

## **Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts**

**Unspeakable  
Practices  
Unnatural  
Acts**

Donald  
Barthelme

Farrar  
Straus  
Giroux

Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition published 1968  
Bantam edition published May 1969  
2nd printing

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968 by Donald Barthelme.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by  
mimeograph or any other means without permission.

For information address: Farrar, Straus and Giroux,  
19 Union Square West, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc., a subsidiary  
of Grosset & Dunlap, Inc. Its trade-mark, consisting of the words  
“Bantam Books” and the portrayal of a bantam, is registered in  
the United States Patent Office and in other countries.

Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, Inc., 271 Madison Avenue, New  
York, N.Y. 10016.

**to Herman Gollob**

1	The Indian Uprising
9	The Balloon
17	This Newspaper Here
22	Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning
35	Report
41	The Dolt
49	The Police Band
53	Edward and Pia
61	A Few Moments of Sleeping and Waking
69	Can We Talk
73	Game
79	Alice
87	A Picture History of the War
99	The President
105	See the Moon?
119	About the Author

We defended the city as best we could. The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds. The war clubs of the Comanches clattered on the soft, yellow pavements. There were earthworks along the Boulevard Mark Clark and the hedges had been laced with sparkling wire. People were trying to understand. I spoke to Sylvia. "Do you think this is a good life?" The table held apples, books, long-playing records. She looked up. "No."

Patrols of paras and volunteers with armbands guarded the tall, flat buildings. We interrogated the captured Comanche. Two of us forced his head back while another poured water into his nostrils. His body jerked, he choked and wept. Not believing a hurried, careless, and exaggerated report of the number of casualties in the outer districts where trees, lamps, swans had been reduced to clear fields of fire we issued entrenching tools to those who seemed trustworthy and turned the heavy-weapons companies so that we could not be surprised from that direction. And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. We talked.

“Do you know Faure’s ‘Dolly’?”

“Would that be Gabriel Faure?”

“It would.”

“Then I know it,” she said. “May I say that I play it at certain times, when I am sad, or happy, although it requires four hands.”

“How is that managed?”

“I accelerate,” she said, “ignoring the time signature.”

And when they shot the scene in the bed I wondered how you felt under the eyes of the cameramen, grips, juicers, men in the mixing booth: excited? stimulated? And when they shot the scene in the shower I sanded a hollow-core door working carefully against the illustrations in texts and whispered instructions from one who had already solved the problem. I had made after all other tables, one while living with Nancy, one while living with Alice, one while living with Eunice, one while living with Marianne.

Red men in waves like people scattering in a square startled by something tragic or a sudden, loud noise accumulated against the barricades we had made of window dummies, silk, thoughtfully planned job descriptions (including scales for the orderly progress of other colors), wine in demijohns, and robes. I analyzed the composition of the barricade nearest me and found two ashtrays, ceramic, one dark brown and one dark brown with an orange blur at the lip; a tin frying pan; two-litre bottles of red wine; three-quarter-litre bottles of Black & White, aquavit, cognac, vodka, gin, Fad #6 sherry; a hollow-core door in birch veneer on black wrought-iron legs; a blanket, red-orange with faint blue stripes; a red pillow and a blue pillow; a woven straw wastebasket; two glass jars for flowers; corkscrews and can openers; two plates and two cups, ceramic, dark brown; a yellow-and-purple poster; a Yugoslavian carved flute, wood, dark brown; and other items. I decided I knew nothing.

The hospitals dusted wounds with powders the worth of which

was not quite established, other supplies having been exhausted early in the first day. I decided I knew nothing. Friends put me in touch with a Miss R., a teacher, unorthodox they said, excellent they said, successful with difficult cases, steel shutters on the windows made the house safe. I had just learned via an International Distress Coupon that Jane had been beaten up by a dwarf in a bar on Tenerife but Miss R. did not allow me to speak of it. “You know nothing,” she said, “you feel nothing, you are locked in a most savage and terrible ignorance, I despise you, my boy, mon cher, my heart. You may attend but you must not attend now, you must attend later, a day or a week or an hour, you are making me ill. . . .” I nonevaluated these remarks as Korzybski instructed. But it was difficult. Then they pulled back in a feint near the river and we rushed into that sector with a reinforced battalion hastily formed among the Zouaves and cabdrivers. This unit was crushed in the afternoon of a day that began with spoons and letters in hallways and under windows where men tasted the history of the heart, cone-shaped muscular organ that maintains circulation of the blood.

But it is you I want now, here in the middle of this Uprising, with the streets yellow and threatening, short, ugly lances with fur at the throat and inexplicable shell money lying in the grass. It is when I am with you that I am happiest, and it is for you that I am making this hollow-core door table with black wrought-iron legs. I held Sylvia by her bear-claw necklace. “Call off your braves,” I said. “We have many years left to live.” There was a sort of muck running in the gutters, yellowish, filthy stream suggesting excrement, or nervousness, a city that does not know what it has done to deserve baldness, errors, infidelity. “With luck you will survive until matins,” Sylvia said. She ran off down the Rue Chester Nimitz, uttering shrill cries.

Then it was learned that they had infiltrated our ghetto and that the people of the ghetto instead of resisting had joined the

smooth, well-coordinated attack with zipguns, telegrams, lockets, causing that portion of the line held by the I.R.A. to swell and collapse. We sent more heroin into the ghetto, and hyacinths, ordering another hundred thousand of the pale, delicate flowers. On the map we considered the situation with its strung-out inhabitants and merely personal emotions. Our parts were blue and their parts were green. I showed the blue-and-green map to Sylvia. "Your parts are green," I said. "You gave me heroin first a year ago," Sylvia said. She ran off down George C. Marshall. Alice, uttering shrill cries. Miss R. pushed me into a large room painted white (jolting and dancing in the soft light, and I was excited! and there were people watching!) in which there were two chairs. I sat in one chair and Miss R. sat in the other. She wore a blue dress containing a red figure. There was nothing exceptional about her. I was disappointed by her plainness, by the bareness of the room, by the absence of books.

The girls of my quarter wore long blue mufflers that reached to their knees. Sometimes the girls hid Comanches in their rooms, the blue mufflers together in a room creating a great blue fog. Block opened the door. He was carrying weapons, flowers, loaves of bread. And he was friendly, kind, enthusiastic, so I related a little of the history of torture, reviewing the technical literature quoting the best modern sources, French, German, and American, and pointing out the flies which had gathered in anticipation of some new, cool color.

"What is the situation?" I asked.

"The situation is liquid," he said. "We hold the south quarter and they hold the north quarter. The rest is silence."

"And Kenneth?"

"That girl is not in love with Kenneth," Block said frankly. "She is in love with his coat. When she is not wearing it she is huddling under it. Once I caught it going down the stairs by itself. I looked inside. Sylvia."

Once I caught Kenneth's coat going down the stairs by itself but the coat was a trap and inside a Comanche who made a thrust with his short, ugly knife at my leg which buckled and tossed me over the balustrade through a window and into another situation. Not believing that your body brilliant as it was and your fat, liquid spirit distinguished and angry as it was were stable quantities to which one could return on wires more than once, twice, or another number of times I said: "See the table?"

In Skinny Wainwright Square the forces of green and blue swayed and struggled. The referees ran out on the field trailing chains. And then the blue part would be enlarged, the green diminished. Miss R. began to speak. "A former king of Spain, a Bonaparte, lived for a time in Bordentown, New Jersey. But that's no good." She paused. "The ardor aroused in men by the beauty of women can only be satisfied by God. That is very good (it is Valery) but it is not what I have to teach you, goat, muck, filth, heart of my heart." I showed the table to Nancy. "See the table?" She stuck out her tongue red as a cardinal's hat. "I made such a table once," Block said frankly. "People all over America have made such tables. I doubt very much whether one can enter an American home without finding at least one such table, or traces of its having been there, such as faded places in the carpet." And afterward in the garden the men of the 7th Cavalry played Gabrieli, Albinoni, Marcello, Vivaldi, Boccherini. I saw Sylvia. She wore a yellow ribbon, under a long blue muffler. "Which side are you on," I cried, "after all?"

"The only form of discourse of which I approve," Miss R. said in her dry, tense voice, "is the litany. I believe our masters and teachers as well as plain citizens should confine themselves to what can safely be said. Thus when I hear the words  *pewter, snake, tea, Fad #6 sherry, serviette, fenestration, crown, blue* coming from the mouth of some public official, or some raw youth, I am not disappointed. Vertical organization is also possible," Miss

R. said, “as in

*pewter*  
*snake*  
*tea*  
*Fad #6 sherry*  
*serviette*  
*fenestration*  
*crown*  
*blue.*

I run to liquids and colors,” she said, “but you, you may run to something else, my virgin, my darling, my thistle, my poppet, my own. Young people,” Miss R. said, “run to more and more unpleasant combinations as they sense the nature of our society. Some people,” Miss R. said, “run to conceits or wisdom but I hold to the hard, brown, nutlike word. I might point out that there is enough aesthetic excitement here to satisfy anyone but a damned fool.” I sat in solemn silence.

Fire arrows lit my way to the post office in Patton Place where members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade offered their last, exhausted letters, postcards, calendars. I opened a letter but inside was a Comanche flint arrowhead played by Frank Wede -- kind in an elegant gold chain and congratulations. Your earring rattled against my spectacles when I leaned forward to touch the soft, ruined place where the hearing aid had been. “Pack it in! Pack it in!” I urged, but the men in charge of the Uprising refused to listen to reason or to understand that it was real and that our water supply had evaporated and that our credit was no longer what it had been, once.

We attached wires to the testicles of the captured Comanche. And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. When we threw the switch he spoke. His name,

he said, was Gustave Aschenbach. He was born at L--, a country town in the province of Silesia. He was the son of an upper official in the judicature, and his forebears had all been officers, judges, departmental functionaries. . . And you can never touch a girl in the same way more than once, twice, or another number of times however much you may wish to hold, wrap, or otherwise fix her hand, or look, or some other quality, or incident, known to you previously. In Sweden the little Swedish children cheered when we managed nothing more remarkable than getting off a bus burdened with packages, bread and liver-paste and beer. We went to an old church and sat in the royal box. The organist was practicing. And then into the graveyard next to the church. Here lies Anna Pedersen, a good woman. I threw a mushroom on the grave. The officer commanding the garbage dump reported by radio that the garbage had begun to move.

Jane! I heard via an International Distress Coupon that you were beaten up by a dwarf in a bar on Tenerife. That doesn't sound like you, Jane. Mostly you kick the dwarf in his little dwarf groin before he can get his teeth into your tasty and nice-looking leg, don't you, Jane? Your affair with Harold is reprehensible, you know that, don't you, Jane? Harold is married to Nancy. And there is Paula to think about (Harold's kid), and Billy (Harold's other kid). I think your values are peculiar, Jane! Strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole.

And you can never return to felicities in the same way, the brilliant body, the distinguished spirit recapitulating moments that occur once, twice, or another number of times in rebellions, or water. The rolling consensus of the Comanche nation smashed our inner defenses on three sides. Block was firing a greasegun from the upper floor of a building designed by Emery Roth & Sons. “See the table?” “Oh, pack it in with your bloody table!” The city officials were tied to trees. Dusky warriors padded with



their forest tread into the mouth of the mayor. “Who do you want to be?” I asked Kenneth and he said he wanted to be Jean-Luc Godard but later when time permitted conversations in large, lighted rooms, whispering galleries with black-and-white Spanish rugs and problematic sculpture on calm, red catafalques. The sickness of the quarrel lay thick in the bed. I touched your back, the white, raised scars.

We killed a great many in the south suddenly with helicopters and rockets but we found that those we had killed were children and more came from the north and from the east and from other places where there are children preparing to live. “Skin,” Miss R. said softly in the white, yellow room. “This is the Clemency Committee. And would you remove your belt and shoelaces.” I removed my belt and shoelaces and looked (rain shattering from a great height the prospects of silence and clear, neat rows of houses in the subdivisions) into their savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads.

The balloon, beginning at a point on Fourteenth Street, the exact location of which I cannot reveal, expanded northward all one night, while people were sleeping, until it reached the Park. There, I stopped it; at dawn the northernmost edges lay over the Plaza; the free-hanging motion was frivolous and gentle. But experiencing a faint irritation at stopping, even to protect the trees, and seeing no reason the balloon should not be allowed to expand upward, over the parts of the city it was already covering, into the “air space” to be found there, I asked the engineers to see to it. This expansion took place throughout the morning, soft imperceptible sighing of gas through the valves. The balloon then covered forty-five blocks north-south and an irregular area east-west, as many as six crosstown blocks on either side of the Avenue in some places. That was the situation, then.

But it is wrong to speak of “situations,” implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there — muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting

with walnut and soft yellows. A deliberate lack of finish, enhanced by skillful installation, gave the surface a rough, forgotten quality; sliding weights on the inside, carefully adjusted, anchored the great, vari-shaped mass at a number of points. Now we have had a flood of original ideas in all media, works of singular beauty as well as significant milestones in the history of inflation, but at that moment there was only this balloon, concrete particular, hanging there.

There were reactions. Some people found the balloon “interesting.” As a response this seemed inadequate to the immensity of the balloon, the suddenness of its appearance over the city; on the other hand, in the absence of hysteria or other societally-induced anxiety, it must be judged a calm, “mature” one. There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the “meaning” of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings, and they are rarely even looked for now, except in cases involving the simplest, safest phenomena. It was agreed that since the meaning of the balloon could never be known absolutely, extended discussion was pointless, or at least less purposeful than the activities of those who, for example, hung green and blue paper lanterns from the warm gray underside, in certain streets, or seized the occasion to write messages on the surface, announcing their availability for the performance of unnatural acts, or the availability of acquaintances.

Daring children jumped, especially at those points where the balloon hovered close to a building, so that the gap between balloon and building was a matter of a few inches, or points where the balloon actually made contact, exerting an ever-so-slight pressure against the side of a building, so that balloon and building seemed a unity. The upper surface was so structured that a “landscape” was presented, small valleys as well as slight knolls, or mounds; once atop the balloon, a stroll was possible, or even a trip, from one place to another. There was pleasure in being able

to run down an incline, then up the opposing slope, both gently graded, or in making a leap from one side to the other. Bouncing was possible, because of the pneumaticity of the surface, and even falling, if that was your wish. That all these varied motions, as well as others, were within one’s possibilities, in experiencing the “up” side of the balloon, was extremely exciting for children, accustomed to the city’s flat, hard skin. But the purpose of the balloon was not to amuse children.

Too, the number of people, children and adults, who took advantage of the opportunities described was not so large as it might have been: a certain timidity, lack of trust in the balloon, was seen. There was, furthermore, some hostility. Because we had hidden the pumps, which fed helium to the interior, and because the surface was so vast that the authorities could not determine the point of entry — that is, the point at which the gas was injected — a degree of frustration was evidenced by those city officers into whose province such manifestations normally fell. The apparent purposelessness of the balloon was vexing (as was the fact that it was “there” at all). Had we painted, in great letters, “laboratory tests prove” or “18% more effective” on the sides of the balloon, this difficulty would have been circumvented. But I could not bear to do so. On the whole, these officers were remarkably tolerant, considering the dimensions of the anomaly, this tolerance being the result of, first, secret tests conducted by night that convinced them that little or nothing could be done in the way of removing or destroying the balloon, and, secondly, a public warmth that arose (not uncolored by touches of the aforementioned hostility) toward the balloon, from ordinary citizens.

As a single balloon must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons, so each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes. One man might consider that the balloon had to do with the notion sullied, as in the sentence The big

balloon sullied the otherwise clear and radiant Manhattan sky. That is, the balloon was, in this man's view, an imposture, something inferior to the sky that had formerly been there, something interposed between the people and their "sky." But in fact it was January, the sky was dark and ugly; it was not a sky you could look up into, lying on your back in the street, with pleasure, unless pleasure, for you, proceeded from having been threatened, from having been misused. And the underside of the balloon was a pleasure to look up into, we had seen to that, muted grays and browns for the most part, contrasted with walnut and soft, forgotten yellows. And so, while this man was thinking sullied, still there was an admixture of pleasurable cognition in his thinking, struggling with the original perception.

Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards, as when one's employer walks in and says, "Here, Henry, take this package of money I have wrapped for you, because we have been doing so well in the business here, and I admire the way you bruise the tulips, without which bruising your department would not be a success, or at least not the success that it is." For this man the balloon might be a brilliantly heroic "muscle and pluck" experience, even if an experience poorly understood.

Another man might say, "Without the example of \_\_\_\_, it is doubtful that \_\_\_\_ would exist today in its present form," and find many to agree with him, or to argue with him. Ideas of "bloat" and "float" were introduced, as well as concepts of dream and responsibility. Others engaged in remarkably detailed fantasies having to do with a wish either to lose themselves in the balloon, or to engorge it. The private character of these wishes, of their origins, deeply buried and unknown, was such that they were not much spoken of; yet there is evidence that they were widespread. It was also argued that what was important was what you felt when you stood under the balloon; some people

claimed that they felt sheltered, warmed, as never before, while enemies of the balloon felt, or reported feeling, constrained, a "heavy" feeling.

Critical opinion was divided:

**"monstrous pourings"**

"harp"

**XXXXXXX** "certain contrasts with darker portions"

"inner joy"

**"large, square corners"**

*"conservative eclecticism that has so far governed  
modern balloon design"*

:::::: "abnormal vigor"

**"warm, soft, lazy passages"**

**"Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling  
quality?"**

*"Quelle catastrophe!"*

**"munching"**

People began, in a curious way, to locate themselves in relation to aspects of the balloon: "I'll be at that place where it dips down into Forty-seventh Street almost to the sidewalk, near the Alamo Chile House," or, "Why don't we go stand on top, and take the air, and maybe walk about a bit, where it forms a tight, curving

line with the facade of the Gallery of Modern Art --" Marginal intersections offered entrances within a given time duration, as well as "warm, soft, lazy passages" in which. . . But it is wrong to speak of "marginal intersections," each intersection was crucial, none could be ignored (as if, walking there, you might not find someone capable of turning your attention, in a flash, from old exercises to new exercises, risks and escalations). Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon.

It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined. Sometimes a bulge, blister, or subsection would carry all the way east to the river on its own initiative, in the manner of an army's movements on a map, as seen in a headquarters remote from the fighting. Then that part would be, as it were, thrown back again, or would withdraw into new dispositions; the next morning, that part would have made another sortie, or disappeared altogether. This ability of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired, was not available. The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of mislocation of the self, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet. The amount of specialized training currently needed, and the consequent desirability of long-term commitments, has been occasioned by the steadily growing importance of complex machinery, in virtually all kinds of operations; as this tendency increases, more and more people will turn, in bewildered inadequacy, to solutions for which the balloon may stand as a prototype, or "rough draft."

I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway; you asked if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having

to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy; trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, sometime, perhaps, when we are angry with one another.

Again today the little girl came along dancing doggedly with her knitting needle steel-blue knitting needle. She knows I can't get up out of this chair theoretically and sticks me, here and there, just to make me yell, nice little girl from down the block somewhere. Once I corrected her sharply saying "don't for God's sake what pleasure is there hearing me scream like this?" She was wearing a blue Death of Beethoven printed dress and white shoes which mama had whited for her that day before noon so white were they (shoes). I judged her to be eleven. The knitting needle in the long thrust and hold position she said "torment is the answer old pappy man it's torment that is the game's name that I'm learning about under laboratory conditions. Torment is the proper study of children of my age class and median income and you don't matter in any case you're through dirty old man can't even get out of rotten old chair." Summed me up she did in those words which I would much rather not have heard so prettily put as they were nevertheless. I hate it here in this chair in this house warm and green with Social Security. Do you know how little

it is? The little girl jabbed again hitting the thin thigh that time and said “we know exactly how little it is and even that is money down the drain why don’t you die damn you dirty old man what are you contributing?” Then I explained about this newspaper here sprinkled with rare lies and photographs incorrectly captioned accumulated along a lifetime of disappointments and some fun. I boasted saying “one knows just where nerves cluster under the skin, how to pinch them so citizens jump as in dreams when opened suddenly a door and there see two flagrantly. . .” But I realize then her dreams are drawn in ways which differ so that we cannot read them together. I threw then jam jar (black currant) catching her nicely on kneecap and she ran howling but if they come to object I have jab marks in extenuation. Nice little girl from down the block somewhere.

The reason I like to read this newspaper here the one in my hand, is because I like what it says. It is my favorite. I would be pleased really quite if you could read it. But you can’t. But some can. It comes in the mail. I give it to a fellow some time back, put it in his hand and said “take a look.” He took a look took a look but he couldn’t see anything strawdinary along this newspaper here, couldn’t see it. And he says “so what?” Of course I once was in this business myself making newspapers in the depression. We had fun then. This fellow I give it to to take a look some time back he that said “so what” is well educated reads good travels far drinks deep gin mostly talks to dolphins click click click click. A professor of ethnology at the University of California at Davis. Not in fine a dullard in any sense but he couldn’t see anything strawdinary along this newspaper here. I said look there page 2 the amusing story of the plain girl fair where the plain girls come to vend their wares but he said “on my page 2 this newspaper here talk about the EEC.” Then I took it from his hand and showed him with my finger pointing the plain girl fair story. Then he commences to read aloud from under my finger there some

singsong about the EEC. So I infer that he is one who can’t. So I let the matter drop.

I went to the plain girl fair out Route 22 figuring I could get one if I just put on a kind face. This newspaper here had advertising the aspidistra store not far away by car where I went then and bought one to carry along. At the plain girl fair they were standing in sudden-death decolletage and brown arms everywhere. As you passed along into the tent after paying your dollar fifty carrying your aspidistra a blinding flash of some hundred contact lenses came. And a quality of dental work to shame the VA Hospital it was so fine. One fell in love temporarily with all this hard work and money spent just to please to improve. I was sad my dolphin friend was not there to see. I took one by the hand and said “come with me I will buy you a lobster.” My real face behind my kind face smiling. And the other girls on their pedestals waved and said “goodbye Marie.” And they also said “have a nice lobster,” and Marie waved back and said “bonne chance!” We motored to the lobster place over to Barwick, then danced by the light of the moon for a bit. And then to my hay where I tickled the naked soles of feet with a piece of it and admired her gestures of marvellous gaucherie. In my mind.

Of course I once was in this business myself making newspapers in the depression. So I know some little some about it, both the back room and the front room. If you got in the makeups’ way they’d yell “dime waitin’ on a nickel.” But this here and now newspaper I say a thing of great formal beauty. Sometimes on dull days the compositors play which makes paragraphs like

```
(!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!)
*****
?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/
o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:o:
?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/?/
*****
(!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!) (!)
```

refreshing as rocks in this newspaper here. And then you come

along a page solid bright aching orange sometimes and parts printed in alien languages and invisible inks. This newspaper here fly away fly away through the mails to names from the telephone book. Have you seen my library of telephone books I keep in the kitchen with names from Greater Memphis Utica Key West Toledo Santa Barbara St. Paul Juneau Missoula Tacoma and every which where. It goes third class because I print HOTELS-MOTELS NEED TRAINED MEN AND WOMEN AMAZING FREE OFFER on the wrapper. As a disguise.

Then a learned man come to call saying “this with the newspaper is not kosher you know that.” He had several degrees in Police Engineering and the like and his tiny gun dwelt in his arm-pit like the growths described by Defoe in *Journal of the Plague Year*. I judged him to be with some one of the governments. Not overfond of him in my house but I said in a friendly way “can I see it.” He took out the tiny black gun and held it in his hand, then slapped me up against the head with it in a friendly way. He coughed and looked at the bottle of worrywine sitting on the table on the newspaper saying “and we can hear the presses in the basement with sensitive secret recording devices.” And finally he said sighing “we know it’s you why don’t you simply take a few months off, try Florida or Banff which is said to swing at this season of the year and we’ll pay everything.” I told him smiling I didn’t get the reference. He was almost crying it seemed to me saying “you know it excites the people stirs them up exacerbates hopes we thought laid to rest generations ago.” He nodded to agree with himself laying soft hands around the windpipe of the gramophone automatically feeling for counter-bugs down its throat saying “we don’t understand what it is you’re after. If you don’t like our war you don’t have to come to it, too old anyway you used-up old poop.” Then he slapped me up alongside the head couple more times with his exquisite politesse kicking my toothpick scale model of Heinrich von Kleist in blue velvet to

splinters on the way out.

Can you imagine some fellow waking at dawn in Toledo looking at his red alarm clock and then thinking with wonder of a picture drawn in this newspaper here by my friend Golo. When we were in Paris Golo was a famous one because he drew with his thumbs in black black paint which was not then done yet much on brown paper and it made people stop. Now Golo has altered his name because he is wanted. Still he sends me drawings on secular subjects from here and there, when they irritate me I put them in. It is true that I dislike their war and have pointed out that the very postage stamps shimmer with dangerous ideological radiation. They hated that. I run coupons to clip offering Magnificent Butterfly Wing Portraits Send Photo, Transistorized Personal Sun Tanner, How to Develop a He-Man Voice, Darling Pet Monkey Show It Affection and Enjoy Its Company, British Shoes for Gentlemen, Live Seahorses \$1 Each, Why Be Bald, Electric Roses Never Fade or Wither, Hotels-Motels Need Trained Men and Women. And I keep the money.

But what else can I do? Making this newspaper here I hold a prerequisite to eluding death which is looking for me don’t you know. Girl with knitting needle simply sent to soften me up, a probing action as it were. My newspaper warm at the edges fade in fade out a tissue of hints whispers glimpses uncertainties, zoom in zoom out. I considered in an editorial the idea that the world is an error on the part of God, one of the earliest and finest heresies, they hated that. Ringle from the telephone “what do you mean the world is a roar on the part of God,” which pleased me. I said “madam is your name Marie if so I will dangle your health in very merrywine this very eve blast me if I will not.” She said into the telephone “dirty old man.” Who ha who ha. I sit here rock around the clock interviewing Fabian on his plateglass window incident in my mind. Sweet to know your face uncut and unabridged. Who ha who ha dirty old man.

## Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning

### *K. at His Desk*

He is neither abrupt with nor excessively kind to associates. Or he is both abrupt and kind.

The telephone is, for him, a whip, a lash, but also a conduit for soothing words, a sink into which he can hurl gallons of syrup if it comes to that.

He reads quickly, scratching brief comments (“Yes,” “No”) in corners of the paper. He slouches in the leather chair, looking about him with a slightly irritated air for new visitors, new difficulties. He spends his time sending and receiving messengers.

“I spend my time sending and receiving messengers,” he says. “Some of these messages are important. Others are not.”

### *Described by Secretaries*

A: “Quite frankly I think he forgets a lot of things. But the



things he forgets are those which are inessential. I even think he might forget deliberately, to leave his mind free. He has the ability to get rid of unimportant details. And he does.”

B: “Once when I was sick, I hadn’t heard from him, and I thought he had forgotten me. You know usually your boss will send flowers or something like that. I was in the hospital, and I was mighty blue. I was in a room with another girl, and her boss hadn’t sent her anything either. Then suddenly the door opened and there he was with the biggest bunch of yellow tulips I’d ever seen in my life. And the other girl’s boss was with him, and he had tulips too. They were standing there with all those tulips, smiling.”

### *Behind the Bar*

At a crowded party, he wanders behind the bar to make himself a Scotch and water. His hand is on the bottle of Scotch, his glass is waiting. The bartender, a small man in a beige uniform with gilt buttons, politely asks K. to return to the other side, the guests’ side, of the bar. “You let one behind here, they all be behind here,” the bartender says.

### *K. Reading the Newspaper*

His reactions are impossible to catalogue. Often he will find a note that amuses him endlessly, some anecdote involving, say, a fireman who has propelled his apparatus at record-breaking speed to the wrong address. These small stories are clipped, carried about in a pocket, to be produced at appropriate moments for the pleasure of friends. Other manifestations please him less. An account of an earthquake in Chile, with its thousands of dead and homeless, may depress him for weeks. He memorizes the terrible statistics, quoting them everywhere and saying, with

a grave look: “We must do something.” Important actions often follow, sometimes within a matter of hours. (On the other hand, these two kinds of responses may be, on a given day, inexplicably reversed.)

The more trivial aspects of the daily itemization are skipped. While reading, he maintains a rapid drumming of his fingertips on the desktop. He receives twelve newspapers, but of these, only four are regarded as serious.

### *Attitude Toward His Work*

“Sometimes I can’t seem to do anything. The work is there, piled up, it seems to me an insurmountable obstacle, really out of reach. I sit and look at it, wondering where to begin, how to take hold of it. Perhaps I pick up a piece of paper, try to read it but my mind is elsewhere, I am thinking of something else, I can’t seem to get the gist of it, it seems meaningless, devoid of interest, not having to do with human affairs, drained of life. Then, in an hour, or even a moment, everything changes suddenly: I realize I only have to do it, hurl myself into the midst of it, proceed mechanically, the first thing and then the second thing, that it is simply a matter of moving from one step to the next, plowing through it. I become interested, I become excited, I work very fast, things fall into place, I am exhilarated, amazed that these things could ever have seemed dead to me.”

### *Sleeping on the Stones of Unknown Towns (Rimbaud)*

K. is walking, with that familiar slight dip of the shoulders, through the streets of a small city in France or Germany. The shop signs are in a language which alters when inspected closely, Mobil becoming Meubles for example, and the citizens mutter to themselves with dark virtuosity a mixture of languages. K. is very

interested, looks closely at everything, at the shops, the goods displayed, the clothing of the people, the tempo of street life, the citizens themselves, wondering about them. What are their water needs?

“In the West, wisdom is mostly gained at lunch. At lunch, people tell you things.”

The nervous eyes of the waiters.

The tall bald cook, white apron, white T-shirt, grinning through an opening in the wall.

“Why is that cook looking at me?”

### *Urban Transportation*

“The transportation problems of our cities and their rapidly expanding suburbs are the most urgent and neglected transportation problems confronting the country. In these heavily populated and industrialized areas, people are dependent on a system of transportation that is at once complex and inadequate. Obsolete facilities and growing demands have created seemingly insoluble difficulties and present methods of dealing with these difficulties offer little prospect of relief.”

### *K. Penetrated with Sadness*

He hears something playing on someone else’s radio, in another part of the building.

The music is wretchedly sad; now he can (barely) hear it, now it fades into the wall.

He turns on his own radio. There it is, on his own radio, the same music. The sound fills the room.

### *Karsh of Ottawa*

“We sent a man to Karsh of Ottawa and told him that we admired his work very much. Especially, I don’t know, the Churchill thing and, you know, the Hemingway thing, and all that. And we told him we wanted to set up a sitting for K. sometime in June, if that would be convenient for him, and he said yes, that was okay, June was okay, and where did we want to have it shot, there or in New York or where. Well, that was a problem because we didn’t know exactly what K.’s schedule would be for June, it was up in the air, so we tentatively said New York around the fifteenth. And he said, that was okay, he could do that. And he wanted to know how much time he could have, and we said, well, how much time do you need? And he said he didn’t know, it varied from sitter to sitter. He said some people were very restless and that made it difficult to get just the right shot. He said there was one shot in each sitting that was, you know, the key shot, the right one. He said he’d have to see, when the time came.”

### *Dress*

He is neatly dressed in a manner that does not call attention to itself. The suits are soberly cut and in dark colors. He must at all times present an aspect of freshness difficult to sustain because of frequent movements from place to place under conditions which are not always the most favorable. Thus he changes clothes frequently, especially shirts. In the course of a day he changes his shirt many times. There are always extra shirts about, in boxes.

“Which of you has the shirts?”

### *A Friend Comments: K.’s Aloneness*

“The thing you have to realize about K. is that essentially he’s absolutely alone in the world. There’s this terrible loneliness which prevents people from getting too close to him. Maybe it comes from something in his childhood, I don’t know. But he’s very hard to get to know, and a lot of people who think they know him rather well don’t really know him at all. He says something or does something that surprises you, and you realize that all along you really didn’t know him at all.

“He has surprising facets. I remember once we were out in a small boat. K. of course was the captain. Some rough weather came up and we began to head back in. I began worrying about picking up a landing and I said to him that I didn’t think the anchor would hold, with the wind and all. He just looked at me. Then he said: ‘Of course it will hold. That’s what it’s for.’ “

#### *K. on Crowds*

“There are exhausted crowds and vivacious crowds.

“Sometimes, standing there, I can sense whether a particular crowd is one thing or the other. Sometimes the mood of the crowd is disguised, sometimes you only find out after a quarter of an hour what sort of crowd a particular crowd is.

“And you can’t speak to them in the same way. The variations have to be taken into account. You have to say something to them that is meaningful to them in that mood.”

#### *Gallery-going*

K. enters a large gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, in the Fuller Building. His entourage includes several ladies and gentlemen. Works by a geometricist are on show. K. looks at the immense, rather theoretical paintings.

“Well, at least we know he has a ruler.”

The group dissolves in laughter. People repeat the remark to one another, laughing.

The artist, who has been standing behind a dealer, regards K. with hatred.

#### *K. Puzzled by His Children*

The children are crying. There are several children, one about four, a boy, then another boy, slightly older, and a little girl, very beautiful, wearing blue jeans, crying. There are various objects on the grass, an electric train, a picture book, a red ball, a plastic bucket, a plastic shovel.

K. frowns at the children whose distress issues from no source immediately available to the eye, which seems indeed uncaused, vacant, a general anguish. K. turns to the mother of these children who is standing nearby wearing hip-huggers which appear to be made of linked marshmallows studded with diamonds but then I am a notoriously poor observer.

“Play with them,” he says.

This mother of ten quietly suggests that K. himself “play with them.”

K. picks up the picture book and begins to read to the children. But the book has a German text. It has been left behind, perhaps, by some foreign visitor. Nevertheless K. perseveres.

“A ist der Affe, er isst mit der Pfote.” (“A is the Ape, he eats with his Paw.”)

The crying of the children continues.

#### *A Dream*

Orange trees.

Overhead, a steady stream of strange aircraft which resemble kitchen implements, bread boards, cookie sheets, colanders.

The shiny aluminum instruments are on their way to complete the bombing of Sidi-Madani.

A farm in the hills.

*Matters (from an Administrative Assistant)*

“A lot of matters that had been pending came to a head right about that time, moved to the front burner, things we absolutely had to take care of. And we couldn’t find K. Nobody knew where he was. We had looked everywhere. He had just withdrawn, made himself unavailable. There was this one matter that was probably more pressing than all the rest put together. Really crucial. We were all standing around wondering what to do. We were getting pretty nervous because this thing was really. . . Then K. walked in and disposed of it with a quick phone call. A quick phone call!”

*Childhood of K. as Recalled by a Former Teacher*

“He was a very alert boy, very bright, good at his studies, very thorough, very conscientious. But that’s not unusual; that describes a good number of the boys who pass through here. It’s not unusual, that is, to find these qualities which are after all the qualities that we look for and encourage in them. What was unusual about K. was his compassion, something very rare for a boy of that age -- even if they have it, they’re usually very careful not to display it for fear of seeming soft, girlish. I remember, though, that in K. this particular attribute was very marked. I would almost say that it was his strongest characteristic.”

*Speaking to No One but Waiters, He --*

“The dandelion salad with bacon, I think.”

“The rysstafel.”

“The poached duck.”

“The black bean puree.”

“The cod fritters.”

*K. Explains a Technique*

“It’s an expedient in terms of how not to destroy a situation which has been a long time gestating, or, again, how to break it up if it appears that the situation has changed, during the gestation period, into one whose implications are not quite what they were at the beginning. What I mean is that in this business things are constantly altering (usually for worse) and usually you want to give the impression that you’re not watching this particular situation particularly closely, that you’re paying no special attention to it, until you’re ready to make your move. That is, it’s best to be sudden, if you can manage it. Of course you can’t do that all the time. Sometimes you’re just completely wiped out, cleaned out, totaled, and then the only thing to do is shrug and forget about it.”

*K. on His Own Role*

“Sometimes it seems to me that it doesn’t matter what I do, that it is enough to exist, to sit somewhere, in a garden for example, watching whatever is to be seen there, the small events. At

other times, I'm aware that other people, possibly a great number of other people, could be affected by what I do or fail to do, that I have a responsibility, as we all have, to make the best possible use of whatever talents I've been given, for the common good. It is not enough to sit in that garden, however restful or pleasurable it might be. The world is full of unsolved problems, situations that demand careful, reasoned and intelligent action. In Latin America, for example."

### *As Entrepreneur*

The original cost estimates for burying the North Sea pipeline have been exceeded by a considerable margin. Everyone wonders what he will say about this contretemps which does not fail to have its dangers for those responsible for the costly miscalculations, which are viewed in many minds as inexcusable.

He says only: "Exceptionally difficult rock conditions."

### *With Young People*

K., walking the streets of unknown towns, finds himself among young people. Young people line these streets, narrow and curving, which are theirs, dedicated to them. They are everywhere, resting on the embankments, their guitars, small radios, long hair. They sit on the sidewalks, back to back, heads turned to stare. They stand implacably on street corners, in doorways, or lean on their elbows in windows, or squat in small groups at that place where the sidewalk meets the walls of buildings. The streets are filled with these young people who say nothing, reveal only a limited interest, refuse to declare themselves. Street after street contains them, a great number, more displayed as one turns a corner, rank upon rank stretching into the distance, drawn from the arcades, the plazas, staring.

### *He Discusses the French Writer, Poulet*

"For Poulet, it is not enough to speak of seizing the moment. It is rather a question of, and I quote, 'recognizing in the instant which lives and dies, which surges out of nothingness and which ends in dream, an intensity and depth of significance which ordinarily attaches only to the whole of existence.'

"What Poulet is describing is neither an ethic nor a prescription but rather what he has discovered in the work of Marivaux. Poulet has taken up the Marivaudian canon and squeezed it with both hands to discover the essence of what may be called the Marivaudian being, what Poulet in fact calls the Marivaudian being.

"The Marivaudian being is, according to Poulet, a pastless futureless man, born anew at every instant. The instants are points which organize themselves into a line, but what is important is the instant, not the line. The Marivaudian being has in a sense no history. Nothing follows from what has gone before. He is constantly surprised. He cannot predict his own reaction to events. He is constantly being overtaken by events. A condition of breathlessness and dazzlement surrounds him. In consequence he exists in a certain freshness which seems, if I may say so, very desirable. This freshness Poulet, quoting Marivaux, describes very well."

### *K. Saved from Drowning*

K. in the water. His flat black hat, his black cape, his sword are on the shore. He retains his mask. His hands beat the surface of the water which tears and rips about him. The white foam, the green depths. I throw a line, the coils leaping out over the surface of the water. He has missed it. No, it appears that he has it. His right hand (sword arm) grasps the line that I have thrown him. I

am on the bank, the rope wound round my waist, braced against a rock. K. now has both hands on the line. I pull him out of the water. He stands now on the bank, gasping.

“Thank you.”

Our group is against the war. But the war goes on. I was sent to Cleveland to talk to the engineers. The engineers were meeting in Cleveland. I was supposed to persuade them not to do what they are going to do. I took United's 4:45 from LaGuardia arriving in Cleveland at 6:13. Cleveland is dark blue at that hour. I went directly to the motel, where the engineers were meeting. Hundreds of engineers attended the Cleveland meeting. I noticed many fractures among the engineers, bandages, traction. I noticed what appeared to be fracture of the carpal scaphoid in six examples. I noticed numerous fractures of the humeral shaft, of the os calcis, of the pelvic girdle. I noticed a high incidence of clay-shoveller's fracture. I could not account for these fractures. The engineers were making calculations, taking measurements, sketching on the blackboard, drinking beer, throwing bread, buttonholing employers, hurling glasses into the fireplace. They were friendly.

They were friendly. They were full of love and information. The chief engineer wore shades. Patella in Monk's traction,

clamshell fracture by the look of it. He was standing in a slum of beer bottles and microphone cable. "Have some of this chicken a la Isambard Kingdom Brunei the Great Engineer," he said. "And declare who you are and what we can do for you. What is your line, distinguished guest?"

"Software," I said. "In every sense. I am here representing a small group of interested parties. We are interested in your thing, which seems to be functioning. In the midst of so much dysfunction, function is interesting. Other people's things don't seem to be working. The State Department's thing doesn't seem to be working. The U.N.'s thing doesn't seem to be working. The democratic left's thing doesn't seem to be working. Buddha's thing --"

"Ask us anything about our thing, which seems to be working," the chief engineer said. "We will open our hearts and heads to you, Software Man, because we want to be understood and loved by the great lay public, and have our marvels appreciated by that public, for which we daily unsung produce tons of new marvels each more life-enhancing than the last. Ask us anything. Do you want to know about evaporated thin-film metallurgy? Monolithic and hybrid integrated-circuit processes? The algebra of inequalities? Optimization theory? Complex high-speed micro-miniature closed and open loop systems? Fixed variable mathematical cost searches? Epitaxial deposition of semi-conductor materials? Gross interfaced space gropes? We also have specialists in the cuckooflower, the doctorfish, and the dum dum bullet as these relate to aspects of today's expanding technology, and they do in the damndest ways."

I spoke to him then about the war. I said the same things people always say when they speak against the war. I said that the war was wrong. I said that large countries should not burn down small countries. I said that the government had made a series of errors. I said that these errors once small and forgivable were now immense and unforgivable. I said that the government was

attempting to conceal its original errors under layers of new errors. I said that the government was sick with error, giddy with it. I said that ten thousand of our soldiers had already been killed in pursuit of the government's errors. I said that tens of thousands of the enemy's soldiers and civilians had been killed because of various errors, ours and theirs. I said that we are responsible for errors made in our name. I said that the government should not be allowed to make additional errors.

"Yes, yes," the chief engineer said, "there is doubtless much truth in what you say, but we can't possibly lose the war, can we? And stopping is losing, isn't it? The war regarded as a process, stopping regarded as an abort? We don't know how to lose a war. That skill is not among our skills. Our array smashes their array, that is what we know. That is the process. That is what is.

"But let's not have any more of this dispiriting downbeat counterproductive talk. I have a few new marvels here I'd like to discuss with you just briefly. A few new marvels that are just about ready to be gaped at by the admiring layman. Consider for instance the area of realtime online computer-controlled wish evaporation. Wish evaporation is going to be crucial in meeting the rising expectations of the world's peoples, which are as you know rising entirely too fast."

I noticed then distributed about the room a great many transverse fractures of the ulna. "The development of the pseudo-ruminant stomach for under-developed peoples," he went on, "is one of our interesting things you should be interested in. With the pseudo-ruminant stomach they can chew cuds, that is to say, eat grass. Blue is the most popular color worldwide and for that reason we are working with certain strains of your native Kentucky *Poa pratensis*, or bluegrass, as the staple input for the p/r stomach cycle, which would also give a shot in the arm to our balance-of-payments thing don't you know. . ." I noticed about me then a great number of metatarsal fractures in banjo splints.

"The kangaroo initiative. . . eight hundred thousand harvested last year. . . highest percentage of edible protein of any herbivore yet studied. . ."

"Have new kangaroos been planted?"

The engineer looked at me.

"I intuit your hatred and jealousy of our thing," he said. "The ineffectual always hate our thing and speak of it as anti-human, which is not at all a meaningful way to speak of our thing. Nothing mechanical is alien to me," he said (amber spots making bursts of light in his shades), "because I am human, in a sense, and if I think it up, then 'it' is human too, whatever 'it' may be. Let me tell you, Software Man, we have been damned forbearing in the matter of this little war you declare yourself to be interested in. Function is the cry, and our thing is functioning like crazy. There are things we could do that we have not done. Steps we could take that we have not taken. These steps are, regarded in a certain light, the light of our enlightened self-interest, quite justifiable steps. We could, of course, get irritated. We could, of course, lose patience.

"We could, of course, release thousands upon thousands of self-powered crawling-along-the-ground lengths of titanium wire eighteen inches long with a diameter of .0005 centimetres (that is to say, invisible) which, scenting an enemy, climb up his trouser leg and wrap themselves around his neck. We have developed those. They are within our capabilities. We could, of course, release in the arena of the upper air our new improved puffer-fish toxin which precipitates an identity crisis. No special technical problems there. That is almost laughably easy. We could, of course, place up to two million maggots in their rice within twenty-four hours. The maggots are ready, massed in secret staging areas in Alabama. We have hypodermic darts capable of piebalding the enemy's pigmentation. We have rots, blights, and rusts capable of attacking his alphabet. Those are dandies. We

have a hut-shrinking chemical which penetrates the fibres of the bamboo, causing it, the hut, to strangle its occupants. This operates only after 10 p.m., when people are sleeping. Then: mathematics are at the mercy of a suppurating surd we have invented. We have a family of fishes trained to attack their fishes. We have the deadly testicle-destroying telegram. The cable companies are cooperating. We have a green substance that, well, I'd rather not talk about. We have a secret word that, if pronounced, produces multiple fractures in all living things in an area the size of four football fields."

"That's why --"

"Yes. Some damned fool couldn't keep his mouth shut. The point is that the whole structure of enemy life is within our power to rend, vitiate, devour, and crush. But that's not the interesting thing."

"You recount these possibilities with uncommon relish."

"Yes I realize that there is too much relish here. But you must realize that these capabilities represent in and of themselves highly technical and complex and interesting problems and hurdles on which our boys have expended many thousands of hours of hard work and brilliance. And that the effects are often grossly exaggerated by irresponsible victims. And that the whole thing represents a fantastic series of triumphs for the multi-disciplined problem-solving team concept."

"I appreciate that."

"We could unleash all this technology at once. You can imagine what would happen then. But that's not the interesting thing."

"What is the interesting thing?"

"The interesting thing is that we have a moral sense. It is on punched cards, perhaps the most advanced and sensitive moral sense the world has ever known."

"Because it is on punched cards?"

"It considers all considerations in endless and subtle detail,"



he said. “It even quibbles. With this great new moral tool, how can we go wrong? I confidently predict that, although we could employ all this splendid new weaponry I’ve been telling you about, we’re not going to do it.”

“We’re not going to do it?”

I took United’s 5:44 from Cleveland arriving at Newark at 7:19. New Jersey is bright pink at that hour. Living things move about the surface of New Jersey at that hour molesting each other only in traditional ways. I made my report to the group. I stressed the friendliness of the engineers. I said, It’s all right. I said, We have a moral sense. I said, We’re not going to do it. They didn’t believe me.

Edgar was preparing to take the National Writers’ Examination, a five-hour fifty-minute examination, for his certificate. He was in his room, frightened. The prospect of taking the exam again put him in worlds of hurt. He had taken it twice before, with evil results. Now he was studying a book which contained not the actual questions from the examination but similar questions. “Barbara, if I don’t knock it for a loop this time I don’t know what we’ll do.” Barbara continued to address herself to the ironing board. Edgar thought about saying something to his younger child, his two-year-old daughter, Rose, who was wearing a white terry-cloth belted bathrobe and looked like a tiny fighter about to climb into the ring. They were all in the room while he was studying for the examination.

“The written part is where I fall down,” Edgar said morosely, to everyone in the room. “The oral part is where I do best.” He looked at the back of his wife which was pointed at him. “If I don’t kick it in the head this time I don’t know what we’re going

to do,” he repeated. “Barb?” But she failed to respond to this implied question. She felt it was a false hope, taking this examination which he had already failed miserably twice and which always got him very worked up, black with fear, before he took it. Now she didn’t wish to witness the spectacle any more so she gave him her back.

“The oral part,” Edgar continued encouragingly, “is A-okay. I can for instance give you a list of answers, I know it so well. Listen, here is an answer, can you tell me the question?” Barbara, who was very sexually attractive (that was what made Edgar tap on her for a date, many years before) but also deeply mean, said nothing. She put her mind on their silent child, Rose.

“Here is the answer,” Edgar said. “The answer is Julia Ward Howe. What is the question?”

This answer was too provocative for Barbara to resist long, because she knew the question. “Who wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic?” she said. “There is not a grown person in the United States who doesn’t know that.”

“You’re right,” Edgar said unhappily, for he would have preferred that the answer had been a little more *recherche*, one that she would not have known the question to. But she had been a hooker for a period before their marriage and he could resort to this area if her triumph grew too great. “Do you want to try another one?”

“Edgar I don’t believe in that examination any more,” she told him coldly.

“I don’t believe in you Barbara,” he countered.

This remark filled her with remorse and anger. She considered momentarily letting him have one upside the head but fear prevented her from doing it so she turned her back again and thought about the vaunted certificate. With a certificate he could write for all the important and great periodicals, and there would be some money in the house for a change instead of what they

got from his brother and the Unemployment.

“It isn’t you who has to pass this National Writers’ Examination,” he shot past her. Then, to mollify, he gave her another answer. “Brand, tuck, glave, claymore.”

“Is that an answer?” she asked from behind her back.

“It is indeed. What’s the question?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted, slightly pleased to be put back in a feminine position of not knowing.

“Those are four names for a sword. They’re archaic.”

“That’s why I didn’t know them, then.”

“Obviously,” said Edgar with some malice, for Barbara was sometimes given to saying things that were obvious, just to fill the air. “You put a word like that in now and then to freshen your line,” he explained. “Even though it’s an old word, it’s so old it’s new. But you have to be careful, the context has to let people know what the thing is. You don’t want to be simply obscure.” He liked explaining the tricks of the trade to Barb, who made some show of interest in them.

“Do you want me to read you what I’ve written for the written part?”

Barb said yes, with a look of pain, for she still felt acutely what he was trying to do.

“This is the beginning,” Edgar said, preparing his yellow manuscript paper.

“What is the title?” Barbara asked. She had turned to face him.

“I haven’t got a title yet,” Edgar said. “Okay, this is the beginning.” He began to read aloud. “In the town of A--, in the district of Y--, there lived a certain Madame A--, wife of that Baron A-- who was in the service of the young Friedrich II of Prussia. The Baron, a man of uncommon ability, is chiefly remembered for his notorious and inexplicable blunder at the Battle of Kolin: by withdrawing the column under his command at a crucial moment in the fighting, he earned for himself the greatest part of

the blame for Friedrich's defeat, which resulted in a loss, on the Prussian side, of 13,000 out of 33,000 men. Now as it happened, the chateau in which Madame A-- was sheltering lay not far from the battlefield; in fact, the removal of her husband's corps placed the chateau itself in the gravest danger; and at the moment Madame A-- learned, from a Captain Orsini, of her husband's death by his own hand, she was also told that a detachment of pandours, the brutal and much-feared Hungarian light irregular cavalry, was hammering at the chateau gates."

Edgar paused to breathe.

Barb looked at him in some surprise. "The beginning turns me on," she said. "More than usual, I mean." She began to have some faint hope, and sat down on the sofa.

"Thank you," Edgar said. "Do you want me to read you the development?"

"Go ahead."

Edgar drank some water from a glass near to hand.

"The man who brought this terrible news enjoyed a peculiar status in regard to the lady; he was her lover, and he was not. Giacomo Orsini, second son of a noble family of Siena, had as a young man a religious vocation. He had become a priest, not the grander sort of priest who makes a career in Rome and in great houses, but a modest village priest in the north of his country. Here befell him a singular misfortune. It was the pleasure of Friedrich Wilhelm I, father of the present ruler, to assemble, as is well known, the finest army in Europe. Tiny Prussia was unable to supply men in sufficient numbers to satisfy this ambition; his recruiters ranged over the whole of Europe, and those whom they could not persuade, with promises of liberal bounties, into the king's service, they kidnapped. Now Friedrich was above all else fond of very tall men, and had created, for his personal guard, a regiment of giants, much mocked at the time, but nonetheless a brave and formidable sight. It was the bad luck of the priest

Orsini to be a very tall man, and of impressive mien and bearing withal; he was abducted straight from the altar, as he was saying mass, the Host in his hands --"

"This is very exciting," Barb broke in, her eyes showing genuine pleasure and enthusiasm.

"Thank you," Edgar said, and continued his reading.

"-- and served ten years in the regiment of giants. On the death of Friedrich Wilhelm, the regiment was disbanded, among other economies; but the former priest, by now habituated to military life, and even zestful for it, enlisted under the new young king, with the rank of captain."

"Is this historically accurate?" Barbara asked.

"It does not contradict what is known," Edgar assured her.

"Assigned to the staff of Baron A--, and much in the tatter's house in consequence, he was thrown in with the lovely Inge, Madame A--, a woman much younger than her husband, and possessed of many excellent qualities. A deep sympathy established itself between them, with this idiosyncrasy, that it was never pressed to a conclusion, on his part, or acknowledged in any way, on hers. But both were aware that it existed, and drew secret nourishment from it, and took much delight in the nearness, one to the other. But this pleasant state of affairs also had a melancholy aspect, for Orsini, although exercising the greatest restraint in the matter, nevertheless considered that he had, in even admitting to himself that he was in love with Madame A--, damaged his patron the Baron, whom he knew to be a just and honorable man, and one who had, moreover, done him many kindnesses. In this humor Orsini saw himself as a son of jackal skulking about the periphery of his benefactor's domestic life, which had been harmonious and whole, but was now, in whatsoever slight degree, compromised."

Rose, the child, stood in her white bathrobe looking at her father who was talking for such a long time, and in such a

dramatic shaking voice.

"The Baron, on his side, was not at all insensible of the passion that was present, as it were in a condition of latency, between his young wife and the handsome Sienese. In truth, his knowledge of their intercourse, which he imagined had ripened far beyond the point it had actually reached, had flung him headlong into a horrible crime: for his withholding of the decisive troops at Kolin, for which history has judged him so harshly, was neither an error of strategy nor a display of pusillanimity, but a willful act, having as its purpose the exposure of the chateau, and thus the lovers, whom he had caused to be together there, to the bloodlust of the pandours. And as for his alleged suicide, that too was a cruel farce; he lived, in a hidden place."

Edgar stopped.

"It's swift-moving," Barbara complimented.

"Well, do you want me to read you the end?" Edgar asked.

"The end? Is it the end already?"

"Do you want me to read you the end?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"I've got the end but I don't have the middle," Edgar said, a little ashamed.

"You don't have the middle?"

"Do you want me to read you the end or don't you?"

"Yes, read me the end." The possibility of a semi-professional apartment, which she had entertained briefly, was falling out of her head with this news, that there was no middle.

"The last paragraph is this:

"During these events Friedrich, to console himself for the debacle at Kolin, composed in his castle at Berlin a flute sonata, of which the critic Guilda has said, that it is not less lovely than the sonatas of Georg Philip Telemann."

"That's ironic," she said knowingly.

"Yes," Edgar agreed, impatient. He was as volatile as popcorn.

"But what about the middle?"

"I don't have the middle!" he thundered.

"Something has to happen between them, Inge and what's his name," she went on. "Otherwise there's no story." Looking at her he thought: she is still streety although wearing her housewife gear. The child was a perfect love, however, and couldn't be told from the children of success.

Barb then began telling a story she knew that had happened to a friend of hers. This girl had had an affair with a man and had become pregnant. The man had gone off to Seville, to see if hell was a city much like it, and she had spontaneously aborted, in Chicago. Then she had flown over to parley, and they had walked in the streets and visited elderly churches and like that. And the first church they went into, there was this tiny little white coffin covered with flowers, right in the sanctuary.

"Banal," Edgar pronounced.

She tried to think of another anecdote to deliver to him.

"I've got to get that certificate!" he suddenly called out desperately.

"I don't think you can pass the National Writers' Examination with what you have on that paper," Barb said then, with great regret, because even though he was her husband she didn't want to hurt him unnecessarily. But she had to tell the truth. "Without a middle."

"I wouldn't have been great, even with the certificate," he said.

"Your views would have become known. You would have been something."

At that moment the son manque entered the room. The son manque was eight feet tall and wore a scrape woven out of two hundred transistor radios, all turned on and tuned to different stations. Just by looking at him you could hear Portland and Nogales, Mexico.

"No grass in the house?"

Barbara got the grass which was kept in one of those little yellow and red metal canisters made for sending film back to Eastman Kodak.

Edgar tried to think of a way to badmouth this immense son leaning over him like a large blaring building. But he couldn't think of anything. Thinking of anything was beyond him. I sympathize. I myself have these problems. Endings are elusive, middles are nowhere to be found, but worst of all is to begin, to begin, to begin.

It was kind of the Department to think up the Police Band. The original impulse, I believe, was creative and humanitarian. A better way of doing things. Unpleasant, bloody things required by the line of duty. Even if it didn't work out.

The Commissioner (the old Commissioner, not the one they have now) brought us up the river from Detroit. Where our members had been, typically, working the Sho Bar two nights a week. Sometimes the Glass Crutch. Friday and Saturday. And the rest of the time wandering the streets disguised as postal employees. Bitten by dogs and burdened with third-class mail.

What are our duties? we asked at the interview. Your duties are to wail, the Commissioner said. That only. We admired our new dark-blue uniforms as we came up the river in canoes like Indians. We plan to use you in certain situations, certain tense situations, to alleviate tensions, the Commissioner said. I can visualize great success with this new method. And would you play "Entropy." He was pale, with a bad liver.

We are subtle, the Commissioner said, never forget that. Subtlety is what has previously been lacking in our line. Some of the old ones, the Commissioner said, all they know is the club. He took a little pill from a little box and swallowed it with his Scotch.

When we got to town we looked at those Steve Canyon recruiting posters and wondered if we resembled them. Henry Wang, the bass man, looks like a Chinese Steve Canyon, right? The other cops were friendly in a suspicious way. They liked to hear us wail, however.

The Police Band is a very sensitive highly trained and ruggedly anti-Communist unit whose efficacy will be demonstrated in due time, the Commissioner said to the Mayor (the old Mayor). The Mayor took a little pill from a little box and said, We'll see. He could tell we were musicians because we were holding our instruments, right? Emptying spit valves, giving the horn that little shake. Or coming in at letter E with some sly emotion stolen from another life.

The old Commissioner's idea was essentially that if there was a disturbance on the city's streets -- some ethnic group cutting up some other ethnic group on a warm August evening -- the Police Band would be sent in. The handsome dark-green band bus arriving with sirens singing, red lights whirling. Hard-pressed men on the beat in their white hats raising a grateful cheer. We stream out of the vehicle holding our instruments at high port. A skirmish line fronting the angry crowd. And play "Perdido." The crowd washed with new and true emotion. Startled, they listen. Our emotion stronger than their emotion. A triumph of art over good sense.

That was the idea. The old Commissioner's musical ideas were not very interesting, because after all he was a cop, right? But his police ideas were interesting.

We had drills. Poured out of that mother-loving bus onto

vacant lots holding our instruments at high port like John Wayne. Felt we were heroes already. Playing "Perdido," "Stumblin'," "Gin Song," "Peebles." Laving the terrain with emotion stolen from old busted-up loves, broken marriages, the needle, economic deprivation. A few old ladies leaning out of high windows. Our emotion washing rusty Rheingold cans and parts of old doors.

This city is too much! We'd be walking down the street talking about our techniques and we'd see out of our eyes a woman standing in the gutter screaming to herself about what we could not imagine. A drunk trying to strangle a dog somebody'd left leashed to a parking meter. The drunk and the dog screaming at each other. This city is too much!

We had drills and drills. It is true that the best musicians come from Detroit but there is something here that you have to get in your playing and that is simply the scream. We got that. The Commissioner, a sixty-three-year-old hippie with no doubt many graft qualities and unpleasant qualities, nevertheless understood that. When we'd play "ugly," he understood that. He understood the rising expectations of the world's peoples also. That our black members didn't feel like toting junk mail around Detroit forever until the ends of their lives. For some strange reason.

He said one of our functions would be to be sent out to play in places where people were trembling with fear inside their houses, right? To inspire them in difficult times. This was the plan. We set up in the street. Henry Wang grabs hold of his instrument. He has a four-bar lead-in all by himself. Then the whole group. The iron shutters raised a few inches. Shorty Alanio holding his horn at his characteristic angle (sideways). The reeds dropping lacy little fill-ins behind him. We're cooking. The crowd roars.

The Police Band was an idea of a very romantic kind. The Police Band was an idea that didn't work. When they retired the old Commissioner (our Commissioner), who it turned out had a little drug problem of his own, they didn't let us even drill

anymore. We have never been used. His idea was a romantic idea, they said (right?), which was not adequate to the rage currently around in the world. Rage must be met with rage, they said. (Not in so many words.) We sit around the precinct houses, under the filthy lights, talking about our techniques. But I thought it might be good if you knew that the Department still has us. We have a good group. We still have emotion to be used. We're still here.

Edward looked at his red beard in the tableknife. Then Edward and Pia went to Sweden, to the farm. In the mailbox Pia found a check for Willie from the government of Sweden. It was for twenty-three hundred crowns and had a rained-on look. Pia put the check in the pocket of her brown coat. Pia was pregnant. In London she had been sick every day. In London Pia and Edward had seen the Marat/Sade at the Aldwych Theatre. Edward bought a bottle of white stuff for Pia in London. It was supposed to make her stop vomiting. Edward walked out to the wood barn and broke up wood for the fire. Snow in patches lay on the ground still. Pia wrapped cabbage leaves around chopped meat. She was still wearing her brown coat. Willie's check was still in the pocket. It was still Sunday.

"What are you thinking about?" Edward asked Pia and she said she was thinking about Willie's hand. Willie had hurt his hand in a machine in a factory in Markaryd. The check was for compensation.

Edward turned away from the window. Edward received a

cable from his wife in Maine. "Many happy birthdays," the cable said. He was thirty-four. His father was in the hospital. His mother was in the hospital. Pia wore white plastic boots with her brown coat. When Edward inhaled sharply -- a sharp intake of breath -- they could hear a peculiar noise in his chest. Edward inhaled sharply. Pia heard the noise. She looked up. "When will you go to the doctor?" "I have to get something to read," Edward said. "Something in English." They walked to Markaryd. Pia wore a white plastic hat. At the train station they bought a Life magazine with a gold-painted girl on the cover. "Shall we eat something?" Edward asked. Pia said no. They bought a crowbar for the farm. Pia was sick on the way back. She vomited into a ditch.

Pia and Edward walked the streets of Amsterdam. They were hungry. Edward wanted to go to bed with Pia but she didn't feel like it. "There's something wrong," he said. "The wood isn't catching." "It's too wet," she said, "perhaps." "I know it's too wet," Edward said. He went out to the wood barn and broke up more wood. He wore a leather glove on his right hand. Pia told Edward that she had been raped once, when she was twenty-two, in the Botanical Gardens. "The man that raped me has a shop by the Round Tower. Still." Edward walked out of the room. Pia looked after him placidly. Edward reentered the room. "How would you like to have some Southern fried chicken?" he asked. "It's the most marvellous-tasting thing in the world. Tomorrow I'll make some. Don't say 'rape.' In English it's 'rape.' What did you do about it?" "Nothing," Pia said. Pia wore green rings, dresses with green sleeves, a green velvet skirt.

Edward put flour in a paper bag and then the pieces of chicken, which had been dipped in milk. Then he shook the paper bag violently. He stood behind Pia and tickled her. Then he hugged her tightly. But she didn't want to go to bed. Edward decided that he would never go to bed with Pia again. The telephone rang. It

was for Fru Schmidt. Edward explained that Fru Schmidt was in Rome, that she would return in three months, that he, Edward, was renting the flat from Fru Schmidt, that he would be happy to make a note of the caller's name, and that he would be delighted to call this note to the attention of Fru Schmidt when she returned, from Rome, in three months. Pia vomited. Pia lay on the bed sleeping. Pia wore a red dress, green rings on her fingers.

Then Edward and Pia went to the cinema to see an Eddie Constantine picture. The film was very funny. Eddie Constantine broke up a great deal of furniture chasing international bad guys. Edward read two books he had already read. He didn't remember that he had read them until he reached the last page of each. Then he read four paperback mysteries by Ross Macdonald. They were excellent. He felt slightly sick. Pia walked about with her hands clasped together in front of her chest, her shoulders bent. "Are you cold?" Edward asked. "What are you thinking about?" he asked her, and she said she was thinking about Amboise, where she had contrived to get locked in a chateau after visiting hours. She was also thinking, she said, about the green-and-gold wooden horses they had seen in Amsterdam. "I would like enormously to have one for this flat," she said. "Even though the flat is not ours." Edward asked Pia if she felt like making love now. Pia said no.

It was Sunday. Edward went to the bakery and bought bread. Then he bought milk. Then he bought cheese and the Sunday newspaper, which he couldn't read. Pia was asleep. Edward made coffee for himself and looked at the pictures in the newspaper. Pia woke up and groped her way to the bathroom. She vomited. Edward bought Pia a white dress. Pia made herself a necklace of white glass and red wood beads. Edward worried about his drinking. Would there be enough gin? Enough ice? He went out to the kitchen and looked at the bottle of Gordon's gin. Two inches of gin.



Edward and Pia went to Berlin on the train. Pia's father thrust flowers through the train window. The flowers were wrapped in green paper. Edward and Pia climbed into the Mercedes-Benz taxi. "Take us to the Opera if you will, please," Edward said to the German taxi-driver in English. "Ich verstehe nicht," the driver said. Edward looked at Pia's belly. It was getting larger, all right. Edward paid the driver. Pia wondered if the Germans were as loud in Germany as they were abroad. Edward and Pia listened for loudness.

Edward received a letter from London, from Bedford Square Office Equipment, Ltd. "We have now completed fitting new parts and adjusting the Olivetti portable that was unfortunately dropped by you. The sum total of parts and labour comes to £7.10.0 and I am adding £1.00.0 hire charges, which leaves a balance of £1.10.0 from your initial deposit of £10. Yours." Yours. Yours. Edward received a letter from Rome, from Fru Schmidt, the owner of the flat in Frederiksberg Alle. "Here are many Americans who have more opportunities to wear their mink capes than they like, I guess! I wish I had one, just one of rabbit or cat, it is said to be just as warm! but I left all my mink clothes behind me in Denmark! We spend most of our time in those horrible subways -- metros which are like the rear entrance to Hell and what can you see of a city from there? Well you are from New York and so are used to it but I was born as a human being and not as a --" Here there was a sketch of a rat, in plan. Kurt poured a fresh cup of coffee for Edward. There were three people Pia and Edward did not know in the room, two men and a woman. Everyone watched Kurt pouring a cup of coffee for Edward. Edward explained the American position in South Vietnam. The others looked dubious. Edward and Pia discussed leaving each other.

Pia slept on the couch. She had pulled the red-and-brown blanket up over her feet. Edward looked in the window of the

used-radio store. It was full of used radios. Edward and Pia drank more sherry. "What are you thinking about?" he asked her and she said she was wondering if they should separate. "You don't seem happy," she said. "You don't seem happy either," he said. Edward tore the cover off a book. The book cover showed a dog's head surrounded by flowers. The dog wore a black domino. Edward went to the well for water. He lifted the heavy wooden well cover. He was wearing a glove on his right hand. He carried two buckets of water to the kitchen. Then he went to the back of the farmhouse and built a large wooden veranda, roofed, thirty metres by nine metres. Fortunately there was a great deal of new lumber stacked in the barn. In the Frederiksberg Alle apartment in Copenhagen he stared at the brass mail slot in the door. Sometimes red-and-blue airmail envelopes came through the slot.

Edward put his hands on Pia's breasts. The nipples were the largest he had ever seen. Then he counted his money. He had two hundred and forty crowns. He would have to get some more money from somewhere. Maurice came in. "My house is three times the size of this one," Maurice said. Maurice was Dutch. Pia and Edward went to Maurice's house with Maurice. Maurice's wife Randy made coffee. Maurice's son Pieter cried in his wooden box. Maurice's cats walked around. There was an open fire in Maurice's kitchen. There were forty empty beer bottles in a corner. Randy said she was a witch. She pulled a long dark hair from her head. Randy said she could tell if the baby was to be a boy or a girl. She slipped a gold ring from her finger and, suspending the ring on the hair, dangled it over Pia's belly. "It has to be real gold," Randy said, referring to the ring. Randy was rather pretty.

Pia and Edward and Ole and Anita sat on a log in France drinking white Algerian wine. It was barely drinkable. Everyone wiped the mouth of the bottle as it was passed from hand to hand. Edward wanted to sleep with Pia. "Yes," Pia said. They left the others. Edward looked at his red beard in the shiny bottom

part of the kerosene lantern. Pia thought about her first trip to the Soviet Union. Edward sat at the bar in Le Ectomorph listening to the music. Pia thought about her first trip to the Soviet Union. There had been a great deal of singing. Edward listened to the music. Don Cherry was playing trumpet. Steve Lacey was playing soprano sax. Kenny Drew was playing piano. The drummer and bassist were Scandinavians. Pia remembered a Russian boy she had known. Edward talked to a Swede. "You want to know who killed Kennedy?" the Swede said. "You killed Kennedy." "No," Edward said. "I did not." Edward went back to Frederiksberg Alle. Pia was sleeping. She was naked. Edward lifted the blankets and looked at Pia sleeping. Pia moved in the bed and grabbed at the blankets. Edward went into the other room and tried to find something to read. Edward had peculiar-looking hair. Parts of it were too short and parts of it were too long. Edward and Pia telephoned friends in another city. "Come stay with us," Edward and Pia said. "Please!"

Edward regarded Pia. Pia felt sick: "Why doesn't he leave me alone sometimes?" Edward told Pia about Harry. Once he had gotten Harry out of jail. "Harry was drunk. A cop told him to sit down. Harry stood up. Blam! Five stitches." "What are stitches?" Edward looked it up in the Dansk-Engelsk Ordbog. Edward had several maneuvers that were designed to have an effect on Pia. One of them was washing the dishes. At other times he was sour for several hours. In Leningrad they visited Pia's former lover, Paul. The streets in Leningrad are extremely wide. Paul called his friend Igor, who played the guitar. Paul called Igor on the telephone. Pia and Paul were happy to see each other again. Paul talked to Edward about South Vietnam. There was tea. Edward thought that he, Edward, was probably being foolish. But how could he tell? Edward washed more dishes. Igor's fingers moved quickly among the frets. Edward had drunk too much tea. Edward had drunk too much brandy. Edward was in bed with

Pia. "You look beautiful," Edward said to Pia. Pia thought: I feel sick.

In Copenhagen Edward bought The Penguin English Dictionary. Sixteen crowns. Pia told a story about one of the princesses. "She is an archeologist, you know? Her picture comes in the newspaper standing over a great hole with her end sticking up in the air." Pia's little brother wore a black turtleneck sweater and sang "We Shall Overcome." He played the guitar. Kurt played the guitar. Kirsten played the guitar. Anita and Ole played the guitar. Deborah played the flute. Edward read Time and Newsweek. On Tuesday Edward read Newsweek, and on Wednesday, Time. Pia bought a book about babies. Then she painted her nails silver. Pia's nails were very long. Organ music played by Finn Videro was heard on the radio. Edward suggested that Pia go back to the university. He suggested that Pia study French, Russian, English, guitar, flute, and cooking. Pia's cooking was rotten. Suddenly she wished she was with some other man and not with Edward. Edward was listening to the peculiar noise inside his chest. Pia looked at Edward. She looked at his red beard, his immense spectacles. I don't like him, she thought. That red beard, those immense spectacles. SAAB jets roared overhead. Edward turned off the radio.

Pia turned on the radio. Edward made himself a dry vermouth on the rocks with two onions. It was a way of not drinking. Edward felt sick. He had been reading Time and Newsweek. It was Thursday. Pia said to Edward that he was the only person she had ever loved for this long. "How long is it?" Edward asked. It was seven months. Edward cashed a check at American Express. The girl gave him green-and-blue Scandinavian money. Edward was pleased. Little moans of pleasure. He cashed another check at Cook's. More money. Edward sold Pia's farm for eighteen thousand crowns. Much more money. Pia was pleased. Edward sold Pia's piano for three thousand crowns. General

rejoicing. Klaus opened the door. Edward showed him the money. Pia made a chocolate cake with little red-and-white flags on the top. Pia lay in bed. She felt sick. They plugged in an electric heater. The lights went out. Herr Kepper knocked on the door. "Is here an electric heater?" Edward showed him the money. Pia hid the electric heater.

Edward watched the brass slot on the door. Pia read to Edward from the newspaper. She read a story about four Swedes sent to prison for rapture. Edward asked Pia if she wanted to make love. "No," she said. Edward said something funny. Pia tried to laugh. She was holding a piece of cake with a red-and-white flag on top. Edward bought a flashlight. Pia laughed. Pia still didn't want to go to bed with Edward. It was becoming annoying. He owed the government back home a thousand dollars. Edward laughed and laughed. "I owe the government a thousand dollars," Edward said to Pia, "did you know that?" Edward laughed, Pia laughed. They had another glass of wine. Pia was pregnant. They laughed and laughed. Edward turned off the radio. The lights went out. Herr Kepper knocked on the door. "The lights went out," he said in Danish. Pia and Edward laughed. "What are you thinking about?" Edward asked Pia and she said she couldn't tell him just then because she was laughing.

## A Few Moments of Sleeping and Waking

Edward woke up. Pia was already awake.

"What did you dream?"

"You were my brother," Pia said. "We were making a film. You were the hero. It was a costume film. You had a cape and a sword. You were jumping about, jumping on tables. But in the second half of the film you had lost all your weight. You were thin. The film was ruined. The parts didn't match."

"I was your brother?"

Scarlatti from the radio. It was Sunday. Pete sat at the breakfast table. Pete was a doctor on an American nuclear submarine, a psychiatrist. He had just come off patrol, fifty-eight days under the water. Pia gave Pete scrambled eggs with mushrooms, wienerbrod, salami with red wine in it, bacon. Pete interpreted Pia's dream.

"Edward was your brother?"

"Yes."

"And your real brother is going to Italy, you said."

"Yes."

"It may be something as simple as a desire to travel."

Edward and Pia and Pete went for a boat ride, a tour of the Copenhagen harbor. The boat held one hundred and twenty tourists. They sat, four tourists abreast, on either side of the aisle. A guide spoke into a microphone in Danish, French, German, and English, telling the tourists what was in the harbor.

"I interpreted that dream very sketchily," Pete said to Edward.

"Yes."

"I could have done a lot more with it."

"Don't."

"This is the Danish submarine fleet," the guide said into the microphone. Edward and Pia and Pete regarded the four black submarines. There had been a flick every night on Pete's submarine. Pete discussed the fifty-eight flicks he had seen. Pete sat on Edward's couch discussing "The Sound of Music." Edward made drinks. Rose's Lime Juice fell into the Gimlet glasses. Then Edward and Pia took Pete to the airport. Pete flew away. Edward bought *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Pia dreamed that she had journeyed to a great house, a castle, to sing. She had found herself a bed in a room overlooking elaborate gardens. Then another girl appeared, a childhood friend. The new girl demanded Pia's bed. Pia refused. The other girl insisted. Pia refused. The other girl began to sing. She sang horribly. Pia asked her to stop. Other singers appeared, demanding that Pia surrender the bed. Pia refused. People stood about the bed, shouting and singing.

Edward smoked a cigar. "Why didn't you just give her the bed?"

"My honor would be hurt," Pia said. "You know, that girl is not like that. Really she is very quiet and not asserting -- asserting? -- asserting herself. My mother said I should be more like her."

"The dream was saying that your mother was wrong about

this girl?"

"Perhaps."

"What else?"

"I can't remember."

"Did you sing?"

"I can't remember," Pia said.

Pia's brother Soren rang the doorbell. He was carrying a pair of trousers. Pia sewed up a split in the seat. Edward made instant coffee. Pia explained *blufaerdighedskraenkelse*. "If you walk with your trousers open," she said. Soren gave Edward and Pia "The Joan Baez Songbook." "It is a very good one," he said in English. The doorbell rang. It was Pia's father. He was carrying a pair of shoes Pia had left at the farm. Edward made more coffee. Pia sat on the floor cutting a dress out of blue, red, and green cloth. Ole arrived. He was carrying his guitar. He began to play something from "The Joan Baez Songbook." Edward regarded Ole's Mowgli hair. We be of one blood, thee and I. Edward read *The Interpretation of Dreams*. "In cases where not my ego but only a strange person appears in the dream-content, I may safely assume that by means of identification my ego is concealed behind that person. I am permitted to supplement my ego."

Edward sat at a sidewalk cafe drinking a beer. He was wearing his brown suede shoes, his black dungarees, his black-and-white checked shirt, his red beard, his immense spectacles. Edward regarded his hands. His hands seemed old. "I am thirty-three." Tiny girls walked past the sidewalk cafe wearing skintight black pants. Then large girls in skintight white pants.

Edward and Pia walked along Frederiksberg Allé, under the queer box-cut trees. "Here I was knocked off my bicycle when I was seven," Pia said. "By a car. In a snowstorm."

Edward regarded the famous intersection. "Were you hurt?"

"My bicycle was demolished utterly."

Edward read *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Pia bent over the

sewing machine, sewing blue, red, and green cloth.

"Freud turned his friend R. into a disreputable uncle, in a dream."

"Why?"

"He wanted to be an assistant professor. He was bucking for assistant professor."

"So why was it not allowed?"

"They didn't know he was Freud. They hadn't seen the movie."

"You're joking."

"I'm trying."

Edward and Pia talked about dreams. Pia said she had been dreaming about unhappy love affairs. In these dreams, she said, she was very unhappy. Then she woke, relieved.

"How long?"

"For about two months, I think. But then I wake up and I'm happy. That it is not so."

"Why are they unhappy love affairs?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think it means you want new love affairs?"

"Why should I want unhappy love affairs?"

"Maybe you want to have love affairs but feel guilty about wanting to have love affairs, and so they become unhappy love affairs."

"That's subtle," Pia said. "You're insecure."

"Ho!" Edward said.

"But why then am I happy when I wake up?"

"Because you don't have to feel guilty anymore," Edward said glibly.

"Ho!" Pia said.

Edward resisted *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He read eight novels by Anthony Powell. Pia walked down the street in Edward's blue sweater. She looked at herself in a shop window. Her hair was rotten. Pia went into the bathroom and played with

her hair for one hour. Then she brushed her teeth for a bit. Her hair was still rotten. Pia sat down and began to cry. She cried for a quarter hour, without making any noise. Everything was rotten.

Edward bought *Madam Cherokee's Dream Book*. Dreams in alphabetical order. If you dream of black cloth, there will be a death in the family. If you dream of scissors, a birth. Edward and Pia saw three films by Jean-Luc Godard. The landlord came and asked Edward to pay Danish income tax. "But I don't make any money in Denmark," Edward said. Everything was rotten.

Pia came home from the hairdresser with black varnish around her eyes.

"How do you like it?"

"I hate it."

Pia was chopping up an enormous cabbage, a cabbage big as a basketball. The cabbage was of an extraordinary size. It was a big cabbage. "That's a big cabbage," Edward said.

"Big," Pia said.

They regarded the enormous cabbage God had placed in the world for supper.

"Is there vinegar?" Edward asked. "I like. . . vinegar. . . with my. . ." Edward read a magazine for men full of colored photographs of naked girls living normal lives. Edward read the *New Statesman*, with its letters to the editor. Pia appeared in her new blue, red, and green dress. She looked wonderful.

"You look wonderful."

"Tak."

"Tables are women," Edward said. "You remember you said I was jumping on tables, in your dream. Freud says that tables are figures for women. You're insecure."

"La vache!" Pia said.

Pia reported a new dream. "I came home to a small town where I was born. First, I ran around as a tourist with my camera. Then a boy who was selling something -- from one of those

little wagons? -- asked me to take his picture. But I couldn't find him in the photo apparat. In the view glass. Always other people got in the way. Everyone in this town was divorced. Everybody I knew. Then I went to a ladies' club, a place where the women asked the men to dance. But there was only one man there. His picture was on an advertisement outside. He was the gigolo. Gigolo? Is that right? Then I called up people I knew, on the telephone. But they were all divorced. Everybody was divorced. My mother and father were divorced. Helle and Jens were divorced. Everybody. Everybody was floating about in a strange way."

Edward groaned. A palpable groan. "What else?"

"I can't remember."

"Nothing else?"

"When I was on my way to the ladies' club, the boy I had tried to take a picture of came up and took my arm. I was surprised but I said to myself something like, It's necessary to have friends here."

"What else?"

"I can't remember."

"Did you sleep with him?"

"I don't remember."

"What did the ladies' club remind you of?"

"It was in a cellar."

"Did it remind you of anything?"

"It was rather like a place at the university. Where we used to dance."

"What is connected with that place in your mind?"

"Once a boy came through a window to a party."

"Why did he come through the window?"

"So he didn't pay."

"Who was he?"

"Someone."

"Did you dance with him?"

"Yes."

"Did you sleep with him?"

"Yes."

"Very often?"

"Twice."

Edward and Pia went to Malmo on the flying boat. The hydro-foil leaped into the air. The feeling was that of a plane laboring down an interminable runway.

"I dreamed of a roof," Pia said. "Where corn was kept. Where it was stored."

"What does that --" Edward began.

"Also I dreamed of rugs. I was beating a rug," she went on.

"And I dreamed about horses, I was riding."

"Don't," Edward said.

Pia silently rehearsed three additional dreams. Edward regarded the green leaves of Malmo. Edward and Pia moved through the rug department of a department store. Surrounded by exciting rugs: Rya rugs, Polish rugs, rag rugs, straw rugs, area rugs, wall-to-wall rugs, rug remnants. Edward was thinking about one that cost five hundred crowns, in seven shades of red, about the size of an opened-up Herald Tribune, Paris edition.

"It is too good for the floor, clearly," Pia said. "It is to be hung on the wall."

Edward had four hundred dollars in his pocket. It was supposed to last him two months. The hideously smiling rug salesman pressed closer. They burst into the street. Just in time. "God knows they're beautiful, however," Edward said.

"What did you dream last night?" Edward asked. "What did you dream? What?"

"I can't remember."

Edward decided that he worried too much about the dark side of Pia. Pia regarded as a moon. Edward lay in bed trying to remember a dream. He could not remember. It was eight o'clock.

Edward climbed out of bed to see if there was mail on the floor, if mail had fallen through the door. No. Pia awoke.

“I dreamed of beans.”

Edward looked at her. Madam Cherokee’s Dream Book flew into his hand.

“To dream of beans is, in all cases, very unfortunate. Eating them means sickness, preparing them means that the married state will be a very difficult one for you. To dream of beets is on the other hand a happy omen.”

Edward and Pia argued about “Mrs. Miniver.” It was not written by J. B. Priestley, Edward said. “I remember it very well,” Pia insisted. “Errol Flynn was her husband, he was standing there with his straps, his straps” -- Pia made a holding-up-trousers gesture -- “hanging, and she said that she loved Walter Pidgeon.”

“Errol Flynn was not even in the picture. You think J. B. Priestley wrote everything, don’t you? Everything in English.”

“I don’t.”

“Errol Flynn was not even in the picture.” Edward was drunk. He was shouting. “Errol Flynn was not even. . . in. . . the goddam picture!”

Pia was not quite asleep. She was standing on a street corner. Women regarded her out of the corners of their eyes. She was holding a string bag containing strawberries, beer, razor blades, turnips. An old lady rode up on a bicycle and stopped for the traffic light. The old lady straddled her bicycle, seized Pia’s string bag, and threw it into the gutter. Then she pedalled away, with the changing light. People crowded around. Someone picked up the string bag. Pia shook her head. “No,” she said. “She just. . . I have never seen her before.” Someone asked Pia if she wanted him to call a policeman. “What for?” Pia said. Her father was standing there smiling. Pia thought, These things have no significance really. Pia thought, If this is to be my dream for tonight, then I don’t want it.

I went to the bank to get my money for the day. And they had painted it yellow. Under cover of night, I shrewdly supposed. With white plaster letters saying CREDIT DEPARTMENT. And a row of new vice-presidents. But I have resources of my own, I said. Sulphur deposits in Texas and a great humming factory off the coast of Kansas. Where we make little things.

Thinking what about artichokes for lunch? Pleased to be in this yellow bank at 11:30 in the morning. A black man cashing his check in a Vassar College sweatshirt. A blue policeman with a St. Christopher pinned to his gunbelt. Thinking I need a little leaf to rest my artichokes upon. The lady stretching my money to make sure none of hers stuck to it.

Fourteenth Street gay with Judy Bond Dresses Are On Strike. When I leaned out of your high window in my shorts, did you really think I had hurtling to destruction in mind? I was imagining a loudspeaker-and-leaflet unit that would give me your undivided attention.

When I leaned out of your high window in my shorts, did you think why me?

Into his bank I thought I saw my friend Kenneth go. To get his money for the day. Loitering outside in my painted shoes. Considering my prospects. A question of buying new underwear or going to the laundromat. And when I put a nickel in the soap machine it barks.

When I leaned out of your high window in my shorts, were you nervous because you had just met me? I said: Your eyes have not been surpassed.

The artichokes in their glass jar from the artichoke heart of the world, Castroville, Calif. I asked the man for a leaf. Just one, I said. We don't sell them in ones, he said. Can we negotiate, I asked. Breathing his disgust he tucked a green leaf into my yellow vest with his brown hands.

When I asked you why you didn't marry Harry you said it was because he didn't like you. Then I told you how I cheated the Thai lieutenant who was my best friend then.

Posing with my leaf against a plastic paper plate. Hoping cordially that my friend Victor's making money in his building. Then the artichokes one by one. Yes, you said, this is the part they call Turtle Bay.

Coffee wondering what my end would be. Thinking of my friend Roger killed in the crash of a Link Trainer at Randolph Field in '43. Or was it breakbone fever at Walter Reed.

Then out into the street again and uptown for my fencing lesson. Stopping on the way to give the underwear man a ten. Because he looked about to bark.

When I reached to touch your breast you said you had a cold. I believed you. I made more popcorn.

Thinking of my friend Max who looks like white bread. A brisk bout with my head in a wire cage. The Slash Waltz from "The Mark of Zorro." And in the shower a ten for Max, because

his were the best two out of three. He put it in his lacy shoe. With his watch and his application to the Colorado School of Mines.

In the shower I refrained from speaking of you to anyone.

The store where I buy news buttoned up tight. Because the owners are in the mountains. Where I would surely be had I not decided to make us miserable.

I said: I seem to have lost all my manuscripts, in which my theory is proved not once but again and again and again, and now when people who don't believe a vertical monorail to Venus is possible shout at me, I have nothing to say. You peered into my gloom.

My friend Herman's house. Where I tickle the bell. It is me. Invited to put a vacuum cleaner together. The parts on the floor in alphabetical order. Herman away, making money. I hug his wife Agnes. A beautiful girl. And when one hugs her tightly, her eyes fill.

When I asked you if you had a private income, you said something intelligent but I forget what. The skin scaling off my back from the week at the beach. Where I lay without knowing you.

Discussing the real estate game, Agnes and I. Into this game I may someday go, I said. Building cheap and renting dear. With a doorman to front for me. Tons of money in it, I said.

When my falling event was postponed, were you disappointed? Did you experience a disillusionment event?

Hunted for a Post. To lean upon in the black hours ahead. And composed a brochure to lure folk into my new building. Titled "The Human Heart In Conflict With Itself." Promising 24-hour incineration. And other features.

Dancing on my parquet floor in my parquet shorts. To Mahler.

After you sent me home you came down in your elevator to be kissed. You knew I would be sitting on the steps.



Shotwell keeps the jacks and the rubber ball in his attache case and will not allow me to play with them. He plays with them, alone, sitting on the floor near the console hour after hour, chanting “onesies, twosies, threesies, foursies” in a precise, well-modulated voice, not so loud as to be annoying, not so soft as to allow me to forget. I point out to Shotwell that two can derive more enjoyment from playing jacks than one, but he is not interested. I have asked repeatedly to be allowed to play by myself, but he simply shakes his head. “Why?” I ask. “They’re mine,” he says. And when he has finished, when he has sated himself, back they go into the attache case.

It is unfair but there is nothing I can do about it. I am aching to get my hands on them.

Shotwell and I watch the console. Shotwell and I live under the ground and watch the console. If certain events take place upon the console, we are to insert our keys in the appropriate locks and turn our keys. Shotwell has a key and I have a key. If

we turn our keys simultaneously the bird flies, certain switches are activated and the bird flies. But the bird never flies. In one hundred thirty-three days the bird has not flown. Meanwhile Shotwell and I watch each other. We each wear a .45 and if Shotwell behaves strangely I am supposed to shoot him. If I behave strangely Shotwell is supposed to shoot me. We watch the console and think about shooting each other and think about the bird. Shotwell's behavior with the jacks is strange. Is it strange? I do not know. Perhaps he is merely a selfish bastard, perhaps his character is flawed, perhaps his childhood was twisted. I do not know.

Each of us wears a .45 and each of us is supposed to shoot the other if the other is behaving strangely. How strangely is strangely? I do not know. In addition to the .45 I have a .38 which Shotwell does not know about concealed in my attache case, and Shotwell has a .25 calibre Beretta which I do not know about strapped to his right calf. Sometimes instead of watching the console I pointedly watch Shotwell's .45, but this is simply a ruse, simply a maneuver, in reality I am watching his hand when it dangles in the vicinity of his right calf. If he decides I am behaving strangely he will shoot me not with the .45 but with the Beretta. Similarly Shotwell pretends to watch my .45 but he is really watching my hand resting idly atop my attache case, my hand resting idly atop my attache case, my hand. My hand resting idly atop my attache case.

In the beginning I took care to behave normally. So did Shotwell. Our behavior was painfully normal. Norms of politeness, consideration, speech, and personal habits were scrupulously observed. But then it became apparent that an error had been made, that out relief was not going to arrive. Owing to an oversight. Owing to an oversight we have been here for one hundred thirty-three days. When it became clear that an error had been made, that we were not to be relieved, the norms were

relaxed. Definitions of normality were redrawn in the agreement of January 1, called by us, The Agreement. Uniform regulations were relaxed, and mealtimes are no longer rigorously scheduled. We eat when we are hungry and sleep when we are tired. Considerations of rank and precedence were temporarily put aside, a handsome concession on the part of Shotwell, who is a captain, whereas I am only a first lieutenant. One of us watches the console at all times rather than two of us watching the console at all times, except when we are both on our feet. One of us watches the console at all times and if the bird flies then that one wakes the other and we turn our keys in the locks simultaneously and the bird flies. Our system involves a delay of perhaps twelve seconds but I do not care because I am not well, and Shotwell does not care because he is not himself. After the agreement was signed Shotwell produced the jacks and the rubber ball from his attache case, and I began to write a series of descriptions of forms occurring in nature, such as a shell, a leaf, a stone, an animal. On the walls.

Shotwell plays jacks and I write descriptions of natural forms on the walls.

Shotwell is enrolled in a USAFI course which leads to a master's degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin (although we are not in Wisconsin, we are in Utah, Montana or Idaho). When we went down it was in either Utah, Montana or Idaho, I don't remember. We have been here for one hundred thirty-three days owing to an oversight. The pale green reinforced concrete walls sweat and the air conditioning zips on and off erratically and Shotwell reads Introduction to Marketing by Lassiter and Munk, making notes with a blue ballpoint pen. Shotwell is not himself but I do not know it, he presents a calm aspect and reads Introduction to Marketing and makes his exemplary notes with a blue ballpoint pen, meanwhile controlling the .38 in my attache case with one-third of his attention. I am not

well.

We have been here one hundred thirty-three days owing to an oversight. Although now we are not sure what is oversight, what is plan. Perhaps the plan is for us to stay here permanently, or if not permanently at least for a year, for three hundred sixty-five days. Or if not for a year for some number of days known to them and not known to us, such as two hundred days. Or perhaps they are observing our behavior in some way, sensors of some kind, perhaps our behavior determines the number of days. It may be that they are pleased with us, with our behavior, not in every detail but in sum. Perhaps the whole thing is very successful, perhaps the whole thing is an experiment and the experiment is very successful. I do not know. But I suspect that the only way they can persuade sun-loving creatures into their pale green sweating reinforced concrete rooms under the ground is to say that the system is twelve hours on, twelve hours off. And then lock us below for some number of days known to them and not known to us. We eat well although the frozen enchiladas are damp when defrosted and the frozen devil's food cake is sour and untasty. We sleep uneasily and acrimoniously. I hear Shotwell shouting in his sleep, objecting, denouncing, cursing sometimes, weeping sometimes, in his sleep. When Shotwell sleeps I try to pick the lock on his attache case, so as to get at the jacks. Thus far I have been unsuccessful. Nor has Shotwell been successful in picking the locks on my attache case so as to get at the .38. I have seen the marks on the shiny surface. I laughed, in the latrine, pale green walls sweating and the air conditioning whispering, in the latrine.

I write descriptions of natural forms on the walls, scratching them on the tile surface with a diamond. The diamond is a two and one-half carat solitaire I had in my attache case when we went down. It was for Lucy. The south wall of the room containing the console is already covered. I have described a shell, a

leaf, a stone, animals, a baseball bat. I am aware that the baseball bat is not a natural form. Yet I described it. "The baseball bat," I said, "is typically made of wood. It is typically one meter in length or a little longer, fat at one end, tapering to afford a comfortable grip at the other. The end with the handhold typically offers a slight rim, or lip, at the nether extremity, to prevent slippage." My description of the baseball bat ran to 4500 words, all scratched with a diamond on the south wall. Does Shotwell read what I have written? I do not know. I am aware that Shotwell regards my writing-behavior as a little strange. Yet it is no stranger than his jacks-behavior, or the day he appeared in black bathing trunks with the .25 calibre Beretta strapped to his right calf and stood over the console, trying to span with his two arms outstretched the distance between the locks. He could not do it, I had already tried, standing over the console with my two arms outstretched, the distance is too great. I was moved to comment but did not comment, comment would have provoked counter-comment, comment would have led God knows where. They had in their infinite patience, in their infinite foresight, in their infinite wisdom already imagined a man standing over the console with his two arms outstretched, trying to span with his two arms outstretched the distance between the locks.

Shotwell is not himself. He has made certain overtures. The burden of his message is not clear. It has something to do with the keys, with the locks. Shotwell is a strange person. He appears to be less affected by our situation than I. He goes about his business stolidly, watching the console, studying Introduction to Marketing, bouncing his rubber ball on the floor in a steady, rhythmical, conscientious manner. He appears to be less affected by our situation than I am. He is stolid. He says nothing. But he has made certain overtures, certain overtures have been made. I am not sure that I understand them. They have something to do with the keys, with the locks. Shotwell has something in mind.

Stolidly he shucks the shiny silver paper from the frozen enchiladas, stolidly he stuffs them into the electric oven. But he has something in mind. But there must be a quid pro quo. I insist on a quid pro quo. I have something in mind.

I am not well. I do not know our target. They do not tell us for which city the bird is targeted. I do not know. That is planning. That is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to watch the console and when certain events take place upon the console, turn my key in the lock. Shotwell bounces the rubber ball on the floor in a steady, stolid, rhythmical manner. I am aching to get my hands on the ball, on the jacks. We have been here one hundred thirty-three days owing to an oversight. I write on the walls. Shotwell chants “onesies, two-sies, threesies, foursies” in a precise, well-modulated voice. Now he cups the jacks and the rubber ball in his hands and rattles them suggestively. I do not know for which city the bird is targeted. Shotwell is not himself.

Sometimes I cannot sleep. Sometimes Shotwell cannot sleep. Sometimes when Shotwell cradles me in his arms and rocks me to sleep, singing Brahms’ “Guten abend, gute Nacht,” or I cradle Shotwell in my arms and rock him to sleep, singing, I understand what it is Shotwell wishes me to do. At such moments we are very close. But only if he will give me the jacks. That is fair. There is something he wants me to do with my key, while he does something with his key. But only if he will give me my turn. That is fair. I am not well.

Alice

Twirling around on my piano stool my head begins to swim my head begins to swim twirling around on my piano stool twirling around on my piano stool a dizzy spell eventuates twirling around on my piano stool I begin to feel dizzy twirling around on my piano stool

I want to fornicate with Alice but my wife Regine would be insulted Alice’s husband Buck would be insulted my child Hans would be insulted my answering service would be insulted tingle of insult running through this calm loving healthy productive tightly-knit the hinder portion scalding-house good eating Curve B in addition to the usual baths and ablutions military police sumptuousness of the washhouse risking misstatements kept distances iris to iris queen of holes damp, hairy legs note of anger chanting and shouting konk sense of “mold” on the “muff” sense of “talk” on the “surface” konk2 all sorts of chemical girl who delivered the letter give it a bone plummy bare legs saturated in every belief and ignorance rational living private client bad

bosom uncertain workmen mutton-tugger obedience to the rules of the logical system Lord Muck hot tears harmonica rascal that's chaos can you produce chaos? Alice asked certainly I can produce chaos I said I produced chaos she regarded the chaos chaos is handsome and attractive she said and more durable than regret I said and more nourishing than regret she said

I want to fornicate with Alice but it is a doomed project fornicating with Alice there are obstacles impediments preclusions estoppels I will exhaust them for you what a gas see cruel deprivements SECTION SEVEN moral ambiguities SECTION NINETEEN Alice's thighs are like SECTION TWENTY-ONE

I am an OB I obstetricate ladies from predicaments holding the bucket I carry a device connected by radio to my answering service bleeps when I am wanted can't even go to the films now for fear of bleeping during filmic highpoints can I in conscience turn off while fornicating with Alice?

Alice is married to Buck I am married to Regine Buck is my friend Regine is my wife regret is battologized in SECTIONS SIX THROUGH TWELVE and the actual intercourse intrudes somewhere in SECTION FORTY-THREE

I maintain an air of serenity which is spurious I manage this by limping my limp artful creation not an abject limp (Quasimodo) but a proud limp (Byron) I move slowly solemnly through the world miming a stiff leg this enables me to endure the gaze of strangers the hatred of pediatricians

we discuss discuss and discuss important considerations swarm and dither

for example in what house can I fornicate with Alice? in my house with Hans pounding on the bedroom door in her house with Buck shedding his sheepskin coat in the kitchen in some temporary rented house what joy

can Alice fornicate without her Malachi record playing? will Buck miss the Malachi record which Alice will have taken to

the rented house? will Buck kneel before the rows and rows of records in his own house running a finger along the spines looking for the Malachi record? poignant poignant

can Buck the honest architect with his acres of projects his mobs of draughtsmen the alarm bell which goes off in his office whenever the government decides to renovate a few blocks of blight can Buck object if I decide to renovate Alice?

and what of the boil on my ass the right buttock can I lounge in the bed in the rented house in such a way that Alice will not see will not start away from in fear terror revulsion

and what of rugs should I rug the rented house and what of cups what of leaning on an elbow in the Hertz Rent-All bed having fornicated with Alice and desiring a cup of black and what of the soap powder dish towels such a cup implies and what of a decent respect for the opinions of mankind and what of the hammer throw

I was a heavy man with the hammer once should there be a spare hammer for spare moments?

Alice's thighs are like great golden varnished wooden oars I assume I haven't seen them

chaos is tasty AND USEFUL TOO

colored clothes paper handkerchiefs super cartoons bit of fresh the Pope's mule inmission do such poor work together in various Poujadist manifestations deep-toned blacks waivers play to the gas Zentral-bibliothek Zurich her bare ass with a Teddy bear blatty string kept in a state of suspended tension by a weight cut from the backs of alligators

you can do it too it's as easy as it looks

there is no game for that particular player white and violet over hedge and ditch clutching airbrush still single but wearing a ring the dry a better "feel" in use pretended to be doing it quite unconsciously fishes hammering long largish legs damp fine water dancer, strains of music, expenses of the flight Swiss

emotion transparent thin alkaline and very slippery fluid danger for white rats little country telephone booths brut insults brought by mouth famous incidents

in bed regarding Alice's stomach it will be a handsome one I'm sure but will it not also resemble some others?

or would it be possible in the rented house to dispense with a bed to have only a mattress on the floor with all the values that attach to that or perhaps only a pair of blankets or perhaps only the skin of some slow-moving animal such as the slug the armadillo or perhaps only a pile of read newspapers

wise Alice tells you things you hadn't heard before in the world in Paris she recognizes the Ritz from the Babar books oh yes that's where the elephants stay

or would it be possible to use other people's houses at hours when these houses were empty would that be erotic? could love be made in doorways under hedges under the sprinting chestnut tree? can Alice forego her Malachi record so that Buck kneeling before the rows of records in his empty deserted abandoned and pace-setting house fingering the galore of spines there would find the Malachi record with little peeps of gree peeps of gree good for Buck!

shit

Magritte

what is good about Alice is first she likes chaos what is good about Alice is second she is a friend of Tom

SECTION NINETEEN TOM plaster thrashing gumbo of explanations grease on the Tinguely new plays sentimental songs sudden torrential rains carbon projects evidence of eroticism conflict between zones skin, ambiguous movements baked on the blue table 3 mm. a stone had broken my windshield hurricane damage

impulsive behavior knees folded back lines on his tongue with a Magic Marker gape orange tips ligamenta lata old men buried upright delights of everyone's life uninteresting variations pygmy owl assumes the quadrupedal position in which the intestines sink forward measurement of kegs other sciences megapod nursemaid said very studied, hostile things she had long been saving up breakfast dream wonderful loftiness trunk red clover uterine spasms guided by reason black envelopes highly esteemed archers wet leg critical menials making gestures chocolate ice pink and green marble weight of the shoes I was howling in the kitchen Tom was howling in the hall white and violet over hedge and ditch clutching oolfoo quiet street suburban in flavor quiet crowd only slightly restive as reports of the letters from Japan circulate

I am whispering to my child Hans my child Hans is whispering to me Hans whispers that I am faced with a problem in ethics the systems of the axiologicalists he whispers the systems of the deontologicalists but I am not privy to these systems I whisper try the New School he whispers the small device in my coat pocket goes bleep!

nights of ethics at the New School

is this "middle life"? can I hurry on to "old age"? I see Alice walking away from me carrying an A & P shopping bag the shopping bag is full of haunting melodies grid coordinates great expectations French ticklers magic marks

nights of ethics at the New School "good" and "bad" as terms with only an emotive meaning I like the Walrus best Alice whispered he ate more than the Carpenter though the instructor whispered then I like the Carpenter best Alice whispered but he ate as many as he could get the instructor whispered

yellow brick wall visible from rear bedroom window of the rented house

I see Alice walking away from me carrying a Primary Structure MOVEMENT OF ALICE'S ZIPPER located at the rear of Alice's

dress running from the neckhole to the bumhole yes I know the first is an attribute of the dress the second an attribute of the girl but I have located it for you in some rough way the zipper you could find it in the dark

a few crones are standing about next to them are some louts the crones and louts are talking about the movement of Alice's zipper

rap Alice on the rump standing in the rented bedroom I have a roller and a bucket of white paint requires a second coat perhaps a third who knows a fourth and fifth I sit on the floor next to the paint bucket regarding the yellow brick wall visible there a subway token on the floor I pick it up drop it into the paint bucket slow circles on the surface of the white paint

insurance?

confess that for many years I myself took no other measures, followed obediently in the footsteps of my teachers, copied the procedures I observed painted animals, frisky inventions, thwarted patrons, most great hospitals and clinics, gray gauzes transparent plastic containers Presidential dining room about 45 cm. coquetry and flirtation knit games beautiful tension beaten metal catch-penny devices impersonal panic Klinger's nude in tree tickling nose of bear with long branch or wand unbutton his boots fairly broad duct, highly elastic walls peerless piece "racing" Dr. Haacke has poppy-show pulled me down on the bed and started two ceiling-high trees astonishing and little known remark of Balzac's welter this field of honor financial difficulties what sort of figure did these men cut?

Alice's husband Buck calls me will I gather with him for a game of golf? I accept but on the shoe shelf I cannot find the correct shoes distractedness stupidity weak memory! I am boring myself what should be the punishment I am forbidden to pick my nose forevermore

Buck is rushing toward me carrying pieces of carbon paper big

as bedsheets what is he hinting at? duplicity

bleep! it is the tipped uterus from Carson City calling

SECTION FORTY-THREE then I began chewing upon Alice's long and heavy breasts first one then the other the nipples brightened freshened then I turned her on her stomach and rubbed her back first slow then fast first the shoulders then the buttocks

possible attitudes found in books 1) I don't know what's happening to me 2) what does it mean? 3) seized with the deepest sadness, I know not why 4) I am lost, my head whirls, I know not where I am 5) I lose myself 6) I ask you, what have I come to? 7) I no longer know where I am, what is this country? 8) had I fallen from the skies, I could not be more giddy 9) a mixture of pleasure and confusion, that is my state 10) where am I, and when will this end? 11) what shall I do? I do not know where I am

but I do know where I am I am on West Eleventh Street shot with lust I speak to Alice on the street she is carrying a shopping bag I attempt to see what is in the shopping bag but she conceals it we turn to savor rising over the Women's House of Detention a particularly choice bit of "sisters" statistics on the longevity of life angelism straight as a loon's leg conceals her face behind pneumatiques hurled unopened scream the place down tuck mathematical models six hours in the confessional psychological comparisons scream the place down Mars yellow plights make micefeet of old cowboy airs cornflakes people pointing to the sea overboots nasal contact 7 cm. prune the audience dense car correctly identify chemical junk blooms of iron wonderful loftiness sentient populations

Kellerman, gigantic with gin, runs through the park at noon with his naked father slung under one arm. Old Kellerman covers himself with both hands and howls in the tearing wind, although sometimes he sings in the bursting sunlight. Where there is tearing wind he howls, and where there is bursting sunlight he sings. The park is empty except for a pair of young mothers in greatcoats who stand, pressed together in a rapturous embrace, near the fountain, "What are those mothers doing there," cries the general, "near the fountain?" "That is love," replies the son, "which is found everywhere, healing and beautiful." "Oh what a desire I have," cries the general, "that there might happen some great dispute among nations, some great anger, so that I might be myself again!" "Think of the wrack," replies the son. "Empty saddles, boots reversed in the stirrups, tasteful eulogies --" "I want to tell you something!" shrieks the general. "On the field where this battle was fought, I saw a very wonderful thing which the natives pointed out to me!"



On the night of the sixteenth, Wellington lingered until three in the morning in Brussels at the Duchess of Richmond's ball, sitting in the front row. "Showing himself very cheerful," according to Muffling. Then with Muffling he set out for the windmill at Brye, where they found Marshal Bliicher and his staff. Kellerman, followed by the young mothers, runs out of the park and into a bar.

"Eh, hello, Mado. A Beaujolais."

"Eh, hello, Tris-Tris," the barmaid replies. She is wiping the zinc with a dirty handkerchief. "A Beaujolais?"

"Cut the sentimentality, Mado," Kellerman says. "A Beaujolais. Listen, if anybody asks for me --"

"You haven't been in."

"Thanks, Mado. You're a good sort."

Kellerman knocks back the Beaujolais, tucks his naked father under his arm, and runs out the door.

"You were rude with that woman!" the general cries. "What is the rationale?"

"It's a convention," Kellerman replies. The Belgian regiments had been tampered with. In the melee, I was almost instantly disabled in both arms, losing first my sword, and then my reins, and followed by a few men, who were presently cut down, no quarter being asked, allowed, or given, I was carried along by my horse, till, receiving a blow from a sabre, I fell senseless on my face to the ground. Kellerman runs, reading an essay by Paul Goodman in Commentary. His eye, caught by a line in the last paragraph ("In a viable constitution, every excess of power should structurally generate its own antidote"), has wandered back up the column of type to see what is being talked about ("I have discussed the matter with Mr. and Mrs. Beck of the Living Theatre and we agree that the following methods are tolerable").

"What's that?" calls the first mother. "On the bench there, covered with the overcoat?"

"That's my father," Kellerman replies courteously. "My dad."

"Isn't he cold?"

"Are you cold?"

"He looks cold to me!" exclaims the one in the red wrapper.

"They're funny-looking, aren't they, when they get that old? They look like radishes."

"Something like radishes," Kellerman agrees. "Dirty in the vicinity of the roots, if that's what you mean."

"What does he do?" asks the one in the blue boots. "Or, rather, what did he do when he was of an age?"

Kellerman falls to his knees in front of the bench. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I committed endoarchy two times, melanicity four times, encropotomy seven times, and preprocity with igneous intent, pretolemicity, and overt cranialism once each."

"Within how long a period?"

"Since Monday."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Which?"

"Any of it."

"Some of it. Melanicity in the afternoon promotes a kind of limited joy."

"Have you left anything out?"

"A great deal." On the field where this battle was fought I saw a very wonderful thing which the natives pointed out to me. The bones of the slain lie scattered upon the field in two lots, those of the Persians in one place by themselves, those of the Egyptians in another place apart from them. If, then, you strike the Persian skulls, even with a pebble, they are so weak, that you break a hole in them; but the Egyptian skulls are so strong, that you may smite them with a stone and you will scarcely break them in.

"Oh what a desire I have," cried the general, "that my son would, like me, jump out of airplanes into aggressor terrain and find farmers with pitchforks poised to fork him as he drifts into the trees! And the farmer's dog, used for chivying sheep usually

-- how is it possible that I have a son who does not know the farmer's dog? And then calling out in the night to find the others, voices in the night, it's incredibly romantic. I gave him a D-ring for a teething toy and threw him up in the air, higher than any two-year-old had ever been, and put him on the mantel, and said, 'Jump, you little bastard,' and he jumped, and I caught him -- this when I was only a captain and chairman of the Machine Gun Committee at Benning. He had expensive green-gold grenadiers from F.A.O. Schwarz and a garrote I made myself from the E flat on his mother's piano. Firefight at dusk on the back lawn at Leonard Wood. Superior numbers in the shower room. Give them a little more grape, Captain Gregg, under the autumnal moon."

"Now, Agnes, don't start crying! We better go see Uncle Rene all together right away, and he'll explain anything you need to know."

"Interesting point of view," the ladies remarked. "Does he know anything about skin?"

"Everything."

Touched by the wind, the general howls.

"He was a jumping general," Kellerman explains to the ladies, "who jumped out of airplanes with his men to fall on the aggressor rear with sudden surprise and great hurt to that rear. He jumped in Sicily with the One-Oh-Bloody-One Airborne. The German cemetery at Pomezia has twenty-seven thousand four hundred graves," Kellerman declares. "What could he have been thinking of, on the way down? Compare if you will the scene with the scene at the battle of Borodino, at the battle of Arbela, at the battle of Metaurus, at the battle of Chalons, at the battle of Pultowa, at the battle of Valmy --"

"Eh, hello, Mado. A Beaujolais."

"Eh, hello, Tris-Tris. A Beaujolais?"

"Listen, Mado, if anybody asks for me --"

"You haven't been in."

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I wanted to say a certain thing to a certain man, a certain true thing that had crept into my head. I opened my head, at the place provided, and proceeded to pronounce the true thing that lay languishing there -- that is, proceeded to propel that trueness, that felicitous trularity, from its place inside my head out into world life. The certain man stood waiting to receive it. His face reflected an eager acceptingness. Everything was right. I propelled, using my mind, my mouth, all my muscles. I propelled. I propelled and propelled. I felt that trularity inside my head moving slowly through the passage provided (stained like the caves of Lascaux with garlic, antihistamines, Berlioz, a history, a history) toward its debut on the world stage. Past my teeth, with their little brown sweaters knitted of gin and cigar smoke, toward its leap to critical scrutiny. Past my lips, with their tendency to flake away in cold weather --

"Father, I have a few questions to ask you. Just a few questions about things that have been bothering me lately." In the melee, I was almost instantly disabled in both arms. Losing first my sword, and then my reins. And followed by a few men, who were presently cut down, no quarter being asked, allowed, or given, I was carried along by my horse, till -- "Who is fit for marriage? What is the art of love? What physical or mental ailments can be hereditary? What is the best age for marriage? Should marriage be postponed until the husband alone can support a family? Should a person who is sterile marry? What is sterility? How do the male reproductive organs work? Is a human egg like a bird's? What is a false pregnancy? What is artificial insemination? What happens if the sex glands are removed? In the male? In the female? Is it possible to tell if a person is emotionally fit for marriage? Why are premarital medical examinations important? What is natural childbirth? What is the best size for a family? Can interfaith marriages be successful? Can a couple know in advance if they can have children? Are there

any physical standards to follow in choosing a mate? How soon after conception can a woman tell if she is pregnant? What is the special function of the sex hormones? What are the causes of barrenness? How reliable are the various contraceptive devices? If near relatives marry will their children be abnormal? Do the first sex experiences have a really important bearing upon marital adjustment? Can impotence be cured? Can the sex of a child be predicted? How often should intercourse be practiced? How long should it last? Should you turn out the lights? Should music be played? Is our culture sick? Is a human egg like a bird's?"

Kellerman stops at the ginstore. "We can't use any of those," the ginstoreman says. "Those what-ever-it-ises you've got under your arm there."

"That's my dad," Kellerman says. "Formerly known as the Hammer of Thor. Now in reduced circumstances."

"I thought it was radishes," the ginstoreman says. "A bunch of radishes."

Kellerman kneels on the floor of the ginstore. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. That one was venial. But in respect to mortal sins, I would announce the following sins. Their mortalaciousness will not disappoint, is in fact so patent, so demonstrable, that the meanest confessor would, with a shy wave of the hand, accept and forgive them, in the manner of a customs inspector running his hand generously, forgivingly around the inside of a Valpak presented by a pretty girl."

"What do you do?" the mothers ask. "You yourself."

"I'm a bridge expert," Kellerman says kindly. "The father of a book on the subject, 'Greater Bridge,' which attempts to make complex the simple, so that we will not be bored. A Bible of bridge, if you take my meaning. Some of our boys carried it in the pockets over their hearts during the war. As they dropped through the air. Singing 'Johnny Got a Zero.' " All deliriously pretty and sexy mothers in brawny Chanel tweeds.

Black-and-white hound's-tooth checks, say; black-and-white silk Paisley blouses; gleaming little pairs of white kidskin gloves. Very correct hang to the jackets. Short skirts with a clochelike slide over the hip, lots of action at the hemline -- couldn't be better. Cafe-ed mouths, shiny orange-brown cheeks, ribbons of green enamel eye makeup. Mrs. Subways.

"I'm cold," old Kellerman says.

"Cold," the ladies remark, pointing.

Kellerman pulls out his flask. "Winter gin," he says, "it absu-meth the geniture."

"Say something professional," the ladies request.

"♠6 ♥K Q J 9 4 ♦A K 8 5 ♣K Q 2," Kellerman says.

On the third, Hood's main army was in the neighborhood of Lost Mountain. Stewart's Corps was sent to strike the railway north of Marietta and to capture, if possible, Allatoona. Steward, on the morning of the fifth, rejoined Hood, having destroyed two small posts on the railroad and having left French's division to capture Allatoona and destroy the Etowah Bridge. The Army of the Cumberland led the pursuit, and on the evening of the fourth it was bivouacking at the foot of Kenesaw Mountain. "And many others," Kellerman says. "Just as steamy and sordid as that one. Each sin preserved in amber in the vaults of the Library of Congress, under the management of the Registrar of Copyrights."

"With all the sticky details?"

"Rife with public hair," Kellerman says, "just to give you a whiff of the sordidness possible since the perfection of modern high-speed offset lithography."

"O sin," exclaims the general from his bench, "in which fear and guilt encrandulate (or are encrandulated by) each other to mess up the real world of objects with a film of nastiness and dirt, how well I understand you! Standing there! How well I understand your fundamental motifs! How ill I understand my fundamental motifs! Why are objects preferable to parables?"

How did I get so old so suddenly? In what circumstances is confusion a virtue? Why have I never heard of Yusef Lateef? 1. On flute, Lateef creates a completely distinctive sound -- sensitive, haunting, but filled with a firm and passionate strength unequalled among jazz flutists. 2. On tenor saxophone, Yusef is again thoroughly and excitingly individual, combining brilliantly modern conception with a big, deep, compellingly full-throated tone. 3. The oboe, as played by Lateef, undergoes a startling transformation into a valid jazz instrument, wailing with a rich and fervently funky blues quality. 4. What is 'wailing'? What is 'funky'? Why does language subvert me, subvert my seniority, my medals, my oldness, whenever it gets a chance? What does language have against me -- me that has been good to it, respecting its little peculiarities and niceties, for sixty years? 5. What do 'years' have against me? Why have they stuck stones in my kidneys, devaluated my tumulosity, retracted my hair? 6. Where does 'hair' go when it dies?"

Kellerman is eating one of his fifty-two-cent lunches: a 4 1/2 oz. can of Sells Liver Pate (thirty-one cents) and a box of Nabisco Saltines (twenty-one cents), washed down with the last third of a bottle of leftover Chablis. He lifts the curiously ugly orange wineglass, one of four (the fourth destroyed in the dishwasher) sent to Noelle at Christmas by her Oregon aunt. He is reading an essay by Paul Goodman in *Commentary*. His eye, caught by a line in the last paragraph ("In a viable constitution, every excess of power should structurally generate its own antidote"), has wandered back up the page to see what is being talked about ("I have discussed the matter with Mr. and Mrs. Beck of the Living Theatre and we agree that the following methods are tolerable"). He nicks the little hump of pate with the sharp edge of a Saltine. He congratulates himself on the economical elegance of the meal. Gregg meantime has attacked Fitzhugh Lee on the Louisa Courthouse road and has driven him back some

distance, pursuing until nightfall. Near one of the hedges of the Hougomont farm, without even a drummer to beat the rappel, we succeeded in rallying under the enemy's fire 300 men; I made a villager act as our guide, and bound him by his arm to my stirrup.

Kellerman stands before a chalkboard with a long wooden pointer in his hand. The general has been folded into a school-child's desk, sitting in the front row. On the board, in chalk, there is a diagrammatic sketch of a suit of armor. Kellerman points.

"A.: Palette."

"Palette," the old man repeats.

"Covers the shoulder joint," Kellerman says.

"The armpit?" the old man suggests.

"The shoulder joint," Kellerman says.

"Are you certain?"

"Absolutely."

The general writes in his tablet.

Kellerman points. "B.: Breastplate."

His father scribbles.

"Covers the --"

"Breast," old Kellerman says.

"Chest," Kellerman says.

"Mustard plaster," the old man says. "Trying to break up the clog in your little lung. Your mother and I. All through the night. Tears in her eyes. The doctor forty miles away."

"C.: Tasset."

"Semolina pudding you wanted. 'No,' I said. 'Later,' I said. 'Bad for the gut,' I said. You cried and cried."

"Tasset," Kellerman repeats. "For the upper thigh. Suspended from the waistplate by straps."

"Strap. Ah, strap!"

"D.: Cuisse."

"I was good with the strap. Fast, but careful. Not too much,

not too little. Calculating the angles, wind velocity, air-spring density, time of day. My windup a perfect hyperbolic paraboloid."

"Covers the thigh proper," Kellerman says. "Fastened by means of --"

"Strap," the general says, with satisfaction. "Unpleasant duty. When in the course of human events it becomes necessary--"

"You loved it!" Kellerman says, shouting.

The Belgian regiments had been tampered with. In the melee, I was almost instantly disabled in both arms, losing first my sword, and then my reins, and followed by a few men, who were presently cut down, no quarter being asked, allowed, or given, I was carried along by my horse, till, receiving a blow from a sabre, I fell senseless on my face to the ground. Germany was unspeakably silly. Technically, I was a radar operator on the guidance system. It was a rotten job. Ten hours a day of solid boredom. I did get one trip to the wild Hebrides for the annual firing of the missile (it's called a Corporal). Confidentially, it doesn't work worth a damn. We have a saying: Its effective range is thirty-five feet -- its length. If it falls on you, it can be lethal. "There are worms in words!" the general cries. "The worms in words are, like Mexican jumping beans, agitated by the warmth of the mouth."

"Flaming gel," Kellerman says. "You were fond of flaming gel."

"Not overfond," the general replies. "Not like some of them."

"What's that you have there, under your arm?" asks the bookstoreman.

"The Black Knight," Kellerman says. "I want one of those Histomaps of Evolution that you have in the window there, showing the swelling of the unsegmented worms -- flatworms, ribbon worms, arrow worms, wheelworms, spring heads, and so forth."

"Worms in words," the general repeats, "agitated by the warmth of the mouth."

"I'm not accepting any more blame, Papa," Kellerman says

finally. "Blame wouldn't melt in my. . ." He hands round the pate. "I love playing with mugged-up cards," Kellerman says, to the nearest mother. She is wearing a slim sand-tweed coat with two rows of gilt buttons and carrying a matchbook that says (black lettering, rose-blush ground) "VD Is On the Rise In New York City." "The four of fans, the twelve of wands, the deuce of kidneys, the Jack of Brutes. And shaved decks and readers of various kinds, they make the game worthy of the name." And it was true that his wife pulled 1 hair out of his sleeping head each night, but what if she decided upon 2, or 5, or even 11?

Of those who remained and fought, none were so rudely handled as the Chians, who displayed prodigies of valor, and disdained to play the part of cowards. The order and harmony of the universe, what a beautiful idea! He was obsessed by a vision of beauty -- the shimmering, golden Temple, more fascinating than a woman, more eternal than love. And because he was ugly, evil, impotent, he determined someday to possess it. . . by destruction. He had used the word incorrectly. He had mispronounced the word. He had misspelled the word. It was the wrong word.

"Eh, hello, Mado. A Beaujolais."

"Eh, hello, Tris-Tris. A Beaujolais?"

Kellerman runs down the avenue, among the cars, in and out. There are sirens, there is a fire. The huge pieces of apparatus clog the streets. Hoses are run this way and that. Hundreds of firemen stand about, looking at each other, asking each other questions. Kellerman runs. There is a fire somewhere, but the firemen do not know where it is. They stand, gigantic in their black slickers, yellow-lined, their black hats covering the back of the neck, holding shovels. The street is full of firemen, gigantic, standing there. Kellerman runs up to a group of firemen, who look at him with frightened eyes. He begins asking them questions. "Should a person who is sterile marry? What is sterility? What is a false

pregnancy? How do the male reproductive organs work? What is natural childbirth? Can a couple know in advance if they can have children? Can impotence be cured? What are the causes of barrenness? Is a human egg like a bird's?"

I am not altogether sympathetic to the new President. He is, certainly, a strange fellow (only forty-eight inches high at the shoulder). But is strangeness alone enough? I spoke to Sylvia: "Is strangeness alone enough?" "I love you," Sylvia said. I regarded her with my warm kind eyes. "Your thumb?" I said. One thumb was a fiasco of tiny crusted slashes. "Pop-top beer cans," she said. "He is a strange fellow, all right. He has some magic charisma which makes people --" She stopped and began again. "When the band begins to launch into his campaign song, 'Struttin' with Some Barbecue,' I just. . . I can't. . ."

The darkness, strangeness, and complexity of the new President have touched everyone. There has been a great deal of fainting lately. Is the President at fault? I was sitting, I remember, in Row EE at City Center; the opera was "The Gypsy Baron." Sylvia was singing in her green-and-blue gypsy costume in the gypsy encampment. I was thinking about the President. Is he, I wondered, right for this period? He is a strange fellow, I thought -- not like the other Presidents we've had. Not like Garfield. Not

like Taft. Not like Harding, Hoover, either of the Roosevelts, or Woodrow Wilson. Then I noticed a lady sitting in front of me, holding a baby. I tapped her on the shoulder. "Madam," I said, "your child has I believe fainted." "Charles!" she cried, rotating the baby's head like a doll's. "Charles, what has happened to you?" The President was smiling in his box.

"The President!" I said to Sylvia in the Italian restaurant. She raised her glass of warm red wine. "Do you think he liked me? My singing?" "He looked pleased," I said. "He was smiling." "A brilliant whirlwind campaign, I thought," Sylvia stated. "Winning was brilliant," I said. "He is the first President we've had from City College," Sylvia said. A waiter fainted behind us. "But is he right for the period?" I asked. "Our period is perhaps not so choice as the previous period, still --"

"He thinks a great deal about death, like all people from City," Sylvia said. "The death theme looms large in his consciousness. I've known a great many people from City, and these people, with no significant exceptions, are hung up on the death theme. It's an obsession, as it were." Other waiters carried the waiter who had fainted out into the kitchen.

"Our period will be characterized in future histories as a period of tentativeness and uncertainty, I feel," I said. "A kind of parenthesis. When he rides in his black limousine with the plastic top I see a little boy who has blown an enormous soap bubble which has trapped him. The look on his face --" "The other candidate was dazzled by his strangeness, newness, smallness, and philosophical grasp of the death theme," Sylvia said. "The other candidate didn't have a prayer," I said. Sylvia adjusted her green-and-blue veils in the Italian restaurant. "Not having gone to City College and sat around the cafeterias there, discussing death," she said.

I am, as I say, not entirely sympathetic. Certain things about the new President are not clear. I can't make out what he is

thinking. When he has finished speaking I can never remember what he has said. There remains only an impression of strangeness, darkness. . . . On television, his face clouds when his name is mentioned. It is as if hearing his name frightens him. Then he stares directly into the camera (an actor's preempting gaze) and begins to speak. One hears only cadences. Newspaper accounts of his speeches always say only that he "touched on a number of matters in the realm of. . ." When he has finished speaking he appears nervous and unhappy. The camera credits fade in over an image of the President standing stiffly, with his arms rigid at his sides, looking to the right and to the left, as if awaiting instructions. On the other hand, the handsome meliorist who ran against him, all zest and programs, was defeated by a fantastic margin.

People are fainting. On Fifty-seventh Street, a young girl dropped in her tracks in front of Henri Bendel. I was shocked to discover that she wore only a garter belt under her dress. I picked her up and carried her into the store with the help of a Salvation Army major -- a very tall man with an orange hairpiece. "She fainted," I said to the floorwalker. We talked about the new President, the Salvation Army major and I. "I'll tell you what I think," he said. "I think he's got something up his sleeve nobody knows about. I think he's keeping it under wraps. One of these days. . ." The Salvation Army major shook my hand. "I'm not saying that the problems he faces aren't tremendous, staggering. The awesome burden of the Presidency. But if anybody -- any one man. . ."

What is going to happen? What is the President planning? No one knows. But everyone is convinced that he will bring it off. Our exhausted age wishes above everything to plunge into the heart of the problem, to be able to say, "Here is the difficulty." And the new President, that tiny, strange, and brilliant man, seems cankered and difficult enough to take us there. In the

meantime, people are fainting. My secretary fell in the middle of a sentence. "Miss Kagle," I said. "Are you all right?" She was wearing an anklet of tiny silver circles. Each tiny silver circle held an initial: @@@@. Who is this person "A"? What is he in your life, Miss Kagle?

I gave her water with a little brandy in it. I speculated about the President's mother. Little is known about her. She presented herself in various guises:

A little lady, 5' 2", with a cane.

A big lady, 7' 1", with a dog.

A wonderful old lady, 4' 3", with an indomitable spirit.

A noxious old sack, 6' 8", excaudate, because of an operation.

Little is known about her. We are assured, however, that the same damnable involvements that obsess us obsess her too. Copulation. Strangeness. Applause. She must be pleased that her son is what he is -- loved and looked up to, a mode of hope for millions. "Miss Kagle. Drink it down. It will put you on your feet again, Miss Kagle." I regarded her with my warm kind eyes.

At Town Hall, I sat reading the program notes to "The Gypsy Baron." Outside the building, eight mounted policemen collapsed en bloc. The well-trained horses planted their feet delicately among the bodies. Sylvia was singing. They said a small man could never be President (only forty-eight inches high at the shoulder). Our period is not the one I would have chosen, but it has chosen me. The new President must have certain intuitions. I am convinced that he has these intuitions (although I am certain of very little else about him; I have reservations, I am not sure). I could tell you about his mother's summer journey, in 1919, to western Tibet -- about the dandymen and the red bean, and how she told off the Pathan headman, instructing him furiously to rub up his English or get out of her service -- but what order

of knowledge is this? Let me instead simply note his smallness, his strangeness, his brilliance, and say that we expect great things of him. "I love you," Sylvia said. The President stepped through the roaring curtain. We applauded until our arms hurt. We shouted until the ushers set off flares enforcing silence. The orchestra tuned itself. Sylvia sang the second lead. The President was smiling in his box. At the finale, the entire cast slipped into the orchestra pit in a great, swooning mass. We cheered until the ushers tore up our tickets.



I know you think I'm wasting my time. You've made that perfectly clear. But I'm conducting these very important lunar hostility studies. And it's not you who'll have to leave the warm safe capsule. And dip a toe into the threatening lunar surround.

I am still wearing my yellow flower which has lasted wonderfully.

My methods may seem a touch irregular. Have to do chiefly with folded paper airplanes at present. But the paper must be folded in the right way. Lots of calculations and worrying about edges.

Show me a man who worries about edges and I'll show you a natural-born winner. Cardinal Y agrees. Columbus himself worried, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea. But he kept it quiet.

The sun so warm on this screened porch, it reminds me of my grandmother's place in Tampa. The same rusty creaky green glider and the same faded colored canvas cushions. And at night the moon graphed by the screen wire, if you squint.

The Sea of Tranquillity occupying squares 47 through 108.

See the moon? It hates us.

My methods are homely but remember Newton and the apple. And when Rutherford started out he didn't even have a decently heated laboratory. And then there's the matter of my security check -- I'm waiting for the government. Somebody told it I'm insecure. That's true.

I suffer from a frightful illness of the mind, light-mindedness. It's not catching. You needn't shrink.

You've noticed the wall? I pin things on it, souvenirs. There is the red hat, there the book of instructions for the Ant Farm. And this is a traffic ticket written on a saint's day (which saint? I don't remember) in 1954 just outside a fat little town (which town? I don't remember) in Ohio by a cop who asked me what I did. I said I wrote poppycock for the president of a university, true then.

You can see how far I've come. Lunar hostility studies aren't for everyone.

It's my hope that these. . . souvenirs. . . will someday merge, blur -- cohere is the word, maybe -- into something meaningful. A grand word, meaningful. What do I look for? A work of art, I'll not accept anything less. Yes I know it's shatteringly ingenuous but I wanted to be a painter. They get away with murder in my view; Mr. X. on the Times agrees with me. You don't know how I envy them. They can pick up a Baby Ruth wrapper on the street, glue it to the canvas (in the right place, of course, there's that), and lo! people crowd about and cry, "A real Baby Ruth wrapper, by God, what could be realer than that!" Fantastic metaphysical advantage. You hate them, if you're ambitious.

The Ant Farm instructions are a souvenir of Sylvia. The red hat came from Cardinal Y. We're friends, in a way.

I wanted to be one, when I was young, a painter. But I couldn't stand stretching the canvas. Does things to the fingernails. And that's the first place people look.

Fragments are the only forms I trust.

Light-minded or no, I'm. . . riotous with mental health. I measure myself against the Russians, that's fair. I have here a clipping datelined Moscow, four young people apprehended strangling a swan. That's boredom. The swan's name, Borka. The sentences as follows: Tsarev, metalworker, served time previously for stealing public property, four years in a labor camp, strict regime. Roslavl'tsev, electrician, jailed previously for taking a car on a joyride, three years and four months in a labor camp, semi-strict regime. Tatyana Voblikova (only nineteen and a Komsomol member too), technician, one and a half years in a labor camp, degree of strictness unspecified. Anna G. Kirushina, technical worker, fine of twenty per cent of salary for one year. Anna objected to the strangulation, but softly: she helped stuff the carcass in a bag.

The clipping is tacked up on my wall. I inspect it from time to time, drawing the moral. Strangling swans is wrong.

My brother who is a very distinguished pianist . . . has no fingernails at all. Don't look it's horrible. He plays under another name. And tunes his piano peculiarly, some call it sour. And renders ragas he wrote himself. A night raga played at noon can cause darkness, did you know that? It's extraordinary.

He wanted to be an Untouchable, Paul did. That was his idea of a contemporary career. But then a girl walked up and touched him (slapped him, actually; it's a complicated story). And he joined us, here in the imbroglio.

My father on the other hand is perfectly comfortable, and that's not a criticism. He makes flags, banners, bunting (sometimes runs me up a shirt). There was never any question of letting my father drink from the public well. He was on the Well Committee, he decided who dipped and who didn't. That's not a criticism. Exercises his creativity, nowadays, courtesy the emerging nations. Green for the veldt that nourishes the gracile Grant's gazelle, white for the purity of our revolutionary aspirations. The

red for blood is understood. That's not a criticism. It's what they all ask for.

A call tonight from Gregory, my son by my first wife. Seventeen and at M.I.T. already. Recently he's been asking questions. Suddenly he's conscious of himself as a being with a history.

The telephone rings. Then, without a greeting: Why did I have to take those little pills? What little pills? Little white fills with a "W" on them. Oh. Oh yes. You had some kind of a nervous disorder, for a while. How old was I? Eight. Eight or nine. What was it? Was it epilepsy? Good God no, nothing so fancy. We never found out what it was. It went away. What did I do? Did I fall down? No no. Your mouth trembled, that was all. You couldn't control it. Oh, O.K. See you.

The receiver clicks.

Or: What did my great-grandfather do? For a living I mean? He was a ballplayer, semi-pro ballplayer, for a while. Then went into the building business. Who'd he play for? A team called the St. Augustine Rowdies, I think it was. Never heard of them. Well. . . Did he make any money? In the building business? Quite a bit. Did your father inherit it? No, it was tied up in a lawsuit. When the suit was over there wasn't anything left. Oh. What was the lawsuit? Great-grandfather diddled a man in a land deal. So the story goes. Oh. When did he die? Let's see, 1938 I think. What of? Heart attack. Oh. O.K. See you.

End of conversation.

Gregory, you didn't listen to my advice. I said try the Vernacular Isles. Where fish are two for a penny and women two for a fish. But you wanted M.I.T. and electron-spin-resonance spectroscopy. You didn't even crack a smile in your six-ply heather hopsacking.

Gregory you're going to have a half brother now. You'll like that, won't you? Will you half like it?

We talked about the size of the baby, Ann and I. What could be deduced from the outside.

I said it doesn't look very big to me. She said it's big enough for us. I said we don't need such a great roaring big one after all. She said they cost the earth, those extra-large sizes. Our holdings in Johnson's Baby Powder to be considered too. We'd need acres and acres. I said we'll put it in a Skinner box maybe. She said no child of hers. Displayed under glass like a rump roast. I said you haven't wept lately. She said I keep getting bigger whether I laugh or cry.

Dear Ann. I don't think you've quite. . .

What you don't understand is, it's like somebody walks up to you and says, I have a battleship I can't use, would you like to have a battleship. And you say, yes yes, I've never had a battleship, I've always wanted one. And he says, it has four six-teen-inch guns forward, and a catapult for launching scout planes. And you say, I've always wanted to launch scout planes. And he says, it's yours, and then you have this battleship. And then you have to paint it, because it's rusting, and clean it, because it's dirty, and anchor it somewhere, because the Police Department wants you to get it off the streets. And the crew is crying, and there are silverfish in the chartroom and a funny knocking noise in Fire Control, water rising in the No. 2 hold, and the chaplain can't find the Palestrina tapes for the Sunday service. And you can't get anybody to sit with it. And finally you discover that what you have here is this great, big, pink-and-blue rockabye battleship.

Ann. I'm going to keep her ghostly. Just the odd bit of dialogue:

"What is little Gog doing."

"Kicking."

I don't want her bursting in on us with the freshness and originality of her observations. What we need here is perspective.

She's good with Gregory though. I think he half likes her.

Don't go. The greased-pig chase and balloon launchings come next.

I was promising once. After the Elgar, a summa cum laude. The university was proud of me. It was a bright shy white new university on the Gulf Coast. Gulls and oleanders and quick howling hurricanes. The teachers brown burly men with power boats and beer cans. The president a retired admiral who'd done beautiful things in the Coral Sea.

"You will be a credit to us, George," the admiral said. That's not my name. I'm protecting my identity, what there is of it.

Applause from the stands filled with mothers and brothers. Then following the mace in a long line back to the field house to ungown. Ready to take my place at the top.

But a pause at Pusan, and the toy train to the Chorwon Valley. Walking down a road wearing green clothes. Korea green and black and silent. The truce had been signed. I had a carbine to carry. My buddy Bo Tagliabue the bonus baby, for whom the Yanks had paid thirty thousand. We whitewashed rocks to enhance our area. Colonels came crowding to feel Bo's hurling arm. Mine the whitest rocks.

I lunched with Thais from Thailand, hot curry from great galvanized washtubs. Engineers banging down the road in six-by-sixes raising red dust. My friend Gib Mandell calling Elko, Nevada on his canvas-covered field telephone. "Operator I crave Elko, Nevada."

Then I was a sergeant with stripes, getting the troops out of the sun. Tagliabue a sergeant too. Triste in the Tennessee Tea Room in Tokyo, yakking it up in Yokohama. Then back to our little tent town on the side of a hill, boosting fifty-gallon drums of heating oil tentward in the snow.

Ozzie the jeep driver waking me in the middle of the night. "They got Julian in the Tango Tank." And up and alert as they

taught us in Leadership School, over the hills to Tango, seventy miles away. Whizzing through Teapot, Tempest, Toreador, with the jeep's canvas top flapping. Pfc. Julian drunk and disorderly and beaten up. The M.P. sergeant held out a receipt book. I signed for the bawdy remains.

Back over the pearly Pacific in a great vessel decorated with oranges. A trail of orange peel on the plangent surface. Sitting in the bow fifty miles out of San Francisco, listening to the Stateside disc jockeys chattering cha cha cha. Ready to grab my spot at the top.

My clothes looked old and wrong. The city looked new with tall buildings raised while my back was turned. I rushed here and there visiting friends. They were burning beef in their back yards, brown burly men with beer cans. The beef black on the outside, red on the inside. My friend Horace had fidelity. "Listen to that bass. That's sixty watts worth of bass, boy."

I spoke to my father. "How is business?" "If Alaska makes it," he said, "I can buy a Hasselblad. And we're keeping an eye on Hawaii." Then he photographed my veteran face, f.6 at 300. My father once a cheerleader at a great Eastern school. Jumping in the air and making fierce angry down-the-field gestures at the top of his leap.

That's not a criticism. We have to have cheerleaders.

I presented myself at the Placement Office. I was on file. My percentile was the percentile of choice. "How come you were headman of only one student organization, George?" the Placement Officer asked. Many hats for top folk was the fashion then. I said I was rounded, and showed him my slash. From the Fencing Club.

"But you served your country in an overseas post."

"And regard my career plan on neatly typed pages with wide margins."

"Exemplary," the Placement Officer said. "You seem married,

mature, malleable, how would you like to affiliate yourself with us here at the old school? We have a spot for a poppycock man, to write the admiral's speeches. Have you ever done poppycock?"

I said no but maybe I could fake it.

"Excellent, excellent," the Placement Officer said. "I see you have grasp. And you can sup at the Faculty Club. And there is a ten-per-cent discount on tickets for all home games."

The admiral shook my hand. "You will be a credit to us, George," he said. I wrote poppycock, sometimes cockypap. At four o'clock the faculty hoisted the cocktail flag. We drank Daiquiris on each other's sterns. I had equipped myself -- a fibre-glass runabout, someplace to think. In the stadia of friendly shy new universities we went down the field on Gulf Coast afternoons with gulls, or exciting nights under the tall toothpick lights. The crowd roared. Sylvia roared. Gregory grew.

There was no particular point at which I stopped being promising.

Moonstruck I was, after a fashion. Sitting on a bench by the practice field, where the jocks chanted secret signals in their underwear behind tall canvas blinds. Layabout babies loafing on blankets, some staked out on twelve-foot dog chains. Brown mothers squatting knee to knee in shifts of scarlet and green. I stared at the moon's pale daytime presence. It seemed. . . inimical.

Moonstruck.

We're playing Flinch. You flinched.

The simplest things are the most difficult to explain, all authorities agree. Say I was tired of p\*\*\*yc\*\*k, if that pleases you. It's true enough.

Sylvia went up in a puff of smoke. She didn't like unsalaried life. And couldn't bear a male acquaintance moon-staring in the light of day. Decent people look at night.

We had trouble with Gregory: who would get which part. She settled for three-fifths, and got I think the worst of it, the

dreaming raffish Romany part that thinks science will save us. I get matter-of-fact midnight telephone calls: My E.E. instructor shot me down. What happened? I don't know, he's an ass anyhow. Well that may be but still -- When's the baby due? January, I told you. Yeah, can I go to Mexico City for the holidays? Ask your mother, you know she -- There's this guy, his old man has a villa. . . . Well, we can talk about it. Yeah, was grandmother a Communist? Nothing so distinguished, she -- You said she was kicked out of Germany. Her family was anti-Nazi. Adler means eagle in German. That's true. There was something called the Weimar Republic, her father -- I read about it.

We had trouble with Gregory, we wanted to be scientific. Toys from Procreative Playthings of Princeton. O Gregory, that Princeton crowd got you coming and going. Procreative Playthings at one end and the Educational Testing Service at the other. And that serious-minded co-op nursery, that was a mistake. "A growing understanding between parent and child through shared group experience." I still remember poor Henry Harding III. Under "Sibs" on the membership roll they listed his, by age:

26  
25  
23  
20  
19  
15  
10  
9  
8  
6

O Mrs. Harding, haven't you heard? They have these little Christmas-tree ornaments for the womb now, they work wonders.

Did we do "badly" by Gregory? Will we do "better" with Gog? Such questions curl the hair. It's wiser not to ask.

I mentioned Cardinal Y (the red hat). He's a friend, in a way. Or rather, the subject of one of my little projects.

I set out to study cardinals, about whom science knows nothing. It seemed to me that cardinals could be known in the same way we know fishes or roses, by classification and enumeration. A perverse project, perhaps, but who else has embraced this point of view? Difficult nowadays to find a point of view kinky enough to call one's own, with Sade himself being carried through the streets on the shoulders of sociologists, cheers and shouting, ticker tape unwinding from high windows. . .

The why of Cardinal Y. You're entitled to an explanation.

The Cardinal rushed from the Residence waving in the air his hands, gloved in yellow pigskin it appeared, I grasped a hand, "Yes, yellow pigskin!" the Cardinal cried. I wrote in my book, yellow pigskin.

Significant detail. The pectoral cross contains nine diamonds, the scarlet soutane is laundered right on the premises.

I asked the Cardinal questions, we had a conversation.

"I am thinking of a happy island more beautiful than can be imagined," I said.

"I am thinking of a golden mountain which does not exist," he said.

"Upon what does the world rest?" I asked.

"Upon an elephant," he said.

"Upon what does the elephant rest?"

"Upon a tortoise."

"Upon what does the tortoise rest?"

"Upon a red lawnmower."

I wrote in my book, playful.

"Is there any value that has value?" I asked.

"If there is any value that has value, then it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case, for all that happens and is the case is accidental," he said. He was not serious. I

wrote in my book, knows the drill.

(Oh I had heard reports, how he slunk about in the snow telling children he was Santa Claus, how he disbursed funds in unauthorized disbursements to unshaven men who came to the kitchen door, how his housekeeper pointedly rolled his red socks together and black socks together hinting red with red and black with black, the Cardinal patiently unrolling a red ball to get a red sock and a black ball to get a black sock, which he then wore together. . .)

Cardinal Y. He's sly.

I was thorough. I popped the Cardinal on the patella with a little hammer, and looked into his eyes with a little light. I tested the Cardinal's stomach acidity using Universal Indicator Paper, a scale of one to ten, a spectrum of red to blue. The pH value was 1 indicating high acidity. I measured the Cardinal's ego strength using the Minnesota Multiphasic Muzzle Map, he had an M.M.M.M. of four over three. I sang to the Cardinal, the song was "Stella by Starlight," he did not react in any way. I calculated the number of gallons needed to fill the Cardinal's bath to a depth of ten inches (beyond which depth, the Cardinal said, he never ventured). I took the Cardinal to the ballet, the ballet was "The Conservatory." The Cardinal applauded at fifty-seven points. Afterward, backstage, the Cardinal danced with Plenosova, holding her at arm's length with a good will and an ill grace. The skirts of the scarlet soutane stood out to reveal high-button shoes, and the stagehands clapped.

I asked the Cardinal his views on the moon, he said they were the conventional ones, and that is how I know all I know about cardinals. Not enough perhaps to rear a science of cardinality upon, but enough perhaps to form a basis for the investigations of other investigators. My report is over there, in the blue binding, next to my copy of *La Geomancie et la Neomancie des Anciens* by the Seigneur of Salerno.

Cardinal Y. One can measure and measure and miss the most essential thing. I liked him. I still get the odd blessing in the mail now and then.

Too, maybe I was trying on the role. Not for myself. When a child is born, the locus of one's hopes. . . shifts, slightly. Not altogether, not all at once. But you feel it, this displacement. You speak up, strike attitudes, like the mother of a tiny Lollobrigida. Drunk with possibility once more.

I am still wearing my yellow flower which has lasted wonderfully.

"What is Gog doing?"

"Sleeping."

You see, Gog of mine, Gog o' my heart, I'm just trying to give you a little briefing here. I don't want you unpleasantly surprised. I can't stand a startled look. Regard me as a sort of Distant Early Warning System. Here is the world and here are the knowledgeable knowers knowing. What can I tell you? What has been pieced together from the reports of travellers.

Fragments are the only forms I trust.

Look at my wall, it's all there. That's a leaf, Gog, stuck up with Scotch Tape. No no, the Scotch Tape is the shiny transparent stuff, the leaf the veined irregularly shaped. . .

There are several sides to this axe, Gog, consider the photostat, "Mr. W. B. Yeats Presenting Mr. George Moore to the Queen of the Fairies." That's a civilized gesture, I mean Beerbohm's. And when the sculptor Aristide Maillol went into the printing business he made the paper by chewing the fibers himself. That's dedication. And here is a Polaroid photo, shows your Aunt Sylvia and me putting an Ant Farm together. That's how close we were in those days. Just an Ant Farm apart.

See the moon? It hates us.

And now comes J. J. Sullivan's orange-and-blue Gulf Oil truck to throw kerosene into the space heater. Driver in green

siren suit, red face, blond shaved head, the following rich verbal transaction:

"Beautiful day."

"Certainly is."

And now settling back in this green glider with a copy of Man. Dear Ann when I look at Man I don't want you. Unfolded Ursula Thigpen seems ever so much more desirable. A clean girl too and with interests, cooking, botany, pornographic novels. Someone new to show my slash to.

In another month Gog leaps fully armed from the womb. What can I do for him? I can get him into A.A., I have influence. And make sure no harsh moonlight falls on his new soft head.

Hello there Gog. We hope you'll be very happy here.

## About the Author

Donald Barthelme was born in Philadelphia, raised in Houston, and now lives in New York City. His stories have appeared in The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, Paris Review, Mother and other periodicals. Some of them were collected in Come Back, Dr. Caligari, which was published in 1964. His remarkable short novel, Snow White, was published in 1967. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1966.



