden intensity in her beauty that I'd never seen before, and impulsively I leaned across the front seat and kissed her. She neither helped nor resisted me. As I kissed her again, feeling the warmth of her face against mine, the porch light on the second floor flicked on. With a quick smile, Belcia hurried out of the car. Driving home, I felt immensely satisfied with the day despite the broken fuel pump.

I struggled into work the next morning but Belcia's sister Manya called to say she wasn't feeling well after the trip and wouldn't be in. In fact, I didn't see her for the rest of the week.

The lab was quite different without Herschel around. I never realized the tremendous pressure he exerted over everyone until it wasn't there. The students relaxed and actually did more work that week than ever before. On an impulse I called the place in Everett to see if the position was still open. It was and I said I'd take it if I could
start after the school year ended. After three years, I had a new job in less than five minutes.

Herschel showed up at the lab on Friday afternoon. He hadn't shaved and obviously hadn't been out of his clothes since we left him in Princeton. Several of the students stared in disbelief.

"God, you must have had some time with Einstein. You look like you haven't done anything but talk all week. Come on into my office."

"No, you come outside."

I could smell alcohol on his breath although I'd never known Herschel to drink before. Anywhere was better than the middle of the lab so I followed him outside. He seemed fairly steady on his feet.

"Now what about Belcia?" he asked.

"What about her? I haven't seen Belcia since we got back from Princeton."

"That's exactly what I mean."

"What's exactly what you mean?"

"You know goddamned well what I mean. I knew I should never have let her drive back alone with you. No wonder my mother wouldn't let her come to work until I got here."

"What are you talking about, Herschel?"

"I think you and I better talk this over with my parents."

"Don't be absurd. There's nothing to talk over. Let me take you home so you can go to bed. I think you've just
had a little too much to drink."

"I have not and you're coming with me if I have to drag you."

Herschel's eye was twitching convulsively. It obviously didn't matter whether he thought he was taking me or not as long as I got him home.

"All right, Herschel. Your car's over here. Come on, I'll drive."

"What car, the Buick? I don't need that junk anymore. You keep it. I'll drive you in my car." Grinning, he pointed to a brand-new yellow Cadillac and began pulling twenty dollar bills from his pocket by the fistful. "Here's my change. The salesman at Peter Fuller's almost passed out when I said cash. I've wanted a car like this ever since I was a kid, so what the hell. What's there to wait for? Now get in and we'll go get this straightened out."