

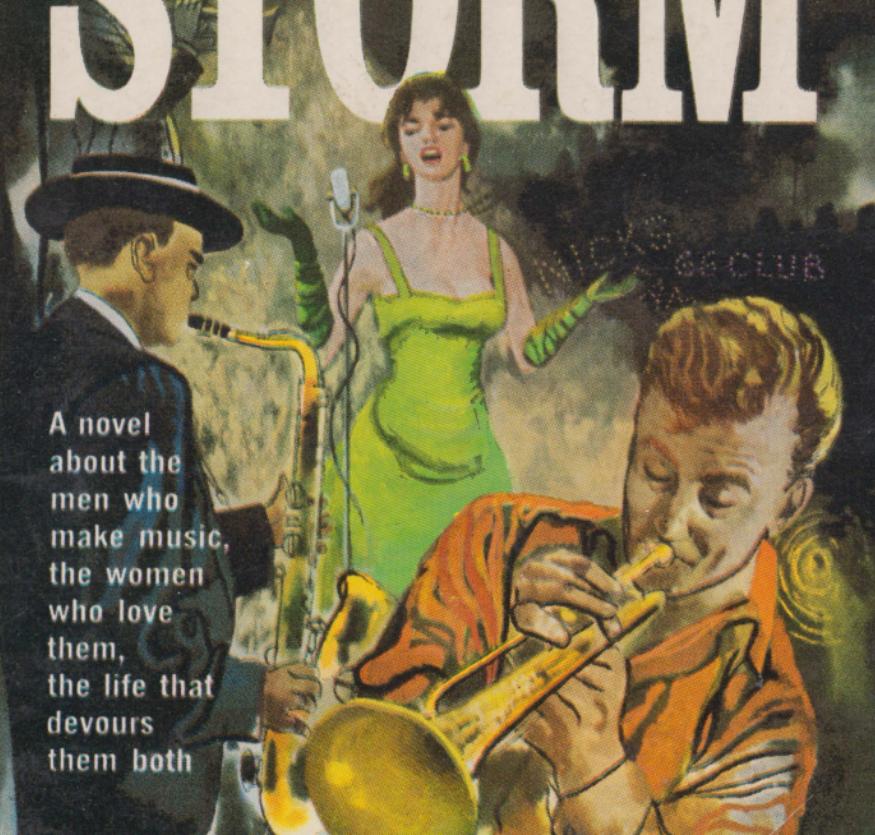
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Author of **THE RAT RACE** and **BORN YESTERDAY**

BLOW UP A STORM



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men who
make music,
the women
who love
them,
the life that
devours
them both

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COMPLETE
BOOK

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Those were wild young days and nights, filled with experiment and with discovery: about music and about living. There was a considerable amount of drinking, but very little drunking, partly because good liquor was rare and expensive, partly because it was necessary to keep functioning—the listeners could pass out, we could not—and mainly because no matter how much we drank we seemed to burn it off in playing.

We often did night things by day and day things by night; sometimes skipped sleep entirely; worked when we had to—but ate and played and loved when we felt to.

BLOW UP A STORM, a novel about jazz and the men who made it, was originally published by Random House, Inc., at \$3.95.

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BLOW UP A STORM

Garson Kanin



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BLOW UP A STORM

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To Thornton Wilder

I “I don’t know any Mr. Woodruff!” I snapped at the operator, and hung up.

I returned to the window, and continued to look out over Lake Michigan from high up in the Blackstone Hotel, Chicago. In the ugly day, the lake was behaving like an ocean. The celebrated wind had been whistling all morning; now it had taken to screaming. Far below, the nervous traffic alternated between speeding and snarling. And I was having a day to match.

In a skillful effort to avoid working, I had jangled myself into restlessness. I was writing a play—my eleventh—and it was turning out to be at least eleven times as difficult as the first. What was it—higher standards or lower spirits? That surprising stream which had come flowing down my sleeve a few weeks earlier had dried to a forced trickle. I was in my kind of trouble.

My wife was playing a matinée at the neighboring Blackstone Theatre, and a stretch of lonely hours loomed before me. An impulse to stop the nonsense and get down to it was smothered in a fog of disorientation. I tried to whip up a case for self-pity, dramatizing myself as a rootless wanderer. Joe Flotsam. Sam Jetsam.

The idea of accompanying my wife on this transcontinental tour of her recent New York success had seemed a good one at the outset. It would provide a fresh look at the country, a change, and an escape from distraction. At first, it had worked out well. My play had begun promisingly enough but, unaccountably, in the past few days, I had begun to look for the weakness in the notion rather than for the strength—an unhealthy sign.

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No. No work today. What's the use? A movie? What's playing? With the deliberation of an experienced staller, I went through the papers, gravely, looking for an attraction. Nothing. Not even as far out as Lake Forest or Libertyville. The magnetic columns held me for an hour or so through the fascinations of readers writing to the Editor; Ann Landers writing to the readers; White Sales; Want Ads; and studio portraits of those organized-looking types on the Business and Financial pages who yesterday had been made Vice-Presidents and District Supervisors. Were any of *them*, I wondered, standing around and studying lakes?

I tossed the papers aside and considered further alternatives. A long browse in Kroch's and Brentano's? Hell, no. Finest paperback department in America, urged temptation. Still. It would doubtless result in another pile of books to cart about, and only that morning my wife had said, "Trouble with you is, when you buy a book, you think you've read it!" It was true, in a way. Up and down the escalators at Marshall Field's? I had done that the day before. La Salle Street Station and see what new magazines are in, since I was down to *Field and Stream*, for God's sake? No. How about over to Lyon and Healy's and playing some records? A waste. Don't waste time, I mused, because that's the stuff life's made of. My feeling surged upward as I admired my trenchant flash, but fell and hit bottom as I realized that I was only remembering—and inaccurately at that—Benjamin Franklin's words.

I sighed, sick of myself and of my lassitude. I'm an unprimed pump, I thought, that's what I am. Who cares? I sought an argument with which to defend myself and came up with a Gertrude Stein scrap: "It takes a lot of loafing to write a play." Fine. Stein's words. Franklin's words. When the hell are you going to come up with some words of your own?

I moved to another window and attempted the Yoga exercise of emptying the brain. Not much of a job, I taunted myself. I closed my eyes and concentrated on a void.

Then, as though from afar, I heard it—a long-forgotten

song called "You, You're Driving Me Crazy" being played by a neatly integrated small combination. Hell of a song. Whose? Jimmy McHugh? No. Walter Donaldson. Listen.

I heard myself, on saxophone, filling in around the tune in imitation of Andy Sannella, a popular reed-man of the early thirties. The melody was being carried by a wide-open trumpet which slid each note into the next, creating an eloquent wail. I felt myself smiling in admiration and memory. Woodruff, I thought. That Woodruff.

I shivered suddenly, whipped around, and stared at the phone. It became his face. My heart began to pound as I tried to separate reality from fantasy. He *had* called, hadn't he? Just now? Yes. I had not imagined it? No. He had called and had been rudely brushed off. Who ever told them down there to announce calls, anyhow?

Woodruff. Had I thought of him because of recalling the tune? Other way about. His name had touched off a dormant remembrance, which in turn, had yielded the memory of the sound. "You, You're Driving Me Crazy . . ."

I picked up the phone.

"Yes?" responded the operator at once.

"That Mr. Woodruff, did he leave a number?"

"Wait a second. I didn't take that."

After a wait, another voice. "No, sir. He didn't."

"You sure?"

"Just a moment."

I held on in hope—contrite and anxious. Woodruff. Woody Woodruff. In time past, one of my closest friends. When would that have been? 1931? '32? Twenty-five years or so. And now I can say, "I don't know any Mr. Woodruff." What the hell happens to us, anyway?

The operator returned. "No, sir," she said. "No message."

"Thanks."

I began looking through the telephone directory. Plenty of Woodruffs, but no Woody. Of course not, that was a nickname. What was his given name? Tension made it impossible for me to recall, and as I studied the list in the directory, Harold B. seemed as likely as Charles. If necessary, I could

phone the whole list. And what if he were not on it? I was stumped, for the moment. The whole jolting occurrence ended *this* day's struggle to get to work. Work had lost, one to nothing. Half happy, I decided to shave, dress, and go out. Where? Might the musician's local have some information? MCA? Some other agencies? If not the telephone directory, perhaps the city directory. Where do I find one of those? Downstairs? City Hall. The point was to find Woody Woodruff. Frank? Hugh? No. Lou? Lane? An *H* definitely. Hal. Hobart. Harold. Henry. Hank. No.

I spoke to the operator again.

"If a Mr. Woodruff calls back, be sure and get his number."

"Very well."

"And look, tell the other girls, too, will you? Very important."

"Will do."

"Woodruff," I underlined.

I walked the busy, impersonal streets of Chicago, remembering Woody and myself—two equally distant, curious characters. . . .

. We had met on a club date, where we were two of seven sidemen brought in to augment the permanent eight-piece band at the Westchester Country Club for its Annual Ball. The house band was a doggedly mediocre and joyless ensemble and the added men wrecked it completely. Between sets, a few of us stayed on the stand, jamming for our own amusement. The guests were clearly uninterested.

Although I earned a fair living at it—by depression standards—I was devoid of talent as an instrumentalist. But I was eager to learn, to copy, to sit in with the gifted ones in the vague hope that I might acquire what I lacked. I was nineteen and determined.

From his first takeoff, I knew that Woody was one of the finest trumpet players I had ever heard. To my ear, he was in a class with Armstrong and Berigan, although reminiscent

of neither. His tone was rich and warm, and he expressed his audacious ideas with faultless technique.

There were two reigning trumpet fashions at that time. The members of one group played a wide-open, blasting style, vying with one another in a contest of volume; the members of the other school seldom unplugged their mutes—and when they did, played into derbies.

Woody belonged to neither. He played his own trumpet in his own way, devoted to the beauty and passion and excitement and communicative properties of sound. His trumpet sang like no other.

Physically, he was compact and intense, which made him appear to be smaller than he was. He was my age—but an *old* nineteen. His good looks were aggressive and clean. He rarely smiled, but when he did he disarmed surely and completely. His appearance, along with his personality, changed when he played—becoming softer and less brittle. He had a nervous habit of moistening his lips with a darting tongue, and another of closing his eyes from time to time in the course of conversation. His eyes were as black as his hair. He needed a haircut. I was to learn later that he always seemed to need a haircut—even ten minutes after he had left the barber's chair.

At one point in the evening, a trio was improvised. The bass player moved to the piano; I sat in the drummer's chair and used the foot pedal of the bass drum while playing the saxophone; and Woody stood between us, leading the way. It turned out to be one of those moments in jazz when, unpredictably, sounds fall into perfect place. Three became one.

All at once, to our surprise, the music appeared to interest a number of people who moved to the bandstand and stood listening. Even a few of the musicians gave us their attention.

We repeated the combination several times in the course of the next few hours, blending more and more as a unit. I experienced for the first time the rare feeling of being part of something first-rate.

The pianist brought all of his bass player's rhythmic skill to the keyboard. Woody rode the main line, and I noodled around: filling in or playing rhythm figures, and sometimes locking in harmonically with him for a phrase or a break. Once in a while, I took a chorus, and when I did, Woody backed it up and carried me along in a way that made me sound better than ever before.

The job ended and we were paid off.

He came over as I was pulling on my coat.

"Want a lift in?" he asked.

"Sure."

"And where's that good oompah man?" he added, looking around. He spotted the piano player of our trio and we moved to him. A few minutes later, the three of us were driving to New York in a cream-colored La Salle runabout with the top down.

Played out, musically and physically, we were silent for a time, until the pianist—a pale, lank, sleepy-eyed Southerner with a built-in grin—spoke to Woody.

"You blow real fine, fella," he said, "but don't sit there and tell me it got you this here rich man's auto!"

"No," said Woody curtly. "A lady gave it me because she liked my second endings. Any more questions?"

No more was said about the car, but we were soon discussing the possibility of continuing as a trio, and by the time we reached the city, Woody had invited us to Dave's Blue Room to complete the arrangements.

"Six months at least," said Woody, as we ate. "If we don't want to stick it for that, better not to start."

The piano player nodded, and asked, "But what if we've got like say nothing for the trio and a record date say comes up for one of us?"

"You turn it down," said Woody.

"Uh-huh," said the pianist doubtfully.

"That's what I mean by sticking," said Woody.

"The only thing," said the pianist, "I got no La Salles."

"And you never will have," said Woody, "if you don't take a chance once in a while."

"I'm in," I said.

"Sure," said the pianist. "Me, too. Only, if I start starving, throw me a piece of toast, somebody. Buttered."

"What's your names?" asked Woody.

"Kirkus," replied the pianist. "Don Kirkus."

I told mine.

Woody said, "Come on over to Plunkett's and we'll have a snort on it."

He referred to a musicians' hangout—also known as the Trombone Club—at 205½ West Fifty-third Street. Here, the jazzmen of the day gathered at all hours to eat and drink and connect and borrow and talk and, most important, to let go in music together.

At Plunkett's, where he appeared to be known, Woody ordered a bottle of champagne, and we drank it, toasting the trio-to-be. It was the first champagne I had ever had, and I got the idea at once.

We discussed a name for the group.

"How about Three of a Kind?" I suggested.

"No," said Woody.

"Definitely," added Don.

We drank and thought.

"How's this?" asked Don, his grin widening. "The One Two Trio?"

I laughed with him. Woody abstained.

I said, "In view of everything, I think it ought to be The Woodruff Three."

"Okay," said Woody.

"Gee," said Don, with a finger snap of mock irritation, "I wonder why I didn't think of that."

"I meant okay for the time being," said Woody, looking him over. "We can always change it."

We dropped Don after arranging to meet for rehearsal the following afternoon. Woody drove me home. We shook hands in the dawn.

"By the way," he said, "my name's *Lee* Woodruff."

The trio was a success from the start, in spite of the fact that jazz on the whole was temporarily in the doldrums. After

a week's rehearsal, we had auditioned for a steady job at the Alice Foote MacDougall Tearoom on Forty-fourth Street, and had made it. We were engaged to play three sessions: lunch, tea and dinner—which left us ample time for study and practice and getting into trouble.

We came to know one another's oddities, in music and out. I was surprised to learn that Woody's main interest, outside of his horn, was modern poetry. He bought it, read it, and studied it—even recorded it on discs and played it back by the hour. T. S. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, E. E. Cummings, Ezra Pound (his preference), Robinson Jeffers, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and so on. I asked him once if he had ever tried to write it.

“Hell no,” he said. “I try to play it.”

He was probably equally surprised to learn of my interest in the theatre, where I spent what time and money I could spare; and of Don's preoccupation with women and strange foods and stimulants of all kinds. I often thought it odd that three such ill-matched men could play together so well.

One day, during a rehearsal break, Woody said, “Technically, this is no kind of a trio at all. It lacks percussion.”

“Thanks,” said Don. “I've only black and blued myself banging it out.”

“No, it's fine,” said Woody, “the way it works out. I say in theory. But what makes it is a kind of accidental shape we've hit. One big harmonic pulse going—that's you, Don. Then male and female. The trumpet, male—”

“And I'm the female?” I said. “How would you like to step outside?”

Don went to the piano and practiced a wild, rhythmic modulation.

“I see I fascinate him,” said Woody.

“Go on some more with this male-female bash,” I said.

“What the hell,” said Woody, “it was just a notion. Let's not lean on it.”

We continued the rehearsal.

My only uneasiness, at this time, was caused by the equal

three-way split of our salary, since I could not persuade myself that I was contributing my third to our playing. I spoke to Woody about it.

"Leave it be," he said. "It's the only way. We start cutting the pie otherwise and next thing for sure, you'll hear it in the music. Anyway, you're coming along."

"Really think so?" I muttered hopefully.

"Why don't you play like yourself more, though?"

"What?" I asked, startled.

"You know what I mean," he said, looking at me and probing my secret. "You're all full of Weidoft, and Bennie Krueger, Benny Carter, and J. Dorsey and Sannella and God-knocks. Why don't you let us hear from *you* more?"

"I don't know," I confessed. "I hear it in my head, but I can't seem to play it out."

"Well," he said gently, "takes time. Meanwhile it's nice to have you lacing around me."

"I enjoy it," I said.

"Yah, but keep looking for *yourself*, boyo—you're in there someplace, I just know it."

(As it turned out, his confidence was misplaced. I never did find a self in music, which accounts for my failure in it and for that locked saxophone case down in the cellar closet. Why don't I throw it away?)

We supplemented our income by playing odd jobs when they could be fitted into the schedule. One Sunday, at an uptown garden party given by Mrs. August Heckscher, we roamed the yard, playing. Don, that day, switched back to his bass, and Woody had hired Dick McDonough on guitar. We sounded fine.

Later, driving Don and me home, Woody lamented the fact that we were wasting Don's talents.

Don agreed. "I'm for a quartet," he said. "That bull fiddle of mine really gave me a talkin' to today. Jealous."

"The who of it's what counts," said Woody. "Let's look around."

"And the split of it," I added. "Unless you think we could hit them up for a raise."

"First let's find somebody, then we'll see," said Woody.

It was as though circumstance had overheard us, because that very night—the following morning, to be exact—we found somebody.

Don, who specialized in Harlem connections, had taken me along to a rent party. Woody had declined, as he always did where Harlem was concerned.

"I can't stand the mood up there," he said as usual.

Neither Don nor I knew what he meant.

"But the beat, man—the beat!" Don said, urging.

"You gentlemen bring it back," said Woody, "and I'll use it."

The throbbing rent party turned out to be a memorable occasion. Never before had I known people and music to coexist so completely, so naturally. The flat was roomy and sprawling. Music was being made in every room, including the kitchen and excepting the bathroom. There was action even out on the fire escape. Don led me to it.

"You ever hear a man play suitcase?" he asked.

"No."

"There's one of the best out there," he said. "Tall Clayton."

On the fire escape, the group consisted of two clarinetists and Clayton.

On an old, black leather suitcase held between his knees, the variety of rhythm patterns he created, using his palms, fingertips, thumbs, hand heels and knuckles, was dazzling.

We moved from there to room to room and in each found music being played, being born, sung and danced to. There was far more eating than drinking, the music apparently providing sufficient intoxication. I stuck to beer and drank slowly, guarding my sense of hearing. At four in the morning, the party thinned out. New musicians and breakfast foods began to appear.

Don and I sat on the floor of the parlor, sharing a plate of buckwheat cakes and sausages, and together became aware of the sound of a vibrant, neat, rhythmic piano that took possession of our ears in a powerfully seductive way.

We stopped eating and looked across the room to the instrument.

A long, thin, dark brown young man sat there, connected to the keyboard by the mystery of talent. At first glance, he seemed to be bald, but a closer look revealed that his hair was of the same color and sheen as his handsome face. His expression was impassive, but now and then he would look happily surprised at what his spirited fingers were doing.

Don and I listened for a time, looked at one another with the same idea, rose, and moved to the piano. We did not leave it for three hours, and when we did, the player, Albie Salmon, was our new friend.

That afternoon, full of the excitement of discovery, we took him up to Woody's, where he played for a full hour. He played songs we had never heard before, and standards in a way that made them seem new. He played ballads, using the pedal in an unorthodox way and finding new harmonies; he played blues and Dixieland and whorehouse piano; he played Gershwin in a way that surely would have delighted Gershwin. In sudden contrast, he played a Bach bourrée with elegant simplicity. He programmed this to relate legitimately to our kind of music. He ended his recital with a rollicking delivery of "I'm Just Wild About Harry"—from that day on, a favorite song.

When he had finished, we all looked to Woody. He was obviously impressed, but said nothing. To put the clincher on it, I suggested to Albie that he repeat something we had heard him do—fifteen chorus variations of "I Got Rhythm." He did so, except that the fifteen choruses were all different from the ones we had heard.

The last one had us all on our feet, and the room tingled for some time after he had swung about and leaned back, his elbows on the keyboard.

Woody nodded and sat down. "Let you know," he said, and forced a smile.

Albie left. We waited for Woody's verdict.

"Remarkable," he said. "But no go."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Come on, kid, wake up!" he said impatiently. "Because we can't afford the problems. You think we can?"

Don and I exchanged a look. It took us a long beat to get what Woody meant.

"What the hell," argued Don. "This is New York City. Who cares?"

"I'm thinking of the commercial angles," said Woody. "Isn't that what I'm supposed to?"

"The music angles, that's the main whack, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes," said Don.

"No," said Woody.

"What?" I asked.

"Maybe should be," said Woody, "but isn't and never will be. Let's be practical."

I had never before seen Don angry.

"Where the hell do you get never will?" he shouted. "It's only every night—night after night—morning—after hours—don't we all by Jesus play with any damn every goddamn whatever color setup that—no matter who—just so long as it sounds good?"

"Sure," I said while Don caught his breath. "You yourself, Woody—admit it—comes a good session, you sit in with whoever."

He lit a cigarette with a trembling match. He was noticeably ill.

"Different," he mumbled stubbornly. "Private, not public."

He rose and walked away from us on the pretense of looking for something.

Don moved around to confront him, and asked, "Am I taking you in right? That—far's you're concerned—it's hunky to mix just so long as you don't do it in front of everybody?"

Woody pointed his palm at Don and said, "Look here, mister. You can twist it any way you like. I've got a say here and it's no."

"All right," said Don, after a long, heavy pause. "I quit." "Good-bye," said Woody.

"Wait a second!" I yelled, as I saw the trio collapsing.

They continued to argue, and I could not help making note of the oddly reversed positions they occupied. Here was Don, a product of Gadsden, Alabama, championing Albie Salmon in an accent which grew thicker and thicker as his temper rose, until I could scarcely understand him; and opposing him, Woody, a literate, reasonable Northerner, taking the conventional, but dead-wrong stand. It was an early lesson in the dangers of pigeonholing, prejudging, and taking-for-granted. I was finding out about the unpredictability of man. Too bad. It was easier in the days when I had conveniently classified all cops as cruel, all Germans as humorless, all redheads as peppy. Don and Woody were still at it.

"I mean it," said Don finally, fuming. "What the *hell*! Either we goin' for somethin' here or for nothin'. With this boy, and me back on bass—we all could blow us up a new kind of a storm."

"That's right," said Woody. "In the places where they'd hold still."

"There's enough such," said Don.

"How do you know?" challenged Woody. "Counted 'em?"

"All we need is one," I offered weakly.

"What is this?" asked Woody. "Two against one?"

"Count it," said Don.

I nodded.

"Okay," said Woody, smiling. "I give up. Let's try it. I'm for majority rule—democracy and all that noise."

We shook hands all around.

"Two things," said Woody. "One is you realize we've never heard what we might sound like, the four of us. And the second, what about the split? Oh, and that brings up a third thing. What if MacDougall's doesn't want a mixed combo?"

The three questions were answered in ten minutes the next day. We had rehearsed as a quartet all morning and, following the luncheon session, had auditioned for Mr. and Mrs. Corcoran, the managers. They had responded with enthusiasm at once; applauding, in fact, as we finished our first

number, a slow but grooved "Sweet Sue." By the time we got through "Get Happy," the raise had been granted. At no time was anything said, by them or by us, about the shade of our new man.

The quartet improved daily. We rehearsed every morning, adjusting to the changed balance. Albie introduced us to a vast new library of old material ("Groovin' High," "Ballin' the Jack," "Ostrich Walk"), and together we worked out new arrangements. Head arrangements, the toughest kind—but in some ways, the most rewarding. It took a hundred go-overs, sometimes more, to set one. Each time, it would develop and mold depending upon how each man felt—toward the others and toward the world. Or on what he had had for lunch, or on whether and how badly he had been insulted that day.

We played in a concentrated way and could feel as well as hear ourselves broadening out.

After work, we would split up in various combinations, and go listening. Albie took me up to the Savoy Ballroom, where I got my first belt of Chick Webb, and down to Bleecker Street for some Art Tatum.

After a month of playing together, we were a fixture at MacDougall's; in three months we had become an attraction.

Then we were discovered by Cookie Raeburn, at that time the jazz recording director for Brunswick Records. We signed with him and began regular recording dates.

The soft, prosperous days which followed gave me an opportunity to contemplate, and to re-evaluate my position in the scheme of things. Up to this time, my objective had been clear: to earn a living, to make some money. How much this week? How much next? How much still owed? How much saved? Now, at last, my debts were paid, the pressure was off, and there were other aims to be considered. The more I listened to the playing of my three partners, the more I became aware of my inadequacies. I added lessons, and extended practice hours, but progressed too slowly. I was attempting to accomplish by determination what the others

did by talent. Yet I enjoyed the work and the life and, more than anything, loved being part of a band.

I decided that one of the ways in which I might solve my problem was to become an arranger. The existing good fortune could finance my education, and when I had mastered the new craft, I could give up my instrument. I hoped that others would play the sounds which, I sensed, I might learn to write, but could not produce.

"Something in what you say," said Woody when I outlined my plan. "I'm beginning to think the every-man-for-himself Dixieland days are over anyway, except for laughs. Much better to know what you're doing and do it the same every time, only better. Also, if I *am* going to take off to whoknowswhere, I want something solid and steady under me."

"My feeling," I said.

Later on, I came to understand that group improvisation has a permanent place in jazz; but at that time, escaping from freedom, I sought rules.

Woody said, "Maybe it's because the damned world is getting more disorganized all the time, so people like to hear some order in sound."

"That's too rich for *my* blood, man."

"And for *mine*," said Woody. "If you ever do dope what I'm talking about, explain it to me, will you?"

"I never understand you when you talk," I said. "Only when you play."

My days began to be occupied with lessons in harmony and counterpoint, instrumentation and orchestration. I studied scores and recordings, investing most of my time and much of my money in the plan. It was a larger undertaking than I had imagined, but I was encouraged by the fact that nowhere did I find the kind of patterns I hoped to create.

One evening as we played, I listened spongily to a figure which Albie had developed around Woody's flowing chorus of "Sometimes I'm Happy." Later, as an exercise, I wrote an arrangement of Albie's stuff for three saxophones.

When I showed it to him, he squinted at it and said, "Sounds fine and mellow."

At the end of our next recording date, Albie said, "Hold a minute, men!" went out into the hall and returned with two friends, each carrying a saxophone—one alto, one tenor. "Let's cut a shot of our boy's arrangement here."

I blushed. He introduced his friends, the scholarly Davis brothers, who lived across the hall from him in Harlem.

I distributed the parts and we ran it down once, slowly. Afterward, I indicated the tempo and the phrasings I had in mind, and we recorded it: Woody carrying the melody—or his version of it—Don and Albie pulsing the beat, the Davis brothers and I providing a soft bed for the sensuous tune to roll around in. The engineer played it back for us. I had never before heard an arrangement of mine actually played and the effect on me was understandably galvanizing, but the surprise was that the others felt the same. It was not the arrangement itself, which was crude and full of elementary errors. The excitement was caused by the combination of instruments. A saxophone trio framed Woody's trumpet perfectly.

Cookie Raeburn caught fire, and against Woody's will, made us do another take for release.

After the session, Woody and I sat in the Automat. He was visibly out-of-sorts and on edge.

"I'm sorry, Woody. I didn't mean for it to go that far. I was just practicing, that's all."

"Good-bye trio, good-bye quartet."

"Why?"

"All out of hand now. Hell, did you see Raeburn's face? It was like he'd discovered liquor!"

"Listen, Woody, he doesn't run us."

"He doesn't, eh?"

"Our deal is for the quartet and if we want to stick to that—"

"—then we do what he wants," said Woody, finishing my sentence crazily.

I laughed and said, "Whatever, though. I've got to admit it sounded great."

"Solid murder," said Woody.

"The whole thing is made out of that riff of Albie's."

"You don't say," he responded witheringly.

"I mean. I realize you noticed it. I was just saying for the record. God, if I can get some more of his stuff down, wouldn't that be something?"

"No."

"No?"

"It'll be something when you think up your own stuff."

Success had gone to my nerve, and I talked back.

"I don't agree."

"You don't?" asked Woody, surprised.

"No. Arranging, that's interpretative—not creative. And anyway, I think it's healthy to give and take and back and forth. That's what makes a band. You're an original, Woody, but even you I hear work in a chunk of Albie sometimes."

"Unconscious," said Woody stubbornly.

"Sure, why not? A lot of the spill comes from the unconscious—but how'd it get in there?"

"Don't worry me with that cosmic goo, pal. I've got practical problems. The quartet, for instance."

Woody was right. Cookie Raeburn took over and the recording quartet became a sextet. Using the same style, I worked on arrangements until my eyes went pink.

Experienced arrangers were brought in as well, to improve on my accidental find.

We continued to work as a quartet, however, at MacDougall's. . . .

. . . . I was recalling bits and pieces of this part of the past as I walked the Chicago streets. Sights and sounds and even feelings returned—without order or form—but the shape of the time was becoming clearer and clearer. Somewhere in the course of remembering, I had stumbled upon Woody's missing first name. Lee. Of course. I went into the lobby

of the Palmer House and consulted the telephone directory. No Lee. I went out to walk again and continued the game of remembering. Backing and filling—often perhaps inventing?—I was re-creating another time. As I did so, it became teasingly difficult and increasingly important. I could not imagine why—but I felt that there was some vital and pressing reason for this explosion of recall; some unsolved problem; some unfinished business. . . .

. . . . We were part of the stage show at the Strand and were playing for dancing at the Astor—but a drummer had been added and we were seven.

The seventh member was Slug Abrams—a huge, encompassing black man with the largest hands and the wildest eyes I have ever seen. His face resembled a work of primitive sculpture: flat, oddly proportioned, and simply artful. He swarmed all over his drums and traps and cymbals and became the heart of our band. But only after a series of wrenching struggles.

The sextet's records had been going well and the Woody Woodruff Six began to appear on lists. Soon Cookie came up with the Hotel Astor offer, but since it was necessary to play for dancing there, more percussion was essential. We began to try out drummers. Slug Abrams was the first one we heard, and Woody dismissed him at once.

"Too powerful," he said. "And another thing, he looked hopped up to me. That's all we need."

"He ain't hopped," said Albie, "he's just like that."

"Too powerful," repeated Woody.

"Maybe could we simmer him down," I suggested. "With a little practice."

"I'm no music school," said Woody testily, and recognizing his mood, we stopped pressing.

After we had listened to more than fifteen other unsuccessful candidates, I brought up Slug Abrams' name again. Woody, Albie, and I, who ran the affairs of the outfit, talked it over.

"The thing about asking a man to change his style," said Woody, "is that sometimes you may ruin him."

"Same style, only softer," I said.

"Soft thunder ain't thunder," said Albie.

I turned on him.

"Holy smoke, pal! What side you on?"

"Me?" asked Albie. "No side. Why do I have to be on a side?"

"Well, are you for taking on Slug Abrams or against?"

"I'm for till you got a better man, then I'm against. And turn your volume down, mind?"

"There's no better man," I said.

"So far," said Woody.

"We've heard eighteen," I argued, handing Woody the list. "And if we're going to make the Astor, that's in seventeen days."

"I know," said Woody, holding his head.

"Let's talk to him at least," I suggested, by way of compromise.

"Sure," said Woody.

It proved to be a mistake. Away from his instrument, Slug made a poor impression. He seemed bored and irresponsible and never—not for one second—did he stop drumming. He drummed with his fingers, his palms, his teeth, his feet; with his glass and the mixing rod and the ashtray. He got on everyone's nerves, but Woody was the first to show it.

"Could you just sit still for a second, Slug?"

"No, I couldn't," said Slug, drumming, "I got no time. *Be dah be dah be dah!*"

Conversation or conference being impossible, we got the band together and cut a few rehearsal sides with him.

By the time we had played them back several times, it was clear that with Slug we had something outstanding. Despite his irritating eccentricities and his peculiar personality, we took him on and came to grips with the problems of his adjustment to the band and the band's to him. But the music was superb.

We were held over at the Astor. By the time we played

the Strand, we had been formed by Cookie Raeburn into a corporation in which each of the seven players owned stock. None of us fully understood the intricacies of the plan, but we trusted Cookie.

During the supper show of our first day at the Strand, an unfortunate thing happened.

We were sitting close together in the center of the stage—except Woody, who stood as always—using a pool of soft light from above to gain intimacy. We were performing tentatively, mechanically—not yet accustomed to playing in a theatre. But we were improving with each number. Woody stepped forward for a chorus of “S’posin’,” we built the background, and for the first time in the engagement, that sweet hush of contact fell over the audience. Woody began to go, we faded, he faded with us and by the beginning of his second chorus we were all playing in a witty, erotic whisper.

Then it happened.

A loud voice from the darkness of the auditorium.

“Siddown, whiteboy!” it shouted. “You’re outnumbered!”

There followed a missed beat from us all, a clinker from Woody—the only one I had ever heard him hit—and a nervous, raucous, scattered laugh from part of the house. We finished our turn, perfunctorily, going over—as Don put it—“Very pretty good.”

Albie and I went into Woody’s dressing room to talk things over and to re-routine our act. We found him knotted and nervy. “Okay, here’s mine,” he said, pouring a drink. “I’m for Cookie canceling us the hell out of this hole!”

“There’ll be a few creeps wherever we go,” said Albie, reasonably. “Don’t let it throw you.”

“You know what I hate?” asked Woody. “Advice.”

“Okay,” said Albie. “Sorry.”

“And you bum-steered me on Slug,” added Woody sharply. “Don’t tell me he wasn’t loaded with something out there today. I don’t know what, but something.”

“Probably,” I had to agree.

“Lemme go see,” said Albie, and left.

Woody and I sat for a while without speaking.

"Outnumbered," he said when he had finished his drink. "Don't think it hasn't crossed my mind."

I stared at him, too surprised to reply, considering the possibility that he was joking in an unfamiliar key.

"Every day I try not to feel it," he went on, "and every day I feel it more. You ever try to *not* feel something? Like—try not to think of a white cow. That one."

"We've been slogging pretty hard," I said. "We're all going a little groggy."

"Don't soap me, huh, kiddo? This is a situation. When we had the quartet—remember?—it felt fine. The music was good and it was three to one, so that made us feel like extra fine men, having a—"

"Wait a second," I said. "Don't tell me what I felt."

"You did, though," he continued relentlessly. "Real *democrapic*. Embracing the poor suffering minority."

"You're blown, y'know it?"

"Next thing we know—presto, chango—*we're* the minority. Like Ezra says."

"Who's Ezra?"

"Pound. The man, man. The man!"

"I've never read it."

"It?" He laughed at me. "You should."

"I haven't got time for the newspapers, let alone—"

"Newspapers!" he snorted. "They tell you where you are. But my man Ezra—he tells you where you're going."

We looked at each other without communicating.

"Listen, Woody," I said. "My family's had a family doctor—the same one—for about fifteen years. Good man. Birnbaum. He used to prescribe all kinds of gonk like all doctors—but lately, he's got a new line. Nine times out of ten, after the diagnosis, he looks at you and he says, 'Live with it.' That's all. Just like that. 'Live with it.'"

"What about it?"

"Well, he's right. Most of the time it disappears or fades away or cures itself or else you just get used to it."

"Bull."

"Not big things, of course. Those he treats—but the usual run of nuisances, that's what he says live with."

"I'm afraid I understand you," said Woody. "Okay. The difference is: you think I've got a pimple, but it's really a cancer."

"No."

"You think I like having this block? Enjoy it? What kind of a meathead are you? I'm split in half. My reason explains it all to me and then my feeling kicks it to bits."

"Live with it," I said.

He laughed bitterly. "God, but you're a sage little bastard, aren't you?"

"No, but I've got a big stake in this and—"

Albie returned.

"Ephedrines," he said. "An overload. I talked to him."

"That's no good," said Woody. "Talk. Put him on notice and let's line up a new man."

"Jesus, Woody!" I exploded. "You were just saying!"

"Saying what?"

"About feeling and reason and—oh, hell. I give up."

"Do that," said Woody, from above. "Give up."

I said nothing.

"It's a big move," said Albie. "Maybe we should talk to Mr. Raeburn."

Woody blew. "Look, mister. I don't need Raeburn to help me run a band. Or anybody. What's a band? A band is a—is an organization. No? And what's organization? Wait a minute. I'll tell you. Discipline—and not much more. You want to hear something? Listen to this. A big thinkpot said it. 'A man who can do deep-breathing exercises for fifteen minutes a day is a man who can rule the world.' Crazy? No. Because what he means is that anybody who's got or can learn enough self-discipline to do that one little thing can do the rest easy. But that's the catch. Nobody can. Try it. Dare you. Let me finish, y'mind? How many resolutions have you kept? Or you? How many broken? See what I mean? Do you really practice every day—regularly, religiously? Like hell. What's all this got to do with what we're talking about? This: dis-

cipline. That's what's going to make this band. And a lack of it's going to wreck it. Okay. We've got a rule. Nobody crooked or hopped on the stand. After work, I don't give a pink goddam. They want to kill themselves, let them. But not on the stand. So if a man flouts it—then what? Talk? How much talk? I say this character's broken the rules and he's out. Now what do you say?"

"One more chance," said Albie.

It was as though Woody had not heard him.

"Remember about Ben Pollack?" he continued. "When he had a thing about neat appearance? And they were playing the Park Central and two of the guys went up to play handball and rushed back down to work still with their sneakers on? And Ben fired them on the spot?"

"I heard it was just dust on their shoes, not sneakers," I said.

"What the hell's the difference? He fired them."

"That's right," said Albie. "And the two guys he fired were Jimmy McPartland and Benny Goodman."

"What about it?" challenged Woody.

"I'd take Goodman barefooted," I said.

"All right, men," said Woody. "How would you like to take over?"

"No, thanks."

"All right, then!"

"We're way off the tune," Albie said. "Listen, Woody. I honest to God think I could straighten him in time. It ain't he's wicked, it's just he don' know no better."

I piled in with, "That's a fact, Woody. But people can learn sometimes—if you give them a chance. Maybe even help them. I know what I'm talking about. People have helped me. You, for instance."

"He doesn't belong in this particular band," said Woody, unbending. "He's not housebroken. I don't want to be any part of a hopped-up, full-of-tea mess."

"One man," I tried, by way of compromise.

"Sure," said Woody. "The one man who sets the beat,

that's all. That you and I follow. I don't want to follow a puffed-up slob, do you mind?"

His voice cracked on the last word and the phenomenon troubled his acutely musical ear. He sat down and lit a cigarette. We watched him smoke it down to a stub, his face changing color several times. He dropped the stub on the floor and ground it out with his toe. He looked up.

"All right," he said softly. "Suppose we leave it alone for now. I'm tired."

Albie and I left and went in to talk to Slug. He listened to our stern plea, drumming on the washbasin with two toothbrushes, and when we had finished, answered by laughing for five minutes.

We completed the Strand engagement and although nothing more was said, I suspected that Woody had decided to accept my—or, rather, Dr. Birnbaum's—suggestion. He lived with it, and, true to the dictum, his problem solved itself. Within nine months, Slug Abrams was dead, we had a new drummer (white), and Woody no longer had to worry about being outnumbered.

What he did have to worry about was more serious—the band was going to pieces. None of us missed the exasperating, troublesome Slug—but oh how we missed his drumming. The heartbeat of the band had been stilled, had been replaced by another—but it was not the same, it was never to be the same. Slug's beat had stimulated the rest of us beyond our best, now we were becoming workaday. Woody drove hard when we rehearsed—perhaps overrehearsed—and began to lose his temper on the stand.

One night, he ragged one of the Davis brothers until both of them quit. A round of replacements began and our reputation suffered. At Albie's suggestion, we returned to the quartet, which was beginning to grow into promise when Albie got the offer from Ellington. He turned it down, but afterward, when we had all talked it out, he accepted. Woody, Don, and I became a trio again. There was a certain comfort in being back where we had begun, in being a smaller group again, but by now I had decided to stop

marking time as a player and get into full-time arranging. I contacted several of the best men in the field, offering my services on an apprentice basis. When, in reply, I heard from Archie Bleyer—I knew that the time had come.

At a sad meeting in Billy La Hiff's Tavern, the trio came to an end, as it had begun, over a bottle of champagne. Don Kirkus went to San Francisco and I saw no more of him. Now and then I would see his name in *Variety*, or on a record.

Woody and I remained close friends for a time, then drifted apart, although we would meet occasionally on the street, in elevators, in movie lobbies. Whenever this happened, we would go to the nearest bar and catch up with each other. More and more, he seemed to be eager to get out of New York, which he found oppressive. He considered going to Chicago where he was well regarded, but at the last moment changed his mind and went to Mexico City. We exchanged a few dull letters until the war years. By that time, I was no longer in music. I heard once that Woody was in the Pacific with the Army, playing his horn. Since my service took me to Europe, our separation became complete, and that was that until the day in Chicago.

. I found myself in front of the Blackstone Theatre just as the matinée was breaking. Automatically, my feet had found their way.

My wife looked at me with alarm as I came into her dressing room.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Me?” I asked in reply.

“You look awful,” she said. “What is it?”

“Me?” I asked again, stupidly.

“Yes.”

“I’ve been walking,” I replied. “Maybe too much, I guess.”

She studied me and said, “Your forehead’s wrinkled.”

“Where do you want to eat?” I asked.

“I don’t know. What’s the weather like?”

“Didn’t notice. Okay, I suppose.”

I was struggling to make my way back to reality.

“Sure there’s nothing wrong?”

“Not a thing. How about the Pump Room?”

“Too noisy. I’d rather just a steak next door.”

“All right. I thought you wanted to walk.”

“Well, couldn’t we walk a little and then next door?”

“You bet. How was it today?” I asked.

“Dandy.”

“Good. Ready?”

“One second.” She touched my face, looked beyond my eyes and said, “Tell me.”

“I will,” I replied, kissing her. “While we walk.”

“Sure you can?”

“Oh, sure. Not important—just one of those big irritating nothings.”

We walked for fifteen minutes, during which time I told of having missed Woody’s call and a little about what it had reawakened.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “He’ll call again.”

Her instinct about such things is remarkably accurate. So, reassured, I relaxed and we went to dinner. The disturbing memory was replaced by the pleasant present, and I determined to put an end to rooting around in the depressing area of used-up time.

After dinner, I took her back to the dressing room and helped her prepare to rest. Lights out, blanket arranged, window fixed, door marked—I left. On my way out, I walked through the semidarkness of the huge, quiet, old auditorium. It seemed so restful a surrounding, that I decided to sit for a time and to avoid the turbulent world outside. I moved to the last row and sat in a side seat. A single pilot light provided the only illumination, and at the fuzzy edge of its throw, a sleeping stagehand was the only sign of life. The stillness was dreamlike. I closed my eyes and at once heard music again. “Three Little Words.” Kalmar and Ruby? Yes. A bigger band this time—but still featuring Woody’s trumpet against a group of reeds.

Another door of memory, long locked, opened, and I thought of Slug's funeral and of the six of us playing "Requiem Without Drums" which I had written for the occasion. I shuddered at the pretentiousness of the title and felt faintly sick as, in memory, I heard the piece. It was competent, mechanical, and clever. No more. Even death had failed to inspire me as a composer. Still, it had its points: a blues pattern without percussion, without a beat. The idea had been to make the absence of Slug's fervent drums felt, and in this, at least, I had succeeded.

These days there is an active school of beatless jazz. Jimmy Giuffre and others—but at that time I had never heard it or of it.

Earlier, there had been another number—"Slug Nutty"—in which I had made full use of some of Slug's wilder flights, featuring drums as the solo instrument. In between, there was another composition, written after visiting Slug at the rest home. It was called "Big Man Dying by Inches." So far as I can recall, I heard it played only once, at a rehearsal session under Woody's direction. It caused one of our few arguments.

He had looked at the score, scoffed, and said, "Okay. Let's give it a rundown. Once."

"Why once?" I had asked, bristling. My insecurity could support no criticism.

"I don't like it."

"You haven't heard it."

"I've seen it."

"Not the same thing."

"For me it is—what the hell—come on, Pops—this is my business we're talking about."

"Do you like everything you play?"

"Let's go, huh? They charge by the hour for this trap—same if you play or debate."

I had slammed out of the room, but could not resist listening, my ear to the door, as my piece was played. Even with my part missing, it sounded off-the-ground, better than I had expected. Composed in true emotion, it was being played so,

too. This was during the time when we were all worried about Slug, although not one of us expected him to die quite so soon.

As I sat in the darkness of the Blackstone Theatre, listening, I was conscious, all at once, of a singular scent in the air about me, a perfume I had not breathed for years. I looked about. No one. I recalled the image of myself pressed to the door of the studio, listening to Woody and the combination playing "Big Man Dying by Inches."

Up on the stage before me, the sleeping stagehand woke, sat up, emitted a cannibal cry, rolled over, and went back to sleep.

The remembered music returned with still another whiff of Edmonde's perfume. . . .

. . . . "Good Lord!" she said when it was over. "What was that?"

I spoke the title in a way which made her say, "Yours?"
"Yes."

"For Slug."

I nodded.

"I apologize," she said, meaning it.

"What for?"

"For all I have thought of your composing until now."

"Oh."

She leaned forward and kissed me on either cheek, in the French way.

"Isn't there a ribbon or something goes with this bit?" I asked, trying to joke off my embarrassment.

She touched my nose with her forefinger. "Not so cynical, please. You are too young."

"You know how we say in America, honey. 'If they're big enough, they're old enough.'"

I reached out, grasped her upper arm and pressed it too tightly.

She regarded me compassionately, appalled by my clumsiness.

"Write more music," she said. "You are not hopeless. It is a compliment. In France, we say that the *great* composers are those which write not *only* bad music."

She left me and went into the studio, but that perfume stayed with me for the rest of the day and part of that night. The kiss, I suppose.

Edmonde Roussel, the first woman I had ever met.

Previously, I had known girls, dames, chicks, and one or two ladies—but never a woman. Nothing to do with age, any of this. Edmonde was our age, give or take a year, but she was a woman; a creature complete and separate from man.

She was a blend of rare physical, spiritual, and intellectual qualities. Small and radiant and graceful, she held attention hypnotically. Her dark hair was long. She used no make-up, because there was no necessity for it. Nature had colored her face in delicate pastels. Her lips were habitually open just a touch and her warm eyes seemed always to be receiving. Her perfectly sculptured body gave the appearance of firmness, but it was meltingly soft to the touch. Her zest for the pleasures and mysteries of life was insatiable. We were all gone on her and she, for a time, was crazy about the band. There was a sort of inside joke involving the band and Edmonde, the origin and significance of which escape me—but it was this: each of us had a different name for her. Could it have been that in this way we each felt a private relationship? I called her Eddie. Woody called her Madame, using the French pronunciation. Don called her Roussel, because he called all girls by their last names. Slug called her Frenchlady. Albie, Miss R. Henry Davis called her Mrs. Panassy—an involved fancy, having to do with the fact that a famous French jazz critic was named Hugues Panassié. And Gil Davis, who frequently imitated his brother, called her Mrs. Panassy, too.

Edmonde. She used to sit in the studio during recording dates while I wondered who the hell she was. Eventually, I found out. Finally, I would miss her—and that perfume—when she was not there.

Once, I was at least two beats late moving into a chorus.

Woody stopped playing and waved his horn at the control booth, signaling a stop. He looked at me with less pity than usual. In desperation, I meaningfully indicated the girl sitting against the wall.

"Take five," said Woody, on a weary breath. We all rose and stretched and lit cigarettes.

Woody floated over to Edmonde. She stood up as he approached, and smiled.

"Wouldn't you be more comfortable in the booth?" he asked, without masking his meaning.

She took him literally and shook her head. "I like to have it pure," she answered, "when I can. Thank you."

"I'd like to have *you* pure," said Woody.

"Pardon?" she said, leaning forward.

He turned on his what-are-we-waiting-for expression and let it run all over her.

Although she had failed to understand his words, his look was crystal clear and her cheeks reddened in a spurt.

"What's your name?" he asked.

She told him.

"Now birth date."

"How?"

"I have to know if you and I—if we're in the stars. Quick, quick!"

Startled, she said, "The second December."

"Oh, you little Sagittarius, you!" he said with a hoarse tremolo. "Go ahead."

"Ahead?"

"The rest of it."

"Nineteen and twelve," she said.

"Nineteen and twelve! A great year. Wait, let me look at my card here." He pulled out his wallet and pretended to consult a reference. "Here we are—nineteen and twelve. Five stars. Well! I'll take a case of you."

He fell forward, placing both palms against the wall behind her, trapping her in the space between. She laughed.

Cookie Raeburn's voice boomed out over the talkback, "How's about it, Woody? Before we cool off, hey?"

Woody Charlestoneed back to his place, shouting, "I never cool off, Pops. You know why? Because I'm pure! That's why."

The next take was the one. The song was "Night and Day." Woody took off and blew himself right into posterity. The record we made that afternoon is still around, a collector's item. I remember finishing, my heart thumping, and looking up at Woody. He had gone white, as though all his blood had been transfused into the music to make it live. I looked across the room at Edmonde. Her face was streaked with tears and her mouth was open.

But that was not the first time I had seen her. She had come into Alice Foote MacDougall's with Cookie several times before this.

Somewhere along the line, I learned that, in addition to being French, she was high-class, rich, and deep in jazz.

Those were wild young days and nights, filled with experiment, and with discovery: about music and about living. There was a considerable amount of drinking, but very little drunking, partly because good liquor was rare and expensive, partly because it was necessary to keep functioning—the listeners could pass out, we could not—and mainly because no matter how much we drank, we seemed to burn it off in playing. To a greater or lesser degree, we all tested the effects of ephedrine sulfate tablets—known as "freddies"—Coke and aspirin, spirits of ammonia in water, and the bolder ones even of what Woody called "Mary Joanna."

We often did night things by day and day things by night; sometimes skipped sleep entirely; worked when we had to—but ate and played and loved when we felt to.

Edmonde was in and out of it. She would return to France from time to time. She made trips to New Orleans and Chicago and Kansas City, always looking for jazz. Whenever she came back, we would see her. Usually, she rented a large flat or a house in the city; sometimes, a country place in New Jersey or in Connecticut—once in Manhasset, Long Island, where that violently disturbing event had taken place.

Edmonde had rented or borrowed a lovely estate. Atop a

gentle hill near the shore, stood a sprawling, old house, brought expensively up-to-date. On another hill, beside it, were five or six outbuildings—cabins, brilliantly arranged so that each had privacy. These were the guest houses. In the valley between these hills, there was a swimming pool, two tennis courts and gardens. Beyond, the calm of Manhasset Bay.

It was here that Edmonde gave a weekend for the band and girls. The Davis brothers brought their girls, who turned out to be their sisters. I brought a music copyist named Lucille Something, so that work would not be interrupted. Don brought *three* girls. Albie came with a Cotton Club showgirl he was trying for. Slug brought no one, nor did Woody.

Edmonde asked Slug about it when we arrived. He patted his bass drum and said, "Mine's right yinside a here, French-lady. Right yinside!"

Woody did not explain.

The first day was filled with sightseeing and walking and swimming and sleeping. Lunch was an enormous picnic on the private beach. Dinner was late and long, and afterward, during coffee, Edmonde began to play records which she had recently brought back from Europe. There was a Swedish combination, pale except for an alto saxophonist who was near to unbelievable; a wild bunch of French screamer-dreamers who were naïve but stirring—then, for laughs, she played us some German jazz.

Nothing primes a musician's sense of song as swiftly as new music; and before long, Woody was sitting on the floor, playing his trumpet along with the records. After a while, the Davis boys came in, and Slug, and finally Don. The records were replaced by our band, without me, settling down to jam. I avoided it, as always, because the too-high flights of these sessions unnerved me. This night was one with a texture and sound and personality of its own.

It was a fine time, full of good food, plentiful drink, pleasant company, fresh air, and an atmosphere of creativity. We were all friends and there was no one to sell or

to impress. During one half-hour, Henry Davis made his saxophone sound like a trumpet—in reply, Woody played a long chorus as though his trumpet were a sax. The Davises joined him and made up a trio. One of the Davis girls, Clara, sang as though she were inventing the songs. From time to time, some of the company would leave and be gone for a while or longer. Food continued to appear and to be consumed. There was a great deal of laughter and some dancing. Everyone seemed unusually attractive.

Sometime after three, I began to feel drowsy and moved into the adjoining sun parlor to rest for a few minutes. Instead, I fell asleep. I awoke at dawn and looked into the parlor. It was deserted except for three people: Woody and Slug and Edmonde.

She was lying on the huge sofa, listening to the two of them playing. Her left hand touched an oversized brandy snifter which stood on the floor beside her. Her right hand held a cigarette and her ankles rested on top of the sofa's back. She gave the effect of being cunningly upside down. Those ankles. Those legs. They were as unique as they were disquieting. The ankles were tiny, but strongly sinewed; the calves, generous; and the line between, absolutely fluid. The knees were gay but unobtrusive, the thighs lean and powerful. In repose, they fed the eye; in movement, those legs quickened the heartbeat. Displayed as they were, I had an opportunity to enjoy them for a few minutes before I became conscious of the music.

Earlier in the evening, Edmonde had played eight or nine different sides of a then-current Parisian waltz, "Parlez-Moi d'Amour." It struck me as being a somewhat lugubrious, predictable tune helped enormously on one of the sides by the throbbing personality delivery of Lucienne Boyer. I suspected that the lyric must be outstanding, and when Edmonde translated it to the music, I discovered that I was right.

Now here they were, playing it in a ridiculous instrumentation. Drums and trumpet. Slug was laying down a slow but getting-on-with-it beat, and Woody was playing the

tune. The tune. Nothing else. No tricks, no frills. But such was his talent, that all at once the tune had new beauty. Was it the phrasing, the contrast of volume from note to note, the sudden accents—what? Whatever it was, it was masterful, and I was caught. So, apparently, was Edmonde. She lay quiet and motionless as the sound flooded the room. Woody finished the chorus and lit a cigarette. Slug continued, almost imperceptibly speeding the tempo and making rhythm patterns out of the song's accents. Woody and Edmonde shared a long look, which was broken by a wild eight-bar breakout from Slug. At the end of it he settled into a fresh beat, abandoning the waltz time and substituting a sort of stomp, leaning on the first two beats in each bar.

It captured Woody's imagination. He put down his cigarette, picked up his horn and let go, playing as though he were two men. It was a characteristic trick of his: blowing the tune, and commenting on it in another register as he went along. Despite the hour, he played amazingly. He must have admired it himself, because he swung at once into a second chorus. This time, his own notions began to assert themselves, and the tune became secondary, which was all right with me, as it was beginning to pall. He modulated into a richer, brighter key and began hitting some wildly exultant stuff. I moved into the room and tried to make my physical presence felt, but I might as well have been invisible so far as they were concerned. I poured a drink—never had had one at six in the morning—and moved back into the smaller room to watch and listen. I cannot remember how or when it began, but there it was—one of those back and forth choruses. Teams of tap-dancers used to do what they called challenge dances, attempting to outdo one another with intricate steps. In music, the pattern was called an answer chorus or a chase chorus, and was considered by some to be amateurish. A "battle of bands" or a "trumpet war" or a bout between two players out to cut each other may have been good for business and may have provided titillation for the crowd, but only served to embarrass true

musicians, who know that art is the antithesis of competition. This—what Slug and Woody were involved in—was more than that. It had begun as a witty game, each of them soloing for eight bars or so, and alternating. For a while, they played fours. But the game, as games often do, became serious. The discussion turned into a debate; into a quarrel; into a fight; and, finally, into a primitive duel to the death.

I realize how overstated this seems—a duel with deadly trumpet and drum. Nevertheless, that is what it was. Both men were expressing themselves with violence. I was on my feet in the doorway, and even now, setting this down, I sense an echo of the fear which had overcome me. Edmonde was no longer lying down. She was sitting, hunched forward, her body moving convulsively to the music—if it could be called music.

On they went, and on. Both were tiring, but calling upon hidden reserves. Both had long since passed the boiling point. I wanted to leave, but could not—being rooted by the recognition of imminent danger. Further, I wanted to be there when whatever was going to happen happened.

Now Woody went out of control. Only someone who knew him and his playing intimately—such as I—could have recognized it. I knew that he was gone, could hear him floundering for balance and order and reason—but failing to take hold again. Slug sensed it, too. His solos began to surge with confidence and victory.

I have heard that judo masters, on an exalted level, do not match strength or skill so much as they do inner psychological domination. I saw it, heard it, happening here.

Edmonde was on her feet now and seemed to have a whole fist in her mouth, biting on it. Her face was flushed and shiny; her body, pulsating.

Woody reached for some high ones and missed, then cracked a few simple ones.

Slug answered, standing, with a display of controlled power that damn near stopped my clock.

I looked over at Edmonde. She quivered. A gasped cry

escaped her. Her knees gave way and she lay back on the sofa again.

Woody's turn. To my astonishment, he began a new chorus of "Parlez-Moi d'Amour"—the song with which they had begun—soft and straight. It sounded pale and banal, although Slug backed it up with a neat, clean beat. Just before reaching the end of the chorus, Woody stopped abruptly and left the room. Slug continued alone, pumping out a jazzed heartbeat.

I followed Woody down the hill. When he reached the swimming pool, he threw in his trumpet, then took off his clothes and dived in after it. I trotted down to the edge and waited for him to surface. When he did, he saw me.

We looked at each other for too long a time, aware of the sound of the drums on the hill pounding on relentlessly. I was torn between wishing it to stop and praying it to continue. In every sense, the point had been made, the climax long passed.

"How's it in there?" I asked, finally.

He did not reply.

The sound of the drums stopped. The silence was deafening. My actions preceded my thoughts and I was amazed to observe myself taking off my clothes and joining Woody in the pool. We swam about for a time, came out, picked up our clothes and carried them into the bathhouse.

"I'm going into town," he announced. "You?"

"I don't know."

"I'd stay," he added. "But these birds—they're screaming me to pieces. I've never heard such noise."

"How about some sleep?" I suggested. "And then decide."

"Sleep is for babies," he said.

"Been quite a night," I said, as I finished drying and began to dress.

"Yes, we dug us some deep stuff, some of us, and some of us came up empty. How it goes."

I switched that off, fast, and said, "And that Clara Davis. Isn't she one bitch of a singer?"

"Damn right. She sings—she doesn't grunt or growl or

croon or holler—she sings. She's got some respect for the sound of the human voice."

"And that Albie bastard," I said, laughing. "When the hell is he going to stop improving?"

Woody sat down on the floor and began pulling on his shoes.

"Remember back there a couple million years ago when I told you no soap on Slug Abrams because he was too powerful?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I was right."

He got up, walked away, and none of us saw him for a week.

I fished his trumpet out of the pool and took it to my room to dry. The weekend continued calmly, to its end.

In the ensuing days, there was much to do; business to transact, dates to be fixed—awkward with the leader absent. Still more awkward was the problem of explaining to Cookie, to the band, and to others what had happened. Albie and I shared the secret of Woody's cutout, and hoped for the best. We booked a date for a week from that time and prepared for it as though Woody were with us. I embroidered some vague implications about an illness in his family in Hinsdale, Illinois.

The afternoon of the evening we were to open at Nick's, Woody turned up at my apartment. He appeared to be well and rested. He wore a brand-new suit.

"Where've *you* been?" I asked, making no effort to conceal my irritation.

"Me? I've been reading."

"Where reading?"

"In the main reading room of the New York Public Library," he said. "The north room, that's the one on the right, with the odd numbers."

"That's the place for you all right," I quipped bitterly. "With the odd numbers."

He struck a florid actor's pose and declaimed, "I am strange—but who is not?" Chekhov."

"We open at Nick's tonight—did you know?"

"Sure I know. I'm here, am I not?"

"I don't know where the hell you are, Woody. And that's a fact."

"What do you want to do, wrassle?"

"No."

"Well, get off my back then. I've got enough of a load without you."

"Gladly."

His pose fell away and he asked, in a bereft and desperate voice, "Try to understand me a little, will you? Help me."

My impatience caused me to mock, "Help yourself."

A mistake. His appeal was of the sort which might have brought forth any one of a thousand responses. I had chosen, in the rhythm of annoyance, a wrong one. He turned away, and moved back behind his façade.

"No kiddin', Woody," I complained righteously. "We've been in a real sweat here, Albie and me. We're the only ones know about the goof-off. Everybody else, including Cookie, I cock-an'-bulled."

"Thanks," he said coolly.

"We upped the dough downtown. Nice?"

He gave me an open look. "How were you planning to open if you didn't know I'd show? Know I'd show to blow?" He laughed.

"I had Ginzy standing by."

He stopped laughing.

"Ginzy!" he slammed back at me, outraged. "That's what he's good for—standing by."

"Best I could do," I muttered.

"Ginzy!" he continued. "There's a sonofabitch goes for a clinker and makes it every time."

"Well," I said, "you try to pick up a standby fast."

He went to the window and stood gazing out. I finished sketching a trio I had been working on and reviewed it before putting it away.

I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up.

"Sorry, Pops," he said. "I've been having the full hello-Joes

these last six, seven days. I think because I haven't been playing."

"Why not?"

"Or didn't you hear?" he asked. "About my horn? It was drowned, poor thing. I thought you knew. You were there."

"Really drowned?"

"Sure. Maybe I should've drowned myself—but no, drowned the horn."

I got his horn out of my closet and offered it to him. He stared at it and shook his head. I put it away.

"But what about tonight?" I asked.

"I better go pick up something to play on," he said. "Unless you care to hear me on comb?"

We laughed together, went and had an expensive lunch at Frankie and Johnnie's and from there walked over to Conn's on West Forty-eighth Street to look for a new trumpet.

As he looked them over, he squinted hard several times, alternating this with an attempt to open his eyes wider than they were meant to open. I shared his apprehension with a dry tongue, waiting for him to play the first note and fearing that it would fail. He picked a horn, and wet his lips. We exchanged a swift look before he turned his back on me and let go with an electrifying ride, which dizzied me. He was still all there—and more. He continued his proud and arrogant display, while I reflected on the imponderables of inner powers. He had not played in a week, he had said, and I had every reason to believe him—yet from the first spill, he was playing as well as ever. Better. Perhaps it was because his reflexes had been rested and refreshed. No one within earshot could have failed to stop and listen.

After playing a showcaseful of trumpets, back-and-forthing through dozens, he returned to one he had tried earlier and gave it a wild workout. He played its lowest notes soft to loud and loud to soft. He demanded its highest notes clear and clean. The instrument responded as though it were a living and trained thing.

Finally, he took the trumpet from his lips, put his atten-

tion on it fondly and, pretending that its bell was an ear, whispered into it, "Don't ever leave me, babe."

Considering that we had not had a full rehearsal for a week, we opened well. We were tightly knit as a group and played with a sense of the enjoyment of interdependence.

Late in the evening, off the stand, I froze as I heard Slug break out, to be answered by Woody; now Slug, now Woody—and I thought, Holy God, this is where we came in, until I realized that all of the violence had gone out of the exchange and that what remained was a joyous, sportsmanlike challenge—each man forcing the best out of the other.

When we finished our first night, Nick invited us all out to a meal at Huey's, a Harlem breakfast club. Woody begged off and I spent a good part of the morning trying to explain that he was a loner and always would be and that we simply had to understand that and adjust to it. I did fair.

Nick's party featured fried chicken, spareribs, sausages, eggs, waffles, and coffee in tall pitchers. We sat around an extra-large round table covered by a red-checkered cloth, passing the dishes around and across. There was beer, too—and, of course, music. Edmonde, aglow, sat beside me and ate beautifully, no mean feat. I remember her laughter but not what we laughed at.

When the party was over, she and I took Slug and Clara home. Edmonde drove and I made plans for the immediate future, while Slug made shameless passes at Clara on the back seat—his toes tapping out rhythms all the while. We dropped them at Clara's address, and headed for Riverside Drive.

"May we go by the way of the river?" Edmonde asked. "Yes, longer but so most beautiful."

"Far as I'm concerned, kiddo, you can go right *into* the river."

She laughed. "You wish to suicide yourself?" she asked.

"No," I replied, mimicking her accent. "I wish somebody to suicide me."

"Your English," she said, "is poor."

"How about you giving me a few lessons?"

We were in the silly department because we had no clear understanding of our relationship. Brilliant and sensitive as she was, there was no use attempting to mask my feeling about her. She must have known, must have sensed it in the air between us—and sensed too, no doubt, my lack of confidence and my terror of rejection. Still, she had invited me to take her home. Why? There had been several others she might have asked. Was she committed to Woody, I wondered—with or without his knowledge? And what about that disastrous morning in Manhasset and the drum stopping—but a few minutes ago, there had been Slug on the back seat. Even we—promiscuous and amoral as we may have been—were not as crass as all that.

“Look,” she said, slowing down and indicating a stunning view of the city.

“Great,” I said.

“You don’t like it?”

“I said great, didn’t I?”

“Yes, but as all of you talk and express—‘great’ is very little. I have learned.”

“I guess you’re right. It’s better than great, all that, but, see, I’ve seen it before.”

“I wonder how is it that great has become small—is it that you aim so high, all of you?”

“I don’t know what you call high, Eddie. My aim right now is I’d like to hold the band together. The best I’ve found in life so far is when the band’s going good, when it’s all connected and together. Like tonight, or last night, I should say, there were a few stretches of what I’d call sheer perfect—the best of everybody blending. And that means that everybody was listening to the others, and understanding or trying to—and the vitality comes out of trying. Talk about fun. Or about heaven. Did you notice?”

“I noticed,” she said.

Having found a receptive and understanding ear at last, I continued, “It beats me. The more I think about it, the less I dig it. The seven of us. The different worlds we come from—the different worlds we want. I know our bodies and brains

are absolutely removed from one another—and, next thing you know—we're swinging. Together. I mean, consider the line-up. I'll start with me. Mediocre." I waited a tiny beat for contradiction. It did not come. I went on. "I'm only sitting in till we can reorganize. But who am I, anyway? And what do I know? Not much, believe me. I've been gigging around, trying to make a living and get a few kicks on the way. But I mean to say, I'm not much. Yet. I couldn't take school, so I cut out and all those dreams my parents had for me—well, they'll stay dreams. I'll tell you the truth. I latched on to music at first as an excuse more than anything. Now I'm in it and on my own and—by the way, would you like to hear the story of my life?"

"Of course."

I stopped talking. She took a deep breath and so did I. I went on. "Books and paintings and ideas and long-hair music—I get near them once in a while but I'm nowhere. I haven't learned how to choose. That's the whole trick of everything, I figure: how to choose. All right, that's enough about me. Take Don. I love him, but he's a mess."

"In which way?"

"In plenty of ways. One, he's out to have every female on the face of the earth."

"He will not succeed."

"Well, if he doesn't, it won't be because he didn't try. So then this leads him to the rest of it. I never saw such a guy for pills and shots and schemes and gadgetry. Every day something new that's going to make him strong and healthy and potent in five minutes. He's wacked all the way, I tell you."

"He is amusing."

"Sure, but— Well, okay. Take Albie. You know how his last name got to be Salmon? Because he likes canned salmon, that's how. He doesn't know who he is or where he came from, nothing. His remembering starts with running away with some other kids from some kind of a home, but he's got no idea where it was or even how come he was in there. He figures he was four, maybe five years old. Orphan-

age? Reform school? He doesn't know. He just took off and spent the next few years trying to eat and sleep and keep from being picked up. A full-time job. So then he shipped out from Hoboken, I think it was, as a cabin boy on some kind of a merchant ship. And there was this elderly captain, who always took his wife along with him. And she had a piano and a Victrola and for some reason—to keep from going nuts, maybe—she decided to give Albie piano lessons. And he was too scared not to take them, so he took them and by the time they got back he was able to get a job in a Jersey City rib joint with a plate on top of the piano for the Woolworth."

"Woolworth?"

"Nickels and dimes."

"Oh."

"So from then on, he just pianoed around till he ran into us. And oh, yes—she taught him to read and write, too, this woman. He had her and her husband come over to MacDougall's when we were there. Nice woman. She blubbered right through her whole dinner. So that's Albie. He thinks all the time. But he doesn't think thoughts—he thinks patterns, he tells me. Sound patterns. But that doesn't make him—"

"Moment," she said, interrupting. She reached over and turned up the volume on her car radio (one of the first). We listened to the music for a bit.

She turned the volume down and said, "Go on."

"What about?"

"You are telling me of the men."

"Okay. The Davis boys. I don't know them too well, but their sister Clara—she's given me a little scoop on them. That's the whole family now—two brothers and two sisters. The boys and Eunice, they've been to college. CCNY and Hunter. And the youngest, Clara—she's there now."

"And the parents?"

"Both dead. They knocked themselves out on these kids. She was telling me—Clara. For six years their father worked two full-time jobs—one in a garage and one in a laundry.

And the mother ran this lunch counter uptown—single-handed. So they put the kids through schools the way they wanted, and all it cost them was their lives."

"Sad."

"The father made it to thirty-seven and the mother a little less. That's why you don't see them horsing around much, the Davises, any of them. They've got a serious stake in life."

"And Slug?"

The question was casual. Only a professional actress could have simulated such ease, and Edmonde was not that. Having decided that the question was on the level, I gave a straight answer.

"Slug," I said, "is not a human being."

"Oh?" she said, startled, in a way that made me doubt my decision.

"No," I continued. "He's a musical instrument."

She laughed.

"It's true," I said. "Consider it. He never stops. At night, I'll bet he doesn't get into a bed—probably into a case."

"He is a master."

"Sure. And he can barely write his name and the only thing he can read is music."

"That's enough. That's his language."

"Okay."

"Where does he come from?" she asked.

"From the streets. I don't know. From the front of the Capitol Theatre. Shining shoes and clogging for pennies. Have you ever seen him? I mean heard him, play a shoeshine box?"

"No."

"Kill you. He snaps the rags and clicks the brushes, bangs the box and it's better than his drums. Anyway, that's Slug."

I said nothing more, nor did she, until we reached the garage where she kept her car. It was two blocks from the house she was living in that year, on Gramercy Park, a few doors from The Players. I walked her home, trying to fathom

the silence between us. When we reached her door, she kept moving and, naturally, so did I.

An elderly French houseman met us in the hall, wearing one of those striped aprons. He and she exchanged a greeting, he gave her a series of messages, she gave him some instructions, and he disappeared.

"Come up," she said, and I followed her up what seemed to me the longest flight of stairs ever constructed.

Directly off the upper hall was her room, or rooms. A huge, rose-pink, high-ceilinged, pleasant area with a raised, curtained section containing the bed. A spacious bay served as an enclosed porch. The whole pad looked like a place to be happy in. She made her way almost at once through an alcove which led to her bath and dressing room.

"Five minutes," she said as she began to unbutton the back of her dress with the skill and grace of a dancer. In the arch of the alcove, she turned and said, "If you wish anything, it is across the hall." She was gone.

"No, it ain't, honey," I muttered, and went looking.

When we met again, she was wearing the sort of dressing gown I imagine they wear in convent schools, and it gave still another dimension to this ever-surprising, iridescent creature.

As I gathered my forces and my courage and formulated a plan for the next few minutes, the old Frenchman came in with a tray, put it on the table in the bay, exchanged a good night with Edmonde, half bowed to me, and went out. She moved to the tray and poured half a glassful of milk, to which she added Vichy. She picked up a cookie.

"This is what I have," she said. "And you?"

"Same," I said. "What else?"

She fixed one for me and we sat in the bay, refreshing ourselves and studying the morning in Gramercy Park. A street cleaner, sweeping, was the only sign of movement.

"Sometime at this hour," she said, "the city looks to me as a powdered face before it has been brushed off."

I pretended to understand what the hell she was talking about and said, "That's very good."

"No," she said sadly. "It is not."

"What'd you ask me up here for?" I teased. "To scrap?" She looked at me. "I asked you," she said, "because you have not finished telling what you were telling."

I could have wept. At that moment, I was tired of talking, of searching—sick of the sound of my own voice and of the problems it was spewing. I had obtusely misunderstood the last half-hour and was mortified.

"Hell with it," I said, and gulped down the whole glass of what suddenly seemed a poisonous concoction.

"You have said about each—except of Woody."

"Hell with him, too," I said.

"You are not friends, no?" she asked.

"We are friends, yes," I said. "But I don't want to talk about him."

"Very well, then. I will talk about him."

"That'll be thrilling," I said.

She frowned and cocked her head.

"Are you nasty?" she asked.

"No, sleepy."

"Would you talk about Woody if you were *not* sleepy?"

"Sure, and about sleepy if I were not Woody."

She laughed. "Oh, la!" she said. "It must be later than I have realized."

"It always is," I said.

She got up, and so did I. She came over and touched me. "Stay," she said. "And sleep. And then we shall talk about Woody."

"Why should I?"

"As a friend to me," she said. "And important for you, for the band, no?—that we should understand him."

She had touched the core, the very nerve center of my troubles. The romantic aura of the escapade faded beside this consideration of practicality.

"All right," I said.

She led me down the hall and into a manlike room. She turned down the bed as expertly as a chambermaid, and flitted about for a few minutes—opening, closing, arranging,

placing, adjusting. I sat and watched her. After a time, she surveyed the room with satisfaction and me with doubt. She came over, gave me her hand, and said, "Sleep well."

I held on to her hand as long as I dared. She leaned down and kissed me.

"Good night, good friend," she said, and left.

That kiss put an end to the sleep-well nonsense. It took me half an hour to deep-breathe my heart back to normal, but each time I recalled the endless moment, it would begin pounding again. I went into the bathroom, where I found new, packaged toothbrushes and shaving supplies and sundries. I used one of everything, showered, and put on—for the first time ever—a robe of Turkish toweling. Moving into the dressing room, I slid open a closet door. There, neatly arranged, were pajamas, shorts, socks, handkerchiefs—and even shirts in that recently invented cellophane wrapping. And a rack of neckties. On closer examination, these articles of clothing were found to be new and in assorted sizes. I found mine and dressed while pondering. What sort of a girl was this? Civilized or overcivilized? A goddess or a bitch? A beginning or an end? Was she delicate and subtle beyond my understanding or cold and dense? Was I the recipient of a classic friendship or the victim of a monumental tease? I reviewed the kiss from every angle, locking into memory the feel, the scent, the sound, and the action of it.

I lay down and shuttled back and forth between imagined heaven and hell, neither asleep nor awake, but in that clockless, billowy limbo between.

A knock at the door. I went to open it. The elderly Frenchman said, in patois and signs, that I might have breakfast in either my room or hers. I chose hers, and he escorted me there after I had brushed my teeth, dashed cold water on my face, and combed my hair.

The old man left.

I walked over and waited for her to put down her cup. When she did so, I took her head in my hands as though it belonged to me and expressed in one kiss all I had been

feeling in the hours which had intervened. I went around and sat opposite her.

"You return things promptly," she said, and smiled. "Thank you."

I examined the table. A flowing cornucopia of fruits, in and out of season. Toast and brioches and croissants in a little table oven. Eggs and ham and bacon and a cheese tray and coffee and chocolate. Bar-le-Duc.

"We'll be here all day," I said.

"I hope so."

We ate in that best of ways, discussing the food all the time.

Beside the table stood a rack holding all of the day's newspapers, and a few magazines.

She picked up a pair of white cotton gloves and tossed me a pair, as well.

"What's the—?" I began to ask.

"For the papers," she explained. "Unless you wish the ink in your hands."

I put on the gloves, feeling foolish, and we went through the papers. Our gloves were tipped with black by the time we finished, and I began to wonder if there was not a certain amount of sense in her eccentricity, as is so often the case with eccentricity.

We moved from the table to another part of the room. She stretched out on a chaise longue, and I sat near her in the most comfortable chair I had ever sat in. Between us were bottomless cups of coffee. We lit cigarettes. While the old man cleared the table, we talked about Bunny Berigan, who had wandered into Huey's the night before. He had had a steaming load on and had played sublimely for an hour. Edmonde had never heard that raunchy growl of his, except on recordings, and wanted to know why it registered in so distorted a manner. I could not tell her, but I could and did tell her much about the strange and striving Bunny.

"Of course," she commented. "A man is what he plays."

When the houseman was gone for good, I asked, "How's business?"

“Business?”

I was ready with my saved-up dart and said, “Yes. The haberdashery business.”

“Oh,” she said. “Very bad. As you say, slow.”

“Could it be the location or what?”

“I don’t know,” she said. I felt that she resented my baiting and that she wanted to leave the subject. But my mean streak drove me on.

“Maybe you don’t advertise right.”

“Very well,” she said. “Enough.”

“You want to change the subject? Go ahead. Take a subject from one to ten. Do you believe in God? I’ll take either side.”

“You don’t remember why you have stayed?”

“Sure. To get a new shirt.”

I had gone too far. Her face splotched with rage, but she controlled her temper and said, “No. You were telling me of the band. One by one. When you have reached Woody, you were tired.”

“Who’s Woody?”

“Ah! That is what I wish you to tell me!”

“He blows by night and he eats poetry by day. That’s Woody. Can I go now?”

“No. I wish to know more.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll give you three wishes.”

She spoke slowly. “Whom does he love and who hate?”

“Try that again,” I suggested.

She frowned. “Who does he love and whom hate?”

She looked so adorable worrying about language that I had to touch her.

“He loves you and me,” I said, “and he hates too many others.”

“I believe that is true,” she said. “Can you tell me why?”

“No,” I said. “I can’t. He worries all the time. He seems to be scared—of a lot of things. Of being swamped, or left out. My father tells me: ‘Don’t push. There’s plenty of room in the world for everybody, and plenty of life to go around. In Hell, they say, it’s crowded—but not here.’ I made the

mistake of telling that to Woody once. I don't know you well enough to repeat what he said."

"I don't understand him," she said.

"Do I? If I had his talent, I'd never be scared. He can just stand there with his horn—and feel there's nobody better anywhere working one."

"He is afraid somebody will be?"

I could have told her a great deal then and there, beginning with the job we had getting him to take Albie on, but could not bring myself to it. Instead, I escaped into anecdote.

"One time, some time ago," I began, "we lived in New Jersey—my family—and we had an old handy man named Tink, who used to help around the house—and sleep over the garage. And one night, my father took us all in to Plainfield to the movies, and Tink came along, too. He'd never seen a movie. This one was *Way Down East*—Lillian Gish—you ever see it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, anyway, it has a death scene with an infant. So. All the way home, Tink just sat in the car, stunned—and we didn't bother him. The next day, I was helping him burn some leaves and when we stopped to rest, he suddenly said to me, 'Y'know? I feel pretty good about that little baby dyin' last night!' So I said, 'You *do*, Tink? Why?' And he said, 'Well, it might've growed up an' done *me* some *harm*!'"

She smiled. I had told the Tink story before and it had gone far better, probably because before it had been told as a joke and not as a parable.

"You think Woody is so?" she asked.

"Not exactly," I said. "But there's a chunk of fear in him that he can't seem to digest. Maybe it comes from being rich—I notice that, about rich people—about how they're more scared than others. Hell, it's understandable. They've got more to lose."

"Woody is rich?" she asked, having sat up slightly in surprise.

"Filthy," I said.

“How much is that?”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “He doesn’t show me his bank-books, but he’s a money boy. Always has been.”

“I would not have guessed it.”

“Sure not. And I’ll tell you why. Woody’s an exception. Most rich people—have you noticed?—no matter where or what—they always bring their money with them, showing a little, tantalizing, like a lace petticoat or an extra inch off a low-cut front. But not Woody.”

“I?” she asked.

I took a beat and an especially long drag of my cigarette before replying, lying, “No. Not you.”

I had flopped. Her eyes jiggled and she tamped out her cigarette, angrily.

“Why are you not truthful to me?”

“Because,” I replied reasonably, “I’m trying to make a little time here with you, Eddie. I start throwing too much truth around, I’ll be out on my ear.” I could see that she was unbalanced by this approach and so I continued. “There are facts and there are truths—not the same thing at all.” I had no idea what, if anything, I meant, but it sounded good at the time. I had her engaged, if not convinced, and I went on. “All the truth I know is in the music. Outside of it, there’s just a tough wrangle, a kind of every-man-for-himself war. What I started to say last night—tried to say—was about that. Here’s a band, like seven pickups. And off the stand—we can hardly talk to each other, some of us. And some get on some other’s nerves. And there’s plenty of feeling—the wrong kind—floating in and around. Next thing, we’re playing. And we seem to be able to live together—and understand—we even enjoy each other. When it’s going right, I’m talking about. I’ve been out of the crib for some time now, and I’ve been involved in quite a few excitements, but I tell you, Eddie, the best of anything I’ve ever found is the few times I’ve been part of it—mingling with a band. Okay. That’s all. What do *you* call the truth?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Another thing. The best ones make the other ones better.

When we took on Albie, we all improved. And from Slug on—even Woody's been borning new stuff. Stuff he probably didn't even know was there."

"Go on," she urged. "You are closer to what I am looking for."

"For what?"

She swung her legs to the floor, and leaned toward me seriously.

"About this music of unconscious flow," she said. "How it works in communication, and what is inside, for which word language is not enough."

"Take it easy," I suggested, retreating from this depth.

She laughed. "My father, he is a professor of history and a deputy. He thinks I am mad. I think *he* is. I see nothing in his history and he sees nothing in my jazz. But he searches and I search."

"Hell with it," I said. "Let's get back to Woody. That's what you're really interested in."

"He is a wonder," she said. "And, as you say—there are things in him even he does not suspect."

I could see that goddammit we were settling down to a talk about Woody. Could I bear it? "Would you think I was a lush if I asked for a drink this early?" I asked.

"Not at all," she said. "Help yourself. Beside, it is five o'clock." She indicated a cabinet, which turned out to be a small bar. I started a slow juicing.

And we talked about Woody. And I was forced into the role of friend of the hero. I had been stuck with it before and hated it. Still, I was able to manage a respectable, experienced performance. She wanted Woody, that much was clear. And I was to help—how, was not clear. I was to be a sort of go-between, interpreting each of them to the other. An interesting and harmless indoor sport, complicated only by the fact that I had an ax of my own which badly needed grinding.

"You'll never make it with Woody," I warned, finally. "But go ahead and try—and I'll help you. When you give up, though, will you please notice who's standing next in line?"

It was dark when I left. I walked to the Fourteenth Street Automat and ate two complete dinners. Nerves. . . .

. My quiet time came to an end as the lights began to come on in the auditorium where I had been sitting. The ushers were arriving. I left the theatre and thoughtlessly turned to the right. Within minutes, I found myself in what may be the most depressing city area in America—six or seven down-and-out blocks peopled largely by derelicts, winos, and bums. They studied me. I began playing the macabre game of searching each filthy face for a sign of Woody. For all I knew, he might be one of these wrecks. I found my way out of this section, and on South Wabash I saw that most of the stores were open. Of course. Thursday night. I went to Lyon and Healy's and found it open and crowded—but the crowd was an enjoyable one, avid and alive. I asked for a catalog and began a record-hunting spree. Most of what I selected was known to me, but I took it downstairs all the same and waited for a booth. When one became free, I settled in. The young Billie Holiday sang to me; I heard Goodman, restlessly seeking form in trios, quartets, and quintets; Johnny Hodges; Earl Hines; Jack Teagarden; the great Fletcher Henderson growing more and more refined and less and less interesting; and, of course, Charlie Parker taking it all apart and putting it back together again, up-to-date. An old favorite: Armstrong and "Tight Like This." I listened hard, the music releasing a flood of new old impressions. . . .

. Between sets at Nick's, Woody asked, "How was the celebration?"

"Celebrated," I said.

"Where'd you go? Deepest darkest Africa?"

"No," I said. "Huey's. We just ate and then I took Eddie home."

"Lucky you. Score?"

"Settle down, pal."

“Why?”

“Because *yew* are her everything—like it says in the song.”

“That song,” he said, “is an ear of corn.”

“‘I Surrender, Dear,’” I said. “How about that one?”

“What the hell’s up with you tonight, Gismo?”

“Me?”

“You.”

“Why do you ask?”

“Number one, you’re talking funny. Also—where the hell did that ‘Embraceable’ chorus of yours tonight come from?”

“No good?”

“Excellent. What’ve you been doing? Saving it up?”

“It came to me in a dream.”

This was so, in a sense. I shared a chorus of “Embraceable You” with Woody, in which I opened with the first sixteen, he took the release, and I finished it. I generally stuck to a neat, showy pattern I had worked out and practiced pat. But tonight, thrown up for grabs by the hours with Edmonde—and further loosened by a little more liquor than usual—I had let go and had produced a daring, howling chorus.

“Well,” said Woody. “Let’s hope you can do it again.”

“If I stay up here with the vapors, I can. Why didn’t you tell me, Dad?”

“Tell you what?”

“How it’s easier with a bit of a bun on?”

He glared at my grin, then squinted. “Have you been drinking, you God damned fool?”

“Watch your language. I’m of age, y’know. Care to glance at my birth certificate?”

“That’s all I need, pal. You.”

“No.”

“You want to face a fact, man?”

“If it’s pretty,” I said, sitting down. “Also, let’s remember that there’s a difference between a fact and a truth. Not bad, huh?”

“The fact I mean is that you’ve got all you can do to hang

on as it is. You start belting the grape, boyo, and you'll last about a sick week around here."

"You just said I played an excellent chorus," I said craftily. "Your very words. Excellent. Word."

"An accident. The kind can happen to anyone. But god-dammit—you know bloody well it's a pile—this turd about people play better, sing better—when they're pissed. Name one. It never happens."

I began to chant a jingle:

*"Drop a nickel on the drum
Cough it up, you dirty bum
Hallelujah, hallelujah . . ."*

Woody walked away. A moment later, Albie played the signal summoning us back to the stand. We played hard and close for the rest of the evening and I was frighteningly sober by the time we wrapped it up at three. Woody and I went to Child's to eat. We talked of nothing much for a while; suddenly he said, "About before, kiddo, I said too much. Forget it."

"No," I said. "I think I better remember it. You were right."

"Yah, but there're ways and ways of putting it."

"The gyp about the juice is, you always think it's going to help—but it never does."

"What's your trouble?" he asked. "Women, or woman?"

"No, that's yours."

"You don't say."

"Mine is what the hell's the matter with the band?"

"Is there a matter?" he asked.

"You know damn well."

"For instance."

"With a thing like a band, Woody, there's no standing still—you bloom or you fade. We've been standing still."

"What do you think it is?"

"I don't know. Nobody sounds right to me. Starting with Slug—he's loud again and—"

"You've hit it. I didn't want to open the beef again, I'm

Simon Legree enough as it is to you guys—but, oh lordy, that man is a trial."

"You better talk to him."

"Me? Oh, no."

"Maybe the room's too small."

"No. He's too big. That's the bug."

"Well, if you're right, Woody, there's only one way."

"Tell me."

"You."

"No, thanks."

"You're the only one he'll listen to. Not me, for sure. He knows I'm a ringer, and he's got no respect for anything but talent. Albie tries, but he cons him."

"How about you and me together?"

I demurred, and tried to get him to agree to Albie in my place, but he insisted, and in the end I agreed.

The next afternoon, we went to call on Slug. He lived luxuriously at the Hotel Theresa on 125th Street, in a suite which must have cost him his salary.

He received us cordially.

"Now what can I give you min in the way've a charge? A drink a Coke or a sniff a coke or a nice fresh stick a gauge —just off the boat?" He laughed delightedly and slapped out a rhythm on the wall with the palms of his hands.

"Nothing, thanks," said Woody.

"No trouble," said Slug. "Anything you say. That's how we live up here. High. And tall. Havin' a ball!"

"I'll have a Coke, Slug," I said.

"The wet kind, you fool?" he laughed.

"That's it."

"Two," said Woody.

Slug picked up the phone daintily, his ringed pinkie sticking out from his hand.

"Room service, m'sweet," he whispered passionately.

While waiting, he used the phone as a double-headed drumstick and the base of the phone as a pedal and boffed out a series of practiced rhythms.

Into the phone again. "This is *Mister* Slug Abrams. Two!

I say *two!* That is a-one-a, a-two-a, a-Co-ca, a-Co-la! Six-eight time. Solid."

He hung up, went to a tray, and poured himself a drink.

"I won't wait," he said. He downed the dark mixture in a single swallow, came and sat opposite us. His heels tapped out a soft, and for once, unobtrusive pattern.

"You're a fine musician, Slug—" began Woody.

"I know it, leader," responded Slug, solemnly. "I know it. Fine fine fine."

"And a fine musician has more than one way of playing."

"I got a zillion an' one," said Slug.

"Yes," I said impulsively, "but they're all loud."

"All?" said Slug, burning me with a look.

"Pretty near," I faded.

"When I wire-brush?" he said loudly. "You call that loud?"

"No," I said.

Woody found a placating tone. "Maybe sometimes you don't realize, man. That's what I've got against any kind of hopup on the stand, or any time we're playing."

Slug rose with dignity and strode out of the room. Woody and I looked at one another. He raised his eyebrows. I shrugged.

Woody whispered, "Let me take it from here."

"More than welcome," I muttered.

"He's a child," said Woody, softly. "He has to be treated as a child."

"Sure."

"The only thing," said Woody, troubled, "I don't think I know how to treat a child."

"If you're asking me, once in a while you have to give a child a good swift—"

Slug returned and resumed his seat. He entwined his long, long legs and smiled. His left hand was cupped before him and contained a small amount of white powder. He wet his right forefinger on his tongue, touched it to the powder and returned it to his tongue. He rolled his eyes, blissfully.

"Delicious," he said, and grinned at us.

Woody and I exchanged confirmation, identifying the sub-

stance in his hand as either ephedrine sulfate or strychnine sulfate, the two going pep pills. This was the expert way of taking it. Not a tablet all at once, but crushing the tablet and assimilating it gradually, a few particles at a time. I watched Woody as he struggled with himself, trying to decide whether to accept the challenge or not. Apparently, he had a new tactic in mind. He rose, smiled back at Slug and said, "Listen, laddie—"

"We ain't on the stand now, man," said Slug, taking another touch of the dust. "You don' see me playin'."

"What?" said Woody, innocently. "Oh, no, I wasn't going to say anything about that. I enjoy a good freddy lift myself every so often. It was just I was going to ask you if you've ever heard how you're not supposed to take it with booze."

"Yeah," said Slug, taking a double touch. "I heard about that. But that's just a rule for *min'*!"

"Aren't *you* a man?"

"Hell, no!" said Slug. "I'm a giant. An' you know how they say in Huey's—'Don' give a giant no plant!'"

Accompanying his laughter, he beat out a rhythm with his heels, his elbows, and finally with the back of his head on the back of his chair.

"That's right, Slug," said Woody with gentle skill. "That's all-the-way *right!* You're a giant, but the rest of us in the band aren't, so you've got to pull way down, otherwise it doesn't fit."

"Like Louie sings," I put in. "'Tight Like This.' That's how it ought to be."

"Don' *you* tell *me* what Louie sings," he snarled at me. "He's a giant, too. He's the biggest giant. Anybody tries puttin' *him* down, I'll beat 'em with a pulp! They ought to build him a *statue*, Louie. Why don' they?"

"They will," said Woody obligingly, "they will. Now let's get back to you."

"Me," said Slug.

"My opinion, you're the best in the business. With the best beat and the steadiest."

"Tell me more," said Slug coyly, maddeningly.

"But you've been accelerating lately."

"Me?" said Slug, sitting up, affronted. "Me accelerating?" His voice had jumped an octave. "Now *hold the phone*, leader!"

"Yes?"

"I got the steadiest beat in the whole beat world. An' the swingest! Don' you give me none of that, boy. I hold it. You check me with the metronome—go 'head! You find any deviation, I give you back the money you pay me."

"I don't pay you, Slug," said Woody. "We're all partners. Remember?"

"But there's times," I added, "you don't behave like a partner."

Slug looked at me again, contempt putting points on his piercing eyes. He brought his palm to his lips, licked up what remained of the powder, and spoke to me.

"I don't know if I want to be partnered with *you*," he said. "You don't swing."

"Never mind that," Woody cut in. "I'm going to take you up on that metronome check. I'm going to have us recorded tonight and I'll show you."

"That's right," said Slug defiantly. "You show me." His dripping black mask betrayed his pose. He was beginning to feel trapped.

Woody looked from his watch to me. "Didn't you have a five o'clock?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, gathering that he had decided my presence was inhibiting. "What's it now?"

"Twenty-five to."

"Yuh. Well, I better track."

I moved to Slug and held out my hand. "No offense, Slug," I said. "We're all together, after all. Trying to be."

He took my hand and gave it a sudden crush, which blacked me out momentarily. I was next conscious of alternately shaking and rubbing my injured hand, and of Slug laughing gleefully.

"There I go," he cried. "Accelerating again. I hurt you, little man?" he asked.

“Yes,” I replied, fuming.

“Too bad. Oh, too bad.” He came at me, swept me off my feet and cradled me in his arms as though I were an infant. “Sorry, little fella,” he crooned, rocking me back and forth in his arms.

“Put him down, Slug,” said Woody, firmly.

On my feet again, I left angrily, without saying anything more. When I reached the lobby, I sat down and tried to collect myself. I wanted to sort out my mingled feelings on the subject of Slug. I had begun on his side, as his sponsor—was I about to desert him in pique? Was I right to take offense? He was only being playful. He meant no harm. As to his low opinion of my musicianship, how could I resent it, since I shared it? I was beginning to dislike him. Why? His arrogance, his refusal to be part of the collective unit, his defiance of organization—no, I thought. None of this is what rankles. It was simply that I resented having my hand crushed, and myself lifted into the air. But can’t you take a joke? See the funny side. Don’t be a sorehead. Laugh, or at least smile. I took a taxi to Gramercy Park and phoned Edmonde from the corner.

“What’re you doing?” I inquired.

“I am listening to Bessie Smith,” she answered. “Would you wish to join us?”

“Sure,” I replied. “I’m on the corner.”

“Oh?”

“Just happened to be in the neighborhood.”

“Come along. I’ll give you some tea.”

I heard the sound of Bessie Smith’s voice as I approached the house. She was singing “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out.” Edmonde was in the parlor, down-stairs. The warmth of her greeting all but unstrung me. I felt as though I never wanted to leave that room. In addition to Edmonde, it contained recordings of four or five thousand titles, which, since long-play had not yet come about, took up an enormous amount of space. On a table near the Capehart, lay spread about books and magazines

and clippings and photographs of Bessie Smith. Edmonde turned a dial to lower the volume.

“She makes me cry,” she said.

“Is that good?”

“Sometime. I think it is because she does not cry herself. With her it is good courage and much spirit.”

She poured me a cup of tea. It turned out to be of a special sort, aromatic and soothing. Nothing about Edmonde was ever unexceptional. (Oh, Eddie, what a girl you were!)

I told her of the meeting with Slug that afternoon, and managed to laugh as I reached the end part, where he had picked me up.

She shook her head, worriedly.

“He is difficult,” she said. “A long way from right.”

“What bothers me is,” I explained, “he doesn’t seem to get any better. As a man. As a drummer, he moves like a streak. Every night, sometimes every hour, he turns up something new, and usually exciting as hell. But as a fellow, no.”

The record changed. The song was now “Cake Walking Babies.”

“Some people,” said Edmonde, “they do not know how to behave. Try to understand. Just as some others do not know how to drive a car or fix some plumbing. It is not against them that they have not learned. Often, they mean well.”

“Oh, sure,” I said, wondering to what extent I knew how to behave. Questioning if this very drop-in call was not an example of social ignorance. Worrying whether or not that was what she meant.

“Woody is still with him?” she asked.

“Probably.”

“Leave it to Woody,” she said.

“He knows how to behave, is that it?”

“He is learning,” she said cryptically.

“The thing I stew about,” I said, “is just how far the end is worth the means.”

She frowned, trying to follow. I frowned, trying to explain.

“What I’m getting at—the main thing is hanging on to

Slug, but getting him to simmer down and fit in more.”
“Yes.”

“So does it matter how we do it? By proving it to him or conning him or bribing him with more money?”

“I think it matters, yes. If it is to last. Bribing or—conning, you say?—it will last only a little while. When he believes—and sees—that the group is what matters—not only he alone, himself—”

“I doubt he ever will.”

“Ah, be an optimist.”

“Sure, only I don’t know if I believe it myself.”

“Believe what?”

“That group flimflam. We like to believe we believe it—a lot of us—but do we?”

“No matter. If we do or no—so long as we know we should is a progress.”

As a background to all this soul searching, Bessie Smith was singing “Gimme a Pigfoot.” It made sudden sense. Edmonde and I listened to it for a time, then shared a smile. I finished my tea and started out. She offered me her hand at the door, but I pretended not to see it. Feeling as I did at that moment, I thought it best not to touch her.

That night, Slug collapsed and fell off the stand.

Reconstructed, the accident was said to have been fortunate. He had apparently fainted and fallen sideways, his left arm taking the weight of his massive body. One of the young ambulance doctors—an eager Polyclinic intern—explained that had Slug not been in an unconscious and therefore relaxed state when he fell, the damage might well have been more serious. A tense arm attempting to support such a fall would have been broken, perhaps in several places. Had he fallen backward, there might have been a head or spine injury. As it was, he wound up with a bruised shoulder and a chipped elbow and, the doctors said, ought to be back at work in a week or ten days.

I did not see the fall, but heard it. We were playing “The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.” Since it was not my arrangement, it required my special concentration. Slug had been

playing in a subdued and steady way all evening. Now and again Woody looked at me, wondering if the meeting had done some good after all. With Slug in this form, the band sounded fine, better than it had for some time. We had played three sets, and during the fourth, it happened. Albie, Don and Woody continued to play while the Davis boys and I hauled Slug into the back room. He was out cold, and after ten minutes of trying to bring him to, we phoned for an ambulance. He was still out when it arrived. While one of the doctors worked over Slug, the other questioned us. The band was between sets and we all stood around, except Albie, who remained on the stand and played fill-in. Woody and I dealt with the officious young doctor.

After recording name, age, address and employer's name, the doctor asked, "Is he cokey, do you know?"

"What's that?" asked Woody.

"Is there any narcotics history here," said the doctor slowly. He looked up at Woody and added, "Don't ride me, huh, pal? I been on since six A.M."

"You ought to ask for a raise."

"You don't know of anything might have caused this?"

"No, I don't," replied Woody. "It's hot and on the airless side in there and we've been playing pretty hard."

"But this guy's not on hop or reefers or like that?"

"Not that I know of."

"Alcohol?"

"Oh, sure," said Woody. "He takes a drink."

"Has he been on it tonight?"

"I couldn't tell you," said Woody. "Maybe."

On the cot, Slug began to make sounds. "Oh, God," he moaned. "I love you . . . I pray. I'm good. No one no harm . . . so help me God, Lord . . . forgive me our debts as we forgive . . . *bee dah bee dah bee dah!* . . . oh, God, man."

The doctor left us and went to the cot.

I pulled Woody to one side and asked, "You know what you're doing?"

"Certainly. Hold still."

"Shouldn't we tell them?"

“Them what?”

“Well, like about today. Where we saw him taking the freddies and grog and—”

I stopped as he punched my arm with the side of his fist. He threw a quick glance over his shoulder, returned his attention to me, and said, “Christ sake, cork it!” through his teeth.

I spoke as softly as I could. “But if this is medical, how—?”

He took me by the elbow and led me to the far corner of the room. “You want to get him into a real jam?”

“No.”

“All *right*, then. Let’s get him fixed up—not jugged. How the hell do we know what he’s been on or how much? We don’t. We’re not careful, they’ll bundle him off to a cure and kill him.”

“Damn.”

“Just button up and play it cozy and don’t say any more than you have to.”

“All right. I just hope—”

“Quiet.”

The doctor returned and lit a cigarette.

“Well,” he said cheerfully, “he’s not dead. Not yet, that is.”

“Now what?” asked Woody.

“We’re taking him in to x-ray that left shoulder and arm. His pump’s skipping a little, too. You sure he’s not on some stuff?”

“How long you think it might take?” asked Woody. “The whole business.”

“Depends,” said the doctor. “We’ll know more tomorrow.”

His partner came over. “This clown’s higher than a kite,” he said. “What on, do they know?”

“Yeh,” said the first doctor. “Cracker Jacks. They think he maybe ate a whole boxful by himself. Prize and all.”

“What the hell,” said the second, “don’t beg for the information. We’ll pump the sonofabitch out and then *we’ll* tell *them*.”

“What beg?”

The second doctor spoke to Woody. “Has he got a wife?”

“No, sir,” said Woody.

“Family?”

“Not in New York.”

“Who’s responsible?”

“Me,” said Woody. “I’m the leader.”

Slug’s eyes were open and full of tears. “Can’t see,” he was saying. “Oh, Jesus, gimme my sight. Where’s Clara? Get me my Clara. Oh, man. Oh, Jesus, it’s dark.”

Henry Davis stood beside him.

“It’s the lights out, man,” he lied. “Take it easy.”

“Well put ‘em on, goddammit!” yelled Slug, covering his eyes.

“It’s a fuse,” said Henry. “A fuse blew.”

“No, no, man. You’re puttin’ me on. No fuse. *My* fuse. Blew my fuse. Oh, Jesus. I swear never. I swear I’m never gone take a drop take a pill. I’ll pray. I’ll get down. I’ll praise the goddam Lord. Oh, man.”

He went on mumbling but most of the rest of what he said was incoherent. The stretcher was brought in, and Slug went out on it. Henry Davis went along with him at the suggestion of the doctors. Someone was required to sign him in. The rest of us returned to the stand. We played a set, and in spite of the fact that Albie pounded the rhythm as hard as he could, and that Don slapped and slugged his bass, we could not sufficiently compensate for the absence of Slug. It was a miserable half-hour, during which, I suppose, the germ of the idea for “Requiem Without Drums” was implanted.

At Woody’s suggestion, I moved over and operated the pedal of the bass drum, as I used to do in the trio days, but now it seemed amateur and embarrassing.

Between sets, we began phoning around for a replacement. In the Hole, a musicians’ hangout in the basement billiard parlor of the Gaiety Building, we reached Al Maghakian, who hurried over and sat in until closing.

We all went to the hospital, but the visit was frustrating.

Both of the doctors had gone to sleep and would not be available until six in the morning. The floor nurse could tell us only that Slug had been treated, was resting comfortably, and was scheduled for x-ray in the morning. No, we could not see him. No, not even one of us. We adjourned to a Foltis-Fisher near the hospital and talked it over.

Everyone seemed to be having cereals and prunes and whole-wheat apple pie and milk—a health kick in reaction to the trouble at the hospital.

“There you go,” said Woody. “There’s a lesson for you—for all of us. A guy with his stuff and all he wants to do is murder himself.”

“A wrought-up man,” said Don.

Albie spoke. “Maybe it’s the wrong time to say it, but I come to believe now he’s a bad lot and nothing to do for it. Nothing.”

Henry shook his head and said stubbornly, “A man can do what he can do on drums, he can’t be all wrong.”

“Check,” agreed his brother.

It seemed to be my turn. “Anybody got any ideas?” I asked.

“There’s this place I know,” said Don. “In Asbury Park. Near there. This friend of mine got to saucing a little on the much side and he went up there and they dried him out real good. It’s like you might call it a rest home. About sixty a week it was back then, but worth it. It wasn’t only for that. A health farm. That’s what they call it, but they have rummies and people trying to get off of this or that—or even just taking off, sometimes putting on weight. But mostly bottle babies. It’s a nice place.” We were all silent, thinking it over, then Don spoke again. “This friend of mine who was up there was me.”

“You think they’d take a colored boy?” asked Henry.

“Sure, why not?”

“Some places don’t,” shrugged Albie.

“Want me to ask?” inquired Don. “I could. No trouble.”

“We’d have to pay,” said Woody. “He hasn’t got a dime.”

“Okay with me,” said Don, and the rest of us murmured agreement as well.

"I'll talk to Cookie Raeburn," said Woody. "There ought to be some way this could come off the top."

"Or maybe make it like a loan," I said. "We lay it out and then he pays it back a little at a time every week."

There was a general acceptance of this suggestion.

"One problem comin' up," said Albie.

"What's that?"

"He may not want to go. Can't force the man."

"He'll go," said Woody. "Didn't you hear him there—in the back—before? He got himself one hell of a scare tonight. He'll be ready for anything in a day or so."

We went into further detail before we split up and called it a night. I decided to wait awhile and be back at the hospital when the doctors turned up at six. Woody chose to stay with me. We went out, bought the morning papers and returned. At five-thirty Woody gave up.

"You'll have to excuse me, pal," he said, blinking hard. "I can't make it. I'm at the end of a rope here and I'm not even sure it's my rope!"

"Go ahead."

"Tell him I'll be in later."

"Should I start about Asbury Park and all that or you want to handle it yourself?"

"No, open it up by all means. Or what might be better, see if you can get one of those sawbones to spill it and you pick it up from there."

"All right," I said.

I found my way to the ward, having received permission to see Slug outside of visiting hours, since this was his first day. A series of screens separated him from the patients nearest him—a bad sign.

"It's me, Slug."

He opened his eyes. The look he wore was sad and soulful. He appeared to be weak and defeated.

"How are you?" I asked.

He shook his head from side to side gently, as though sparing his energy.

"Rough. Oh, Lord, they treated me rough. Don' never come in here. They rough people."

"They were trying to help you, Slug. You were awful sick last night."

"Awful sick right now, man. Like sick to die. Fact."

"No."

"That's what they tol' me. Die. Fact."

Tears welled up in his dulled eyes. I noticed that for the first time since I had known him, he was still and not drumming. A moment later, I heard a faint tapping, located its source, and smiled as I saw the fingernails of his enormous left hand clicking out a slow rhumba rhythm on the metal slat of the bed. I pointed to his hand.

"They've slowed you down a little, Slug. But see, they haven't stopped you."

"What?" he asked.

I realized that he was totally unaware of his activity and that his fingers were operating independently.

He looked at me, pleadingly. "Get me away. I apologize I squashed your hand. Picked you up. Here is one rough place. I don't want to get hurt no more."

"Nobody's going to hurt you, Slug. Everybody's *for* you."

"Not here," he said, throwing his head from side to side. "Not here."

"Okay. Calm down. I'm going to look for the doctor."

The floor nurse directed me and I found my way to a door bearing a penciled card reading "Dr. I. M. Urbont." I knocked softly.

"Yup?" from within.

I opened the door. The young doctor with whom we had had most of our talk the night before stood there, stripped to the waist, shaving. A steaming cup of coffee had been placed amidst the shaving paraphernalia.

"Come in," he said.

I entered the office.

"Sit down," he said, and took a swig of coffee.

"I don't want to trouble you," I began.

"Go ahead."

"Well, just—you know. Inquiring. About how he is. My friend."

He made a spitting sound of derision and said, "You got *some friends*, fella."

"That so?" I bristled.

"That," he said, "is so."

I waited, but he was taking his own sweet time, shaving and drinking coffee.

"Well, how is he?" I blurted finally, trying to keep my impatience out of my voice.

"Nthng brkn," he said through the left side of his mouth, shaving the right. Rinsing his razor, he added, "He had the presence of mind to fall on his head, this character." He laughed, delighted with his display of wit. "He bruised his shoulder when he rolled over and there's a little elbow chip, that's all. Nothing to it."

"Thanks."

"But that's not the trouble," he said slowly, continuing to shave.

"No? What is?"

"Where's that other joe? You know, the leader."

"He couldn't make it this morning. He'll be around later, though."

"How come he couldn't make it? He a hophead, too?"

"How do you mean 'too'?" I asked, beginning to think of my rights as a citizen.

"Like that spade inside there." He motioned toward the ward with his fat head.

"You mean Mr. Abrams."

He stopped shaving and looked at me. "You know who I mean, buddy."

"I sure in hell do," I said. "And so far I'm not so sure I like the service he's getting."

"No? Well, why didn't you stick around last night and help us pump him out? You missed a charming party."

"Not my racket," I said.

He finished shaving, rinsed his face, dried it and faced me. "You know what we took out of him along with two,

three barrels of booze? About a dozen worth of ephedrine sulfates."

"God!"

"You surprised or making out? I'd like to know, no kiddin'."

"I'm astonished."

"Yeh, you look it. All you jazzbos—what the hell's the matter with you? You think you're made of something else—aluminum—or what?" He drained what remained of the coffee.

"Don't look at *me*, doctor. I've never had one of those pills in my life." This was not strictly true, but it seemed the thing to say at that moment. "If I'd had any idea about Mr. Abrams, wouldn't I have told you?"

"I don't know. Would you off?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Because you're all a bunch of wiseguys, you guys. You think you're hotstuff because you make a hundred a week. You know what *we* make?"

"Two hundred?"

"See? Like I say. Wiseguys. But the laugh's on you. That dope in there? He's burned out already, nearly. He's put himself a couple holes in his duodenum that maybe they'll never heal. So who wins and who loses? Okay, you live fast, you guys—but that's how you die, too."

He had alarmed me into anger. "You know, for a doctor," I bit, "it seems to me you talk one hell of a lot about dying. Or maybe you're really an undertaker?"

"Okay," he said, dismissing me. "Screw."

I went back into the ward. An unappetizing breakfast was being served to the patients. Slug was having nothing.

He stared at me as I came into his view.

"Where you been?" he asked testily.

"Talking to the doctor. He says you're okay."

"How's he know?"

"I'll tell you one thing, though, Slug. You're not going to be unless you start laying off the junk."

"Junk? What you call junk?"

"Any of that crap I call junk. Like what you were full of last night. Freddies."

He heaved a deep sigh. "Man, listen. I ain't had me a freddy in five weeks. Six."

I weighed the sincerity of his delivery against the sight of him consuming the stuff before my eyes only a few hours before. It struck me as funny, outlandishly funny, and I laughed.

"You don't believe me?" he croaked.

"No, Slug, I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because I saw you on it. With my own eyes. Don't you remember?"

He shook his head slowly and smiled mysteriously before saying, "That was no freddy, man. No sir!"

"No? What was it?"

"It was a *fooler*, that's what."

This outrageous liar, I had to admit, had style. Only a man who lives and thinks in far-out categories would dare such a whopper.

"Now, Slug," I said patiently, "I'm no doctor and no copper, so don't for chrissake lie there and lay it on *me*. I'm your friend. Partner, even."

"My right hand to God," he said, trying to raise it, "I ain't had me a freddy in weeks. Five, six."

Delirious, I diagnosed, since an oath such as this from Slug could not be taken lightly. Clearly, he was off his head.

"Okay, Slug," I said. "I believe you."

"Tell them doctor bitches then," he said. "They got me dead wrong. They writin' me down in the record for a doper. Thing like that sticks."

"No, they're not."

"They tol' me, man," he insisted in a cracked whisper.

"Don't worry about it."

"If you tell me," he said. "Oh, Lord. Oh, man."

All at once, he gave out and was asleep. I went home.

Later in the day, during formal visiting hours, I returned with Woody. We brought a bag of fruit, some magazines and

picture books, and cigarettes. Slug seemed unimproved. I had told Woody that I had not broached the subject of the rest cure.

We listened to Slug's moans and complaints for a time.

Woody cleverly asked, "You want to get out of here?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, please, yes. They rough."

Woody leaned over him and continued softly, "Well, listen. Only one way. We have to get some private doc to say he wants you out in the country or something like that, see?"

"Yeah," whispered Slug, who loved a conspiracy. "Yeah."

"Whatever they ask you," said Woody, "you tell them what I say goes."

"You say goes."

"But listen good now, Slug. When we get you down there—you stay there—or else, they'll put you right back here."

"Oh, no. Oh, please, no."

"Okay."

Talking to Dr. Urbont, we were soon joined by his colleague, Dr. Ely.

"Can this eightball understand anything?" asked Dr. Ely.

"Certainly," said Woody.

"He's a fine musician," I added.

"Who cares?" said Dr. Urbont.

Dr. Ely continued, "What I mean, can it be explained to him that if he drinks he's going to be sick, and if he uses pepjunk he's going to be sicker and if he does them both together he's going to be dead?"

"Sure," said Woody. "He can understand that."

"But will he believe it?" asked Dr. Ely.

"Why not?"

"Well, do you?" asked Dr. Urbont.

"I guess you know what you're talking about, sure."

"When can we take him?" I asked.

"Soon as you can lift him," replied Dr. Ely. "And it's my guess you boys've got yourselves a real full handful."

Two days later, we drove Slug to Seacrest, the rest home in Asbury Park; Woody, Don, Edmonde, and I. Edmonde had hired a limousine, and Slug was made comfortable on

the back seat with blankets and pillows. Don and Woody sat on the jump seats; Edmonde and I shared the front seat with the driver, I held her hand all the way. What a ride.

Slug's spirits rose as soon as we left the hospital, and he was back to sounding continuous rhythms.

"Man, this is travelin'," he said. "What I mean! Hot damn!"

"Pretty soft, huh?" said Don.

"This what they call a *lousemachine*?" he asked. "I never been in no lousemachine before." He cackled, happily.

"Don't knock yourself out, Pops," said Woody.

"Who fixed me up with it?" asked Slug. "Must be French-lady. Thank you, Frenchlady!" he sang out.

"Welcome," replied Edmonde.

"Settle down, boy," suggested Woody.

"Maybe we ought to stick the radio on," I said.

Edmonde did so and happened to hit a broadcast by B. A. Rolfe and his orchestra. This was a successful, large dance orchestra which played straight and conventional music in an uncompromisingly colorless way. Slug giggled for half an hour, and as the performance began to strike him as funnier and funnier, we had to turn it off for fear of exhausting him.

We checked him into Seacrest and sat around on the porch for a while. The quiet and restful atmosphere troubled him, although he did not speak of it.

"They wouldn't let me my set down here, huh?" he asked plaintively, referring to his drums.

"Not right away," said Woody. "But we brought you along a practice pad and plenty of sticks and all that."

"Good good."

"And the man here said not to worry," I said. "They're going to keep you busy."

"I'll say," said Don. "Boy, when I was down here, the days went like wind."

"Oh, I don' mind," said Slug. "I like to rest me and sleep an' all. I'm beat. Fact. Beat beat beat of the tom-tom." He looked at me and said, "Thinkin'. I got me a mess of thinkin' to do, too." He shifted his look from me to Woody.

"You do that," said Woody, and got up.

Time for milk and cookies arrived. The guests—an odd lot—turned up and we sipped and nibbled with them. Soon after, we left.

Driving home, Woody suggested that since the band—not counting Al—plus Edmonde equaled seven, we could lay on a neat visiting routine for the weeks ahead. If each of us made it one day a week, Slug would have a visitor every day. When the Davis boys went, they could take along Clara or Eunice. We talked about possible needs: a radio, a record player, records.

When my day came, I went down alone on the bus. I brought along a few new Roy Eldridge records to play on the machine which Edmonde had provided a few days earlier. On my arrival, I was told to go up to Slug's room, where I found him in bed.

I cannot imagine what sort of miracle I had expected to be performed in four days, but I was stunned and surprised when I saw him. He was confined to his bed and had not even held his own. He had lost weight, and looked gaunt and drawn. He seemed to be shrinking. (It was after this trip that I began to work on "Big Man Dying by Inches.") I was eager to get downstairs as soon as possible to make some medical inquiries, but Slug had other ideas.

"In that hospital," he said, "they tol' me they took a load of freddies out of me. They tol' you that, too?"

"Yes, Slug. They did."

"Now here's the question. How come they took some out when I didn't put none in?"

"You did, Slug," I said patiently. "You just forgot."

"No. Some time back, the kick man said me—you drink or you hop-up with freddies—but don' never them both together because they'll knock you down so's you won't get up. And I never do. Not ever. Not ever."

I wondered if we had put him into the right place, under the proper treatment. His condition seemed so plainly mental. Something told me to reason with him.

"Slug," I said. "I was up there, remember? At your place

at the Theresa. And you had a drink, a socket—and then you went out and when you came back you had a fistful. And I saw you take it. You just forgot."

"No," he said, "I didn't forget. I remember it all and it's all like you say. Only what I had in the hand was no freddy. It was just glucose. Yeah. Powder glucose. Like I take a lots of, for the health, and for the energy. Dr. Caffrey give it me. Old man doctor. Real good man. No dealer. Yeah. I know I make out it was freddy dust—know why?—just to burn that Woody man's ass. He's all a time tellin' me do this, do that, don' do this, don' do that. Not like a leader. Like a boss."

"I'll tell you what happens, Slug. When we drink—I mean drink too much—any of us—you, me—any of us—we forget. That's all."

"That's what you think?"

"Must be."

"I'm gonna ask you one question. You don' know no more about it than that? You swear? You swear on God an' on your own mother?"

"Of course."

"You better go. I got to rest now."

"Right."

Downstairs, I found the medical supervisor rather reserved, and disinclined to discuss the case with me.

"But I mean," I pressed, "is it normal? That is, the usual course for them to have delusions and obsessions like this?"

"When you use the word 'delusion,'" he asked patronizingly, "or 'obsession,' do you think you know what you mean?"

I was cowed. "Well, maybe not medically," I retreated, "but I think I know, sure."

"This man is ill," he said, his attention only half on me, "and in his physical state, he is, of course, subject to depression—even to hallucination. Remember he's had a good deal of tampering with his nervous system. First the unnatural amount of stimulation and now the necessary sedation. You'll have to be patient."

"But this fixation he's got about—I mean this bug he's got in his ear about—"

"Part of the process," he said reassuringly. "My night nurse tells me that he often talks the whole night through, asleep and awake. And what a curious nervous habit that is he has of making rhythmic sounds. Incessantly."

"That's no nervous habit," I said. "That's his profession."

"I see," he replied, smiling to himself.

But he did not see.

It is probably a mistake to think of a man's body, mind, and spirit as separate elements; continuing research reveals more and more that they are inextricably interwoven. Still, Slug's mind cleared and grew sharp, his spirit soared, while his body wasted away.

After nine weeks at Seacrest, he could not be contained, and insisted upon leaving. He returned to the Hotel Theresa, engaged a rehearsal room downtown, and practiced for four hours a day the first week, eight hours a day the second, and twelve hours a day the third. We would drop in, singly and in groups, from time to time, to hear him. His routine in the last week was to rise at a quarter to eight and be at his drums by nine. Practice until one. Lunch, then sleep (on the floor) until three. Practice from three to seven. Food, and again from eight to midnight. Home and to bed.

Edmonde and I went to hear him play his middle session one day during the third week. He had his record player blaring and was drumming with some of the best musicians in the world. He smiled as we came in, and boffed out a pleasant, excited greeting on his snare, adding a few rim shots by way of exclamation points. He did not speak, nor did we. He played, we listened. I hear him now, across time. I have heard many drummers since, a number of them outstanding—first-rate jazz drummers being more numerous than players of any other instrument—but never one like Slug. His style was as singular as his face. He co-ordinated his hands and his feet as though he were the leader of a percussion quartet. One foot on the bass pedal, the other on a foot cymbal, one hand flying left, the other flying

right—yet all controlled with a perfect sense of rhythm, which is even more rare than perfect pitch. His drums had a sweet tone. They did not thump, they sang. His inventiveness appeared to be inexhaustible and the patterns and variations which he brought forth were constantly surprising, and therefore stimulating.

And he had taste—which means that, among other things, he knew or felt the most attractive possible tempo for any number as soon as we had played it through once or, at most, twice. Often he would have us riding a ballad (“What Is This Thing Called Love?”) and sometimes would turn a jump tune (“A Shine on Your Shoes”) into a slow stomp. In these matters, his judgment was never at fault.

He saw and felt and heard rhythm in all things and, although he had heard thousands of hours of music, the inspiration for his own came from nature and people and from the world about him.

“Listen that!” he would often shout, calling attention to a previously unnoticed sound. Then he would imitate it and laugh. One of his favorite places was the zoo in Central Park—the movement of the animals, the noises they made, the sounds of the birds, were a source of constant interest to him.

Once, walking away from the zoo with him on a bursting spring day, I pointed admiringly to a great flowering oak tree. He studied it for a time, and said, “A fine tree. Fine. Know why? Because that tree got *rhythm*!”

Rhythm, to Slug, was form and tempo and balance and design and order and logic and love. He found rhythm in the changing and recurring seasons, in a girl’s walk, and in a bunch of bananas.

All this was present in the untidy rehearsal room in which we were observing him, Edmonde and I. As we were leaving, he sent us off with an exultant twenty-one-gun salute.

I took Edmonde to Lindy’s, a place she loved, especially in off hours. We fed gloriously and she talked of what we had just heard. She had clearly heard more than I had.

“You didn’t feel it?” she asked. “The marvelous organiza-

tion? The economy? No more the showing off, the tricks. Now a deep respect for design."

"Eddie," I said, "I'd love to spend a weekend inside your head someday. With a guidebook. What a world."

"In this ten, twelve weeks," she continued, "he has become from a small boy to a man. I can wait hardly to hear him with the band."

"Hardly wait," I corrected.

"Yes," she said, wolfing apple pancake.

"If he lasts," I worried. "I don't care what anybody tells me. There's a sick man."

"Ah, yes," she agreed.

"And he's half his weight. How can he stick it?"

"Because," Edmonde explained, "what he does is not with his body—principally—but with his—ah! the word."

"Say it in French."

"I don't know it in French, as well."

"Spirit?" I suggested. She shook her head and looked for the word on the ceiling. I kept trying. "Soul? Unconscious? Talent? Gift? How about the overself?"

She looked at me and asked, "What is that?"

"Search me. I read it somewhere."

"Maybe. All these things together. And more. Is why he can perform so with a broken body."

I was beginning to follow. "Go ahead," I urged.

"I am still hungry," she said.

"Keep talking. I'll order." I called out to the waiter, "Tiny!"

"Music," said Edmonde, "is a thing of the spirit, not of the mind."

Tiny stepped over.

"Two orders of cheese blintzes," I said.

"On the top of everything?" he said, writing.

Edmonde continued, studying the tip of a fork, "That is why it is so a great treasure."

"With sour cream," I said to Tiny, "and honey—no jam."

"Honey?" He disapproved.

"That's right, and no debates."

"The customer," said Tiny, "is always right—*he* thinks." He left us.

Edmonde went on. "Music," she said, "is feeling—so far and so full that there are not words. Only sounds. The great players, they are the ones who feel—without effort—and can convey what the composer felt."

"Go ahead," I said, softly.

"And in the jazz. See how often they go beyond— And push the small ideas—further and further—mingling with their own feeling."

"That why *I'm* no good?"

"That is why," she said gravely. "You have feeling, but it is not for music. You *think* in music, but you cannot feel in it. Slug—the other way."

Of course she was right. I felt empty and hopeless and not at all like talking, but I said, "You're some girl, Eddie."

"Hungry," she said.

"Hold tight," I said. "Blintzes on the way."

Slug stayed thin and no amount of effort changed that. He ate constantly all those things which he was allowed; milk was always around; vitamin pills and capsules and powders. Cases of Gerber's baby foods: strained vegetables and fruits and chicken and fish. I can see him opening one of the little tins, sitting, and spooning the contents out, dutifully. There was a Sterno burner in the back room to heat up milk for the Ovaltine and water for the Bovril. Old Dr. Caffrey, who looked like a Zulu chieftain, dropping by every night to give him a shot of this or that.

I had a beer once with the elderly doctor, and tried to pump him.

I said, "I get the feeling he ought to be doing a hell of a lot better, Doc. Anything *in* that?"

"Much," replied the doctor.

"Is it the playing? Would it be better if he knocked off? Maybe went back to Asbury for a while?"

"No, no. He'd fade even faster there. This activity, that's

the best thing we've got going for us right now. It's keeping him alive."

"But how come no improvement?" I asked.

He shook his head, frankly discouraged. "In medicine, son—there ain't no never and there ain't no always. He should be a lot better, yes. I admit that—but he could be worse, too. So why don't we just settle for a man holding his own? How's he playing? He tells me better than ever, but you know him. He'll say any ol' thing comes in his head. True or false."

"Don't I know it!"

"But what would you say? About the playing."

"I think he's telling you right, Doc. It's never been better. My opinion doesn't go for much around here, but everybody seems to think so. And the one who really does know, our manager, Mr. Raeburn, he must think so, too, because he's got us recording about twice as much as ever before. He says there comes a time with a band when it gets juicy and he says this is ours and he wants to bottle it."

"Well, the boy seems happy. Glad of that. Doesn't come to many—even for a stretch."

Somewhere in this period, Slug had said to me, "I'm goin' to beat this, man. I tell you. I promise you. I bet you. I'm gone get on top. Hop to the top! All the bad things, I've had 'em an' done my share. I enjoyed 'em but I don' want 'em no more." He prepared a glass of malted milk and went on. "I ever wind up on you about my kid brother? The one went crackers in the head?"

"No."

"Well, he went crackers in the head on account of one night come a camp meetin' to near where we lived and he snuck in with no ticket. He was just a runt of a small boy at the time. He didn't want to go—hell, he didn't even know what it was goin' on inside there, but somethin' caught him—the singin' an' the shoutin' an' the clappin' hands and swayin', and he stayed right with 'em from that night on. I mean he joined up with the troupe for no pay. Just to do what anybody tol' him do, and all he wanted was to be around every

night hallelujahing an' praisin' His name. They give him some kind of angel suit to wear—like a choirboy, y'know. He was only maybe ten, eleven the time. An' he never took that angel suit off—maybe only to take a bath every once a while. Yeah, he got happier and happier an' started puttin' the whole Scriptures right in his head. Got so he could go on for a couple hours at a time without missin' a word. Took him a long while to get wise to the money angle of this bunch he was with, but when he did, finally, he quit 'em an' went lookin' for some honest savers. I don' know for sure where's he now—but one time he was with some shave-head monks. He come to see me an' I didn't know him with the head an' the little beard. Talk? That boy never had to take a breath, seems like. An' he said to me this time about there's this voodoo about when a man gets born, his food and drink is put one side for him and when he's finished his portion—that's it. Out. Dig that? Think about it a minute. See? It means if you go it slow with the bottle and the knife and fork you last longer. An' that's me. I figure I've had my share an' maybe a little more—but if I got any more comin', I'm goin' to drag it out slow tempo an' make it last."

The idea of death had been introduced into his life for the first time. Before his illness it is possible that the notion had never so much as crossed his mind; or, if it had, only as a remote abstraction. Now, having been faced with final and forever extinction, he had responded violently. Like most of us, he harbored a deep and secret hope that perhaps, maybe, it would not happen to him. Something would be found or invented, the final riddle solved in time.

He expounded. "I just now, t'other day, been nearer to the dead side than the live, I swear. It was a fading away. Goin', goin', almost gone. An' quiet? Holy man, you never heard such a quiet. An' somethin' pullin' me inside out. Easy—not rough like them rough doctors. An' I said—I mean I said it right out loud—I said, 'No, man!' 'Not me,' I said. 'Not yet. I ain't goin'. I'm twenty-eight years of age,' I said. 'Born August ten, nineteen-o-five,' I said. An' I started countin' an' figurin'. An' I said right out, I said, 'I've had twenty-seven

years an' nine months an' four days an' seven hours, an' god-dammit, that ain't enough! You go get you somebody else,' I said. 'I know there's some dry old people in the old people's home they waitin' for you and glad to see you. Pay you welcome. Not me.' I said it. An' I meant it. An' it wanted me to go all the same, but I wouldn't an' I hung on. That's how I made it. A funny thing—well, maybe not so funny—but while I was hangin' on like that I kept thinkin' of my records. That a hype? An' how many an' who with an' what. There was some I didn't want to remember—like when I've sat in with some pure hoboies, just playin' toodledy-too. An' some good ones, but not enough. Some of the best ones, they was with little bunches nobody never heard of, so nobody buys—but good just the same. Maybe best. Late night ones, some of them, when the instruments started in to playin' the men. Them kind."

The records and the idea of death went together naturally. The concept of being no more is so abhorrent to the mind of man that he builds defenses against it, takes antidotes for the slow poison. Some come to have faith in a life after death. Others work to make a lasting mark. Most common, and most real, is simple propagation. A man sees himself living on in his son. But to Slug Abrams, immortality was represented by a phonograph record, and during the months between his collapse and his death he was hipped on the subject of recording.

One night, after cutting six sides with the band, he begged Cookie to let him do a twelve-inch alone, on both sides. This meant two sections of drums and traps for four and a half minutes each. Unheard of, at the time. Cookie, to humor him, agreed.

Slug began the first side slowly and softly, in the mood of a man going out for a long, leisurely walk. Gently, almost imperceptibly, the tempo and the volume began to increase—he gauged the length perfectly, and by the time the side had neared its end, he had whipped up a passionate frenzy which had us all astounded. The climax. *Now!* No, more. Surely now. No. Not *yet*? Can it go faster? *Is* there a faster?

Can it get louder? Will the machines hold it? More and more and unbelievably more—and always in miraculous control. At last, seemingly miles beyond the top—he ended. No. Now? Now? Now. A long silence. He rose, oblivious to the applause and to the praise, adjusted his instruments, and signaled a flip-over to the booth. He watched for the standby signal, took the Go sign and started precisely where he had left off, this time reversing the process and moving from storm to calm, ending with—well, say “a dying fall.” It was a demonstration of virtuosity, imagination, and artistry (and sheer joy) such as none of us had ever seen or heard.

Cookie took a chance and included this record in the release batch and it outsold the rest. I have no idea as to whether or not it is ever heard now, but I listened to it once with Dave Tough, no slouch himself on drums, and he told me that he considered it the most impressive display of its kind ever recorded, including some flights by the great Max Roach. . . .

. . . . I stayed in that booth at Lyon and Healy’s until I noticed that I was damp and dizzy. Records were strewn about. Apparently, I had been putting them onto the machine automatically, one after another. Two waiting customers were giving me hard looks and I gathered that I had had the booth tied up for too long a time. I collected the records, put each one into its proper sleeve, and carried them back upstairs. It was almost time to go and call for my wife.

The side doors of the Blackstone Theatre began to open onto the alley where I stood waiting. The audience drifted out on waves of tired air.

I made my way backstage, determined to put the past back where it belonged and to plunge my arms, up to the elbows, into the present.

My charged-up wife came off the stage, grabbed my arm and together we moved into her dressing room. We kissed. “*Very glad to see you,*” I said, and I was. Whatever their

comparative colors, I find I prefer the present to the past.

"You've got make-up all over," she said, handing me a Kleenex and tearing off her wig.

She sat down to catch her breath.

"How'd it go?" I asked.

"Started slow but ended just great!"

"That's the way."

She began to loosen her costume, and I helped.

"He call?" she asked.

"Who call?"

"Your friend. The one you were worried about."

"I wasn't worried about him. Just about missing his call. More about myself—worried, I mean—far as that goes. I mean what a jerk not to recognize his name. Granted, it struck me at an absent-minded moment—more and more of those lately—but even so."

"You're *not* a jerk."

"Thank you."

"Well, did he? Call back?"

"No. But he will."

"That's what I said."

"I know."

I poured myself a glass of water and drank it.

"What did you do tonight?" she asked.

"Me? Oh, I just floated around. I got to thinking about something and I couldn't stop."

"About what?"

"This fellow. Woody. And the band and this other fellow Slug Abrams and—"

"The one who died?"

"Yes."

"And you just floated around thinking about that all evening?"

"Well, sure. Turns out there's quite a lot to remember. More than I thought."

Her maid, Grace, came in to assist her in undressing and dressing.

My wife said to me, "I hope you didn't walk *too* much—because I'd like to now."

"Fine. No, I didn't. I went over to Lyon and Healy's and played some records."

"Oh, were they open tonight?" she asked absently.

"No," I said. "They were closed, but I never let a thing like that stop me. I just heaved a paving stone through the window and went in and played some records."

She laughed, but Grace regarded me with compassion.

Visitors arrived, and it was half an hour before we started down Michigan Boulevard. We decided to walk as far as the Wrigley Building before taking a taxi to the Pump Room for supper.

We talked over plans for the following day, reminding each other of appointments and needs. After this, we were silent for a time, strolling, now and then stopping to look into a shopwindow.

"Okay if I talk about this?" I asked.

"About what?"

"About this big think," I said.

"Of course."

"It's new for me, you know. I'm not too crazy about the past."

"So I've heard."

"But this—I don't know. Maybe it's the night or the climate or my sudden age or something, but I've got a peculiar feeling."

"Maybe it's the full moon," she suggested brightly.

"Maybe."

"How do you mean, peculiar?"

"It's as though—well, I feel there must be some reason why I want to keep remembering that particular time."

"Maybe because you enjoyed it."

"I didn't, much. But it's as though—" I stopped. "Well, let me say it, no matter how it sounds. It's as though the past were trying to tell me something."

"Yes?"

"That doesn't sound nutty?"

“No.”

“Thanks, angel.” I kissed her hand and went on. “Well, it was a ragged time. The depression was on and prohibition sort of dying. Hard to make a living. Lots of lawlessness. And things happened then that I didn’t get at all. Now that I’m thinking back on it, a lot of it’s much clearer. But there are so many holes. Empty spaces. Things I’ll never know. Those were formative years, I suppose, even though I was no kid.”

“Is he still a musician? Your friend Mr. Woodruff?”

“I don’t know. Truth is, I haven’t heard of him—hell—even *thought* of him in years. He may be. But if he is, I can’t understand not hearing of him. What I’m trying to say is—I can’t imagine him being in music and not being on top. This guy was—he was really it. He was everything I was not.”

“I don’t believe it. I’ll bet you were it, too.”

“Save your money,” I said. “But Woody. He was born to it. I don’t know much about who’s around now or what’s happened to the business—but in those days, there were damn few could touch him.”

“He’s probably playing right here in Chicago somewhere.”

“God, if I knew where I’d take you right over there and show you.”

“I’d go,” she said.

A show window full of unusual, custom-made neckties diverted us and led to a long discussion about whether or not I should order some. She was for, I was against.

“I don’t need any more neckties.”

“Nobody ever *needs* any more neckties,” she argued. “But they’re nice to have. Nice for other people who look at you.”

“We’re only here for—how long more?”

“Three weeks and a little. Plenty of time.”

“I’ll see.”

The introduction of the time factor led to other matters—talk about neglected responsibilities and pressing duties. We forgot about taking a taxi as planned, and walked all the way to the Ambassador East and its Pump Room. There, the opulent atmosphere and the music and the passing parade in

addition to supper made the hour absorbing, and my journey into the forest of memory was temporarily abandoned.

We drove back to the Blackstone. No messages. I bought the morning papers, took them up and read them before preparing for bed. A careful combing of the entertainment ads yielded no clues of Woody.

I had been lying in the darkness, sleepless, for what seemed an inordinately long time. This seldom happened, but tonight I had made the mistake of returning to the unresolved subject as soon as the lights were out. No. The subject returned to me.

Clara. I began to think of Clara and to fit *her* into the story. I tried to recall the first time I had seen her. That weekend at Edmonde's in Manhasset? Surely not. I could see myself urging her to sing, and I would not have done so had that been our meeting. That first dinner at the Davises'? That was after. Was it? No, before. But before that, a laughing afternoon in a small Chinese restaurant without a name over on Ninth Avenue—which had an elevated then. *That* was the first time I had met the Davis girls.

I slipped out of bed, put on a dressing gown and moved softly into the sitting room. I poured a glass of Poland Water, drank some of it and went to the window. The city was asleep and still. I was nowhere. Not in Chicago, not in New York. Removed from the present and surely not in the past. I was inhabiting the shapeless domain of my own recall. An incomplete world, seen from the single point of view of my own situation, which was not always the most advantageous position.

Clara.

. We had finished a recording date—this was not long after the Davis brothers had begun to record with us—and were packing our instruments into their cases.

"You always use *Vibrator* reeds?" I asked.

"Yes," said Henry. "I came onto them first and then, after a while, I got Ol' Stubborn here to switch."

His brother giggled. "I always liked scraping my own, but now I admit the error of my ways. Amen."

Henry went on. "Takes a while to find the one's the best for you. They come in ten strengths—from number one to number five and a half. Number one, that's the softest. I use a three and Gil likes the four and a half."

"What I had in mind," I said, "was this. Long as it looks like we're going to be a trio more and more, anything we can do to blend is to the good. So I'll look into this reed thing and see where I get to."

I looked up and was surprised to find them both studying me. Suspiciously?

"That's nice to hear, fella," said Gil.

Henry asked, "You like to come have a bite?"

"Sure," I replied. "Why not?"

Gil turned to Henry. "Don't forget about the chicks we have awaiting."

Henry laughed. "I won't." He said to me, "You don't mind women, do you?"

"Hell, no," I said.

On the curb, in front of the building—1619 Broadway—two attractive, dark brown girls stood waiting, demurely.

"*There's our women!*" shouted Gil.

"The skinny one's mine!" Henry yelled, as he and Gil dashed across the sidewalk. They put down their instrument cases and embraced the girls violently and alternately, finally knocking all four hats to the sidewalk, and almost collapsing with laughter and high spirits. I joined them and was introduced.

"This old shaky one here is Eunice," said Henry. "And this underage job is Clara. They're both good kids, but a little tired, know what I mean?"

"How do you do?" I asked, and shook hands with both.

"Where to, ladies?" asked Gil. "Any ol' thing your starvin' little hearts desire. Paid off today." He flashed a pay envelope.

Eunice, putting her hat back on, said, "I feel real Chinesey today. Don't ask me why."

"I knew it!" sang Gil. "You've got Moo Goo written all over your *pan!*"

This struck them all as being hilariously funny.

"There's a new place over on Fifty-first," suggested Henry.

"All the same to you," said Clara, "let's go someplace we've been before. Kim's. I'm in no mood for a civil-rights scream today."

"I yield to the Senator from Mississippi," said Gil, pointing at Clara.

Henry took Eunice's arm and started off. Clara walked between Gil and me, following them. She glanced at me and asked, "You're the arranger, aren't you?"

"Well," I said, "I'm working on it."

"We heard those two sides, the ones that've been released."

"Oh?"

"We think they're excellent. Absolutely original."

"Thank you." (Was I blushing?)

"And what about that trumpet!" she glowed.

"What *about* him?" I agreed.

"You really have an exceptional little outfit."

"What do *you* do?" I asked politely.

"Her?" answered Gil. "She's a schoolgirl. In kindergarten right now."

Clara replied to me as though Gil had not spoken. "I'm at Hunter College," she said. "Senior."

"You like that?"

"Love it," she said. "I'm scared to think what'll happen when I leave. There's been some talk about a one- or two-year business course, but I don't know. You get all toned up and then the job opportunities are pretty limited, let's face it."

"I think you should get married," said Gil. "Fast. Right away. To a rich man. No. I take that back. To a *very* rich man."

"Swing 'em in here," said Clara.

"The reason I say fast," added Gil, "is that you're not get-

tin' any younger. Why, you must be right up around nineteen or so by now."

"You've guessed it!" said Clara.

"See? Well, time flies, all right." He spoke across her, to me. "Ah, you should've seen this trick when she was young. Sixteen, seventeen. A vision."

"I can still see traces," I said, trying to get into the act.

A few minutes more of just-met banter, and we reached the restaurant. An outsized greeting from the tiny proprietor, a drink on the house, and the knowledgeable ordering began. I had thought that chow mein and chop suey were the things one ordered in a Chinese restaurant, but I was to learn otherwise this day. I remember that meal as vividly as a love affair. The delicate soup, the barbecued chicken and almost raw vegetables, the pungent pork, the delicious beef and the varieties of rice.

As the feast was put before us, Gil said, "What? No duck? I'm leaving."

The meal began, and I noticed an odd condition: these four people fell into the pattern of a family. Eunice served and sounded like the mother; Henry demanded and answered as the father; Gil and Clara became more and more the happy, unruly children. I was clearly the guest. The table seemed to have a set and fixed routine, well-ordered and organized.

I commented on it. "You four must spend a lot of time together," I said.

A suppressed giggle and a bit of choking on the food.

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "We've had these chicks on our necks for years."

"And years and years and years," said Gil.

"All right," said Eunice, "that'll do."

Clara's eyes sparkled mischievously. "We've all been living together for a long time."

My discomfiture must have been apparent, because Eunice reached over, touched me and said, "Our name is Davis, too. We're their sisters."

"Oh, listen to that shameless woman," said Gil.

"All right, Bud," she said. "Joke's over."

"Okay," said Gil.

This was an old game of theirs; pretending to be a pair of courting couples in the presence of strangers. My impression of them as a family unit had not been in error. They had assumed their usual roles without being aware of it. Eunice was the eldest, twenty-six. The death of their second parent had occurred five years earlier, two months before she was to have been married. The marriage had been postponed, postponed again, and finally called off. She was strong and gave the impression of strength, both physical and moral. She was handsome—not pretty, not beautiful, but handsome. Her good looks were somehow not female.

Clara, conversely, was all girl—except for that part of her which suggested cat. She showed it in every move, sounded it in every tone. Tall and willowy, with a live bosom and black eyes, she claimed attention. In dress, she favored shades of brown with stunning effect. She seemed unaware of her beauty, thus adding to its magnetism. She was avid and bright and, although I was not to learn about it for some time, a singer of rare and individual talent.

These were the Davis girls, who, along with the Davis boys, were to become my close and valued friends. I went often to their home, a large apartment on 131st Street. I took Edmonde there one night and she became part of our family at once.

Don used to come with me sometimes; then he did so less and less.

"I love the food," he explained, "but there's too much conversation goes with it."

"Well, hell, man," I argued, "you can't live your whole goddam stupid life in four-four time. You've got to take in something, once in a while."

"Sure, sure," he said, "but not all these long gumbeats. I've got my own troubles."

"Such as."

"Such as? Such as it's gettin' tougher and tougher to

locate a good, working stick of tea in this louse-bitten town. The last batch I connected with made me puke."

"Yuh, well you've got troubles, all right."

Woody came with me to the Davises' twice. He was reserved both times, but polite and pleasant. The second time, the talk turned to religion in both its formal and personal aspects. Woody spoke of its relationship to music, Henry advocated orthodoxy, Clara was against discussing it at all, since she thought that overdefinition tended to destroy spirituality.

Eunice said, "I have read the whole Book. That's right. Beginning to ending. Anybody else?" Woody raised his hand. "Good for you, then. I don't know what it said to you, but I boiled it down for myself to three words and that's all. So I never read it any more or go to services. There's nothing more I need to be told. I've got all I can handle now."

"What three words?" I was the one to ask.

"It's where He says, 'Love one another.' That's it. That's all. Not so easy," she ended.

We had all had an especially fine time that night, but Woody never suggested joining me there again, and somehow I never asked him, either.

Albie and I were the ones who went most often. Regularly, really. We brought flowers until Eunice said that she would prefer plants, after which we brought plants; and boxes of candy; steamer baskets; live lobsters; once we went down to Gellis's and brought up a huge load of Second Avenue delicatessen specialties which went over big. I remember several champagne occasions, but on the whole, there was little drinking. On one of the champagne occasions (Eunice's birthday), I threw away a whole bottle because it was flat. Afterward, when I complained to the bootlegger, I learned that he had sold me a rare bottle of that superior delicacy—still champagne, since I had asked for something special. Another night (Clara's birthday, this time), the champagne was pink, because I had heard about it in an English movie and wondered if there really was

such a thing. There was dancing that night, the rugs thrown back and everyone's shoes off.

Two developments stemmed from these evenings at the Davises'. Eunice fell in love with Albie, and I fell in love with Clara.

About Eunice. I may have known about it before Albie. I saw it beginning, watched it grow, felt it reach its climax. I wondered when Albie would become aware of it. He was not, as a rule, obtuse. I frequently considered, did he know and was he playing it cozy? In any case, he did not openly respond to her. I could hear the subtle change in the tone of Eunice's voice as she addressed him; she began to dress in a new and cunning style; she demonstrated her considerable housekeeping abilities with studied carelessness. Albie looked and listened, but seemed, outwardly at least, unimpressed. A less contained girl might have panicked and begun to press. Not Eunice. She simply blossomed and continued to lay down her gentle barrage.

One night, as we left there, Albie and I, he asked, "Feel in the walking mood?"

"Sure."

"I'll walk you home."

We were on 131st Street—my place was on 53rd, between Fifth and Sixth, so his suggestion meant that there was something on his mind that was going to take a long talking out.

At Fifth Avenue and 110th Street, Albie said, "You ever given much thought to the idea of marriage, I mean the idea behind it? The institution?"

"Certainly. Hasn't everybody?"

"I don't know. Tell me your conclusions."

"Well, I don't know that I'm at the point of conclusions or anything like that, but it seems to me to be a *lovely* idea. One of the best around."

"It's unnatural, of course," he said, deep in thought.

"How come?"

"Because it is. It's as unnatural as buggery an' sometimes

I can't understand how most everybody is so for one and so against the other."

"I don't see that. Even animals have a respect for family life."

"Not the animals I know," said Albie.

Ninety-sixth Street.

"Where most people go wrong," said Albie, "is they accept the partner before they accept the idea of the institution. Now. Should be the other way around. I know plenty of fine, possible wives. It's just I worry about the notion."

"Everybody does."

"Not enough. If they did you'd have less of it. I've made a study of it."

"I see you have."

"It's a contract. An' there's much more in it than the church and the state asks you to do. It's got economics in it, and health, and art, and family, an' God knows what else."

"Sex," I reminded.

"Yes," he said, "that too. A man, a young man, takes a whale of a chance to settle for a certain one. How does he know, or she, what may come across their path to complicate it all? That inside tugging and pulling doesn't know a thing about the rules of the game. That's what I mean by unnatural."

Eightieth Street.

"But if you just keep gassin' about it you'll talk yourself out of it," I said.

"Or into it."

"No, out of it. Because that's the general direction. If you're asking me for my advice, Albie, I'd say this: follow your instincts. If you feel like it, do it. If not, no. But don't reason it into the ground. Hell, it's like talking over a lay while you're at it."

"What's wrong with *that*?" asked Albie indignantly, and we laughed for two blocks.

"It's Eunice I'm thinking about," he said presently.

"I know."

"How do you mean, know?"

“Been in the air for some time.”

“That a fact?”

“You bet.”

We slowed down.

“It would be a good thing in many ways,” he said. “She’s a practical person and she knows the score. She’ll always be a happy woman because she doesn’t want more than she can get. Funny. There right beside her is sister Clara—and she’s always going to be in a misery because that’s just what she *does* want.”

“What?”

“More than she can get.”

“How do you know?”

“It’s in her eyes. Hungry eyes,” he said.

“I like Clara.”

“I know you do.”

“I like Eunice, too,” I added hastily.

“But *you* don’t have to decide whether or not to marry her.”

“No.”

“Or anybody.”

“Not at the moment, no.”

He stopped, and so did I. He took off his left shoe and shook a pebble out of it, replaced it, and tied the lace carefully. We resumed our walk.

“Have you ever asked anybody?” he asked.

“Once,” I replied.

“Tell me about it, you mind?”

“Wasn’t much. I was crooked and so was she. This was up in the country a couple of summers ago. Livingston Manor. I was playing at this hotel and she was a guest. So I asked her and she turned me down. In fact, she laughed at me. Imagine? And that was that. Later, it turned out I was sorry I’d asked and she was sorry she’d turned me down.”

“Think of it,” he said.

“And that, Daddo,” I said, “is how I came to join the WCTU.”

Sixty-fifth Street.

"If I ever do decide to go through with it," he said, "I believe I'd care for you to be my best man."

"Honored, Albie."

"Because it all came up through you, didn't it?"

"Did it?"

"Sure. First you dug me out of the rent party and into the quartet. And after, you put down the arrangement that got me to get the Davis boys in."

"But wait a second," I said. "The arrangement was actually a swipe from you—so you can take some of the weight yourself."

After a pause he said, "I suppose having children must be pretty interesting at that."

"I'd think so."

"But against it is the times when we maybe have to travel the band. You get caught in wanting to stick together with your wife and the expense of taking her along. Oh, hell, and if there are kids—then you can't move around so good at all."

"Boy, you really have gone into this thing, haven't you?"

"In and out and around and between and up and down."

We reached Fifty-third Street and he came up for a drink. It was about two-thirty A.M. We took our shoes off.

"There's the matter of love," he said, looking out at the top of Radio City. "We haven't gone into that."

"Unfortunately," I said, "you've picked a subject which I never discuss after midnight."

"I don't know if I love Eunice—because, tell you the truth, I'm not sure I know what it is."

I laughed. "Eddie hit me with one the other night. She said there was this big brain in France—I forget his name—once said, 'Most people would never fall in love if they hadn't read about it first.' Something like that."

He looked at me sharply.

"How'd she come say a thing like that to you, son? You pitchin' there?"

"On and off," I said. "Mostly off. Never mind me. You're on tonight."

"I like to *be* with Eunice, I know that. I'm comfortable with her and she rests me. But I don't *desire* her in the way they say a man should."

"That can come in time."

"You think so?"

"Certainly, Albie. Talk about unnatural. Hell, our whole life is a wack. I don't know how much of your drive goes into the music, maybe too much. So just at this moment, maybe there's not so much left."

"Into the music," he said. "And into several ten-dollar houses."

I yawned. He rose and finished his drink.

"What time tomorrow?" he asked.

"Eleven at Brunswick."

"See you."

"Let me know," I said.

"Yeah. But you might just as well start lookin' around for where to rent one of those striped-pants get-ups."

"Fact?" I asked excitedly.

"Possible," he said, putting on his shoes. "If I can ever figure out how to put it to her, I may put it to her."

He left and it was dawn before I could get to sleep.

Nothing happened in the matter for months. I often thought of bringing the subject up again, but it seemed indiscreet and so I let it rest.

One night, I was awakened by a series of loud knocks at my door. I looked at the clock. Five. Trouble.

"Okay!" I called out, put on a robe, went to the door and opened it. Albie twirled in.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Put on those strip-ed pants!" he yelled.

We embraced, pummeling one another. Automatically, I went to the kitchenette and started some coffee.

"Thank God!" I said. "The suspense's been killing me."

"And me," he said.

"Where'd you get the steam, finally?" I asked.

"Wait'll I tell you!" he said. "An' wait'll you disbelieve it. I've been windin' up on it till I was all wound down. Couldn't handle it. It was all sharps and flats. Couldn't get myself around to put it to her—so what happens? *She* puts it to *me!*"

"No."

"Tonight. She sent everybody out and she sat us down in the sitting room and she said about she'd been thinking and considering for a year and come to the conclusion it would be a choice thing all around if we were to marry. Reasonable and practical and healthy. And I said, 'Fine. In fact I've been going over the same lines myself.' And then we sort of—don't laugh—we sort of shook hands."

"Do you know when yet?"

"That's another thing. Now I really *do* need some help. Because the proposition, the way she puts it, it throws me."

"What is it?"

"It's she wants me to move in up there."

"Move in?"

"An' live there. An' then, if we want to stay that way—well, then—legalize. An' if not—not."

"Jesus," I said.

"I mean it's all right and all that, but don't you think it's maybe a little like a long audition?"

"Sure, but it's an audition for her, too."

"That's the truth," he said. "I never thought about it like that. But it's the truth. And she thinks we should buy a car—a small car—and get away by ourselves now and again. She knows this place in the Berkshires."

"Eunice," I said, "is a goddam living wonder."

The new life began so smoothly that no change was apparent. We all watched the experiment, involved and interested. Without doubt, all was well. The delicate adjustments—Albie to the Davises and they to him—were made easily and painlessly. Everyone concerned seemed to be better off. Before long, there was talk of a small apartment in the same building which was about to become available. Plans for the near future were made. In two months, the

apartment would be free. Two more weeks to repaint and decorate. Two months to furnish. Then the marriage. It was a project in which we were all caught up.

After the wedding, there was, of course, extra space in the large apartment, and at times I wondered if Clara might not follow her sister's lead and invite *me*. She never did. In fact, she never spoke a sentence which indicated the slightest awareness of the passage of any feeling between us; nor did I. Yet it was there and both of us knew it and knew of the other's knowledge. But the lines of communication were insulated against shock.

I turned up one evening and found her alone. Eunice and Albie were in their own apartment. The boys had gone over to hear Jimmy Crawford, the new drummer in Jimmy Lunceford's band. She opened the door, answering my ring.

"Hello."

"Hello."

I followed her into the living room, which was dimly and restfully lit. The sound of Fats Waller's piano emanated from the record player, never raising its voice. It meant something, because a few nights before, I had discoursed long and loud on the subject of Waller as a shamefully neglected and unappreciated American songwriter and musician. My point had been that the sensitive organist, as well as the composer of "Honeysuckle Rose," "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Squeeze Me," "I've Got a Feelin' I'm Fallin'," "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now," and "Willow Tree," deserved more respect than he had thus far achieved and that the reason for this, in part at least, was that he had been conned into playing the clown and allowing himself to become "Fats" Waller; that he was presenting himself, not in his own image, but in the image he believed the public wanted, thereby gaining its favor but losing its respect. Clara had been the only one to agree with me, and had apparently remembered. Thomas Waller's rich, joyously conceived music filled the room.

Clara sat on the sofa and lifted her long legs onto the coffee table before it. We looked at one another for a time,

exchanged a smile, then I sat, too, at a circumspect distance. She reached out her hand at once, I took it and we sat thus for half an hour.

She got up, fixed two tall Tom Collinsees and brought them to the coffee table. I said nothing, not even, Thank you, since we seemed to be committed to a wordless patch. We drank our drinks slowly, and when we had finished them, she lay back and swung her feet into my lap. I grasped her ankles, and we were together again, tranquilly, sharing time and each other's presence. A long time. When she sat up, we lit cigarettes and smoked, watching the streams and clouds of our smoke intermingling. After our cigarettes, I lay back with my head in her lap, and listened with full concentration to the sound of her heartbeat above, fitting it into the continuing music. Eventually, another drink, fixed by me this time—after which we joined hands again. I knew her hand well by now. What a friendly, expressive touch it had. The moment came when it suggested the evening's end.

I rose and moved to the door, she followed. At the door, she touched her cheek to mine and said, "Thank you."

I replied, "Good night," and left.

Even now, I think of that night as one of the most satisfying I have ever known, in spite of the fact that the moment we had both awaited patiently had failed to arrive.

A week later came the walk. That damned walk.

It was a Sunday. A mild spring afternoon. We had met—Eunice, Albie, Clara, and I—at a loan exhibition of French moderns, at the Gaenzler Gallery on Fifty-seventh Street and had spent a dazzling two hours seeing things we had never seen before. Afterward, Albie invited us all to the Russian Tea Room down the street. We stuffed and talked, reviewing each picture and comparing reactions. The place was crowded but I am certain that we attracted no particular attention.

"Everybody come to the movie show," said Albie.

Clara said, "You're going to sit in a big dark room on a day like this?"

"Why not?" asked Albie.

"It's this French go," Eunice explained. "And Edmonde said don't miss it."

"We're going to walk," said Clara, turning to me. "Aren't we?"

"Just what I've always wanted," I said.

We walked Eunice and Albie to the Little Carnegie and declined Albie's invitation again. The stills outside were tempting, but Clara was dead set against going in, so she and I said good-bye to Albie and Eunice and continued to walk. We went to Central Park South, crossed to the walk which fringes the park and turned left toward Columbus Circle. We seemed to be strolling aimlessly, but later I suspected that every move had been arranged.

"A collection like that," she said, referring to the paintings we had seen that day, "it changes the look of the world for you, doesn't it? Look. Wherever you look. That's no accident, you realize—the fact that all these new buildings are like those cubist pictures."

"Changes the look," I said, "and changes the sound of the world, too. You can believe it or not, but I could hear some of those things."

"I'm not sure that's right," she said, troubled.

"Why not?"

"To get visual impressions mixed up with auditory ones."

"All right, then," I said quickly, "I won't."

"It's too literal, don't you see that?" she said earnestly. "Hearing a picture—it's like seeing exact images for music, program stuff. It's the worst kind where tooty flutes are supposed to be raindrops, and instruments represent characters. Drums for thunder, and trumpets for horses—harps are brooks rippling. It's anti-music all that, don't you think so?"

"Sure," I said, won over by her vehemence.

"But what these men are doing, in their field, that is—it can be done in music, too. Especially your kind. Painting—old painting—used to be photography, more or less. But this stuff—impressionism—each man showing you what it looks like, feels like, to him. That's close to jazz, don't you think?"

I responded with an overlong, "Uuhh."

“Think about it!”

We walked along and I tried, but the day was so full and the sun so warm and the girl at my side so fragrant, that I could not keep my mind on the esoteric problem. I looked at her and smiled.

“Thinking,” I said.

She took my arm and we walked. I cannot re-create the details or the moment when it struck me, but I was soon aware of people regarding us strangely. It bothered me. I remembered a time a few months earlier when the band had played an all-night party for Legs Diamond, in the Village, and when it was over, I had gone down into the subway wearing my tuxedo at eight in the morning. It was much the same feeling—being stared at as though an eccentric or a freak.

Clara seemed to be oblivious to it. She said, “The individual is what matters most, would you agree with that? I suppose I should say, ‘*who* matters most.’ That’s why these painters are important. Because they stand for the individual. I mean, you might say for the dignity of a single human being’s point of view. Not just a trained mirror or—”

“*What you tryin’ to do, Buster? Change your luck?*”

These words, followed by three voices joined in high-pitched laughter, broke in on us. It took me a moment or two to realize what had been said, to whom it referred and what it implied. I turned to look back over my shoulder and saw three overdressed young dandies walking backward and still looking at us. The middle one pointed to me.

“Yeah, you,” he said. “You with the nose on.”

Another laugh from his companions. I felt a slight but firm tug on my arm and a gentle quickening of pace.

“When Woody plays ‘Sometimes I’m Happy,’ for instance,” Clara said, controlling her voice carefully. “Couldn’t that be classified as pure post-impressionism?”

“Pure,” I said.

She released my arm on the pretext of getting a handkerchief out of her pocketbook to blow her nose.

She was talking again. I thought I heard an edge of strain

now. I am sure that there was a nervous speeding of speech tempo. I became more and more conscious of the stir we were creating simply by walking along Central Park West. I thought it best to take my attention off the growing feeling of discomfort and to put it back onto the meaning of her continuing words, which were floating around my head without entering it.

“. . . to get involved in that old form and content argument,” she was saying. “What’s the difference? We have this one teacher—Dr. Ebert—she has a theory that they’re one and the same thing, anyway. How about that?”

“It’s an opinion,” I muttered, floundering.

“Yes,” she laughed, “but I’m not ready for it just yet. I can still see a difference. I’m not going to criticize Woody, not on a beautiful day like this, but I have to say there are times when I hear him and I think—the form is there, now if there could only be more in it.”

“Content,” I said.

“Yes. Sometimes with Woody it’s as though he’s blown the most beautiful and original bottle—have you ever seen those glass blowers in Coney Island? Well, it’s as though he’s invented a new style and size—even shape. And color. But then—the bottle’s empty. There’s nothing in it. Or—” She stopped. I had never seen her so troubled.

“Or what?” I prompted.

“Or as if there *is* something in it, but something ugly. No, not ugly. That’s not what I mean. Cruel.”

“Woody’s not cruel,” I objected.

“I didn’t say he was. I said what he played was cruel. Sometimes.”

“I think I know what you’re getting at—that mean sound of his—but it’s nothing to do with cruel. I read it as tormented—or—more like self-doubt.”

“Maybe. That’s what’s so interesting listening, especially to men you know. The stuff underneath can be amazing. Imagine how well I know Henry and Gil. And yet, I hear them at times and I can’t imagine how it got *in* there.”

"Some of it's been there a long, long time," I said. "Thousands of years, maybe. Millions."

"Yes," she said. "And then it gets blended and—and fused, with what they hear around them, and with what comes out of, say, you. And that's been there a long, long time, too."

"Are we onto the ol' mingling of cultures routine?" I asked. "I hope so."

"Why?" she laughed.

"Well, because it's more familiar ground for me. I like it and I don't get so scared."

"Take that wedding dance you did for Eunice and Albie," she said. "What's the name of it?"

"Well, now. That particular wedding dance I have entitled 'Wedding Dance.' Clever?"

"What about that for a blend?" she said.

"I know. It's an old Jewish holiday dance—I don't know if wedding or what—but the harmonies are modern. And the rhythms—they're all Slug's, not mine. I suppose they must be African or Cuban. Not sure."

"And then what Woody does with it!" she marveled.

"You don't call that cruel, do you?"

"Of course not!" she said angrily. "I didn't say—"

"Be strung up, the two of 'em, where I come from!"

The strident voice of the speaker of this sentiment cut Clara's speech off, sharply. I looked to my right to the sound. Across Clara's lovely, shiny, heaving bosom, the flashing little eyes in a bloated face looked at me with hate. Man or woman? It took me a beat to decide. Man. This time I pretended that I had heard nothing and spoke to Clara, quietly.

"Okay, okay," I said, and tried a little laugh, which came out flat. "Don't get excited."

We walked in silence until she said, "I love getting excited."

We went on. I did not get used to it, nor did the people in the street. I began to wonder why this had not occurred before, and realized that we had never walked together in the street before. How had that happened? Accident, or design? How had today happened? Design. I was suddenly

convinced of it. It was Clara's way of demonstrating something she thought important. Clara was a born teacher. We all knew that. What we did not know was what she was teaching us and when.

Four girls of high-school age, hatless, arms interlocked, approached us, walking in step and singing in harmony. "Shuffle off to Buffalo." They were dressed almost identically. They saw us, stopped singing, and came at us, playfully. We stopped, to avoid a collision.

One of the girls, a disgustingly pimpled drip, looked at Clara and said, "My! what a tan."

The four then split and marched by us, two to the left and two to the right.

Another sang out, "Hey! Let's go get a black-an'-white soda, okay?"

The giggles which followed were musical and sweet.

I took Clara's arm. "Should we grab a cab?" I asked.

"No," she answered simply.

We walked, both of us returning to the subject we had left; she, nervous; I shaken. Our talk became fitful and the day began to spoil.

"I may kill somebody," I seethed.

"Careful it isn't yourself," she said.

I thought about this until 110th Street. The end of the park, which had this day taken on the characteristics of a tortuous ambush. As we crossed the street away from it, I felt relieved and oddly victorious. But what victory had I won? Perhaps a small one over myself and my temper. There had been opportunity for easy ugliness and this had been avoided.

We started up Lenox Avenue and moved, seemingly, into a sudden, new country inhabited by a different nationality. It was a land of another color. The children, the policemen, the taxi drivers and passers-by were suddenly of her world, not of mine. The minority had become the majority in the time it takes to cross a street, but the hostility toward us as a pair continued. The same stares, the same surprise.

We turned the corner at 128th Street. A candy store. A newsstand. Metal bricks holding down the papers flapping in the breeze. Leaning against the window, a row of Sunday-dressed young men of varying hues. I sensed trouble, correctly. A knot of other young men on the curbstone untied and formed a row. Thus, we were to pass between two lines. The quiet as we approached was oppressive. From the right we heard, "You too dingy to pass, don't you know that, ladybug?"

From the left, "He's too little, cutie. You better throw him back in!"

We tried to hurry past. All this was happening quickly, too quickly, and there was no time to think. I took her arm and, as I did so, felt my hat fly from my head. A folded tabloid had been skillfully thrown. I reached down to pick up my hat, but before I could so so, a foot stepped on it. Leaning over, I tugged at it ineffectually for a moment, then pitched forward and fell sprawling as I was kicked with force from behind. Clara helped me to my feet and we found ourselves surrounded. The faces in the circle were non-committal, but the silence was sinister.

"It's Sunday, fellows," I said.

I have often thought of that idiotic remark and tried, without success, to trace its reason or origin.

A chunky man, slightly shorter than I, confronted me, and peered at me through his horn rims.

"Where you live, son?" he asked, officially.

"Fifty-third," I said.

"What you doin' way up here?" he asked.

I replied reflexively, "What's it to you?" and regretted it at once. It had come out sounding tougher than I had intended.

He took off his eyeglasses and handed them to a friend.

"Wait a second, pal," I said, holding out a palm. He purposely leaned forward and twisted, so as to make my hand touch his lapel. He knocked my hand off, indignantly.

"Don't you make no pass at me!" he screamed, and turned to the group. "You see him make a pass at me?"

“Yeah, boy.”

“Standin’ right here.”

“You gone take that, Jeff?”

“Muscle man!”

A small boy darted in and, with a single, swift, expert motion, ripped open my fly, and darted out.

“Look out, man!”

“Get that boy’s name!”

The circle danced with laughter.

I began to rebutton my fly and looked toward Clara, who had been shoved aside. Her eyes caressed my face, but suddenly reflected horror and squinted shut as her head turned away. An explosion of pain in my left ear dizzied me. I seemed to be spinning, although my feet were firmly planted. I bent over sharply, protecting both ears with my hands, and struck my mouth on an upcoming fist. All of my attention was suddenly concentrated on the technical problem of not swallowing the tooth which had been knocked loose and lay on the back of my tongue. I coughed it forward and cached it between my lower lip and gum. They can put it back, I thought, they can put it back. I straightened up and, groggy, formed a pair of soft fists. I began flailing them about wildly, hitting nothing, but throwing myself off balance.

I heard a scream. Clara?

The back of my left fist hit something or someone and began to bleed. Was blood supposed to be so sticky? I closed my eyes and stayed in motion.

Clara’s voice. “You bastards!”

Laughter. A traffic cop’s whistle, peep-peeping endlessly; but it seemed so far away. I thought, Miles. I’ll be out before they get here. I hope so, anyway. The whistle seemed to be coming closer, but I put it down to wishing. My right fist was caught, all at once, as though in a mesh of barbed wire, and a paralyzing blow smashed into my armpit. I tore my hand loose and, as I turned, a pointed kick caught me on the hip. In a panic, I realized that it had been aimed at my groin. I covered my testicles with both hands and opened

my eyes. I could see only an out-of-focus kaleidoscopic pattern swimming in nausea. The same blow on the same ear again. Another? Or a delayed reaction from the first? Keeping my left hand on my crotch, I swung my right back and forth before me, connecting with air. The whistle, very loud now. Many voices. My fist striking a cheekbone. A cry of pain. Proud of my success, I opened one eye. I had struck a policeman, who held me off, shouting. His words, whatever they were, were obscured by a stuck auto horn which was bleating inside my head. I stopped swinging, and leaned against a wall. My insides had been disarranged and I seemed to be leaking. My lower half felt, first numb, now absent. I sank to the sidewalk. Clara knelt beside me, weeping. Her dress, a new dress, was torn and ruined. I will buy her a new one, I thought. And: They can put it back, they can put it back. But to what did that refer? No idea. My nasal passages were blocked, and breathing through my mouth I was afraid of swallowing my loose tooth. That's it. *That's* what they can put back. I spat it into my hand, surreptitiously, and clutched it tightly.

Clara and I looked at each other. She stopped crying. I thought I ought to smile, but just as I was about to do so, my tongue felt the empty space between my teeth and I decided against it. (What a moment for vanity!) They can put it back, I thought. I smiled a tight-lipped smile, held it until I realized that it probably did not look like a smile at all. Waves and waves of sickish emptiness washed over me. The End.

I remember no more until the bathroom of the Davis apartment. I was in the tub, naked. Eunice and Albie were helping me. The bathwater, tinted by the clotted blood which was being washed off me, was a vibrant pink. Eunice held an ice pack to the back of my neck.

As she and Albie came into focus, Eunice said, "Here he is. Okay? Okay?"

I nodded and she handed me a brandy. I drank it in a gulp, remembering to keep it from the hole in my gum.

Out of the tub, my stomach went out of control. I kneeled on the floor and used the convenient toilet to be sick in. Eunice made it easier.

Another empty space.

The doctor—old Dr. Caffrey—with his coat and shirt off, began to apply the bandages. This proved to be too painful and, after straining for a time, I gave up and let go.

I awoke to a half-conscious state and found myself in Clara's room, in Clara's bed. The doctor had given me a sedative injection but I felt more hungry than sleepy.

Woody was there, and Albie. The doctor had left. I could hear many voices—some familiar—in the rooms beyond. Woody loomed up at the foot of the bed.

“You up?” he asked.

I nodded.

“Say something,” he directed.

“I’m up,” I said.

“Say it again. Louder.”

“I’m up!” I said loudly, finding it painful to talk.

Albie said, “There’s some police here, any time you think you can.”

“Hell with it,” I said.

“It’s just they want to know a few things,” said Albie.

“Not now,” I said, and sighed.

Woody lit a cigarette and blew some smoke toward me, reviving the sickish feeling. Albie left. Woody came around to my side and looked down at me. Why did he look so unfriendly?

“I hear you gave a thrilling account of yourself,” he said sarcastically.

“Get the hell out of here.”

“You must be batty,” he persisted.

“Beat it.” I was on the verge of tears and wished that he would leave, that they would all leave. Everyone. For good. Better still, I would leave. Italy? London? In which one was English spoken? Did I want to hear it or avoid it? Think.

Woody’s voice. “Where the hell do you come off taking

on a street fight on Lenox Avenue? You're lucky you're alive, you chowderhead."

"What's lucky about that?" I asked miserably.

"Hope you learn something out of it. That's all I hope."

"Learn what?"

Albie returned with one of the policemen, a white-haired Negro, who asked, "Better, young man?"

"Can I get some coffee?" I asked.

"Sure," said Albie. "I'll bring it right in."

"No, no," I said, thinking, Gol "Let me up."

I was in motion.

"You think—?" began Woody.

But I was already on my feet on the floor of the carrousel-ling room. We all went out to the dining room. I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror on the way and went cold. What I saw was the reflection of a battered stranger. My red nose and swollen ear, pale face and missing tooth gave me a comic, clownish appearance. I resembled—what was his name?—Billy Hagan of Bumpsky and Company, who, in the days of The Lyceum Theatre stock burlesque company in Rochester, would black out a different tooth each week, to our constant delight. What struck me as ridiculous, even at that moment, was the concern I had been feeling about the look of me without a tooth. If that were all I had to worry about—

I gave up the effort of shielding the open space with my lip. We sat around the table. A second policeman, white, joined us. Eunice served coffee.

"Where's Clara?" I asked. My voice sounded older. It had undergone a permanent change in timbre and register. The tooth has been replaced several times, improving in quality as circumstances have improved.

Albie replied, "We've got her resting down our place. She's all right. Day or two."

The first policeman said, "I think we got everything we need—from her, far as the facts go. Two things. How do you feel and how far you think you want to go on this?"

They were all looking at me. I wanted to say something

intelligent and impressively adult but could not imagine what that might be.

"Well," I said, "I feel okay, that is, *will* be okay. And about the other, I don't know. I'm open to suggestions."

The cops exchanged a look.

Albie said, cautiously, "The point is, they think there wouldn't be too much trouble locating these birds—or most of them—but then, even with Clara, she can't be positively sure just who did exactly what."

"And when you get down to the legals," said the second policeman, "you got to pinpoint your case pretty exact."

"Well, if Clara can't, I sure in hell know *I* can't."

Woody said, "I guess not. I hear you had your eyes closed the whole time. That was quick."

I heard a voice—mine—yelling. "Jesus Christ, Woody—are you up here to bite on me? Go home, will you?"

Woody left the table and went into the living room.

"Take it easy, son," said the second cop.

"Look," I said, "I get the idea. I don't have to be sledged. Let's forget the whole thing. It never happened. I wasn't there. I'm not me. There was no scrap. It was just a collision. Accidental. I apologize. I'll pay the fine. How much?"

"It's a bad situation," said Albie, "and nobody wants to make it any worse."

"They'll be warned, that bunch, and they'll know there's an eye on them," said the first cop.

"Sure, sure," I said. "Thanks."

The policemen rose.

"We'll be checking back," said one of them before they left.

I drank a great deal of Eunice's excellent coffee, and joined Woody. We shook hands.

Soon, we were all sitting about and jokes were being made. Henry and Gil returned late in the evening. Sunday was their concert-going day and they had been to four. A string quartet in the morning at Aeolian Hall. The Philharmonic in the afternoon. A recital of Hugo Wolf songs at Town Hall at five and the Heifetz concert in the evening

at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Albie intercepted them in the hall and gave them an account of the day's excitement. They said all the right things before I got them onto the subject of their day.

Around midnight, I went down to see Clara. She was undressed and in bed and drowsy. I sat beside her.

“Sorry,” she said.

And I said, “Sorry.”

“I should have known better,” she said.

“Listen.”

“See how complicated it is?” she murmured. “No. Impossible.”

“What is?”

“What?” she asked. “Not yet. Not here, anyway. Oh, hell.”

I saw that this was no time for conversation.

“Go to sleep, Clara.”

“I’ve been thinking,” she said, “that I may never sleep again. There’s so much to do.”

“See you tomorrow,” I said.

She looked up at me. “You look terrible,” she said dopily.

“Well,” I replied, “it’s nothing to how I feel.”

I kissed her cheek and left.

The weeks which followed were maddening. Clara and I tried hard to regain our common ground, but matters of nature can be forced only to a certain degree. We were trying too hard, with the result that our hours together became strained. The more we talked, the worse it was. We were drowning our sensibilities in words. The words betrayed us, changing color and meaning as we used them, becoming symbols and losing energy.

It was as Woody used to say about the music, “Don’t talk it, play it. Don’t think it, feel it. Get inside your instrument and trust your instincts. The more you try to explain it the less there is to explain.”

. “You all right, love?”

My wife’s middle-of-the-night voice, warm and tender,

took me easily out of the whirling pool of past impressions. I had been standing at the window, remembering in climaxes. I had been trying to relate my story with Clara to Slug's death. Was there a connection? I had been trying to riddle it, moving images back and forth in time, recalling words and looks and significant reactions. But it would not solidify.

I turned and saw my wife standing in the doorway. I moved to her at once. I embraced her, gratefully, and whispered, "Fine, absolutely fine."

"But you've got the *insomania*," she insisted, using our family word for it.

"It'll go away," I said, and led her back to bed.

"Take some calcium," she said as I tucked her in.

"That's just what I'll do," I said.

"But don't take a long walk," she sighed. "Chicago."

I left the bedroom and returned to the sitting room. I looked through the books, hoping to find a soporific. Alan Watts? Zen. Henry James? No. Chardenal? Grammar. Dashiell Hammett? Again? Dylan Thomas? Poetry. Poetry? Woody.

I was back on the track. Woody. Was he still caught up with poetry, with Ezra Pound, with the sound and size and shape and smell rather than the meaning of words? Wherever he was? Wherever, nothing. I knew where he was—right here in Chicago. He would call again tomorrow, no doubt. Or if not, surely I would be able to find him. A phone call. A few phone calls would do it. If anyone could help me to sort out the jumbled memory box I had come upon, he could. Would he have any idea about Clara and me? About Slug and Clara and me? About the effect of Slug's death on us? Of course he would. Oddly, he and Slug had been close toward the end. No one did more for Slug than Woody, and it was to Woody's place—the Stanford Hotel on East Thirty-eighth Street—that Slug ran on that last desperate, dying night. It was on Woody's floor that he died. . . .

. . . . The death itself had come as no surprise. We had all been expecting it for some time, yet the way of it was weird. Slug's wild, nearly naked dash through the streets to the home of a friend when he knew that the time was approaching, was not in the least like him.

Woody had phoned me at about two in the morning.

"Wake you?" asked Woody.

"T's okay. What's up?"

"Slug."

"Oh, Jesus. Is it over?"

"No, no. Sorry. I didn't mean that. He's here."

"Where's here? Where are you?"

"Home. My place. The Stanford."

It made no sense. I had seen Slug in the hospital only that day. How could he be at Woody's?

"Wait a second," I said. I put the light on, sat up in bed, and lit a cigarette. I picked up the phone again.

"Start again, will you, Woody?"

"I was just saying," he said patiently, "that Slug is here. At my place. He got here about an hour ago and I've been trying to handle it myself, but I'm giving up." He lowered his voice and went on. "He's way out. Can you come over, please?"

"Sure, but shouldn't you call the hospital?"

"He doesn't want me to. He says the black shadow's over there looking for him."

I heard Slug's voice, off-phone, in a stream of incomprehensible gibberish.

"Holy hell!" I said.

"Maybe you can talk him out of it," said Woody. "Maybe we can do it together. Anyway, I know I can't handle him alone. He's too strong. Make it fast, though, will you?"

"What's he doing now?" I asked.

"He's sitting right here," said Woody, "looking at me. He's smiling, but he's sore. And he's drumming. Come on."

I got out of bed and began to dress. I was trembling with nerves. I felt as if I had a date with Death, whom I had never met, not even casually. What could I take to steady

myself? A few deep breaths? I tried. To my surprise, they worked.

Out in the street, I hailed a cruising taxi and asked the driver to get me to the Stanford Hotel as soon as possible. He was young and dashing, and gave me a considerable ride down Sixth Avenue, weaving in and out of the pillars of the El. By the time we arrived, I had to do a few more deep breaths, but this time they did not work. There was no one in the lobby, no one on the elevator. I ran up the stairs and knocked at Woody's door. It opened and I started in, but Woody blocked the way. He shoved me into the hall and joined me there, closing the door. He looked distracted. Finally, he spoke.

“Now it’s over.”

“Who?” I blurted foolishly.

“Slug.”

“What?” I asked.

“Slug Abrams is dead,” said Woody, tears flooding his eyes.

“You sure?”

“Dead sure,” said Woody. He looked at me, drunkenly. “Jesus, did you hear what I said?”

“Dead sure?”

“Yes.”

“What about calling? Shouldn’t we, the police— Or what about the fire department, aren’t you supposed to get them—with the equipment?”

“All done,” said Woody. “Police, fire, Bellevue, you.”

“I think I’ll go in,” I said.

“Don’t,” he said. “Not alone.”

“Why not?”

“It’s worse than you can imagine. He hemorrhaged.”

“I don’t care,” I said.

I fantasized a mistake and a heroic last-minute save by me. I went in. What had once been Slug lay on the floor, his head grotesquely twisted. There was purple blood everywhere, it seemed. I went to him and tried to find a pulse, a heartbeat, a sign of life. I had never touched a corpse

before. I kept looking for a long time until I heard a cross, thin voice behind me say, "What the hell you think *you're* doing?"

I turned to see five men moving into the room.

"I was looking for a pulse," I said. "I mean, to make sure."

"You a doctor?" inquired the man in charge.

"No. Just a friend."

"Okay. Out in the hall, friend."

"Sure."

I did as I was told, passing a burly detective type who said, politely, "Don't go 'way, please."

"No, sir," I said.

Woody was smoking. I looked for a cigarette but could not find one. I asked Woody. He took his from his mouth and handed it to me. I smoked it, hard. He got out another and lit it for himself.

"We better let people know," I said.

"The guys, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

I spoke to a policeman. "Can I—may I make a couple of phone calls?"

"Later."

"It's just to let people know. A few."

"Later."

"Anything wrong with now?"

"Routine, mister. Nothing happens till His Nibs gives the office."

I returned to Woody.

"God," I said. "All of a goddam sudden my life is full of police and blood. What the hell's happening?"

"Time," he said.

"Who should we call?"

"The Davises, Albie, Don, *Madame*, and that's all. And Cookie."

"When they let me."

"They will."

They did, but not for two hours, during which time

Woody and I were questioned individually and together. We were asked all sorts of questions about ourselves, the band, Slug, and the events of the previous evening.

"So then you arrived here at what time?" I was being asked.

"Twenty to three, about. You asked me that before."

"I did?"

"Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"Same thing."

"You did?"

"Certainly."

"You didn't."

"No?"

"No. Before, you said you got here at two-forty. This time, you said twenty to three."

It took me a few seconds to sort this out, then I asked, "What's the difference?"

"You don't see it?"

"What's there to see?"

"Not much, but see, it's on teeny-weeny stuff like that that we catch our murderers sometime."

I swallowed a large lump.

"What're you, Mac, a comedian?" I smirked.

"No," he said. "Detective, second grade."

"That's what you sound like, second grade."

"I don't think that's nice of you," he said, feigning a hurt look, "to sass me around like that."

"Yuh, well I don't like the way I'm being handled."

"Why not?"

"Why? A friend of ours's been sick a long time, so he dies, so the whole thing gets to have the shape of a crime, cryin' out loud. All this questioning."

"Just practicing," he said.

"Well, don't practice on me."

"Got to practice on somebody."

"Why?"

"Because we've got to get good. See, nobody can really lie

for long. That's our theory we're all the time trying to prove. The only thing'll stand up for a full round is the whole truth and the nothing but. Now, the way I know *you're* telling the truth is no matter how many different ways I ask the same questions, the answers check. It's interesting."

"Not to me, it isn't," I said.

He turned to Woody. "Don't you think it's interesting?"

"Certainly," said Woody. "But you gentlemen don't seem to understand that we don't come up against a situation like this every day, the way you do. So it jolts us a little."

"Why do you suppose your friend came here?" asked the detective, tenaciously. "The dead one, I mean."

"You asking me?" asked Woody.

"Uh-huh."

"I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine."

"Maybe better, even."

"What?"

Woody was noticeably startled.

"Maybe my guess is better than yours."

"Okay," challenged Woody, "let's hear it."

"My guess is this poor brute was on a kick of something—I don't know what, I'll have to check Bellevue, but whatever. And he needed it, whatever it is or was—and he couldn't get it—so he bust out and came here because you're on the same kick and would have some to give him."

"Some what?" asked Woody.

"Some whatever."

Woody shook his head and emitted a snort of laughter. He turned to me and said, "No wonder taxes are so high, huh?"

I looked at the detective. "If that's your guess, Hawkshaw," I said, "try two more."

"What do *you* take?" he asked me, annoyed.

"Lydia Pinkham's."

"What else?"

"Carter's Little Liver Pills. For my little liver."

"What else?"

I turned to Woody. "Where do these guessers get the notion all musicians are hopheads?"

"From the musicians," said the detective.

"Let's remember everything he says," I suggested to Woody. "Maybe we should take it up with the union."

"That's right," said the detective. "You take it up with The Hopheads Union."

This did not seem funny at all to me, but Woody laughed. "Can't win," he said.

The questioning went on, some of it getting too personal for comfort. While Woody was answering a fresh string, I had an idea and said, "When do *we* start asking a few?"

"Go ahead," said the detective, amiably.

"What the hell kind of a hospital is that where a sick, nervous man walks out in the dead of night?"

"A good question," nodded the detective.

"Some hospital."

"Very bad."

"We're taxpayers, after all."

"You are?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then," he said, "in that case, you've got a beef."

I could not tell if he meant it or if he was kidding. I think he meant it.

It was light outside by the time they took the remains away. I made the phone calls at last. After some discussion, Woody and I went to the hardware store in the next block and bought ammonia, kerosene, stiff-bristled brushes, and sponges. We returned to the room and spent two hours cleaning it up. The rug had to be thrown away for good, the floor scrubbed and cleaned. As friends arrived, they fell in and helped without being asked.

By ten o'clock, Don, Albie, the Davises, Cookie Raeburn, and Edmonde had assembled. Eunice took charge of the complicated, practical arrangements and stayed on the phone until noon. Albie was in and out, at her command. The rest of us sat and talked about Slug and tried to come to grips with the idea of his being no more. It was difficult. The

sound of him was still around, in the atmosphere about us.

Cookie brought up the subject of a permanent replacement, and several were discussed. Al Maghakian, who had been filling in for Slug, was steady but dull. Cookie pointed out that there were good men around, many of them, but that those he knew were tied up. Edmonde recommended Willie Hall, whom she had heard with Bennie Moten's band in Kansas City, the scene of a going jazz renaissance. There was a rumor that Moten's band was breaking up.

"I don't say he is good as Slug—but he is of the same genre." She looked out of the window. "He even looks as Slug. Maybe."

"What of it?" asked Woody, roughly.

"Nothing," said Edmonde. "In passing. He plays the same live style."

"Let me say something here," said Woody. He stood up and looked around at us, carefully. "It's about Slug. We haven't quite grasped it yet, but the fact is, he's dead. In a couple of days, we'll bury him, and his—and with him, his playing. That's it. Hail and farewell. Now if we want to blast ourselves wacky, the way to do is to keep listening for him. He was a real what you call ownway man, but he's finished now. Beginning tonight it's a new band. Different. Maybe worse, or better, but different."

Edmonde continued to tout Willie Hall, but Woody was set against bringing in what he called "a stranger," and, in the end, we settled for Al Maghakian, temporarily, at least.

Eunice arranged Slug's funeral. Watching her do so, you might have thought that she had arranged Slug's funeral many times before.

She engaged the Savoy Ballroom and had hundreds of folding chairs brought in. The bandstand became a bier. Upon it, Slug's coffin was flanked by his drums and traps, and there were simple flowers in addition to floral tributes. The time she chose was dusk. When I pointed out that it was customary to conduct such services in the morning, Eunice said, "Why make it hard on everybody? Far as ol' Slug's concerned, it's no difference to him."

For half an hour, while the mourners assembled, records featuring Slug were played over the amplification system. The last two were those solo drum sides which Cookie had put out as a special release.

Slug's brother, the monk or whatever he was now, had been located and although I worried about what such a screwball might let loose, he brought serenity and dignity to the occasion. He spoke a moving, personal farewell to his brother, and recited, with breath-taking brilliance of phrasing, the first three chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Next came six musician friends, one by one. Each, in turn, stood beside the coffin and played a short, unaccompanied, private statement. The order was: Bobby Hackett, trumpet; Coleman Hawkins, saxophone; Pee Wee Russell, clarinet; Joe Hines, trombone; Stuff Smith, violin; and last of all, Woody Woodruff. When Woody ended his haunting dirge—eloquent but much too long, I thought; as though he had lost himself in it—the rest of us in the band joined him on the platform. We formed a semicircle around the coffin and played "Requiem Without Drums."

The minister of the church which Slug had regularly attended offered a prayer and joined the assemblage in a unison recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

When this ended, the funeral director's men took over. Some of us drove out to Queens for the interment. It was quiet and practical and curiously lacking in emotion. Death, usually so unreal, seemed hard and true in this evening's light, as Slug took his place in the ground.

We worked that night, but right afterward, I got drunk. It was the first time in my life that I had done so deliberately.

I went downtown by myself, to McSorley's, had several glasses of ale—potent, even though the label read 3.2—and took part in a barside debate: "Resolved, that Colonel Jacob Ruppert, Owner of The New York Yankees, does not know his ass from a hot rock." I shifted with agility from the affirmative to the negative and back again.

With a new friend, I left and started uptown, stopping

from time to time in any discovered speakeasy. Gin—most of it served in coffee cups—became the order of the night. Low-life swirled about me and what Slug had left behind did not seem too attractive a prospect. Later, and still farther up-town, and with a new group of friends, it all turned gay and worth living and convivial and I felt sorry for Slug who was missing it all and I cried. By now I was tired and began to use taxis—the ones which would take me—and late, very late, I began phoning Clara every fifteen minutes precisely. She may have had her phone cut off or she may have been away. I may have been asking for the wrong number. In any case, I failed to reach her.

I ended in Washington Market in the far middle of the night, helping two men to unload a truckful of crates of artichokes. It seemed to me, at the time, the most important and useful work I had performed in years. They took me to a hole in the wall when we had finished and bought me the best three hamburgers I have ever had. And coffee. And we shook hands and I went home, cold sober, went to sleep, and awoke without a hangover.

Yes, the private area shared by Clara and me had been abandoned as of that day. What had it been previously? A beginning? Of what? Without the usual words, without the accustomed acts, we had shared an exchanged expression of friendship which had been more refreshing than air. Why, then, had it ended? And why on that particular day? Did Slug's death have anything to do with us as a pair? How could it have? And yet—

Almost immediately after the funeral, Clara had left for Europe. She had stayed away for about three months, and when she returned she was greatly changed. She looked younger, but had become much older.

I noticed that no amount of maneuvering succeeded in getting her to be alone with me. One afternoon, I phoned her. Even her voice was new.

Mine was the same as I asked, "How's chances of seeing you, Clara?"

"Why?" she responded. "Haven't you been?"

“Not what I call, no.”

“What do *you* call?”

“Alone.”

“Oh.”

“How about it?”

“No, please.”

“Why not?”

“What’s the point?”

“I’d like to hear about the trip and all that.”

She laughed. “Seems to me that’s all I’ve been talking about. That damned trip. Anyway, what’s more boring than hearing about other people’s travels?”

“Why ‘damned?’”

“What?”

“You said ‘damned trip.’ Why?”

“Because it was a bust. Complete. And I went and spent all my saved-up money on it. Damned trip.”

“How about taking a walk?”

“No.”

“Where’d you go after Rome?” I asked.

“Africa.”

“Africa?” I repeated. “Why?”

“I wish I knew,” she said. “Just following a pull of some demented kind. I wanted to go there. It was nothing. It was every bit as nothing as here. And even more lonesome.”

“What?”

“I have to go now.”

“Clara. Listen. You want me to stop bothering you?”

“You’ve never bothered me.”

“But would you rather I just—?” I stopped.

“Yes,” she said. “You know.”

“Okay,” I said.

We hung on, in farewell silence, for a long time. At last she spoke.

“See you,” she said softly.

“Sure.”

We hung up. I reviewed what had been said. Very little. Still, the communication was clear and complete. We met

many times after that, but we were no longer reflected in each other's eyes.

The band went on working. There was nothing wrong with Al Maghakian except the fact that he was not Slug Abrams. He stayed, or was kept, outside. It worried him as much as it did the rest of us and he grew tense under the strain.

"You know what it's like?" he asked me one day.

"What?"

"It's like you get married to a quiff who's the widow of, say, Rudolph Valentino, it turns out. So you're *in* there—follow?—tryin' to make good all the time, but the odds got you beat."

"Nobody's complaining, Al."

"I know not. I wish they would. I feel like some goddam *in-law*."

He tore apart a Benzedrine inhaler, and dropped the damp cotton wad it contained into his cup of black coffee.

I asked, "You know where you make your mistake?"

"Go ahead," he said thoughtfully, stirring the wad around in his cup. "Tell me where I make my mistake."

"You try for Slug's beat."

"I do, huh?"

"I think so."

"Oh, you think so?"

"I do, yes."

"Why?" he asked bitterly. "Just because I sit and listen to his bloody records for about seven hours a day? Is this what gives you the idea I'm trying for his beat?"

He drained his cup of awful and lit a cigarette.

"I think you've got me wrong, Al."

"I haven't got you at all."

"Nobody expects you to play like Slug. We all realize we've got to readjust. Just let us hear from you. And we'll fit in. Or try to. Know what I mean?"

"No."

"No?"

"You guys," he said scornfully. "You'll never let anybody else in."

"Al. Let me tell you something? I don't want to bum-rap Slug, especially since he's— But here's a fact. We never got along—any of us. Let me say it out. Nobody even liked him."

"What's that got to do?"

"Everything."

"Hell you say."

"Why hasn't it?"

"Because in a band," he said, "who the hell cares what's on top? This guy's a creep, that guy's devout. The piano player's a faggot and the sax man eats hay. So what? That's the surface. Under, that's what counts. The under. What they've got to say with their insides, that even they don't even know about, that's what counts. Because that's the hope and the song; that's the *message*, you fishbrain!"

"What the hell're you getting whitenose with *me* for?"

"Because you're making me sound like a crewcut," he shouted. "What the hell do you think makes a man play? To see how much noise he can make? A buck? What? He's trying to get out what's inside. To show you. To tell what he can't say any other way. What he's feeling and how he feels about what you're feeling—and all the others. And then once in a while it happens—all the ooze fits together and it turns out you're all feeling the same thing and trying for the same top. That's what a real band is—a bunch that's found out the biggest thing there is to know: that we're all more the same than different." He stopped talking. I thought he had finished, but all at once, he started again, on the same high note. "Don't tell me how you didn't like this dead bastard. Part of you—all of you—the under part that counts—you were all in love with each other." The outburst had exhausted him and he sat looking at me, breathing hard.

"You ought to get off that coffee-benny kick, pal," I said. But his words left a long-lasting impression.

Al and his coffee-benny kick. All of the kickups and slow-

downs and things we tried and took and did and drank.
Why?

Edmonde once said, "You boys who live in the jazz, I can understand if you wish something to help to slow. Yes. Because jazz is fast, it makes one to go fast or too fast. Did you know it means this?"

"Means what?"

"The word. Jazz. It means 'fast'—in the Creole language."

"That a fact?"

"Yes."

"Wha'd'y'know?"

"And a beat is a commitment—you say commitment?"

"Yes."

"A contract. You have your chorus or your riff, but the beat is there behind and you must fit with it. It reminds of our lives. Whatever we have to say or wish to do—always, always time is beating and the heart going and the moment we are born we begin to die and so we race. We hurry to see it all or do it or feel it. Jazz. It says this. Quickly, quickly, live."

"To you, you mean."

"To me," she smiled. "So I can understand when sometimes I see all of you as you drink. Certainly. To slow down. It frightens to go too fast too much. So you drink and dope and—"

"Me? Not me."

"I meant you—all of you. The plural you."

"I don't know much about the plural you, but you—that is, the singular you—were saying they drink to slow down."

"Yes."

"Makes sense."

"Very well. But why the other? The pepup and hop?" She frowned in earnest wonder.

"Maybe because they get too slowed down with the other."

"That is very well, but too simple. There is more to it. Why should this music of yours and these things go so close?"

"Do they?"

“Do they?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think yes,” she said. “I believe they do. Why?”

“Some guys,” I attempted, “they think they play better when they’re high—on anything. They think it helps them find their way to other parts of themselves where some new good stuff is.”

“Yes,” she said, in a way which made me feel superior for a moment.

“Well, when you play—the hardest thing is to let go. You sit there or you stand there and you’re surrounded by worries. Will you crack or hit a clinker or play out of tune or move into a chord progression you can’t get out of? Worries. And the more you stew the less chance you’ve got to blow something worth blowing. But if you can lose yourself, *and* your name, and hook in with the listening world and let go—that’s the whole thing, to let go—and dare, burst what’s inside. Well, that’s it. And it’s easier to get that kind of a cutoff, they say, with a puff or two.”

“Yes,” she said, digesting it.

“The way I know so much about it,” I added, “is because I can’t do it. With puffs or without. I’m just telling you what I’ve heard. You know, just for the record.”

“To get to other parts of ourselves,” she mused. “Where is the good stuff?”

I was so glad to hear her echoing me that I said, “Damn right.”

This was one subject with which Woody had no patience. I tried to tell him about this talk I had had with Edmonde, but he kicked it aside.

“Spare me, will you, laddie? I don’t want to hear a lot of scholarly drippery on the subject of hopheads.”

“We’re all hopheads, more or less,” I argued, trying to engage him.

“Knock it off.”

“You with the poetry—what the hell—that’s hop. And me with the coffee. Is that a drug or not?”

“Not.”

"Caffeine is not a drug?" I challenged.

"Where've you been all day, man?" he asked. "In the *Reader's Digest*?"

"Everybody's on something."

"That's right. I know a trombone man, Kalionzes—Greek, I suppose—he eats five banana splits a day, including one for breakfast. So that's hop, too."

"Sure."

"Okay."

"So what's the point?" I asked, confused.

"The point is don't put me in a class with the fuzzheads until I go out of control—which I have no plans to do, by the way."

"Question of degree, that's all, Woody," I insisted lamely.

"Fine," he said. "Settled."

As I say, it was the one subject he was tough on.

Not Don. Don was the expert, and at all times a few months ahead with the latest bash. I suppose he was what might be called a sensation-seeker. He did not confine himself to a consideration of forbidden pleasures, but was, for example, a connoisseur of teas. In his room, there was a cabinet which never held less than thirty or forty sorts of tea, which he would blend and brew and discuss, while drinking, with passionate interest.

He knew strange, small restaurants and what to order in each. He knew the best Armenian place, the best Japanese, and a Swedish kitchen on Staten Island where they made a fish sausage unlike anything any of us had ever eaten. He experimented with cocaine and heroin and marijuana, settling on the last as his steady kick.

Whoever else has claimed it, I am certain that it was Don who invented that antic delicacy, marijuana fudge.

"See," he explained, "reefers put you where you want to be. It's a soft-as-a-pillow kick. The other ones—the big ones—they're wild and jolty all right, but I get scared. I like to keep at least one toe touching something. And no aftereffects. That means a lot to me. I put down a fifth of the ol' heimer-deimer and, Pops, it takes me a long morning to shake it off—

with bromos and alkas and Worcestershire and hair-of-the-dog. No, keep it. Me, I've got me mine."

"Then why keep bringing around new junks?"

"Well *hell*. Who knows what the brainies'll think up next? Did I try you out on that little green and red one for before a meal and then you can eat two of anything?"

"No, thanks."

"It's enzymes or like that. What's enzymes?"

Neither of the Davises drank at all, nor, so far as I knew, did they use anything else. Not even Cokes. I see them each with a tangerine while the rest of us had Cokes. Don generally added an aspirin to his—"To cheer it up a little," he said. Albie? I recall that he was a moderate man. He had a drink from time to time, but never seemed to need it.

So it came down to Slug as our only problem man. The only one over whom a kick had control. Yet, it seems to me that he was constantly battling against it, particularly from the time he fell off the stand. He had been frightened by that, and fought gallantly to reform himself. In order to stop smoking, he kept a cigarette in his mouth at all times, unlit. When at last, he had to light up, he would get out a Cubeb medical cigarette and smoke that. Many complaints from the stand about the fumes. At other times, he would pretend to smoke—inhaling and all—using a chocolate cigarette. In an effort to give up ephedrine tablets, he played the same sort of tricks on himself; swallowing little chunks of peppermint Life Savers; or, to simulate the powder-taking method, he would take glucose or confectioner's sugar instead.

. Wait. How do I know all this? Because he told me, because we all knew it and joked about it. Did we believe it? Yes. If so, why had I not believed it that day at Seacrest in Asbury Park when he swore up and down? Or had all of these efforts come after? What if I had believed him? What possible difference could it have made?

A bright morning sun brought an end to musing. Surprisingly, I was not at all fatigued, and looked forward to the

day, to finding Woody and, with him, answers to questions.

I opened the window wide and drew a dozen deep breaths. Something—the whispering city or the color of the sky or the scent of the season—brought back another morning after another up-all-night. The tea party. Riverside Drive. . . .

. . . . It was a whole-floor penthouse with a terrace, belonging to Don's then-current, a loaded-with-money lady named Mrs. Ceil Ryman. They were new together, and it was always a puzzle to us how long his various matchups would last.

"I stay with 'em," explained Don, "until when they butt in about my shirts. About how maybe my shirts need fixing or a button off and please let me sew it on. Or, I think you need some new shirts, look how that one's collar's gone, let me buy you some. Or, do you think that tie goes with that one? But I mean, it's always about shirts. That's the day it cracks. That's the clue—or do I mean cue? When they move in on my shirt territory, that's it. I dump 'em and I get on to the next one—whichever I've had warming up in the bull pen. They have just got to leave my shirts *alone*."

I often thought that it would have been a kindness to warn the new whichever about the shirt situation, but this would have been meddling with the fatalistic theory that there is but a single possible stream of circumstance. So I watched them come and go and now and then (seldom) come back again.

"You'd think they'd learn," said Don, flummoxed, "these ones I've had in and out and back—but no, let 'em back in and it's only a question of time before they start in on my shirts again. Like for example Roxie? When she came back and we decided to try a take two? I said to her in the plainest I know, I said, 'Roxie, I love you like lotus-bud tea, and I want you around where I can sip you whenever, so I'm giving you fair warning—don't—repeat—do not—f'Moses' sake—ever *haberdash* me!' What happens? Inside of three months I come home one morning and she's sitting there—

this pot-sewing missing buttons on. Had to let her go. Sad, huh?"

Apparently, the present partner had, thus far at least, respected the sovereignty of his shirts, although most of them had been moved into her sprawling apartment atop one of the oldest and best buildings on the drive. She owned the building, so there was never any question of other tenant or landlord annoyance when things got swinging up top.

Mrs. Ryman was an abundant two-time widow of about forty, one of those fortunates whose overweight is becoming. She loved to eat and drink and dance and go and, above all, she loved to laugh. She listened to music—listened. She did not use it to undulate to, or as an aphrodisiac, or an escape—she listened.

I once complimented her on this, saying, "To find people to play it, that's easy compared to finding people to listen. That's one of the troubles with our kind of music right now. People to listen."

"It nourishes me," she explained. "I need it. When it's good, it nourishes me."

We had been to a number of her parties after hours—good food and gay guests, but I noticed that, somehow, we always wound up playing. Once, I thought to fool them and so left my instrument back at the place. At two in the morning, Don produced an alto and I was stuck again. He kept a full rack of instruments in his room—just in case.

As he put it, "You never know who might drop in. I've even got a beautiful Spanish guitar back in there in case of Segovia."

Along with Woody, I had stopped going to Mrs. Ryman's parties. Don began hawking this particular one a week in advance and invited me. I declined.

"I know you," he laughed. "You're scared of the overtime. Peace. Think nothing of it. Put it away. The only music at this one'll be blown by the angels."

"What?"

"Listen good. You ever hear about the Boston Tea Party? That was a wake, as tea parties go. This one is ten people.

I told her. That's the limit. Ten people and The Man with the Load Of." He danced away, snaking, then slithered back to me. "Everybody gets on, except two."

"Why's that?"

"Always must keep somebody on the ground, for balance. Like say when a balloon goes up—somebody stays down to hang on. Yes? And when a diver goes down into the briny, somebody stays up—in case. So when *we* go, it ain't up and it ain't down—it's more like all directions at once and the same time. Can you imagine? Try this: Imagine being on your way to Los Angeles and New York at the same time. Can you?"

"No, I can't."

"You come along Thursday night, child, and you'll see how it can be done."

Titillated but diffident, I talked it over with Edmonde.

"Why don't you go and look on?" she asked. "Be one of the two on the ground as he says."

"Because I know the kind of a Jello I am. I'll never hold out."

"Then better not to go."

"That's no solution."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like to miss things. Especially like this. What I'm thinking of doing is going and having a whack at it. Just to see."

"You never have?"

"No. Thought about it, but it never came up."

We were walking through the New York Botanical Gardens (her idea) as we discussed all this, and the luxuriant background could not have been less appropriate. We sat on a bench. She put her head way back, studied the sky for a while, closed her eyes and said, "Why don't we both?"

"Both?"

"You could ask him to ask me, no?"

"Sure, it isn't that, only—" I stopped, she waited. "And we be the two on the ground?"

"Not at all," she said, opening her eyes and putting them

on me. "If we are going—*let's go!*" She used a different voice on the last two words, giving her somewhat addled impression of American speech.

So it was that we went. Edmonde turned up at the club for the last hour, and sat at her usual table, near the percussion side, drinking Coca-Cola and ginger ale and orangeade. We had been instructed by Don to lay off liquor in preparation for the new excitement.

After the last out-chorus, the three of us drove uptown together, in Edmonde's car. On the way, Don asked to stop at the drug store near Broadway and Seventy-ninth. He went in, and came out a few minutes later carrying five two-pound boxes of candy.

"What's all that?" I asked.

"Candy," he replied, putting it on the back seat. "Essential equipment."

"There's always plenty of candy around up there," I said.

"Never enough," he explained. "She always thinks she's got enough, but she's new to all this and so she forgets. There comes a minute all of a sudden, everybody wants candy—and sometimes they get worried it's going to run out so they start hiding it. Better to have too much than not enough. Candy!" he sang.

The first surprise was the guest list. I had seldom seen a more circumspect group. Ten, as he had said. He and Ceil; Edmonde and I; Clara and a famous Harlem pianist (two gulps: seeing her here and seeing her with him); a middle-aged, handsome, society pair (from Philadelphia, said Don); and, finally, Ceil's sister and brother-in-law (the ballast) who were behaving as though they were the host and hostess, serving food and tall glasses of nonalcoholic drinks. Grape juice and soda was popular.

The evening began with a long and superb sit-down supper. Ceil's relatives—Mae and Rob—brought the food in from the kitchen and placed it all on the table on ingenious little heaters. We all helped ourselves, and passed the plates around. Mae and Rob took care of clearing and replacing. Edmonde found it fascinating and I explained that this was

the American farm style, which had been adopted in most American homes. The idea in this case was, of course, to be rid of servants for the night.

Marvelously fed, we moved into the living room for coffee. Don made this himself, with enormous ceremony.

The famous pianist played and it was soon clear why he was famous. In ten minutes, he had changed the color of the room, and the shape of it, the time of the night and the mood of the hour.

Don and Ceil began opening boxes of chocolates and other candies and putting them all around the room in a business-like way. No one joked about this. Apparently it would have been tasteless—like joking about the ambulance waiting on the sidelines of a football field. It struck me that if this was an orgy I was taking part in, it was a remarkably serious and purposeful one.

Gradually, the brighter lights in the room were extinguished and the atmosphere took on a restful tone. I was sitting at one side of the room, on a huge sofa, with Edmonde. She had thrown off her shoes and had drawn her legs (those legs!) up under her, making herself extraordinarily comfortable in a pile of cushions of various sizes and shapes. I was leaning back, my feet up—pretty comfortable myself.

Clara was singing. Thinking of it now objectively, remembering it vividly, taking care to divorce it from any personal feeling whatever—I believe that Clara Davis was as fine a singer as I have ever heard. She was a musical animal, a singer of the purest quality and of infallible instinct. She sang for the same reason that a bird sings—because there was music within her. (I am sometimes reminded of her giveout when I hear Erroll Garner play.) The song she was singing now—“Star Dust”—was being produced as effortlessly as a sigh. At the end of the chorus, she moved behind the player and listened to his chorus with her hands on his shoulders and, as the third chorus began, there came forth from her throat a slow-flowing river of sound without words—passionate and affecting. Not the melody of the song, and

yet, the song was there. An impression. A quest. A mood. The song ended and Clara moved away from the pianist, who continued. No one applauded and no one said anything. It did not occur to us to applaud Clara's singing any more than we would have thought to applaud a sunset. It was there, around us, a welcome part of nature.

"Too good to be commercial," Woody had said about it. I wondered if he could be right.

"Who is that?" asked Edmonde, looking across the room.

I followed her look and saw a small man; a truly small man, no more than five feet tall, but perfectly proportioned—a man in miniature. He was dressed conventionally and conservatively in a dark blue suit with a vest. He wore a white shirt, but his necktie was a scarlet shoestring and his shoes were scarlet, too. His face seemed to own no more than a single expression: the smile of victory over any and all imponderables. No, it was more than a smile—it was a painted grin, and it never left his face. I looked away from him several times, then back, always to find the same expression on his face. Was it a face, I mused, or was it, perhaps, a mask?

"Do you know?" Edmonde asked again.

"What?" I responded, startled.

"Who that is?"

"No. I'll go find out."

I rose.

"Don't stay away," said Edmonde.

"Ahl!" I said, looking down at her. "You beginning to get the idea of me at last, maybe?"

"Not that," she said, "but I am unnervous."

"You're what?" I said, and laughed.

"Un-nervous," she repeated distinctly. "You don't say so? Unnervous? But I am sure. I have looked it up."

"Unnerved?" I suggested.

"Yes," she said. "What did I say?"

"You said you're beginning to get the idea of me at last," I said, and moved off to find Don.

"Why, he's The Man with the Load Of," said Don,

in answer to my inquiry. "He's known from coast to ditto."

"Oh."

"Big Chief Redfoot," he laughed. "Whenever you're ready, just step over and hold out your bowl like Oliver Twist and he'll lay it on you."

"Thanks."

"Wait a second. Forgot. You're a virgin. Is that not a fact?" He squinted at me, suspiciously. "Or were you just giving me a bit of the ol'?"

"No, I wasn't. Driven snow, that's me."

"My, my," said Don. "And you don't look a day over."

"What's more," I said, "Eddie's never—"

"She, too?" he interrupted.

"Ninety-nine and forty-four hundredths percent."

"I didn't honestly know there *was* any. Well," he said, handing me his sandwich, "you just fill out this form and I'll enroll you in the elementary class. And if you come tardy, you got to bring a note from your mudder."

Ceil stepped over and said, "Excuse me." To Don, she added, "I think we better start plugging up, sweetmeat."

I could not imagine what on earth she meant, but I was soon to find out. She and Don, whom I followed about, went around closing and sealing every aperture in the room. Windows—she had the double kind with metal stripping (especially for this purpose?)—were tightly shut; and doors; the fireplace plugged; even the ventilation outlets had special covers. This, I learned, was for the purpose of assisting in the effect. Air would dilute it. We had not come here tonight for air.

"Let me ask you," I said, studying him, as he placed a rolled rug against the crack at the bottom of a door.

"Yes?"

"Have you started already, or not yet?"

"My son," he said in a bass voice, "don't you know that a captain is always the last to goof the ship? No, I haven't had a breath yet—I'm just heady with happy." He slapped me on the back too hard and cried, "Glad to have you aboard!"

Suddenly, he winked and directed my attention to the

handsome Philadelphian named Holly (I never did find out his last name) who was approaching us carefully. His visage had most certainly changed—I would say for the better. Its cynical, superior cast was gone and in its stead was a young, wide-eyed, eager look. Something about the eyes—what? In color, they had turned black, but that was not it. They seemed to be seeing more than there was on the surface, and liking what they saw. The whole man was relaxed.

Don turned to me and held out his hand. I took it and we shook hands. "My name's Before," said Don. "And here comes Mr. After."

"Blue, blue, blue," said Mr. After (Holly), with a profundity that made me stop for a moment and consider the inner meaning of his statement.

"Good evening, Mr. After," said Don. "My name is Before. Don Before."

"Sir," said Holly, with a slight bow.

"And may I present Mr. Never?" said Don, indicating me. Holly offered his hand as he said, "Delighted, Mr. Never."

"Of the *Ever* Nevers," said Don, breaking himself up.

Holly regarded him with pity and looked me over fluoroscopically. He nodded, conveying the impression that he understood everything about everything. Perhaps, at that moment, he did.

I became conscious of something cold in my hand. It was *his* hand.

"Blue skies," he said.

"Smiling at me," I said, adding the next words of the Irving Berlin lyric.

He released my hand and looked at me, moved, as though discovering a friend. To make certain, he continued, tentatively, "Nothing but blue skies?"

And I said, "Do I see."

That did it. He embraced me fiercely, then held me off at arm's length and studied me fondly through his slow-welling tears.

"Okay, Holly," said Don. "Drop that man!"

"He's fine, fine," said Holly, fervently. "He's my fine

friend." He turned back to me and said, "I want to give you some money."

"Take it," Don advised me.

"How much?" I asked Holly.

"Name it. Take a thousand."

He reached into his breast pocket and took out a checkbook.

"No, thanks," I said.

"Why not, why not?" he said.

"Because it's too early. Maybe if I wait till later you'll give me more."

He replaced the checkbook.

"You will die," he said. "And so will I die. Money never dies."

I had offended him and I was anxious to smooth things over.

"Blue skies," I said.

"Blue blue blue," he answered confidentially, and this time, damned if I did not perceive some meaning in it.

"How's the crud, Holly?" asked Don, meaning the marijuana.

In reply, Holly simply rolled his head around in ecstasy, his eyes showing only white.

"The greatest?" asked Don.

"Greater than the greatest," said Holly. "This is the best yet best. No sass-frass like that last-time bandit. This is genuine gungeon, you bet. The little man with the red shoes. And this is but the beginning. One stick is all thus far and split with my husband Anne what's more."

"Your *husband*?" I laughed.

At this, Don grabbed my arm so tightly that I winced.

"Don't!" he whispered fiercely. "Whatever you do. Don't tangle. Don't tease. Don't tease anybody tonight."

"Okay," I said.

"Or fight or argue. Don't contradict. Just go along with anything and every."

The warning had come too late. Holly stood there frowning at me.

"Yes," he said slowly. "My husband. Have you met her?" "Anne?" I said. "Damn right. Great fella."

"Anne is not a 'fella,' you stinking guttersnipe."

"Blue blue blue," I said desperately, in an effort to find the old moment. He looked at me, into me, teetering with indecision. I went on and said meaningfully, "Never saw the sun shinin' so bright."

He beamed and rhymed, "Never saw things goin' so right."

"Right!" I claimed.

"Right," he echoed, and we were friends again. We shook hands. He said, "I'm on my way. I told Anne I'd get us another stick of muggle. From The Man with the Load Of." He sighed. "I've got a long, long way to go. I've been gone for Jesus knows how long. She's superior and love. She thinks me. Anything for me and always no matter what where when how when. Come here." He took my arm and led me aside, away from Don. He continued, conspiratorially. "Listen, you louse, you're not going to tell her, are you?"

Remembering Don's recent admonition, I said, "Hell, no."

"About Mrs. Coombs," he went on, either ignoring or not having heard my response.

"Hell, no," I repeated.

"You know," he said. "The kid's tutor. How did I get into it? I don't know. She started it, not he. He is me. But we're still at it—wham—we tear off a piece whenever the chance but Anne doesn't know and must not. You better not talk about it here. You never know who's on the earie around this place. I've been here before, boy. They don't catch *us* twice. Follow me."

His order was firm and clearly not one to be questioned or countermanded. I followed him out of the room, across the hall, and into the guest washroom. It was a small, pink, frilly retreat with a dressing table and bench, a basin, and an alcove toilet. The room was far too brightly lighted for its size and color. My eyes began to be uncomfortable at once. Holly bolted the door.

"This is better," he said. "Much?"

He took a crumpled cigarette from his case and lit it carefully. I looked at it with interest.

"What?" he asked. (He meant, 'What are you looking at?')

"Is that a stick of gauge?" I asked.

"This?" He held it up.

"Yes."

"God, no. This is nothing but an innocent, know-nothing little Chesterfield. But it helps keep the pure gold going. The home fires burning. Did you ever notice about champagne? Drink water on top it and you've got yourself a free bun on again. They say the water breaks the bubbles and releases the fumes. I don't know if there's any truth in that or none but I like to think of it that way, I truly do. So what I'm doing with this unemotional little Chesterfield: I'm breaking the bubbles. Chesterfield. They satisfy. I'd walk a mile for a Camel, but they satisfy. Satisfy. That's what I want to tell you about. Let's sit down, shall we?"

I looked about, considering how best to follow his suggestion. He was staring at the blank, pink wall as though it were a famous painting. I put the toilet seat down and sat on it. He sat down, facing me, on the bench in front of the dressing table. I examined the light fixtures and the switches, in the hope that I might find a way to dim the glare.

"You restless?" he asked.

"No, sir," I replied.

He winked a knowing eye at me. That thought which I seem to think at least once a day struck me: What am I doing here? This time, I added: Why have we come here of all the possible places in the apartment? Why has he locked the door? What might he do? I considered our comparative sizes and weights. I was no match for him in the event that he became physically unreasonable.

"What the hell are you sitting there like *that* for?" he asked angrily, his eyes becoming larger.

"Me?"

"You look ridiculous for chrissake sitting there on the can. This is important we've come here to discuss. I'm not going

to disclose my innermost secrets to some half-wit sitting on a toilet. What the hell's the matter with you?"

I decided to shout back. "Well, you said let's sit down, didn't you? Where would you suggest? On the wall?"

His reply was so quiet that I could barely hear it.

"I only meant," he said, "you look silly and this is serious. To talk about. Move over here."

He slid to one side of the bench and made room on it for me. Since it was curved, in half-moon shape opening on the dressing table, it proved to be more convenient to sit on it facing the table. He swung around and waited. I got up and moved over to sit beside him. Our shoulders touched and immediately he discovered that, by looking directly ahead into the three-way mirror, he could look me straight in the eye; or find my eye, geometrically, even if I turned away or tried to do so. During our talk—I should say *his* talk—we played a counterpoint game of mirror hide-and-seek with each other's many heads. He began by choosing one of my reflected faces and fixing on its pair of eyes.

"We understand each other," he said. "There's no question about that, is there?"

"None whatever."

"Take Anne. Very well. Take me. Very well. Now take us together. There you are. That's where the trouble begins. And ends. It was *un mariage de convenance*," he said with what sounded to me like a perfect accent. "Do you speak French?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "But this girl I brought is French."

"What about it?"

"Nothing," I said. "She speaks French."

"Well, why the hell wouldn't she if she *is* French?" he said, turning nasty.

"*Un mariage de convenance*," I mimicked, hoping to get him back on the track. It worked. He continued as though there had been no interruption whatever.

"Perhaps we were wrong to get into it but then what would have been right? Everyone around us was doing it. The same damned thing. People get together and they get

married—why?—because it's a good idea and the practical thing to do and you all make the best of it and most of the time it works out well enough. The line of least resistance. The way of the world. The law of supply and demand. Law. If there were a law heaven forbid that said you had to bring love in and show it before they would issue a license—*hell!*—there wouldn't be enough marriages around to float a doughnut. *Don't* keep looking away from me when I'm trying to tell you something it's very irritating."

"Sorry."

He sulked for a moment, wounded, before he said, "Everybody is a bore to somebody so you take your chances."

"You're not a bore to me."

"I'm not?" he asked, looking up, moved.

"You're probably the most fascinating man I ever met in my whole life."

He thought this over, then clouded and asked, "What's that 'probably' doing in there?"

"Go ahead," I said, giving him another set of eyes.

"So we started the way most do. She was getting on, of course. And I suppose I was too." He stopped as we both became aware of someone attempting entrance. The lock held. The knob persisted. He shouted, "*Occupé!*" in three sharp syllables, turned back to me, and picked up where he had left off. "She was twenty-seven. Well that's not aged but all of her crowd had already and some of them—*hell*—dozens of kids and show off and I was around. See what had slowed me up and left me on the loose was that for a while there it looked very much as though I had it—the jism that makes leaders—white star on the forehead. I was a foregone conclusion. But that meant postgraduate and business administration and a year of merchandising and then the old boy—he insisted on two years in London at L.S.E. and—"

"What's that? L.S.E.?"

"What?"

"The initials. What do they stand for?"

He thought hard. "I don't know," he said, frowning. "But

his idea was for me to be equipped just that much better than the next man and he had politics in mind too though he never mentioned that and neither did I. The year in France. That was all right. The Sorbonne. The language and nothing else. That was a relief. I'd been pushing pretty hard frankly. That is to say he'd been pushing me. In spite of all his loot and chairman of the board he felt a failure and he wanted to make up for it in me, the old pirate. I was beginning to get those migraines I still get. Pushing too hard to make up for my lack of upstairs weight. London School of Economics."

"What?"

"L.S.E. Didn't you just now ask me what that stands for? Well, I'm telling you. London School of Economics."

"Oh, yes."

"So by the time I had all that under my belt, the bloom was off my peach too and I was getting, as they say over there, a little long in the tooth, and I got home and did nothing but the store for a while but out now and then and there was Anne and what the hell. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Ha! There's something I've said over and over and often and a dollar for every time and I'd have even more of what I don't need any more of. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"She's beautiful," I commented.

"She's beautiful," he said. "And I'm exceptionally good-looking myself, don't you think so?"

"I do."

"I've always thought so. In fact in some ways I'm even more attractive now than I was then. Handsomer. Somebody—friend of mine—you wouldn't know him—said everybody has a certain age—time of life—when they're at their best. Some are best as children or students or parents or elderly or old. I'm right in my period now—physically, I should say. No!" He shouted this last word, startling me to my feet. He looked up at me. "Sit down," he said. "What are you doing?" I resumed my place beside him on the bench. "I didn't mean to say at my best physically. Not. I meant to say my looks.

My good looks are at their goodest. No. That's not it." He made a grimace of pain. "What's the word?" he demanded imperiously.

"Best?"

"That's it!" He turned from the mirror and looked at me. I looked back. "You're clever," he said, turned away and chose a face of mine in the mirror. "My good looks at their—best. Meaningless. I don't regret marrying Anne do I?"

"Of course not," I said. "Why should you?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time. We're both so attractive that we were no more than following the law of natural selection. Law. Beautiful people marry other beautiful people. You've noticed that of course. Passable get the passable. And the uglies go together too. That's all right. Infrequently, there may be an exception where money buys beauty—or some eccentric quirk makes an attractive her or him grab an odd one but on the whole. So there was that. Further, there was the fiduciary side. She's got half of most of the money in Pennsylvania—and I've got the other half. Got or will get. Coincidence. She's an only in her family and so am I in mine. Did you know him?"

"Not very well," I said, by now expert at the game.

"And did you know the second one?"

"Not at all."

"Where were you? Away?"

"Yes," I said. "At L.S.E."

"Sure," he said. "I remember you there. So that's how we both missed him."

"The second one."

"Yes. She told me all about the two of them. Told me before we were married. I'm no prude are you?"

"Not any more," I said. "I gave it up."

"Good for you. There's no damned percentage in it." He stiffened into a trancelike stare and continued in a not unattractive monotone. "She thinks she was in love with him. What I say is how the hell would she know or anybody know, male or female, about if it's ever love that first time out or just a concentrated distillation of all the atavistic de-

sires and needs and hungers piling up for years and painful and then being released at last all at once—now!—thank God oh Jesus what a sweet miracle thank you dearest oh oh that felt good so comfortable so com fort able and the tension gone and franticity less and why not. After you've been locked in a cell the size and shape of your own body for years and years and nobody's told you why you've been imprisoned like that and then all at once somebody comes and unlocks it and lets you out why certainly why of course why not feel grateful and thanks and overwhelmed?" He took my hand and leaned toward my reflection. "But what I'm asking you Anne is this: What makes you think that was love? You went on and on with him, that's what you told me and he even used to drive you wild telling you who his other girls were—friends of yours—and what he did with them and how and smallest details and when and you knew he must be telling them about you, too—and he told you he was going to choose one of you for good but didn't know which and you tried and did as you were told and more and submitted to indignity and looked for rare forbidden books to find a secret that might win him and then he left you all three and left Philadelphia and went to Vancouver and married lumber there and the other two scrambled around and picked over what was left but you decided you had lost the love of your life and went to work at the farm for retarded children." He stopped talking, unfroze, let go my hand, and patted me on the back. "Not that there's anything wrong with that," he said, a change of voice indicating that I was no longer Anne to him. "But he was just a stallion after all. The second one was more sensible but it was a stillborn affair. He was the divorced father of one of the kids there and came to visit every single afternoon until the kid died—after which he stopped coming but Anne went and found him to comfort him and she succeeded but having produced a shocking mistake he was terrified—it had cost him his other wife and his other life—but Anne went after it, hard, until he told her once and for all to go. And she thinks *that* was love too, the poor dear. It was sympathy.

If that. Pity." He twisted me around and spoke over my back and close into my ear. "Listen Anne. Can't you understand this? There's no such thing as one-sided love. If it's one-sided its something else. I don't know the word for it. Maybe there *is* no word for it. People say. They're in love with each other. With. Understand? With. It's a state of mutual feeling. Shared longing. Equal emotion. We had it." He shook me. "Don't laugh. We had it. You with me. Not with those two others. That was something else. The love in your life you had with me. All right, all right. I know it wasn't for long but it was there. When? We know when. Not at first and not now but somewhere in there with fuzzy edges of when it began and a sad dying away when it ended. Not on and off like a faucet but like the best day in the world dawning and coming and then after being—slowly slowly turning to evening night and quiet black. But we had it that day and it lived for a couple of days or was it years so Anne in memory of it we ought to be kind to one another and what's more respect one another because we did one great thing together and could not have done it separately. And in that time was love." He released me and we both put our attention on the mirror once again. I studied him as he took out a handkerchief, wiped his eyes and blew his nose. I assumed that the dizzying meeting was over, and was about to rise when he caught my eye, misread it and said, "Prove it? Prove it was love? Very well. Nothing easier. Remember when you had to have a basal metabolism and you were not allowed breakfast that morning and I got up and went with you and waited in the doctor's outer office and when you came out—I'd been to the corner drug store and bought you orange juice and a prune Danish and lots of coffee and you sat right down and wolfed it all nervous with tears in your eyes and holding my hand? And Dr. Havemeyer said, No basket parties in here—and we all laughed? *That* was love Anne. Do you agree?"

I looked him in the eye and said, "I do."

Someone had been trying the door again, but neither of us paid any attention to it.

"Now as to this mess I'm in now," he said, blushing. "Corky was born. Boy. Fine. Soon after—damn it all—how or why I don't know and I'm sure Anne doesn't know either but we—she and I—began to be less together as man and wife. Marriage fatigue? And during the rare times when we were I sensed that she was submitting not caring and then five or six times—six, actually—came repulsion. And a long stretch of nothing. And once we tried again and it was no good and that frightened us both and we went on trying more and more but I had developed a real problem the name of it was detumescence and the doctor worked in conjunction with the catalyst and—no, not catalyst—what do I mean? Oh yes, *analyst* not catalyst, what's the matter with me? The doctor worked in conjunction with the *analyst* and I was full of shots from the one and questions from the other but Ol' Man Detumescence he just kept rollin' along. And came the night of Corky's nightmare. Him screaming down the hall and me waking and dashing down there and when I got there Mrs. Coombs already handling it and Anne in right after me and Corky calming down at last. It was a question of her nightgown and the way he'd torn it, I suppose. Thrashing about like that he'd clutched hold tight of her bodice and before she could settle him he'd ripped it right down the front with both hands but I didn't see it at first because he was covering her front. His arms were locked around her neck and his legs around her middle and we all worked over him but he wouldn't let go of her not for his mother and not for me and then she said—Mrs. Coombs said, He's all right, leave him to me. And then—now this is important—she started to put him down and as she bent over I saw or thought I saw or imagined or thought I imagined something—a vision of human anatomy—indescribably lovely there between her and him. But Anne and I left and went back to our room and Anne was upset and said she was going to take a big pink one and at that moment I felt like saying, Don't please don't because you shouldn't leave me alone now I'm not safe. But I didn't and she did and I sat around for a while trying like hell to

slow down but it was no use because there was Anne hard asleep and snoring a little and the next I knew I was pounding inside and pumping and it was coursing through me and I was swelling and that heady feeling came and I was on my way down the hall."

He changed mirrors and spoke to a different reflection of my face, in another voice. "Listen Anne. Remember when we were standing on the dock and there was the *Leviathan* and I had six weeks of tickets and reservations in my brief-case and it was ten A.M. and the sailing was noon and we were saying good-bye to everyone and—bang—you said to me, I wish we weren't going. And I said, Why not? And you said, I've got a bad feeling about this whole trip. And I got all our luggage and baggage off the boat and we didn't go and just went home and laughed about it? That was love, Anne."

He returned to the earlier reflection and continued, in its own tone, the account which he had interrupted.

"I went right into Corky's room without knocking and she looked up from what she was doing not a bit surprised. What she was doing was giving Corky a massage. It was almost as though she'd expected me to come back but as I've told you I was only a breath from not coming back and I said something I don't remember what and Corky said, More light, Daddy, or words meaning that. The only light on at this point was the lamp beside his bed which put the light on him and she was in shadow and I was in the dark once I had closed the door and I said to her, Is it all right? And she said, Of course. So I touched the switch and the room went bright and that was all right until I moved closer to them to the bed. She had stripped Corky—he was just past six at the time—and had him lying on his back. She was massaging him soothingly and expertly with almond oil and rose water. He opened his eyes as he felt me come near and he said very proudly, I had a nightmare, Dad. My own nightmare. Didn't I, Missus? Nothing could be done to keep him from calling her that all the time. And she said, Yes, dear, and went on treating him and rubbing him

gently and rhythmically and steadily with great concentration. All her attention was on him none on me and none on herself so she probably was not aware of the extent to which her full beautiful beauties were exposed. At any rate I stood there and watched her then him then her and him. I noticed something I had never noticed before. About Corky. About his resemblance to me. Now of course people had said from the day he was born that he looked exactly like me. I never saw it though they all said it. Later his hair went my color and the same chin and all that but I had never thought much of any of this until I stood there and saw it really saw it. By God he *was* me. Tip to toe. A pocket edition of me. And the pocket edition whispered, I'm thinking about pleasant things, Missus, the way you said to. And she said, Good my pet. Sshh. Far away. Far far away. And she went on mumbling sounds that seemed to convey something private—but no words. Just pleasant things, I suppose. And her left hand was rubbing his little foot. (Mine!) And her right hand was smoothing his belly. (Mine!) And the action went slower and slower and the sounds she was making softer and softer and after a while a hell of a while it was clear that he was asleep. By this time her breasts and I were friends. I had discovered them seen them studied them understood admired praised them—and coaxed them back into my line of vision by sheer will whenever they had disappeared. She was middle-aged and soft gray hair—is—but her breasts were—are—as young as her eyes. She looked up at me with her eyes—as young as her breasts—and she smiled. She looked over to the bed lamp which was throwing a strong light across the surface of the bed and I read that I was meant to put it out. I went over and did so. When I returned to my position I saw that she had pulled her robe across her front, shielding it from my sight. She was still massaging Corky—now with her fingertips only and surely whatever *she* wanted them to do *they* were caressing. I knew it because I could feel it. Every touch was mine. Every end was a gasp. Every new contact was breath. Inhale exhale. It became too-nearly unbearable. She

lifted her fingertips from his body and held them over him for oh so long. It took all I had to keep from screaming out, Touch me. Touch me! And then she very gently drew the coverlet over him. We watched him together until with an old man's sigh he rolled over on his side pulled himself into that foetal position he likes and slept soundly. Mrs. Coombs reached down and removed one of her slippers then the other. I saw that she was barefooted. My slippers were soft-soled but I followed suit and took them off. We both moved to the door without making a sound. At the door we stopped and stood still for a minute, looking back at the bed."

He got out a cigarette and lit it, slowly. He studied it. He rose, turned his back to the mirror, and leaned back against the dressing table. He reached out, put two fingers under my chin and lifted my face to his. He spoke directly to my eyes.

"Anne! Remember after I'd been in charge of the store for a year and things—not my fault—went against me, and that white star on my forehead turned into a violent white pain, and the board was going to meet on a Monday afternoon to decide and you packed a bag for you and one for me and we drove off with the radio going full blast and we drove and walked and swam and talked and bought groceries and cooked in road camps and drove all night some nights and slept days and didn't stop until we got to Key West and then we shipped the car and flew back to find that I had indeed been bounced but by then it didn't seem to matter all that much because it was such old news. So I'd had my chance and muffed it and would probably never be a big man in business and I went back to buying and didn't mind in fact was relieved and happier and you didn't care or didn't show it which is the same thing. *That was love, Anne.*"

He took his fingers from my chin, and returned to his place on the bench. He twisted his body and changed position several times until he found the precise one he had been in before his self-interruption. He picked up where he had left off.

"So we stood there looking back at the bed. Let me tell

you I better tell you about the light switch in Corky's room. It has three positions. On and Off and Night. On is up Night is down and Off is in the middle. The night light is a dim blue we always leave on. Blue blue blue. The switch was on On now and to put it to Night it had to go to Off first. I touched the switch and the room went black. We stood there in the enveloping thank God marvelous home-at-last blackness for a hell of a long time. No. A heaven of a long time. I could hear the sound of my heart. Too loud. Then I thought I could hear the sound of hers. She turned and took a step away and as she did she stepped on my foot with hers. That was electrifying. Our bare feet touching. She tried to pull away too suddenly and lost her balance slightly and held me to steady herself. I held her, too. I could smell her hair and her skin and there was no suggestion of perfume or any artificiality—it was simply a sweet breath of overpowering womanliness."

Now as we sat in the washroom, the doorknob was loudly rattled. Something shouted. The door slapped hard. He did not hear a sound and went on.

"She whispered, *Night light*. That was all. I don't know if it was the words or the sound of her voice or holding one another or heaven or hell—but the whirlpool came and we were spun into it deep and delicious. Warm and flowing and perfectly partnered. We were joined. We got to the floor like falling in slow motion. It was all without effort or thought or meaning to or worry. It was two other people. Creatures. It was nothing but ecstasy in all that blessed privacy surrounded by wonder. I think she said, *Night light*, a number of times but by then the words meant something different to me. I must impress upon you that all of this was kindness itself. By both. It was not a question of conquest on either side. No chase. No struggle. No pass. It was simply a long long sharing. A kind of inevitable coming together at last and those fingertips moving over me contained life. Remember that I had been incapable and a clinical study, a statistic—anything *but* a man. But here on the floor of my little son's room my drive had been returned to me

and I was grateful more than anything I was most deeply grateful to this dear person who had remade me. I helped her to her feet and we steadied one another. And I said, Night light. And I think she gave a little laugh—not sure. She touched my face. I put the night light on. We were two blue ghosts but we kissed anyway. The kiss spoke of our mutual thanks. We parted in the dim hallway and just before I went into my room I saw her entering hers. I wanted her to look down the hall toward me but she didn't. She asked to see me the next day and came into the library downstairs. I looked at her and tried to find a single little change. There was none. I could read no expression whatever in her face. Chagrin? Shame? Remorse? Gladness? Anger? Nothing. Contained and neutral. Do you want me to leave? she asked. God no, I said. Thank you, because I don't want to leave. Good, I said. And then she began to give me a report on Corky's latest aptitude test and all was as before until a week or so later. Anne went in to a Community Chest cocktail thing. I went in to help Mrs. Coombs put Corky to bed. She let me arrange him and then waited for me ready in her room adjoining. Not a chance anyone in the house would cotton. No way of knowing where I was. They know I spend a lot of time in Corky's room anyway. But of course you get bolder. On her day off now she checks into the Bellevue and writes her room number in green ink on the bottom of the Postal Telegraph blank book in the lobby writing desk and I join her. Several times at home in the library while we've conferred about Corky's progress and plans—we've found ways and ways to. The trouble is I think the servants know. I think so. Anne doesn't know and if you tell her Mr. Never I've got ways of fouling *your* nest my friend."

"I'm your friend," I said.

"Very well," he said, "how much do you want?"

He got up, went to the door, tried it, and found it locked. He turned to me.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded.

"Idea?"

"Locking this door."

"Well," I said, "you know. Privacy."

"Open it," he commanded, "before I scream."

I went to the door. It turned out to be one of those trick jobs which always confuses me. I fussed with it, getting nowhere, until I felt myself swung about, roughly. He had grasped my lapels and I thought I heard a stitch go. He was angry.

"What is this?" he said, his eyes becoming slits of fury.

I took a deep breath and, fortunately, thought to say, "Blue days all of them gone."

He beamed, winked that wink at me again, released my lapels and replied, "Nothing but blue skies from now on!" He flicked open the lock and left me.

I returned to the large room to find the atmosphere changed. The whole place had a sharp, acrid smell and it was smoky but the smoke was not of the usual color. What was it? Greenish, sort of. All abrupt movement had ceased. The attitudes, reclining or sitting, were relaxed to a point of languor. Walking, moving, and piano-playing were oiled, ball-bearinged, and streamlined.

Don came to me. "My boy, my boy!" he cried, "Where have you *been*? Sin. Gin. Fin. Rin-tin-tin. Win. Chin. *Beguine* the *Begin*."

"If I told you," I said, "you wouldn't believe me."

"Grieve me," he said. "Retrieve me."

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Grand. Band. Hand. Sand. Land. Stand. Tanned. Gland."

I interrupted him, saying, "Orange."

"Orange," he repeated, and added, "Torange. Lorange. Forange. And kiss mine, Buddy!" He executed a perfect military about-face and strode off.

I looked for Edmonde and found her still sitting on the sofa, talking to Clara. I sat down on the coffee table in front of the sofa and regarded them both.

Edmonde said to me, "I hate you."

"Oh, have you started on the stuff already?" I asked.

"No," said Edmonde, "I hate you without anything."

"Why?"

"You have left me."

"I couldn't help it," I said. "I was in the bathroom with Holly."

The girls laughed.

I explained. "He had to tell me his problem and I had to listen."

"Oh," said Edmonde. "In which case, I don't hate you."

"Clara," I said. "You sing better than anybody."

"Now you stop," said Clara.

"He means it," said Edmonde.

"Imagine how I'd sing," asked Clara, with a dead smile, "if I had something to sing about?"

She took a long swallow of her drink. I reached over, took the glass out of her hand, put my nose into it and inhaled. Bourbon. I handed back the glass and said, "Hey. Don't you know that grog is definitely out on this kick?"

"Yes, I do," she replied. "But I'm different." She took a long swallow. "One word description of me. Different. So never mind the rules. I get up different and go to bed different." She rolled off the sofa and rose with the grace of a tigress. "See you later," she said. "You'll probably've changed size, but I'll know you."

We watched her move away. It was impossible not to watch her when she moved.

"What's the matter with her, I wonder?" I said.

"You don't know?"

"No. Why, do you?"

"Of course."

"What?"

"She has a foolish wish. To be white."

"Huh?" was all I could manage as the truth hit me in the middle.

In the center of the room, Ceil and Don were dancing stylishly. They moved as one and to the music. Years of watching from a bandstand had made me conscious of how infrequently people actually did dance to the music. These

two made it a part of their movement. They were enjoying themselves and the rhythm and each other.

"The little man with the red shoes," I announced to Edmonde, "is The Man with the Load Of. With the supply."

"Yes, I thought it."

"But I'm not so sure—in fact, positive not—that we're going to make use of his services, you and I," I added.

"Oh?"

"I just got a flash of an early result."

"Philadelphia?"

"Yes. This stuff—seems like—takes you way out. Maybe too far. He told some secrets it's going to take me weeks to forget."

"He behaves so happy."

"Sure, because he's unloading. Maybe good for him, but not for me. Scary. I've been considering, Eddie. What if everybody told *everything*? Would that be any good? I mean, suppose we all said it right out to each other? The whole *everything*?"

She smiled and shrugged. "No one—not one—has ever done it. Comic. So many billions born and dead—and all dead with something private inside still. Not told. Not said. Yes?"

"I'm with *them*," I said. "With the billions. You don't catch *me* going around telling out my secrets."

"You have secrets?"

"You bet your—" I stopped and nodded. "You'd be surprised. Deep, dark."

"I *would* be surprised."

"You want to hear one?"

"Yes."

I looked at her for a long moment, and she looked at me. I phrased and rephrased a declaration in my mind until she said, "Ah, but that is not a secret."

We both laughed.

The famous pianist was still at the piano. He had removed his jacket and vest and shirt—where were they?—and played, stripped to the waist, his black skin glistening. He wore a white bow tie around his neck, and on his head a tall silk

opera hat which the endlessly resourceful Don had produced from somewhere. I noticed something odd and mentioned it to Edmonde. Together, we moved to the piano to consider the observation further. What I had noticed was this: that although the intensity of his playing had increased, and the notions become blindingly imaginative, much of the precision had gone out of his playing, and any expert ear—especially one which had heard him before—could detect it. Was the sacrifice worth it? Which would we rather hear—perfectly played lesser concepts, or sloppily executed bursts such as these? For myself, the former, and Edmonde agreed. But this, in its own way, was exciting. He took the fasts too fast and the slows too slow, the louds too loud and the softs too soft. The subtleties were gone and in their place was crude power and elemental drive. The taste and refinement which were his stock in trade were discarded for the moment as though they had been too-tight shoes and he was now playing, so to speak, barefooted.

Clara sat beside him, her eyes fixed on the keyboard, watching the sound as well as hearing it.

Anne (Holly's wife. Mrs. After. Mrs. Philadelphia) knelt on the floor beside the piano bench in physical and intellectual contact with the music.

What we saw and heard was this: the player playing softly, so softly that at times we wondered if we were hearing the music or supplying it. His renowned, striding left hand was in especially fine form, riding out a solid succession of pulses. His right hand sang a blues full of weird and long-lost chords. We were all silent, taking in. He stretched a long, melodic, minor-key line, postponing and postponing its resolution until our nerves were on edge, but at last, he came down.

"I know it!" said Anne, speaking sensibly to the music. "I know it."

The player turned out a commanding chromatic succession, and before it ended, Anne held out a hand and said, "No, please. I can't. I would if I could. Please."

She threw her face into her palms, agonized. The music

stopped for a moment, before the beat began rolling again, and a song found its way into the air.

Anne looked at it and said, "That's what I *told* you. Didn't I? Didn't I?"

The song replied, briefly.

"Of course I don't blame you," she said. "It's only I wish you could keep it out of the house and away from the servants."

The music grew louder and became more rhythmic, then opened up for her to say, "Why should I? You need it and I don't any more. I really don't mind."

The blues theme modulated to a higher key, straining for brightness.

Anne said, "Oh, yes. Maybe I will. I hope and pray. I promise to try. Meanwhile. Meanwhile. Don't leave me. I say, do not leave me. I do my best and watch my weight, don't I? And look at my skin. Has it ever been smoother?"

During this speech, the volume of the music had increased and now became almost deafening. Anne went on talking, not competing in sound, but simply talking—with the result that the music drowned her out almost completely.

I caught a word now and then: ". . . lies . . . normal . . . food. . . ." Or a phrase: ". . . for *their* wives . . . or else incapable . . . to pay for it . . . as abstruse as all that. . . ."

But her conversation with the music had come to a close. She sat beside the piano, put her arms about its leg, nestled her head against it, and smiled serenely. I forgot about her then, but afterward—perhaps an hour or more later, I saw her there, still in the same position.

Don came to the piano, wriggled in between Edmonde and me, laced his arms through one of each of ours and said, "Time." He added, "Grime. Sublime. Crime."

I turned to Edmonde and asked seriously, "What do you think?"

"Brink," said Don. "Link. Sink. Pink. Stink. Clink."

"Okay, *plug off!*" I snapped fiercely. He looked at me, hurt and offended, but said no more for a while.

Edmonde was in an overcharged state as she said, "Come along. It is why we are here for, no?"

We wheeled about, all three, and moved across the room without unlinking arms. On the way, we had to step over Ceil and Holly, who lay stretched full-length on the thickly carpeted floor, their heads close together, but their feet pointing in opposite directions. Their heads were deep in conversation and having stepped over both prone bodies, we stopped and looked down and listened.

Ceil said, "No future in any middle way. Got to be yes or got to be no. Trouble with it all—the whole cosmos—is that so far it's been all maybe. Stand for something. You can't stand for nothing. That's why I say no middle way. No bloody compromise. Oh God make them see what I see. One way or another way. Be a man or a woman but don't be don't try to be in between or both. Holly!"

Holly, who had been watching her lips form these words and her tongue articulate them, replied, "No, it was entirely a question of sales volume. An unpredictable. The following quarter it might have gone *my* way. But luck. There's your answer. The luck of the game."

While speaking, he had reached over and taken hold of Ceil's tongue with his fingers. Both he and she behaved as though this were the most natural of acts.

Don led us away. We went to what seemed to be his room, professionally interior-decorated. Two day beds formed an L in one corner of the room. Ceil's sister, Mae, was there, emptying a box of chocolates into a large bowl on the low table. The little man with the red shoes was there, too.

"Make yourselves loose," he said.

Edmonde sat down on one of the day beds, and I sat down on the other. He opened his flat gold case and carefully extracted two reefers. He laid them on the table on a purple silk handkerchief which had been placed there. He still wore his pasted-on smile.

"Now, do I understand you two kids are first-timers? May I take this opportunity of welcoming you to the fold?"

"Gold!" shouted Don, in the background. "Told. Mold. Hold. Rolled. Bold!"

He embraced Mae, opened his mouth wide, and kissed her, actively and passionately. She responded in kind, holding on to his ears, and caressing his hip with her knee.

The little man went on, unperturbed. "There's nothing to it if you pay attention and don't ad-lib. Just as you're told."

Edmonde was smiling, but I was in a panic. Was this the beginning of deterioration? The first step on a long wrong-way journey? Did I want to be like these people? God, no. Why was I doing it? What if it killed me? It might.

The little man said, "I'll light you up and then you can have it. Suck a little air with it. Take it down deep. Swallow. Keep it. Like this, see?" He unclipped a fountain pen from his outer breast pocket, pressed one end of it between two tight fingers, held it between his pursed lips and simulated a take, sip-sucking swiftly in short, vigorous pulls. "Tsz! tsz! tsz! tsz! tsz! TSZ!! Now hold it. Hold it long and see how much you can count. Try for a hundred but don't hysterical if you don't make it. Now let out slow slow slower slower. Rest. Breathe nice and regular. Now go again. Tsz! tsz! tsz! tsz! tsz! TSZ!! Hold it. Etcetera, etcetera. And prit soon you won't need me nor nobody." He picked up one of the reefers and held it close to Edmonde's lips. "Wet it down a little," he said. She put out the tip of her tongue and he rolled the stick over it, expertly. "That's so she don't burn away too quick," he explained. He lit the stick carefully, blew daintily on the burning end, sniffed it, and handed it to Edmonde. She pinched it to her lips and imitated him well.

"That's *it!*" he cried. "That's *it!*" She was swallowing what seemed to me a great deal of the smoke. "Look at this, Donnie. Look at this chick go."

Don untangled himself from Mae, turned her from him, gave her a swift kick in the rump, and tiptoed toward us, flapping his head happily. He stared at Edmonde. "Take *it!*" he growled. "Make *it!* Shake *it!* Bake *it!*"

She took all she could, pressed her lips together and held

it down. The little man said, "Hold it," and turned to Don. "Don't now tell me this ladybug here is a starter—no, no, Nola—she's been up and out before."

"Before you," said Don. "Implore you. Restore you. Adore you."

Edmonde began to let the smoke out, slowly. She coughed, a cue for the little man and Don to shout in rhythmic unison, "Don' *waste* none a that *stuff*!" They howled, appreciating an apparently standard routine.

Don said, "Down there in the end part—in the roach—that's where the true ambrosia lies. Ties. Fries. Cries. Dies."

"Again now?" asked Edmonde, pale.

"You on your own, ladybug," said the little man. "You don' need me for nothin' except more. When you get down to the end piece you sing out an' I'll fix you a handy crutch to get to it."

"I'm ready," I said.

He looked at me, wondering where I had come from, and said, "Oh, yes. You."

He had me wet the second stick, lit it and blew on it and handed it to me. I tried to do what he had demonstrated and what Edmonde had done, but in my nervousness, botched it. I made the proper sound but none of the smoke went where it was meant to go. Edmonde, holding her second load, watched me.

The little man was impatient and yelled, "No! No!"

I took a long drag and inhaled it as one would an ordinary cigarette.

"No!" he belted.

I felt as though I were back taking a saxophone lesson from the irascible Rudy Weidoft.

I exhaled slowly and tried again. I coughed, hard.

Edmonde looked at me. "Don' *waste* none a that *stuff*!" she said.

At this, Don sank to his knees, laughing, and slapped the floor. While he was thus occupied, Mae walked over and heartily returned, with the inside of her foot, the kick she had so recently received from him.

The little man put his fountain pen to his mouth and made the sounds again, but he was obviously uninterested in me. He went away and so did Don and so did Mae, and we were left alone, Edmonde and I.

She continued to smoke her stick, concentratedly. I watched and tried to follow her lead. I knew that I was not doing it well or even correctly but kept on. I was terrified and had no real wish to get into this; my sense of reason was, needless to say, dead set against it. But some stubbornness or sense of perverse rebellion or caution-to-the-winds adrenalin pushed me forward and I continued, trying to try. What little smoke I succeeded in getting down clogged my windpipe and burned my tongue and bruised my lungs.

The odor which both of us were creating was nauseating. My eyes began to smart. The little man returned, took the butt away from Edmonde, pinched it into an ingenious silver holder—called a crutch—and handed it back. He went away. She continued; dutifully, correctly, doggedly, as though she were executing an important responsibility, one which she had taken an oath to uphold. I moved the thing from my right hand to my left and tried it that way. I smelled the fingers of my right hand and was shocked to find them so foul. I puffed harder now in an unconscious attempt to get to the end of this foolhardy adventure, and shortly there was only a butt in my fingers. What had he called it? A roach. I smoked it down as far as I could, holding the smoke in my lungs each time and exhaling slowly. Finally, I tamped out the burning stinkweed. Edmonde still had a way to go.

“How you doin’?” I asked, but such was her preoccupation that either she did not hear me, or did not deign to reply.

I sat watching her, then turned my attention back to myself. I had failed. I did not feel a thing except slightly ill. I wanted a drink. Better not. But this hasn’t worked, I argued. I had blown it. Maybe I would try again later. No, no drink. Maybe some of that sweet wine they were now serving? That was all right, they said. I hate sweet wine.

I looked at Edmonde again. Were things working out for

the best for me here? She seemed to be going at it properly and successfully. Now then, *think*. If *she* gets high enough and *I* stay in control— Here? Or take her home? To *her* home. I struck my forehead sharply with my fist to knock these unworthy maunderings out of my head. What the hell good would that be? As a punishment, I forced myself to remember in detail the one time I had taken a drunken girl to bed. A harrowing, shaming, near-necrophilic experience. I tried to shake the memory loose, to blot it out, to melt it away. I used the trick of pretending that it had happened to someone else and not to me and that I had only heard about it second-hand, third, fourth. No use. I wallowed in sick remorse.

I looked at Edmonde again, resolving not to lay a glove on her tonight no matter what. She gazed at me, as though from afar, wisely. I searched her face, carefully, but could not find the smallest single sign of effect. What troubled me even more was the fact that I felt nothing. Nothing whatever. What a disappointment. After all the preparation and decision-making and anticipatory fever; after finding myself at last on the brink of new and daring sensation, to have failed so ignominiously. Better luck next time. I saw myself as clumsy and impotent and emasculated. A colorless blob.

I felt a sudden need to urinate, said, “Excuse me,” got up, and went into the bathroom.

There I found it impossible to perform the simple act although I seemed to have to. It worried me until the need ended suddenly without having been satisfied. I thought this odd and went back to Edmonde. She was lying back on the day bed, relaxed and supple.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

“Nothing,” I said. “Not a goddamn thing. Maybe it doesn’t work on some people. Like certain drugs. Take my hay fever. There are pills work for some but not for me. Live with it. So as for this—I guess I’m immune. I got a hell of a lot of it down and held it and let it out slow—but no go. Slow but no go? God, I sound like Don. Wan. Gone. John. This is a real blow, though. Jesus, there I go again. When. Then. I

mean it. It's disappointing as hell. Not that I think it's so much. Those poor nuts out there, I mean the ones it's worked on, well, they don't seem to be so much. I mean I wouldn't want to be like that would you?" I sat down beside her and went on. "I get the feeling there are far better kicks in life than this one. See, what I think of this sort of thing is it's a short cut. Bang. Two, three puffs and you're there, where it takes monks maybe years of meditation or philosophers a lifetime. It's artificial that's the trouble with it. There's nothing finer than sleep—natural sleep—and nothing worse than sleeping-pill sleep. Know why? Because there's an essential difference between sleeping and sleeping it off. Make a note of that. The mid-twentieth-century man. He's going too fast. Say! Is that why jazz fits him like a custom-made? Is it the beat of his day? Who told me—you, by God—about how 'jazz' means 'fast' in some language. Creole? Everything's fast. A short cut. Dr. Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf. Did you know I bought one? That's right. The whole five feet. Dr. Eliot's five feet. What got me was the fifteen minutes a day promise. Oh, Promise Me! You read fifteen minutes a day and that's all, pal. You can stand right up to the best of them and you don't have to take a back seat to anyone or any guff and you're as educated and as well-read as any collegiate sonofabitch who tries to give it to you down the nose—hell, you're right up there right in there with Dr. Eliot himself his personal self even though you never got through high school, like me. As me. Who's crying? *I'm* not crying. Fifteen minutes a day. It may be true for all I know. You can't prove it by me, because I haven't done my fifteen minutes a day yet. I may, though. I mean I've got the shelf right there. If it doesn't work you get your money back. Only my problem is how can I get my money back when I haven't paid them for it yet—only the first down payment. Short cuts. They say, take this pill: you'll be thinner. Drink this potion: you'll be fatter. Right away. Overnight or sooner. Big ad: play the piano like a professional in thirty days by this amazing new scientific method. Now you know and I know that's a cruel unholy horseball.

But it goes over big because it's a quick quick quick. Who's got time? That's what this smoke is supposed to be. A short cut to the living end. There are other ways, but they take longer. It takes quite a while to really appreciate and get a full-scale belt out of a Cézanne or a dinner or a woman. Time and effored. What? *Effort*. Here's the laugh, though. The best of it—of anything—is the means, not the *end*. Don't tell anybody. Let them find it out for themselves, the way I had to. That the getting there is better than the actual there. That long route to that chorus you're looking for—that's the best of life. When you get to the chorus, it's over. The striving and the doing. That piece I made up? The one you like? It was a state of man oh man while I was doing it and when it was finished, I felt awful. So who wants short cuts? That's why I don't care that I find this goddam marijuana doesn't work on me. I don't care. Why should I? I should worry I should care, I should marry a millionaire, he should die, I should cry, I should marry another guy!"

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"I can't pee," I said.

"Oh?" she replied. "Would you want me to put some more lights on?"

I pondered this, thinking hard, matching her remark against mine in several positions. It took me a time to recognize the phonetic error.

When she next addressed me, it was in French, and speaking in her own language, she became another person entirely. The slight, tentative tenseness was gone from her face; she spoke swiftly, gracefully, easily and, I felt certain, wittily. The curlicue of an upward inflection conveyed to me that I had been asked a question.

"I don't understand what you're saying, Eddie. I wish I did but I don't."

Judging by her response, I could hardly have said anything more telling or effective than this. She laughed delightedly, spilled another gushing stream of words, stopped, and waited again for my response.

This time I said, "Three months from now I'm going to

understand you. Thirty minutes a day with a Linguaphone. And fifteen with Dr. Eliot. Forty-five. That's what they say. Short cuts. That's the thing these days."

She looked at me angrily, obviously insulted, and spat out a word which must have been a dirty name. She got up and moved away. On Don's desk, she found a cigarette and lit it.

I went toward her, saying, "Look, Eddie, I don't know what you think I said, but I—"

At this point I reached her range, whereupon she whirled on me and slapped me, hard, in the face. Before I realized what I was doing, I had slapped *her*, in a thoughtless reflex. We burned a look at one another. She embraced me violently and bit into my shoulder until I moaned. She stepped back, closed her eyes, stood with her feet apart and her arms held slightly away from her body, palms toward me. I could not fathom the significance of this pose, although she opened her eyes several times in an attempt to communicate. Eventually, I stepped to her and put my arms about her. She pushed me away, roughly, and went back to her day bed where she lay down. I looked across the room at her and decided to go and sit beside her and talk. A long talk, in any language, or in no language, would settle everything. I started toward her.

I walked and walked and walked and walked. Why was it taking so long? A long room. How long can a room be? I was still walking. I was coming closer to her all the time, I was most certainly approaching her—there was no question about that—but I could not seem to reach her. I walked more swiftly for a while and then had to slow down as I felt myself running out of breath. I considered sprinting—after all, I had been a track man at James Madison High and had once run a ten-second hundred-yard dash. (Knottman, the coach, had clocked it at ten-two, but he was a notoriously careless timer. My friend Lou Cuneo had clicked it off, too, and showed me the stop watch. Ten flat.) I thought it best not to sprint without my track shoes on. This floor was too slippery. Should I go get them? Hell with it. I was still walking, she was still waiting, and, it seemed to

me, growing impatient. What was the matter here? Was it my fault or the room's? Why was it taking me so long to get from the desk to the day bed? I stopped and looked at my watch. It seemed enormous and in execrable taste. As though I wanted everyone to see and know that I owned a wrist watch. Who cares who owns a wrist watch or how big? I took it off and tried to put it into my pocket, but of course, it was far too large. I threw it away. It made a shatteringly loud crash as it landed, and I expected a crowd to come pushing in to see what had happened. I resumed walking and night fell but I plunged on, bravely, in the darkness and after a swift eternity it began to get light and finally, in the glare of the rays of a bright, new sun, I reached Edmonde's side, at last. I sat down beside her, tingling with a sense of accomplishment.

She spoke to me in French again but this time I understood perfectly. Had I already taken that Linguaphone course? Probably. Because I understood and was to continue to understand all she said to me in the hours which followed, although she continued to speak in swift, casual French. I felt that I could easily have replied in French, but decided against it. Why show off?

She had said, "Where are you?"

And I replied, "Nowhere. I don't feel a damned thing. How about you?"

I understood her to answer that she felt well and happy and buoyant and that she regretted having struck me.

This seemed so gracious that I decided to stop holding out and when I next spoke to her it was in her own language and I said—swiftly, casually—that I was not going to take advantage of her euphoric condition for my own lustful purposes, so not to worry.

She said that she was depressed by this announcement, because she desired me ravenously although she felt it only fair to tell me in all candor that she did not love me. She loved Woody, and women of her class and birth and breeding made it a firm practice to love no more than one person

at a time—no matter how many they exchanged impulses with.

I replied smoothly, and with a wit that blinked her, that I understood and approved and accepted my role gracefully. Love, I explained, was after all a form of religion and as such was based upon faith which in turn, was not a matter of will. The sexual union, on the other hand (hand?) was simply and stunningly the fullest and highest expression of friendship—an extension of, say, dancing—and in a civilized world of course why not and I am so happy that we understand each other. Shall we dance and shall we fullest expression a bit? I went on and pointed out that persons of *my* birth and breeding had principles as well and that although I would prefer not to discuss *my* b. and b., she had my word for it that if she really knew, she would stand up.

She stood up anyhow and we danced. Someone, or something, was playing. We danced without stopping for six or seven months. When winter came and it was time to go south, we danced into the living room.

Almost everything about it had changed since we had last been there. It had been a large room but it had shrunk. Never would have happened had Ceil sent it to a *good* dry cleaner, like Denihan. Try to save money and see what happens. It was now a tiny room. I wondered if Edmonde noticed the change.

"This room," I said, "is no bigger than the inside of a taxicab. I mean *capsitag*."

She touched my lips and said, "Please!"

I put my attention back on the tiny room. Although it contained a great many people, it was not in the least crowded, and there was ample room for spread-out dancing. I could not fathom how it was that there was so much space in this small room. The people had remained exactly the same size—people-size. It was a trick of some sort. I loathed it.

Edmonde, dancing in my arms, became Clara. Another trick? Come on, Eddie, if you want to kid around, kid around, but don't kid around! No, I thought. Edmonde is able to do this because the weed has worked on her. She

followed the directions (remember?) and did it so well (yes!) that now she can be Clara if she wants to or anyone, I suppose.

As Clara, she sang as we danced, without words, but with rocketing riffs and bursting hooks. I recognized masses of Henry's designs and some of Gil's and wondered if they got it from her or she from them. What did it matter? What mattered was the material, damn it all. I could see that now, now that dancing was sending blood to my brain. All this talk of who influences who and who steals what from who or where is only of interest to the hawkers and hucksters and peddlers and parasites. Who cares? They care. What does it matter? It doesn't. If a man, blowing a horn, finds something new on it and I hear it and understand it, am I a crook if I repeat it? Or imitate it? Or try? Would we have Fats Waller without James P. Johnson? Or Tatum without Waller? The passed-down strain is one of the few endearing things about the passage of time, and about man's use of it. Who is there alive whose life has been free of imitation? We learn to walk and talk by imitation; to see and hear and, in the best sense—through the poets—we learn to feel. Name a poet. Percy B. Shelley. Name another. Jelly Roll Morton. Thank you.

Clara was still singing in my arms, but stopped as she became Ceil. Now, wait a second. Was it Clara become Ceil; or Edmonde, tired of being Clara, changed into Ceil? Or could it be that no one is changing into anyone—but that Edmonde is Edmonde, Clara is Clara, Ceil is Ceil and I am the one who is changing—not to anyone else—but from one to another? This might be. Don't answer that. Don't commit yourself. Postpone decision as long as possible. Who knows what the next hour may bring? In any case, this was Ceil.

"What are you doing these days?" she asked.

"I'm writing a play within a play within a play," I said. (I had recently seen the stark, daring Norman Bel Geddes production of *Hamlet*, starring Raymond Massey, and had been especially caught by the intricate and effective struc-

ture of the players' scenes.) I could see that this statement impressed hell out of her and so I went on in an effort to impress a little *more* hell out of her. "I brooded about it for a long time but I never thought I'd have the nerve to do it. I don't know much about the theatre although I *have* seen a great many plays and twice now I have sat in an orchestra seat right up close to the stage and I buy theatre magazines and one of them the *Theatre Arts Monthly* had an ad in it about this place, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and I read the entire ad from top to bottom many times so maybe I am more qualified than I think, and anyway it has to be done and no one else wants to so it's up to me, I suppose, and I have accepted the challenge. You see, there's no other way to see life. Into life. If you want to see into an onion you've got to get into it layer by layer. That's why the only way is a play within a play within a play within a play."

"It takes a lot of money to write a within a within a," she said.

"Yes," I said, "but my wife gives me all I need. More. She's French, you know. She supports me. Gladly."

I knew I should not have said that. We had meant our marriage to be a secret forever. I had wondered how we were going to keep it a secret from our children, but Edmonde had said to leave such things to her, that in France they did it all the time.

She was furious now and I knew I was in for it. We were dancing, Edmonde and I (what had I done with Ceil?), and she was berating me—in our language—for having told Ceil that we were married. She said that the thing she minded most about my telling it was that it was not at all true and never would be. I denied everything and told her to stop or I would slap her again—remembering how greatly I had enjoyed the first time. She forgave me and bit my shoulder again. My other shoulder this time, thank God.

We found ourselves dancing near the piano. No one was playing. In fact, there was no music from anywhere. How long had we been dancing without music? Would we be

caught? Wasn't it against the law in this state? It must be. Don't tell anyone. If they come, don't give your right name. Come on out into the kitchen, that's where all the fun is!

Edmonde sat down at the keyboard and began to play. Although I had never heard her play, had never heard that she did play, I was not in the least surprised. Her playing, like everything else about her, was feminine; sweet and neat and clean and inviting. Clean and inviting: could this be the basic secret of femininity? Had I made a discovery? Should I tell anyone? Everyone? How true! Give me a drum roll, please. All right, that's enough. Don't make a pig of yourself, Slug. Ladies and gentlemen. Do you know why all cats seem feminine? Because they are clean and inviting. (Applause.) And all dogs not because they are not. Even *she* dogs seem *he*. (Mingled cheers and boos.) Just a moment, *please!* (I have gone too far, as usual. Is there any way out? I have made enemies. They will get me, hold me back, fix my wagon. A joke! Try a joke, for God's sake.) I was only joking, ladies and gentlemen—and dogs. (Laughter. Yes, that did it. I am saved. I can joke my way out of anything. Remember that. Only trouble is, it is always so temporary an out. Now. A big finish. Serious, don't forget.) So let us go forward together, into a better tomorrow for all. (Prolonged applause and cheers.) Congratulations.

Edmonde (clean) was still playing (inviting). Don handed me my horn—again no surprise—and I was delighted to join her. Don got on bass and we took off as a trio. Don, good ol' Don, stayed far away and provided no more than an insidious, insistent, matchmaking pressure.

Edmonde and I played together in our third language of the evening. She led and I followed, not sure of her route or her changes, but trailing her in and out of her alleys, and round and round in her maze. She teased, but in a warm and charming way, not with the cruelty which so many of her sisters employ. She tantalized and bedeviled, held back and confounded and switched—several times, stopped my motor with astonishment—but always stayed well within the rules of the game.

All at once, I had *her* following *me* and she did so, sweating and laughing. The beads of perspiration on her forehead were rare, glittering gems. I played her a way-in, low-register love song; and she took it spread—contributing and sharing. She went into a set of feeling blues, and I sympathized, then we got happy on the same phrase, and rolled and rolled. All the time, there was Don in the background urging us on.

Edmonde and I had it together and it had been such a joy that instead of stopping abruptly, we came down slowly, cloud by cloud. She was playing Bix's "In a Mist" and I did a chorus of it which I had once heard him do himself in his room at the Forty-fourth Street Hotel and guess who else was there that day? Babe Ruth.

While we were playing "In a Mist," there was a smoky fog in the room—very hammy—most Fanchon and Marco. And there was light, but the source of it was a number of oddly placed lamps. There were pools of light, rather than over-all light and the effect was startlingly dramatic as people moved in and out of the spills.

There came a time—once upon a time—when all movement in the room stopped. Were they listening, I wondered?

In a lightning-like switch-on, at the edge of one of the larger pools of light, my eyes, and then I, saw Clara—stark naked. I stopped playing—fortunately I had seen her right at the end of a chorus—closed my eyes, gave my head a violent shake and opened my eyes. She was still there. Half of her. The front half. The light highlighted it but where was the rest of her? At first, she seemed to lack a third dimension, but as I stared, it came clearer. I see. She is a brown bas-relief pasted onto the wall of dark. I had never seen a living bas-relief before, nor such colors. Brown, yes—but a brown made of red and gold and deep purple and mahogany and black. Now she left the wall, turned, found the rest of herself and began to dance a young and altogether open dance. She was like a child discovering the relationship between movement and sound.

Her body was conscious of nothing beyond its own bal-

ance and the sound to which it was so guilelessly responding. She moved around the pool of light, plunging in and out of it once! twice! again!—as if the light were either too hot or too cold.

I looked at Don who was gaping at her. He turned to me and increased the intensity of his beat.

“Do *you* glom what *I* glom, Tom?” he asked in rhythm.

“Afraid so,” I said. “For a beat there I thought the junk was working on me after all.”

“You still on the ground?” he asked. “Found? Mound? Hound? Round?”

Everyone in the room was watching Clara from various intensities of background darkness. I began to play again. I wonder why. For one thing, it kept me from gawking and made the whole shocker seem more casual; or did I want to be part of the act, or was I afraid that if the music stopped, *she* might stop? Whatever the reason, I played on as unobtrusively and as self-effacingly as I could. Clara danced.

Now in her hand there appeared an article—soft, translucent, catching the light—what was it? A silk stocking, either black or white. It whirled about her head and then, in the shadow, she could be seen putting it on. One stocking on, rolled and tightened at the top, her movements continued until another article of clothing was seen—into which she stepped with the grace of a panther. (Pantheress?) I prayed for the second stocking, asked for it on my horn. In time, it materialized. Now the dance lost its purity and began to touch prurient nerves. Her nakedness had first suggested Biblical beauty, now as one piece of clothing after another began to cover her, nature’s ideas (immense) were supplanted by man’s (petty). Her shoes came next—where were all these things coming from? When and how had she removed them and placed them? Had it been planned or was the ritual being conceived before our eyes? Watching her handle the brassiere, I was tempted to stop playing, drag her from the floor, and throw her and her clothes after her into a room somewhere. Into a closet. At the moment of this consideration, I saw Edmonde watching me and de-

cided to stay put. Clara gave that hungry brassiere a work-out, made it live, made it challenge her body, made her body resist the stricture, made the brassiere win and her body lose.

It was clear to us all now. We were seeing a strip tease in reverse, and the wonder was that it could be so inflaming. To take things off, bit by bit, seemed sordid and senseless compared to this performance. Skirt, then blouse, and near the end, rings and bracelets and earrings, one by one. The dance became elaborate mime, the mime became everyday movement and, finally, she stood at the small bar, pouring a drink and flirting expertly, gently, with every man in the room in turn. Every man, who had seen, who knew and need not guess at what lay beneath those sensuous folds. We faded her music to nothing in a long, long, smoldering ending.

I was eating candy, ravenously, in answer to a sort of hunger I had never known. I had been hungry, with no prospect of food, four times in my life; but this was hunger of another sort. This had fear in it; and concern that even all the food in sight would not assuage it. I swallowed bonbons and chocolates and saw Don and Ceil and Clara laughing at me.

Anne on the floor in a corner of the room, sucking on a stick of tea, too noisily. I am beside her and she shares it with me, helping me, instructing me. She is dear. (How could Holly have deserted her for that cow, Mrs. Coombs? Never mind, Anne, *I love you.*) My stick technique is improving. Take more air in with it, that's it. I look at every person in the room in huge close-up. Each person is a face. Each face I love. My heart goes out to every friend. I feel terrifyingly intelligent. I know all. Ask me anything. I walk up to Holly and beckon him close. He gives me his ear and I speak into it as though it were a microphone on a coast-to-coast hookup.

I say, "Competition kills."

He jerks away and closes his eyes, blinded by this white-heat explosion of validity. I can't help it if I know, can I? I walk away on a flower bed of well-being. There is no

longer any mystery, any pain, any trouble, any illness, any anxiety. My future is assured, my past without blemish, and as for the present—well, that is The Grand Prize: there is no present. The strain of being alive has been eased. I am of the elements and friends who love me are drinking me, eating me. I am part of all and all is part of me.

I reach this top, grow dizzy, and go into a spin. Down, down without end. I have never known such despair. I am helpless, hopeless, and afraid. I am a fraud and feel nothing. I fool no one. I am transparent. Not one of my tricks works. Everyone knows the inner details of my most private and personal life and mocks me. My many shaming thoughts run twinkling across my forehead in the manner of the news bulletins on the face of the *New York Times* building. I would die if they let me, but they won't. There is nowhere to go, nothing to do, it is all a useless, futile, wasteful void. I am friendless. I am forlorn. Everyone else in the world is healthy and wealthy and wise—I alone am the pariah. I suffer.

"Holy smoke, man," says Don. "Oh yes holy. Oh yes smoke. What you doing out here *already*? How could you finish your first stick so quick? I just left you in there. Where. Stare. Chair. Bare."

Confused, I saw myself—watching myself from a high angle—get up from the floor and walk away. Where was I going? Why was I limping? I called myself back. I ignored me. I shouted at my receding figure, begging it to return. I did not want to be two. One was tough enough. The walked-away me paid no attention. I got down from my high angle, followed myself to the buffet and stood watching myself begin to eat again. A tongue sandwich this time. I laughed at him-me, eating again. Why tongue? It means something. Nothing. Everything means something. People who know, know. Every little movement has a meaning all its own. Why tongue?

Music coming out of a walnut and gold box. I am on my knees before it. So is Edmonde. I give her a part of my sandwich and we listen, in tears, as seven men, each with

the added appendage of a musical instrument, become a melodious, living entity. Had it long been an especially beloved side, or did it become one that night?—the State Street Ramblers playing “Careless Love” on a Gennett recording, a kazoo and a washboard in the instrumentation adding innocence to the joy.

“Jazz is spontaneity,” I say. “Not only that—but spontaneity is jazz!” I can see that she is struck. Strongly struck. If only that stinkin’ rotten Holly had not swiped my “Competition kills” crack I would say it now and really lay her out. From now on, boy, I am going to copyright everything! “But form,” I continue with aloof but captivating pedantry. “Listen. As in life. We must have order—” I pause for dramatic effect and add, “but not *too much* order!”

I have fired off a more telling shell than I had intended. It enters her. I do not understand the physics here. Something large has been transmitted from me to her and yet I am immediately more and she less. I smile. Moses. She looks at me as though I am a revelation.

“Yes,” she whispers, stunned by sudden knowledge. She touches my lips reverently, because she considers them to be a sacred fount of wisdom.

I am in a bloodboil of shame as the spotlight hits me and reveals an inept swindler, a caught pickpocket, a phony baloney. Lie if you must, but not to friends. A single lie poisons a friendship. I move her fingers from my lips and confess.

“Eddie. That’s not mine, that order thing. That’s North Alfred Whitehead. No. Alfred North. I think. Anyway his. And not mine. Woody told me. Gave me the book. Woody. What a brain. I’ve learned more from him. The University of Woody.”

“Listen,” she commands. The State Street Ramblers were still playing, and oh how well, because they were playing together.

“Together,” I said, discovering the word. “To. Gether. To. Geth. Er. Togeth. Gether. Together. That’s the whole one God damn simple only bloody worth thing in the whole

one God damn simple only bloody world. In a room or a town or a planet. Man cannot live by man alone. Never mind that nonsense Holly tells you. You listen to me, because I am in possession of the true scoop. Copyright in all including the Scandinavian."

"Listen," she said.

We listened. Together.

"They are *interdependent*," I said.

"Oh yes," said Edmonde. "Oh how yes."

"Never mind being *independent*, that's easy. Any kid of eight can be that and most of them are or think they are that's why they run away from home at that age. Independent. And dependent? Babies are. Nothing. But to know how to learn how to live how to be *interdependent*—listen, Eddie, how they are! What's better? It makes music. Like Woody says sometimes before we start—when he's feeling good—he says, 'Okay, men, let's decorate the world a little.' What's better?"

Edmonde took my hand, leaned over it, brushed it with her nose, and kissed it in a formal way.

Still holding it, she said, "Each man has some one good thing. You and Woody and Slug and him and he so I am sad. Because I need all in one and there is no one."

"Me," I said. "I'm taking lessons in being the one. The all in one. I can learn anything if I get the right teacher. The things I can't do—they're not my fault—the teachers were no good but I've got a good one now so wait for me. I'm your the one. Your one."

"The band is the one," she said, throwing away my hand. "I am in love with the band. It is all."

"You want to hear something?" I asked. "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law to keep myself physically fit morally straight and mentally awake."

"You are a good boy," she said.

"I am an American," I said. "And proud of it. I am one of the few who knows all the words to 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

“Few do,” she said.

“I know ‘America the Beautiful,’ too. Hell of a tune. Better than that other one. That other one goes too high.”

“Stop singing,” she said, although I had not yet begun. I will not deny that I was about to begin.

“Candy,” she said, and opened her mouth.

I reached into the air and produced some. We chewed it and felt fine.

“What’s good about this,” I said, “is how clear everything is. I can see and hear.”

“You can’t?” she responded. “I can.”

“Look how clear. Life. What they call life. You come out of the slime, you carry on, you stop. Clear? Nothing before, nothing after. That you know about, that is. But you’re all that came before and you’re part of all after. Think of that. Just because everything we know and understand has a beginning and an end we think the universe has to. But no. No beginning, no ending. ‘Something always was, else nothing could ever have been.’ Your own life is as long as you conceive it to be—and everyone’s always was and always will be. Ecstasy is eternity so what the hell good is term insurance?”

Edmonde thought and thought and finally said, “I cannot question your answer.”

“Tell me,” I insisted. “I have absolutely got to know. Why did she take all her clothes off like that? Clara. To make friends? To show us what? Or prove the point. What point?”

Holly—was that his name?—came to us. “Excuse me,” he said. “I beg your pardon. There is something I must tell the little lady here, if you don’t mind.”

“Help yourself,” I said with an oversized gesture.

He bent to her ear. I turned my head away, politely. Actually, I was placing my ear into a better position for eavesdropping, my perfected habit of a lifetime. Another one I can do is read upside down and backward from anyone’s desk. Very useful, both.

I knew what was about to happen, because it already *had* happened, a few moments earlier.

Holly said, "Competition kills."

I looked to see what effect this would have. Edmonde nodded, in passionate agreement. Tears flooded her eyes as she and Holly shook hands. He bowed to me and went off. Edmonde looked after him, her face full of awed admiration. (Well, I'll be a sonofabitch!) She turned back to me.

"My father," she said, "is wise. You are a fool, and you are not my father."

"Your father knows from nothing," I said. "He sits there. Does he listen? What we have going here in the U.S.A. is a culture mix like never was yet so far in history. And jazz holds it all. Room for everybody, everything. Name a nation."

"The French."

"Hooray. Add black," I said. "And English, too. And African, West Indian. Spanish. Irish. It's all in what they call New Orleans. Jazz is brotherhood. We feel it when we play it. And then it lets even more in. The blood gets richer. And here comes Ory and Bix and Benny and Tram and Vido Musso and blowers from everywhere and it makes it. Help me, Eddie. Please. Listen. I don't understand how black and white got to be the divider. I try but I don't. Certain tensions I can grasp. Male against female. Big against little. Old, young. But how the hell did black and white get mad at each other? We're cheating ourselves out of whoknowswhat locking them out. Why the hell am I the only one who sees this?"

"Stop singing," she said.

I searched for Clara. Ceil and Don had gone to bed, where I found them, but they did not know where she was and went back to sleep, holding hands. Leave her *alone* and she'll go come *home*. It doesn't rhyme, it never has, but I had never noticed it before. Holly and his wife—Mrs. Holly—sat crosslegged on the floor near the piano, looking at each other. They did not move or speak. They looked at each other. They behaved as though watching little movie screens, and every now and then one of them would smile or be shocked or widen eyes in wonder. The famous pianist

(not as famous now as he was when he came in) was back at the piano. Or was he leaving? He had his overcoat on and his hat and scarf and gloves, and played and played.

Mae and Rob are in the kitchen, which is fetchingly situated on a small island, surrounded by a wide beach of confectioner's sugar. I move to them—or is it that they move to me? In either case, I find myself close to them, examining their heads with interest. First, their faces: how come her eyes are gray and his blue? Can it be that they are not really married, as they claim? Next, their hair: here, too, a discrepancy, although not so marked. The difference is a subtle one of shade. I look at her hair, then at his, touch hers, touch his—and say, "The tragic gray of aging, and the tranquil white of age!" We are all meltingly moved.

The little man is there in the kitchen with them. His bright red shoes are now bright green shoes. They all speak to me but the poor things have lost their voices and do not know it, so I pretend that they are making sense. The one thing I do not wish to do is to hurt their feelings, because I have hurt enough feelings in my time and my time is up and I have not yet found Clara and if I lose her no one will ever trust me with a girl again.

I look into every cupboard and closet and into the oven and the garbage can and the row of canisters: Flour, Salt, Sugar, Clara. There. I take the top off the Clara one and find it empty. I shout her name into it and hear the two well-known stomping bars which precede the word Chloe in the song of that name. By special permission of the copyright owner. I don't care. I shout, "Clara!" again. The same music. The next time I shout the name I cannot help singing it to the tune and someone laughs. I have made a fool of myself.

Clara sits beside the famous pianist (he is unknown now) and I am yelling, or, rather, singing, and we keep it up: *Bom-pah bom-pah bom-pah bah bah bah*—"Claa-rah!" *Bom-pah bom-pah bom-pah bah bah bah*—"Claa-rah!" On and on. Why doesn't he go on with the rest of the song? I hope he doesn't because I don't know the words. He won't. His needle is stuck. So is mine. *Bom-pah bom-pah bom-pah*

bah bah bah—"Claa-rah!" But she refuses to look up. I want to move to her but the way is barred. There is no getting through. I wish I could. What was all that I had told Ceil? Within a within a. Yes, but within a what? I'll think of it in a minute. A Clara within a Clara within a Clara. That's not it, but it's better than it. Go home, I tell myself. Go home before it is too late.

I am with Edmonde. She crooks a finger at me. Leaning in to listen, I guess what is coming. I am right.

"Competition kills," she says.

There is no justice.

Time moved backward and we were just starting out, on our way to the party after Don had bought the candy.

"I'll drive," I said, and we sped down a pale-blue silk-ribbon highway with the wind blowing hard through the windshield and I thought we'd never get there and we never did. Burma Shave.

I opened my eyes and after I had done so, opened them again. A good trick. I found myself sitting in an armchair, pleasantly numb. Across the room in the L-shaped day beds, Edmonde and Clara slept. Lacy nightgowns protruded. Clean and inviting. The day beds had been converted into night beds. I was fully clothed.

I placed myself at once, checked and verified my age, called the roll of my family, locating each member geographically, and felt awful. I rose slowly and went into the bathroom. I locked the door and began to breathe. Another good trick. I shaved with Don's razor, unlocked the door, showered (hoping all the while that one of them would walk in by mistake), brushed my teeth with a Turkish towel, and—still lonesome—dipped my head into the basin full of ice-cold water several times.

I re-dressed and walked back through the bedroom and out into the dining room. It was dark and light out. Dawn, I surmised.

Mae, wearing an apron, greeted me. Rob sat in a chair under a lamp, reading an evening paper.

“Ready for breakfast?” asked Mae.

“Coffee,” I said. My voice had changed.

She produced it at once and I took it down, boiling.

“Careful,” said her finger, pointing at me.

“Drop that finger!” I roared.

Mae squeaked, startled.

“Easy, boy,” said Rob, without looking up from his paper.
Was I the rearing horse he had admonished?

“What time is it?” I asked, feeling that an accurate answer to this question would solve everything.

“Quarter to six,” said Mae.

“Twelve to,” corrected Rob, looking at a watch he had taken out of his vest pocket and snapped open. My eyes caught the Elk’s tooth hanging from the chain across his vest and it turned my stomach. A dead animal’s molar. Disgusting. I closed my eyes and inflicted further burns with the coffee.

“Am I first up?” I asked, wondering why the question sounded odd. Is that how to say it?

“Well, you none of you went to bed till just before noon,” Rob laughed. “The funniest part was you and that girl playing.”

“Funny?” I asked, vaguely recalling his reference.

“Must’ve been eight A.M.,” he said, “so I locked off the hammers on the piano, but that didn’t keep you from playing it like mad.”

“Me? The piano?” I asked.

“Sure, and the girl was blowing into a saxophone; only it didn’t have any mouthpiece on it. And Clara dancing—now, *that was something!*”

I have touched madness, I thought, and broke into a cold sweat. But it is so easy to go mad. Who needs the help of narcotics? The idea is to go sane. What can you take for *that?*

“Noon, you say?” I asked.

“About that, yeh.”

I had been up all night.

The following day, I made the mistake of telling Woody all about it.

He looked at me with pity until it turned into contempt. He threatened to inform my family and added, "You're not the hophead type, pal, and if you think you are or can turn yourself into, you're in for some rude bumps."

"Don't bust your plumbing," I said. "It was just a try. Charge it up to experience."

"Why don't you swan-dive off the top of the Chrysler Building? That would be an experience, too."

"I've already done that."

Our conversation was taking place in the lobby of the Alvin Theatre during the intermission of *Music in the Air* which we were seeing at a matinée. I had never seen a better show and was transported, but Woody's thoughts were on other things.

"You want to know something about the band?" he asked.

"Our band?"

"Yah. The poor bloody thing is doomed," he said. "I suppose you know that."

"Sure. It's as doomed as any other thing living—but that's got nothing to do with Don or me or a stick of tea."

"No? What then?"

"I think we know without flogging it, Woody. Something keeps us from blending right—consistently, that is."

"You mean me."

"Did I say that?"

"Never mind what you said. I'm more interested in what you meant."

"Woody," I said pleadingly, "I don't want to wrestle with you. You're my friend and I want to keep it that way."

"I don't care to have an idiot for a friend," he said. "It's unsettling."

The lobby buzzer sounded. We started back to our seats. I put my arm across his shoulders.

"Don't worry about me," I said.

"No," he said. "It's all I can do to worry about myself."

. . . . Out in the bedroom, where my wife slept, the alarm clock rang. I started for the bedroom in order to reassure her about my absence when there was a sharp knock at the door. I went to it and opened it. Breakfast.

"Good morning," said the waiter, wheeling it in. "Lousy out."

"Morning," I said, signed the check, and hurried into the bedroom.

"You all right, love?" I asked.

The response was a long babble which I took to be affirmative.

"You sleep?" she asked.

"Oh sure," I replied.

By longstanding common consent we were in the habit of leaving mail and papers aside until after breakfast.

"Hell," said my wife, looking out at the bum day. "And I wanted to walk."

"Maybe clear up," I said automatically.

"No," she forecast, bending to see the sky. She looked at me. "I hope *you* clear up, though."

"I'm okay," I said.

"You just say that. What is it?"

"Couldn't sleep."

"Something? Or just?"

"That damned call I missed yesterday. It set off a whole string of firecrackers in my head. One thing to another. And by this morning—guess where I was?"

"I give up."

"At that marijuana party."

"At what?"

"I've told you. Riverside Drive that time."

"Oh, yes," she said. "I'm not sure I believe much of *that* one."

"Okay," I said. "Just for that, I'm going to keep the weather like this for four days."

We examined the mail. Nothing much. There were a few phone messages. The first one, for me, read: 8:05 A.M. Mr. Wood Rough called.

"Holy jumping!" I exploded. "Look at this!" I handed the message to my wife as though she had written it.

"Well," she said. "Hotels."

"I may pop somebody down there," I said.

She had the messages now and was looking through them.

"Here," she said, handing one back across the table. "Is this what you want?"

This one read: 8:30 A.M. Please call Mr. Lee Woodruff, State 7-3040, Third Floor. Before noon.

I stood up, and sat down, flooded with relief.

"Don't get yourself all worked up, now," I heard.

"No," I said, "but—"

"I know," she said soothingly.

"You mind I try it now?"

"Of course not."

"I could from the bedroom," I suggested.

"Don't be silly."

"No."

I picked up the phone and asked for the number, enunciating carefully. Waiting, I tried to recall Woody's face. Difficult, this, because it was the sort of face that used to change from time to time.

"West Side," said a voice.

"Third floor, please."

"Moment."

What was this? I wondered.

"Third floor, Miss Akawa."

"I want to speak to Mr. Lee Woodruff, please. I'm returning his call."

"Would you spell that, please?"

I did.

"One moment. See if we can find him for you."

I waited and speculated about what this re-contact was going to lead to.

"All right?" asked my wife.

"I don't know," I said. "Sounds a hospital."

A voice hit me then, and I quivered as though I had received a small electric shock.

“Yah?” it said. Woody. He never said Hello. Always Yah. I identified myself.

“Well, bless my penwiper!” he said. “Wait till I pay myself off here.”

“What?”

“I bet myself a pack of filter-tips you wouldn’t call back, so I lose to me.”

“You didn’t leave a number till this morning, Nutsy Fagan.”

There was a long pause before he said, “Good to hear your voice again, Jasper. Such as it is.”

“When can we get together?”

“Well, it’s a question. I’m in a bit of a bind here.”

“Where’s here?”

“Where I am.”

“I know, but where’s that?” I asked.

“Eight twenty South Damen.”

“What is it there?”

“Oh. I’m in the hospital.”

“Oh. That’s what I thought, but I wasn’t sure.”

He laughed. “You sound like you’re worried this may be a touch.”

“No.”

“Well, stop worrying, because that’s just what it is!”

I found this embarrassing and could think of nothing to say.

“You gone, Dad?” he asked.

“No.”

“Can you come see me?”

“Sure, when?”

“Well, the best is from five till seven, but I can get a special if that’s a sweat for you.”

“No, no,” I said. “I can make it. Today?”

“Sure.”

“Tell me again where, will you, Woody?”

“Veterans’ Administration Hospital,” he said. “Eight twenty South Damen Street, D, a, m, e, n. Or maybe it’s Avenue. Anyway. Ask anybody. Third floor, west wing.

There's a kind of a reception hole. I'll be in there waiting."

"Swell," I said. "Can I bring you anything?"

"Sure," he said. "Money."

"Forward to seeing you, Woody."

"Yah," he said.

We rang off.

"He's in the hospital," I told my wife.

"Did he say what?"

"No. I'll have to leave here about four-thirty, I guess. Okay?"

"Of course."

"He's in trouble, all right."

"Well, maybe you can help him."

"I doubt it, but maybe."

I was not prepared for what met me there at five o'clock. The man I had talked with on the phone did not relate to the man I found. On the phone, he had been much as I recalled. Live, flip, tough, sharp. Now here before me stood a pasty-faced wreck who looked, beyond anything else, scared out of his wits. He had a book in his hand: *Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Good Lord, I thought. He's still on it.

We shook hands. His was damp. He was in hospital pajamas and robe. He started to tremble as he saw me, but stopped after we had joined hands. His bleary eyes began to tear. He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. The handkerchief was more nearly black than gray. Woody, who had always been the most fastidious man I knew.

"This'll be okay," he said, leading me to a corner of the reception room. "Nobody ever comes in here. The ones have the visitors are usually the ones can't move. This is a private pavilion for me."

We sat down. He on the wicker sofa against the wall. I on the matching chair facing. The ashtrays on the low table between us had not been emptied for days, and fouled the air.

"You okay there?" he asked.

"Fine."

"How the hell are you? *You* start," he said.

"Well, ups and downs," I said. "But on the whole, all right."

"So I hear. I saw a play of yours. What was the name of it? Pretty good."

"Thanks. How'd you happen to call? I mean wham out of the blue like that?"

"I saw your name in Kupcinet," he said, referring to a local columnist. "So I thought I'd track you down. Just something to pass the time. No. More than that. I've been a long time getting to this certain point and— A break. Just the guy I want to see and he turns up just when I'm ready. One of those things."

"How are you, Woody?"

"Well," he said, spreading his arms, "as you see. All in. I've been on the blink for years, but just lately—all in."

"How long you been here?"

"In the ward?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Hard to say. I'm in and out. It's a routine. I get out and around and when it gets to be too tough on me or on who I'm around with, I check back in here."

"How long Chicago?" I asked.

"Six years," he replied. "I got out of the Army and joined the Navy. Ain't I the one?"

"When was all this?"

"Forty-five," he said. "I was out for a year and bugged to pieces. My playing went off—because nothing to say, I suppose, and *everything* got to be a drag. I couldn't make a postage stamp stick on a letter. You ever get into a mush like that? My shoelaces kept breaking. And shells in the eggs—no matter where I went or how careful. But the worst was the stamps. Wouldn't stick. Finally, I got the full heebies and I went to the main post office and put in a beef. The character just looked at me. I told him. I said, 'Your stamps don't stick.' So he looked them over and took them back and gave me new ones and I stood there—right there in front of him and licked them and tried them and no go."

They would not stick. The fellow was pretty surprised and he just handed me a roll of Scotch Tape and shrugged. There were people behind me and I was beginning to feel balloony so I took the tape and went to a desk and worked it and while I was doing it, I saw this poster. Recruiting for the United States Navy. Well, I've always looked best in blue and in the poster there was a shot of the Navy Band and I figured me, why not? Food, shelter, clothing and all the arrangements—I guess that's the biggest drag in life, no? Arrangements? And they must have their own stamps. That stick. Or a meter. Something. But the main thing and the best—they *think* for you and boy, did I need that!"

"How do you mean—'think for you'?"

"Didn't you notice that in the service? How they train you to not think? Just to do as you're told? Left face. Right face. About face. Right. Right. Right. Left. Left. Right. About. What did you think all that was for? Automatic response. Do it. And I noticed—didn't you?—how after a while it got to be so comfortable. So, right or wrong, that day, standing there in the La Salle Street Post Office, I made up my mind and I sashayed down to the place and I made me a deal. I told them what I did—it happened the kid they had on the table there that day had heard me and knew who I was. So then they gave me the layout and hup, two—I'm in Washington, D.C., and a petty officer is going through the band book with me."

He paused, and closed his eyes, wearily. He began again. "So," he said, "six years later—"

"Wait a second," I interrupted. I laughed. "Aren't you going a little too fast?"

"Why? Didn't you ever see a movie where it says ten years later or twenty? What does that mean? It means that what went between was nothing to talk about. That's my six."

"I know, but what was it like?"

"Playing the book. Rehearse. Play. March. Broadcast. Record. March. Play. Fly. Train. Bus. The President of the United States. Play. Travel. It was okay. And the stamps stuck. Listen, did you ask me all this?"

“Sure.”

“I don’t remember you asking. What the hell am I giving you my long sad for?”

“I’m interested.”

“I’m not.”

“So then you got out,” I prompted.

“Six years. A full hitch. But I was tiring. Physically tiring. And there were some changes in the section and it got to be not so congenial, so I walked. I find I’m glad to do anything and anywhere just so long as the company is congenial. It wasn’t, so I couldn’t. Nineteen fifty-two I came out and everything seemed to be bop. So I gigged around, trying to latch onto it.”

“Where?”

“Everywhere. Here. K.C. Denver. I even bucked Las Vegas. There’s a wild. The first few months, I was really blowing them some sad horn. Could’ve been the big band had pushed it all in. After a while, it started to open up a little and I heard some good boys. And they got me moving. I was on the way nicely. Till, boom, it got to a point and started to go out on me and I went through the whole bit. Stiff chops. Soft lung. It was like my body didn’t want to play and my head couldn’t make it. I was in plenty of trouble and I found out something, Jasper. People are kind, but they’re not patient. You ever notice that?”

“No, I can’t say I have.”

“Watch it. You’ll see how I’m right. Very little patience around. Consider it. A guy’ll go to play a benefit, okay? For charity. He gives up his time and talent and there’s no question of money—but—don’t keep him waiting twenty minutes when he gets there!”

“You’re way over me, Woody.”

“Patience. Isn’t that what we’re talking about? That’s what nobody had with me when I started my crackup. They were sympathetic and nice about it and commiseration flowed like tap water—but nobody much wanted to be bothered. A man in nothing but trouble is a bore. I had to go home, finally. I was sick and starving. Well, that was a mis-

take. My mother was gone by then—and my father wished I was instead. I was his big disappointment. The minute I saw him, I blamed him for every damn thing that had gone wrong with me—not him, personally, you understand, but he represented the whole way I was taught and trained—the way that had left me absolutely unequipped. Somewhere along the line—no matter who—you're supposed to forgive your parents. I never could. Could be I was brought up for the wrong century. That was my trouble. We got stoned together one night—the old man and I—and we both said it all and then some. We stood there—he on his mountain and me on mine—and the Grand Canyon between us—and yelling our misunderstandings across it. The next day I left. Pride. I may not look it, but I've got quite a load of it. So that was when I made the big boner. Paris. Wouldn't you know I'd have to cross an ocean to get really put down?" He looked into himself, and respecting the moment, I said nothing. Presently, he continued. "Nineteen fifty-two. Two things decided me. Three. One was that Edmonde. You remember her? *Madame?*"

"Sure," I said.

"Unfinished business," he said. "Second, I thought maybe a change of air. And the last, face it, was practical. I'd heard that the kind of stuff they'd stand for over there was somewhere in my range, the way I was playing then. So all things taken all in all, I packed two bags and got a loan, and took a slow boat."

I tried to place this in time. Where was I in 1952? What month?

"When in fifty-two?" I asked.

"Winter of," he replied.

But I had been there too! Well, it's a big city. What did he mean 'boner'?

"Oh," I said.

"I was right about two of the three, anyhow. The change of place was dandy. What a town! It's *made* for blowing a horn. The space—and the *space!* You can *see* things. You walk in a street and you feel like a *man*. Around here and

even more in New York, I'm the cousin of a cockroach. So the place was a yes. I looked up Mezz and he steered me, and Ernie Anderson was there, one of the all-time best, and he planted me right away in a nice serious little *boîte* where you didn't have to blow the top of your head off. Every once in a while, I'd see a face I knew or that knew mine. Tell you who came in one night. Bushkin. He got on the stool and we had a good long digback. They made a neon of my name and I was in business. So that part of it was all right. But the third thing, the big thing, *that conked*. God damn. You know how they say time—how it heals? Maybe. Fifty-two. That's five years. A lot of years and months and days. But when I think of how I had it damn near made—right there in my hands and couldn't hold onto it I—" He stopped as his throat contracted. His face flushed, and he looked for a moment as though he were going to cry but he did not. He lit a cigarette instead, and added, "I better get off this before they come in and see me and send me up two floors to the PN ward."

I guessed that this meant Psychoneurotic.

"What the hell happened?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," he said. "But not now. I hope this isn't our last."

"Of course not."

"Well, then," he said. "Let's get down to it."

"Sure."

He smiled as he reached over and grasped my knee.

"Now, kiddo, I *know* how things are not as good with you as they might be—and about the murderous tax setup and about how right now is a bad time with liquid cash a little short and about what's all tied up and I *know* all about how you've got to take it up with your business manager and your tax counselor and your lawyer and your wife and your mother—I *know* all that, but I need five hundred bucks and don't ask me if I could manage with two for the time being because if I could manage with two, I'd ask for two. How about it? Yes or no."

"Well, that's quite a spill, Woody."

"Uh-uh," he sang warningly. "Here we go." He addressed the wall and asked, "Why won't they ever just say yes or just say no? I wrote *Madame*—you know, Edmonde—an ask last year. Long letter back. I shook it out. Nothing. So I didn't read it. I'm allergic to explanations. Just a yes or a no is what I want."

"I'm saying both, Woody. Yes *and* no. Now that's pretty generous, you've got to admit."

"Yah."

"I'll do it," I said, "if you promise to pay it back."

"When?"

"When you can."

"Deal," he said, with a gulp of relief.

"Because the fact is—all your teasing aside—I can afford to lend it to you, all right. But to give it to you is a press."

"The thing is," he said, "I want to get out of here."

"I don't blame you."

"And I need some dental work, here, in the front." He opened his mouth and pulled aside his lip to show me two broken teeth. I said nothing, but he replied to my thought. "Yah, sure. They'd do it here, only I don't want them to."

"I know."

"Also. I'd like to pick up an instrument and see if it can play me."

"You've got no horn?"

"I've got 'em in every other hock shop in the Loop. But I'm going to try for a new one—for new luck." His pumped-up optimism collapsed in a blown-out sigh and he continued in half voice, on the verge of resignation. "I could *use* some, wouldn't you say so from looking at me?"

"You look okay."

"I can get my room back, but I want to pay up some back and put down some advance. Turning point," he mumbled.

"Hope so," I said.

"Did you bring a checkbook?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That's my boy."

As I made out the check, I kept wishing that he would not watch me.

"It isn't that I *need* the money, you understand," he said. "It's just that I'd feel like such a goddamn fool in case I got held up!"

We tried to laugh at it.

I handed him the check and asked, "How long before you can leave?"

"With a little graft, tomorrow. Without, next week."

"Make it tomorrow, why don't you? We'll have dinner, late. Maybe go hear some noise."

"Who's around?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'll find out."

"You look pretty good yourself," he said. "What do you do? Live right?"

"Try."

Half an hour later, I found myself walking in the newly built world of West Side Chicago. The immediate presence of these structures without history made looking backward difficult, for some reason. Still, I tried. I felt that I had to while the impact of the rediscovery of Woody was fresh. Who was it who said that although life is lived forward, it can only be understood backward?

I wanted to piece together what little I had gleaned from Woody this afternoon. There would be more later, but even what he had volunteered today was useful to my purpose. He and Edmonde. Why had I never looked her up? Since the last time, I mean. The last time. That was something. I had said that I would never forget it, but I *had* forgotten it, or at least not thought of it in years. How did it relate to Woody and Edmonde in 1952? What *was* that? He would tell me. I walked and walked in the slowly darkening new world and remembered an old one. How had I arrived at that time and place? The Gare de l'Est, Paris; May 25, 1945; 10:30 A.M. The last time I had seen Edmonde. No. The last time but one. . . .

. . . . It had begun in London. There was a cellar joint off the Haymarket, around the corner from Prunier's, called the French Club. Bob Capa had taken me there. As one of *Life* Magazine's principal photographers, he had been in London for some time and, in his Hungarian way, had made it his hometown. He knew all the spots. The French Club was one of the best. It featured gray sandwiches and dubious drinks but also constantly new phonograph records brought from the States by the Air Force guys, and a rare exchange of information. Conversations were often made up almost entirely of names; lists of names with facts and rumors to match. It was possible in a few hours there to learn a great deal about who was where. Capa, who had many French friends, usually insisted upon at least part of every possible evening there. I knew hardly anyone in France, but from time to time, I would mention Edmonde's name. Never a flicker. Until late one night, when a group of FFI huskies, recently arrived—by what means no one inquired—were getting tanked fast on pink gins. I spoke Edmonde's name and one of them lit up in recognition. He pantomimed jazz by simulating the playing of a trumpet, drum and piano in quick succession. We were connected, however imperfectly. As he spilled what he knew, I sought Capa's help as interpreter. I could have used a more efficient one, since Capa's English was not always comprehensible to me—and in all this noise—

“Where is she, do you know?” I asked through Capa.

The great French shrug. More excited talk.

“He don't know her,” said Capa, and added his favorite English word. “Useless.”

“Sure he does,” I insisted.

“All right, you talk.”

“No, wait a second, he *must*. He did all that music.”

Capa contacted him again. They both talked at once for a long time, then Capa broke out of it with, “Ah!”

“Yes?” I asked.

“He knows the husband.”

The way in which I echoed, “Husband?” must have had a

pathetic-comic sound, because it made Capa laugh for half an hour. During that time, however, I did get him to make the fellow spell out the husband's name. At least it was a clue. The landings were imminent and the man would be someone to look for if I ever got to Paris. I wrote the name, Jean-Pierre Kov, on the inside of a matchbook cover, put it into my wallet, carefully, and zipped that into my pocket. Kov? Did I have that right?

Checking my melted money the following morning, I came upon the little piece of cardboard and had no idea what it or the name represented. Such had been the night. Later, I remembered. I copied the name into an address book and also Scotch-taped a slip to the back of my mess card. Jean-Pierre Kov, E's husb, it read.

From that time on, I would mention both names, his and hers, whenever I got into one of those round-robinns at the French Club. It helped to humanize the war for me. The liberation of France became a symbol for the liberation of Edmonde. In addition, I had better confess, it set me apart somewhat from the run of characters. I was a man with old and intimate friends in France. I *belonged* in the French Club. I came to mention both names automatically.

"Kov?" repeated the English-speaking young Frenchman. "He's a gude frenofminel!"

"He is?" I said, astonished. I had hit a bull's-eye without looking at the target.

"But of course. You know *him*?"

"No," I said. "His wife."

"But he is not *married*. You say Jean-Pierre Kov?"

"Yes."

"No. No wife."

I wanted to laugh myself for half an hour, but Capa was not there that night, so there was no point.

"You're sure?" I checked.

"Oh, yes. He has with one English girl. Very gude."

"What're you talking about? Where?"

"Here. He is with the Free Radio, you know?"

"In London?"

"Oh, yes."

"Have a drink," I said. "Everybody."

I thought it best to go there directly the following morning and not bother with the phone. I found it on Portland Place, just off Regent's Park, overcrowded and understaffed. I asked for him, and explained that it was personal.

"Captain Kov?" said the receptionist. "Doubt he's in. Do sit down. Won't be a moment."

I waited. Since I was at this time a lieutenant, I hoped that the difference in our ranks was not going to complicate matters.

"Well," she said, after completing a call. "You're in luck. My word! He's hardly ever in this time of the morning. Straight through there, if you please. Just keep peeping into the cubicles."

"Which one? See, I don't know Captain Kov."

"Oh, don't you? Pity. Well, you can't miss him. He's the madly attractive one."

I made my way down the cardboard hallway. As it happened, he was watching for me. We shook hands and examined one another. He was certainly "madly attractive" as advertised by the all-eyes receptionist. I would have guessed him anywhere to be French and upper class. He was in uniform, but it had not come from the Oxford Street PX, that was certain.

"Personal?" he asked guardedly as we sat down on two folding chairs in his cluttered cubicle.

"Yes," I replied. "I used to know Edmonde Roussel."

He reacted sharply, got up from the chair, came around and half sat on his desk.

"So?" he said, softly. "When?"

"In the States. Years ago. Maybe ten."

"I see."

"I used to be in jazz. A musician."

He straightened up and executed a wide gesture of understanding, using both his arms, his shoulders, his face and hair. A sound went with it as well: "Aahaah!"

"How is she?" I asked.

"I have no informations," he replied solemnly. "We are out of touch since three years."

"You mean direct touch, I suppose."

"Yes. I have many bad rumors, but nothing sure."

"Bad like what?"

"She was taken, maybe. In forty, I went but she could not. Marseilles to Lisbon, then here. She went too, but elsewhere and I suppose she has hided. But since one year I have heard bad."

"But not sure?" I pressed.

"No, not sure."

We sat and digested one another's tidbits. I wondered how to go about finding out what I wanted to know. ("When in doubt, tell the truth."—Mark Twain)

"Listen," I said. "There's something I wish you'd clear up for me."

"Yes?"

"Well, one man I met—at the French Club—"

"Yes, I know it."

"Said that she was—is—your wife."

He was silent. I went on. "Then another one told me that—well, no, that she wasn't."

He returned to his seat, behind his desk, re-establishing the formal shape of our interview.

"And how is this your business?" he asked.

"She's a friend," I said.

"I find you rude," he said.

"Sorry."

He continued, quicker and louder, "Sometimes it has charm, this naïve American fresh. And sometimes, no."

"Maybe you didn't quite understand me, Captain."

"My English is excellent!"

"It certainly is—and all I asked was is Eddie your wife. Why's that fresh?"

"Eddie?" he asked with a pained expression.

"Edmonde."

"Eddie!" he crunched out. "God!"

"It was just—"

The phone on his desk rang.

"Excuse me," he said, and picked it up. After a few seconds, I realized that he was sitting there, holding the phone, and looking at me. I gathered, suddenly, that his last words had had a second meaning.

I got up and said, "Oh. Thanks," and left, closing the door.

Walking away, I came upon a rare bright sun which seemed to illuminate my thoughts. How had I offended the man? If she were his wife, there would have been no cause for such behavior. If she were not, he would have said so. What had ticked him off, obviously, was some complication in their relationship, something unresolved and highly personal which turned any inquiry or comment into a painful intrusion. I let my imagination range over the possibilities, but it came upon nothing to grasp. Within the hour, I was up to my eyes in problems of my own and thought no more about it.

Sometime later (I cannot compute the interval, even approximately, since that stretch of time relates not to clocks or calendars—but to events; that is to say, a month of waiting was shorter than a day of action), I ran into the captain again. I had forgotten his name and was unable to introduce him other than in a mumble to Capa who was with me, and so, I am sure, I seemed rude again. He was with a young lady who was so actressy that it was clear she was no actress. We all had a drink together, at the Connaught bar, and a plover's egg apiece and talked of absolutely nothing for half an hour, right through the nine o'clock news on BBC. By the end of this time, I had worked up a fierce dislike for him and his opinions and his haircut and his fancy uniform and his fancier girl.

"Why do I hate that guy?" I asked Capa, later.

"So simple," he answered. "Because he hates you!"

Our third encounter was arranged, and by him. He phoned me early one morning and asked if we could meet. Breakfast meetings were fast becoming the fashion, but I had not yet been able to bring myself to face one, so I declined and suggested eleven at a pub near his headquarters.

It was one of those places where it was always night and where anyone but a regular was looked upon as a spy. We sat in a corner. I wanted some coffee, but when he ordered coffee, I said tea.

He took a hell of a pause before beginning, then said, "I am sorry." After which, he paused again.

Finally I said, "What about?"

"That we have not hit together, I and you."

"So am I. How'd you get my number, by the way?"

"Mr. Capa," he said. "My friend knows him. Iren-ie." He pronounced her name in the British way as though he had been carefully coached.

"I'll *bet* she does," I said.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"And poor Edmonde and I. It is a subject so difficult for me."

"Of course."

"When you came to me and you have talked of it—of her. I was unprepared, you understand?"

"Sure."

"You have asked so suddenly something for which I have not the answer."

This bloke is off his track, I thought.

"Never mind," I said, which seemed to cover everything.

"Is she my wife? Yes and no."

"I see," I said, in a fog.

"Yes, because we are married since nineteen and thirty-seven. But no, because we have decided to go apart, just before the catastrophe. We are apart. *But* in the flat, *but* apart, for one year."

"I don't get it."

"It was complicated to arrange. A divorce is not so simple as in America."

"Oh, is it so simple in America?"

"It isn't?"

"I don't know," I said. "They don't seem to handle them at the A. and P."

He looked at me blankly, and went on. "Suddenly the collapse and ourselves did not seem important. I had to go at once and she was to save what could and join with me, but this plan has failed, because everything has failed. Soon, no telephone, telegraph, post. Nothing. So I know nothing of her, or she of me or what is."

"The thing I'm wondering," I said, "is how come you called me this morning?"

"I have wakened you? I apologize."

"No, you didn't," I said. "But why today especially?"

"Because I have been thinking," he said. "You are a friend of her. The only one I know, it seems. So maybe you can help. Help her," he added as an afterthought.

"How?"

"The Americans. They have good services of intelligence and liaison with International Red Cross and so forth. Soon will come the landings, eh?"—he traced the D-day date on the damp table and glanced at me slyly to see if I was properly impressed by his importance. I was not. He continued, "And will be a chaos time. Then counts influence and contacts—what you say connections, yes? Because so soon as possible, it will be well to arrange all, no?"

"Go ahead," I said, beginning to sense his callous motive.

"So perhaps if we can be in touch and help one the other and exchange informations—will be good."

"Good for *you*," I said.

"For *all*," he said with a knowing, between-ourselves smile. I disliked him more than ever, this patently selfish operator who had eaten all four of the biscuits we had been served.

"Look, mister," I said, the combative usage being lost on him but satisfying to me, "my interest in Edmonde is strictly old times' sake." I thought of saying more, but had begun to notice a pompous note in my voice and thought it best to stop.

"Of course," he said. "But of course!"

He looked at his wrist watch and, not to be outdone, I

looked at mine. He slapped me on the back, once, before we parted.

From that morning on, he phoned me regularly. What I mean, regularly. Every Wednesday morning at nine sharp. He could hardly have displayed a more irritating symptom than this methodical one. I classed him as inhuman along with my cousin who copulates on Friday nights only; and with that Executive Creep in Beverly Hills who plays with his children from seven to seven-twenty every evening.

I heard that he was calling Capa, as well, but on *Thursday* mornings at nine. Whatever we may have thought of him or of his ways, he was succeeding in keeping in touch.

One night, he had us to dinner at the flat he shared with the three-syllabled Irene. With singular power and purpose, he had transformed the Kensington dwelling into a typical French bourgeois home; and the girl into a slavish inferior. She may have thought that she was his mistress, but he treated her as his wife—to the extent, I later learned, of having a mistress elsewhere.

We talked of Edmonde and of her possible fate. Capa generally came by excellent information, and had ferreted out the almost certain report that Edmonde, along with a large contingent of other Frenchwomen, had been sent to the labor camp at Ravensbrück. We had begun to forward International Red Cross parcels whenever possible, but without much confidence in their safe arrival.

After the best meal I had had in a year, I expressed my gratitude to Irene and complimented her.

Kov responded. "Thank you."

The brandy made me say, "I was speaking to *her*."

"Yes," he said, "I know. But, after all, a woman is what her man makes her, no?"

I looked at Irene to see if she was going to take this. She took it, all right, and went off to the kitchen to clean up. We sat, blowing cigar smoke at one another, and talking big. Strategy and all that.

The success of the evening softened Kov, and he surprised me by asking a long series of questions about Edmonde in

America. I answered some of them. I asked if she was still interested in jazz.

"No, no," he said. "I have taken all this imbecile thing from her head."

"That so? How?"

"It was droll," he said. "It is how we have met. I am journalist, you see, very good, but is hard to make enough of money in this way. So all of us—good journalists—we make odd jobs. To write for the Radio Monte Carlo, and to make books for bicyclists and theatre people, and speeches for deputies and once I heard from one I know that some young lady—of money—looks for someone to help with a book about the modern music. I don't know of this but, you know—for money. So we meet and she tells me her plan—to trace the story of one music and to show international aspects and so on. French Guinea to New Orleans to New York to Paris and so. Stupid, you know? But to go about and listen and be paid was agreeable and I have done it and soon we are together and after—married, and then I have told her, enough of this exaggerated jazz, and I have put it from the house. I have made her to become more for our apartment and in the country near Chantilly. Also we have our good villa in Ischia. And to guard the three and manage was enough to do with no jazz, hey? Also we have tried to have a child. We have tried both times, but not good. It was lost. And we began the difficulties."

He would have said more, being in wine, but, in desperation, I stopped him by asking his personal opinion of General Leclerc. I had no interest whatever in this, but could not bear to hear any more about the jarring misalliance and the slow extinguishment of that lovely, lively spirit I had once known.

Irene joined us. I introduced the party to stingers and prepared a fine batch. Jean-Pierre (as we were now addressing him) objected at first to adding anything as lady-like as white crème de menthe to good brandy, but after being prevailed upon to sample two or three small glasses, he began

to approve the formula and we all wound up the evening at the Milroy, dancing with strangers.

Another lapse, and our next meeting of any significance took place in Paris, some weeks after the liberation. He looked me up at the Scribe and told me the latest. Capa's information had been verified. Now all depended upon the progress of what remained of the war. Kov had been transferred to a forward information service and was in and out of Paris. He had reclaimed his apartment on the Quai Voltaire and had installed Irene there.

"How the hell'd you manage that?" I asked.

He smiled shyly, and winked. "You know the story. Connections."

"Oh, sure," I said. "I thought only we were supposed to be the experts at that."

He laughed and I bought another drink.

Then came the day.

The day began the night before. I was asleep and the phone rang and rang. I knew that it could not possibly be for me. The Scribe phones, manned by truculent children, had a way of ringing meaninglessly at all hours. Further, the night was cold and the phone was on the wall near the door far across the room. Hell with it. It rang and rang but the awake half of me convinced the asleep half that it was all taking place in a room across the hall. After a time, the rings became feeble, and finally they gave up.

The loud knocking which followed—almost immediately, it seemed—could not be explained away. I sat up, turned on a light and shouted, "Yes?"

A voice, muffled, responded, and the knocking stopped. I swung out of bed and went to the door.

"Who do you want?" I said through it, rubbing myself against the cold.

"Jean-Pierre!" said a voice. For a short moment I thought it a mistake, until I matched the voice with the man. The sense of urgency brought me awake with a start, not only awake but surging with energy. I unlocked the door and

opened it. Jean-Pierre came in. I turned on more lights and got into my raincoat.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Something,” he said, and sat down.

“What?”

“Do you have a—please—some little whiskey?” he asked.

“A little,” I said, and got out the emergency pint.

I rinsed a glass and poured him a drink. He sent it down and said, “Thank you.”

“What is it?”

“I am not sure. If I knew—good or bad—I could live it. But this—”

So far he had told me nothing, but I knew that the upset was concerned in some way with Edmonde. Otherwise, he would not have sought me out. I waited, having learned to take time with overwrought people.

“It may be,” he continued, “she is coming tomorrow.”

“Here?” I asked.

“No one is sure. Only that many women, some from Ravensbrück, are being sent.”

“How?”

“By the train. It will come to the Gare de l’Est nine o’clock.”

I picked up my watch from the night table and squinted at it. Six-fifteen.

“Where’d you get all this?” I asked.

“Capa sent the message by Totsi. He is someplace near there and Totsi came back with his films and called me.”

“That Capa,” I said. “What a man.”

“I have tried to check but no one knows nothing. Or they don’t tell.”

“Look,” I said. “Don’t count on it. She might or might not be. You know these things. Capa didn’t say for sure.”

“You will come with me?”

“Sure,” I said. “I’d like to.”

“You have some transportation?”

“No, but I think I can scare something up. Palmer had a jeep last night if he hasn’t lost it.”

“Where is he?”

“I think at the Chatham across the way.”

“Can we go?”

“All right.”

He stood at the window, looking into the nothingness of the dark courtyard while I dressed. What should I carry in addition to the usual? I wanted to be efficient. A box of K-rations? Chocolate? What there was left of the liquor? Undecided, I stuffed everything into a musette bag, plus a sweater and a scarf and a first-aid kit. We went down.

The Scribe was principally a press billet and some of the more permanent guests had chipped in to provide twenty-four-hour snack service. We took advantage of this windfall and loaded up on croissants and coffee. I put a few oranges into the sack.

We went across to the Chatham to look for Palmer, and found him sitting in the lobby. He was delighted to see us. Palmer was small, young, crewcut, and eager. He was possessed of that ability to be in two places at once; where needed, and where wanted. Multiplied by a few thousand, he won the war. He was the Army's extra inch.

“What's the matter with you?” I asked. “Can't sleep?”

“It's my dreams,” he explained. “They bore me!”

Despite the moment, Jean-Pierre laughed at this.

“Have you got a jeep?” I asked.

“Right here,” he replied, and pulled a rotor out of his pocket. Removing the rotor was the common way of protecting a jeep from being appropriated.

“Can you stick with us this morning?” I asked.

“Until two P.M.,” he said, “I'm yours, wheels and all.”

All at once, Irene appeared. She had tracked Jean-Pierre to the Scribe, and to here. He took her aside and they conferred. She was clearly on the offensive and he was doing all he could to placate her. He took her by the shoulders and she kicked him. He tried to shush her and she slapped him several times, hard. She was out of control, in tears, and her prettiness had been smeared. She went for his face, in an

attempt to scratch his eyes, but nicked his ear instead. Still, he remained calm and tried to quiet her.

As I considered the possibility of entering into this private quarrel, Palmer said, "Yow! What a king-size heel he must be!"

"He?" I repeated, astonished. I had thought that he was behaving like a gent.

"Sure he," insisted Palmer. "Otherwise, why would he take that much blast from her?"

He had a point and I saw it.

"Should we interfere, do you think?" I asked.

"We better," said Palmer. "She's got him outnumbered. Let's suggest food."

"We've had breakfast," I said.

"Lieutenant," said Palmer, "your trouble is you're logical."

We went over to the battlers. Irene was dissolved, crying against the wall, exhausted and miserable.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Let's have breakfast," said Palmer, cheerily. "Let's all have breakfast!"

Jean-Pierre replied to me, "She wants me not to go, or if yes, she wants to come, too."

"No good," I said.

"You talk to her," he pleaded.

I noticed his bleeding ear and decided against it. In any case, Palmer was already leading her into the dining room, which had just opened.

Food made us all more sensible and we discussed the matter, calmly. Irene insisted that she wanted only to be helpful, that women understood women. Jean-Pierre agreed but felt that it would be best if he could handle it alone at first. I began to argue passionately on his side and wound up on hers.

Palmer settled everything by saying, "I'll get the jeep. It holds five."

We drove slowly through the gently waking streets of the world's most beautiful city. Palmer had the radio on, softly. "Daddy," it sang, "I want a diamond ring, bracelets, every-

thing . . ." On the back seat, Jean-Pierre was smoking and Irene was repairing the damage which her tears had recently done to her face.

"What's your hunch?" asked Palmer.

"Negative," I said.

"Mine, too."

We noticed that the sidewalks were becoming more and more crowded. Men and women and children in a thin stream, all moving in a single direction, the same as ours. Did it mean anything, or was it only that it was getting later? When we had passed a familiar restaurant, L'Ecu de France, we saw the station ahead and the answer to our question about the gathering crowd.

The station was a huge lump of sugar and we were all ants going toward it, overwhelming it, following one another. Palmer pulled the jeep to one side and we watched, looking at one another in wonder.

As Jean-Pierre had explained, it had been impossible to acquire any official information. There had been nothing in the papers, nothing on the radio, no *affiches*. How then, had the details relating to time and place been disseminated?

Palmer parked the jeep, locked it, and removed the rotor—but on second thought, decided to stay with the car and wait for us.

"It isn't that I don't trust people," he explained, "it's just that people are crooks!"

Jean-Pierre, Irene, and I made our way to the station.

"If we get separated," I suggested, "remember where the jeep is and check back there, okay?"

"Right-o," said Irene.

The crowd was noisy. No one was silent. Questions and answers filled the air. Chunks of bread were being passed around, drinks were being sold, pockets were being picked, infants were being fed by breast and bottle. Relationships to the awaited were interesting to speculate upon; husbands, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends.

I waited with Irene while Jean-Pierre went to try for some

late information. The few station officials, after having been mercilessly besieged, had retreated and had locked themselves into their offices. Nothing was listed on any board. No announcements were made.

As the hour of nine approached, the tension mounted to a near-unbearable pitch. No one had any idea as to which of the many tracks would be employed and so all of them were lined with waiting people. Small groups rushed suddenly from one track to another on nervous premonitions.

Nine o'clock came and went and the atmosphere remained taut; but now it was nearly nine-thirty and a sense of all gone wrong began to pervade the station. The tension went slack. People sat on the ground. A man was crying, comforted by a woman. Some began to leave, numb with frustration. A let-down. A cruel false hope. The buzz of excitement turned into a whine of disappointment before it died away to a funereal quiet.

We all went back to the jeep to see if Palmer had heard anything. He had not, but in our absence had acquired a basket full of fruit, a pink umbrella, two bottles of champagne, and a small dog. Scrounging was a war-time art, but no one before had, to my knowledge, raised it to the level of being able to practice it standing still. It was as though the bank had brought the money to the robber's house. We ate some of the fruit and drank one bottle of the wine and at about ten-fifteen decided to join the slow-departing, defeated crowd. Palmer opened the hood, and was in the process of replacing the rotor when it happened.

A single, long, high-pitched blast of a train whistle. I had never heard such a sound, signifying warning but containing, too, exultation. It struck us into immobility along with everyone else in sight. I cannot say how long it was that the scene remained in this frozen position.

At a given moment, as though startled by a pistol signal, the crowd turned and ran toward the station, screaming. Or was that sound the continuing whistle cry? Or were both combined? We ran, too—all except Palmer—trying to stay together. Why were so many of the runners falling down?

We stopped to help some of them to their feet, until it became clear that this could be a full-time job.

The train was approaching slowly. The crowd surged first to both sides of its oncoming route, and then onto the track itself. The train blasted its whistle more furiously than ever, trying to clear the track. The station officials appeared, far too late to be effectual. Bells of all sorts were ringing. The crowd pushed in all directions, barely making room for the train. With what seemed like a single, collective gasp, the crowd stopped moving, and stood stunned and silent at its first sight of the train's cargo.

Leaning in clusters out of every window, standing packed in every possible opening, were the returning, returned Frenchwomen. They were covered rather than clothed, they were haggard and skeletal, and their skin tones were not at all the color of flesh. Most of them had no more than newly grown fuzz on their heads, having so recently been subjected to shavings. From a distance, they might have seemed like a bunch of little boys returning from summer camp—except for those gray faces. The silence was overpowering, even the train had stopped its screaming. There appeared to be nothing but eyes in sight. Thousands of shocked, yet piercing eyes on the platform. Hundreds of hungry, searching eyes moving slowly toward us. Silence, in which even the far-off city sounds grew still. There must have been *some* recognition—surely a connection must have been made by *someone* on the train and one on the ground—but there was no sound.

At last we heard the first break—a rhythmic, hoarse chant which slowly and laboriously found its way to a melody.

"Allons enfants de la pat-ri-ie!"

It was "La Marseillaise" being sung—but only by the women on the train. It must have occurred to some on the platform to join in, but not one did. Only those wretched wrecks found somewhere, in what was left of them, sufficient spirit to salute their land and their compatriots. Gaining spirit from one another and gathering strength, they began now at—"L'étandard sanglant est levé!"—to sing out lustily.

Around me, some wept and others—unable to bear the

sight of naked, bleeding courage—turned away. No one joined in.

The anthem ended vibrantly and echoed through the station's caverns. Slowly and delicately, so as not to break the spell of the spun-glass moment, a movement began. Two movements: the first—a slow, tidal surge toward the cars; the second—a tentative, dreamlike disembarkation. As the feet of the women touched and reverently trod the platform, a path was opened for them to walk, to search or to be found. From afar, a cry. From another direction, a scream. More and more now—one added to another, resulting in a roar, an undisciplined cheer, a shout of victory and somewhere within the chord, a promise of vengeance.

I suppose that I would not have seen her, or having seen her, would have failed to recognize her, had it not been for the fact that she behaved in a most unusual way. She did nothing. She stood at a window of the wooden car. At first, hers had been only one in a sea of faces; now it was alone, framed in the window, because she did not, or was unable to, move. It was she, beyond a doubt, although I should never have known her were not all of my forces and energies of memory concentrating on the recollection of her face: its size and shape, the dimensions and disposition of its features. So it was that as the negative image in my mind overlaid the positive vision before me, a click of focus occurred. I knew the face then even though it was a caricature. Short bristles of hair in patches, wasted flesh beneath, purple sores on a yellowish skin, a shapeless nose in collapse, a virtually toothless mouth beyond bloodless lips—nothing left intact but the eyes. Edmonde's eyes. Eddie's. They roamed the platform, wide and worried—did they meet mine? Just then? Just there? If they did, it was without the least flicker of recognition.

Throughout the crush, despite the push and pull, Irene and Jean-Pierre and I had managed to stay together, holding on to one another. Now, as I looked about, I saw Jean-Pierre transformed and suddenly aged, as though by a skillful make-up expert, staring at his wife. His jaw was tightly clenched

and he was seeing far more than was apparent to our eyes. Edmonde saw him and wearily lifted a bony, dirty arm in salute.

He moved toward her, slowly and resolutely. Irene and I stood still, holding hands. Jean-Pierre reached the car and held up his hand. Edmonde reached down and grasped it. As she did so, Jean-Pierre pressed his forehead against the car, his arm raised high above his head and his hand held by Edmonde.

The curious pose held my attention until I felt myself being pulled away. I looked around and saw the back of Irene moving toward the exit. Holding fast to my hand, her long, sharp fingernails pressing deeply into my palm, she squirmed and forced us both through the crowd with difficulty. The people who composed it were getting out of hand and dealing with one another as if they were all inanimate obstacles. At length we reached a comparatively open area in the station. She let go my hand and turned to me, full of qualms.

“Help me!” she implored.

“How?” I asked, studying my palm to see if she had drawn blood. Almost.

“Think. I don’t know what on earth. Can he take us—the lad with the jeep—”

“Palmer.”

“Palmer. Can he take us and let them find some way? That would give me a bit of a chance at the flat—”

“What chance?”

“To clear out. But no—no, then he wouldn’t—how would he know to take her there? Would he? But if he waits for them—Palmer waits—how can we possibly get there before them?”

She was rambling, but I caught the thread of her plan. I recall being not at all surprised. It was a situation in which only one course of action is possible. When a place catches fire, you leave it—whether you are wise or foolish, selfish or unselfish, sensitive or a clod.

“Come on,” I said, and took her arm. We headed for

Palmer and the jeep. On the way, I sketched a scheme and decided to see it through no matter what.

Not long before, in the line of work, I had advised an actor to attack his part in a forthright way, pointing out that in human communication, a positive wrong is often better than a negative right. I would follow my own counsel. For once.

At the jeep, I said to Palmer, "Now listen—and don't go sleepy on me and don't ad lib. Just do it!"

"Do what? You haven't said yet, Major."

"What?"

"I just promoted you. I like your face."

"Come on, now. Pay attention. Here it is. He'll be out in a few minutes. Get it through to him that it's okay to go to *his* apartment—get that?—that he should take his wife to *his* apartment."

"Got it."

"But! Are you listening?"

"How can I help it?"

"Not right away. Give us an hour at least, more if possible. Stall. Take them to eat somewhere, or get lost and have a breakdown—go to The Chatham first—I don't know. Just so we have time to get squared away there."

"Okay."

"Don't say okay," I barked. "Tell me what you're going to do."

He rattled it off. "Wait here. Confidentially tell him okay apartment. Take them there but not for a couple hours. Sir."

"Palmer," I said, "remind me to run you for President."

"I'd settle for Pfc." he replied. He had never been attached to a unit long enough to acquire a single stripe.

"But how will we—?" began Irene.

"C'mon, honey. I'll show you. Metro."

"What?"

"The subway—the, oh hell, what do *they* call it, Palmer?"

"The underground," he said.

"Do you know how?" Irene asked me.

"Oh, sure. I'm a power down there." I shook hands with Palmer. "So long, little man, I'm counting on you."

"To the death," he said.

Irene, obviously impressed by the man of action I had become, took my arm and we walked swiftly to the Gare de l'Est metro station, sharing a cigarette on the way.

"Can you get me back to England?" she asked.

"I don't know. How'd you get here in the first place?"

"Civilian employee SHAEF, actually," she said.

"Well, can't they get you back?"

"Who?"

"The ones who brought you."

"They don't know I'm here," she said. "John brought me."

"John?"

"John-Pierre," she said, insisting, with her countrymen, on anglicizing whenever possible.

"Well, he'll have to get you back."

"But I've nowhere to go. Until."

"You can use my room," I said. "At the Scribe."

"Oh?" she said, filling the short sound with a packed file of correspondence.

"Oh," I confirmed. "I'll move in with Palmer."

"Oh," she said again, conveying her utter disbelief in my gentlemanliness and referring me to her earlier oh.

"One thing at a time," I said, covering everything. I was consulting my pocket street guide as we walked. "First, we've got to get to the Quai Voltaire. Let's see—Bac. That's the station. Then, next—the clearout—you figure that much of a job?"

"No," she said.

"If there's not too much luggage," I said, "we can use one or two of those bicycle taxis."

"I don't have much," she said.

"You don't *need* much," I commented.

"Oh?" she said again, implying multitudes. It struck me that this babe could go through life using no more than her apparently inexhaustible supply of ohs.

We reached the station and descended. Whatever disorder

and confusion existed above, down here all went on as before. It was like the champagne caves we had visited in Rheims, a few weeks earlier. The work of corking and turning went on without interruption no matter who was in possession of the terrain above.

We hurried into the apartment. She had one valpack and a few small pieces. When the packing began to be a problem, I suggested that we borrow one of his valpacks. We did so, simplifying everything. She ran about from bathroom to bedroom to kitchen, collecting her belongings, while I searched for possible small telltale details which might inadvertently be left behind. I had seen my share of mystery plays.

It took us less than half an hour to get ready.

"The key?" she asked. "Shall I leave the key?"

"No," I replied. "Keep it, in case."

Downstairs, I made a deal with two bicycle cartmen. Irene went with one, I went with the other and we reached the Scribe together.

"Go 'way," I instructed her at the entrance, "and come up to five-o-six in fifteen minutes."

"Right-o," she said cheerfully.

I moved her things into the lobby and waited for someone I knew to turn up and give me a hand. It turned out to be Totsi, Capa's man. We luggered the bags upstairs. I gave him three packages of cigarettes. He complained that they were not his brand and I promised to change with the next carton.

Shortly after he left, Irene turned up. I gave her a drink and had one myself. We sat quietly, resting.

"Well," she said, "smashing while it lasted."

"May not be over," I said. "All the same, I think you did the right thing for today."

"I'm not a bloody fool," she said. "He's got a proper job ahead of him now, poor sod. Slap and tickle days are over—for a while, any rate. Crikey, he was nice. I never want anything but a French beau. Once you've had a French beau—Know what I mean?"

"How many guesses have I got?"

She changed her shoes from low-heeled ones to high.

"I suppose you think me a chippie of some sort, don't you?" she asked.

"I did think so, yes," I replied, finding my way into her eyes for the first time. "Until about ten-thirty this morning."

She began to cry. I tried to console her, without success.

Finally, I said, "I'll be back around one o'clock and take you to lunch, okay?"

The answer was a negative choke, but when I returned, a little after one, she looked like a date. She had changed, done her hair and tied it with a gay ribbon, and was ready to leave, gloves and all.

As we were going out the door, Palmer phoned. He was downstairs. I asked him to come up, but he said that he would prefer it if we came down, since he was still guarding the jeep. We went down. I asked him what had happened to those two o'clock orders he had mentioned.

"Blew 'em," he said. "I sent a friend. It was nothing. A little gray-market zigzag. They said this pastry cook had a few dozen hot Leicas to trade."

"Can we take you to lunch?" I asked.

"I'll take you," he said. "Out to the country. You two look like you could use a little away-from-it-all. She's not so bad—*ectually*—but you, Lieut, you're bedraggled!"

"Where in the country?" I asked.

"This garden joint," he said. "Coq Hardi. You ever hear of?"

"No."

"I've got a dingdong legal rig fixed with them. I give 'em a mess of K-rations and coffee and whatnot—and oohlala, what they *do!*"

"How do you figure that legal?" I asked.

Palmer took an attorney's stance, and said, "Law says we're not supposed to buy from civilian restaurants. Yes? Well, who's buying? This is services only. They do us a favor so we give them a little gift. No currency of any kind involved. Who's hurt?"

We went. It was all he had promised. What the chefs there made of our depressing ration boxes restored my belief in magic.

Looking backward, it is hard to believe, but true, that the drive and the company, the splendid place, and finally, the food and drink combined to obliterate the earlier part of the day. Especially the food. Driving home, stuffed and satisfied and pleasantly floating, it struck me how great a part of us is animal, after all.

Palmer roundabouted us to the Scribe and waited while I went up with Irene to get what I needed for the night. Two messages from Jean-Pierre had been slipped under the door. One for her and one for me. We looked at them, unopened, for a moment.

“Shall we trade?” asked Irene.

“What?”

“You take mine and give me yours,” she explained, holding hers out to me.

“Why?”

“Why not?” she said with a shrug.

There was a certain cynical, bitter point to this, but I failed to get it at the time.

I moved away from her and opened the note addressed to me. It read:

Dear friend,

She is ill, but shall be well. Do not worry. I shall care. It is in her mind principally. Time and patience. Please telephone to me to office, Opera 70-63 before 6:30 P.M. (1830 hours). I shall appreciate food supplies, but more necessary are woman's clothings (underwear, brassieres, stockings and sweaters). Thank you infinitely for all.

J.-P.

I looked up and saw Irene reading her note at the window. Her face was flushed. I waited. She must have been reading it over and over again.

“Okay?” I asked, finally.

She turned toward me, bewildered, as though she had forgotten that I was in the room.

“Okay,” she whispered in reply.

I went to her, offered my note, and waited for her to give me hers. Instead, she stuffed it into her pocket, and took mine.

As she read it, I phoned him, as requested.

“It is nothing,” he said, “only to thank you.”

“Is she really all right?”

“She says yes.”

“Look, don’t let me butt in, but it happens I know an ace guy around—Hank Ross. He’s a Colonel in the Medics, a pip of a doctor. I’m sure he’d have a look at her and help out if she needs anything not easy to get, like special medicine and vitamins or shots or whatever.”

A long pause, after which he said, “You think?”

“Sure. He’s at the Meurice,” I said. “Here’s the best way to do it: I’ll call him and tell him you’re going to call. Right?”

“Tell his name?”

“Colonel Henry Ross. R, o, s, s.”

“Yes. In one hour?”

“Yes.”

He paused before continuing. “Irene. She is there?”

“Yes.”

“May I?”

“Moment.”

I turned to her and, instinctively, she took a quick backward step and shook her head, tightly.

“I’ll leave,” I promised, holding out the phone.

“No,” she said, in pain. “No more.”

I urged her, silently, but it was no use. She stood motionless against the wall, pressing the fingertips of both hands into her gut. I spoke to Jean-Pierre. “Can’t make it, kid.”

“She is there?”

“Yes, but she can’t talk now. Maybe later.”

“She is all right?”

“Yes.”

"Tell her please my thanks," he said. "All my thanks for understanding and for all."

"I will. Listen. Just one more thing. Did Edmonde see me? I'm not sure."

"No. She has mentioned nothing. Nor I."

"Good. I thought she might have there, once."

"No. Her eyes are one of the bad things."

"Well, Hank'll fix her up."

"Yes," he said. "I call him."

"Not right away," I reminded.

"No. I know. Good-bye."

"Bye, boy."

Irene and I spent that evening together, wandering about the city, and treating one another to long, long silences. I brought her back to the Scribe just after midnight.

That ended it, except for two things—or, rather, one thing in two parts.

The first part took place early the following morning. I returned to the Scribe, went up to the room and found the door locked. There was no response to my knock, which worried me. I hustled about looking for a maid to open the door. When I got into the room, I found Irene gone. There was a note from her on the floor, with a fork as a paper-weight, written in an uncommonly beautiful hand, full of flourishes:

Greetings, Chum!

Have found lift home so ta. You are rather a duckling (with good chance of growing into duck) but will get more out of life when you learn to read between people's lines. Few Americans can or do. Taking handbag only. Kindly give rest of everything to JP for wife. All has been laundered and ironed best of ability. V for vitality!

*Faithfully yours,
Irene DONE
(Get it??)*

She had apparently left in a hurry, because the improvised laundry lines were still stretched across the room and the bathroom. The desk table, turned into an ironing board, had been left that way, and my small electric iron was still plugged. I went to it, fearful that it might have been left on, but no, it was off, all right. I unplugged it.

On the bed, neatly piled, was an array resembling a trousseau; and hanging in the armoire were six dresses, two skirts, a coat and a raincoat. Shoes had been left and scarves and even some costume jewelry. A packed box of cosmetics and perfume—scent, Irene would have called it. Everything required, in fact, with the exception of hats. There was not a single hat because Irene did not wear hats. Where could I get some hats, I wondered, and when the name Hank Ross came into my mind, I knew that I had better lie down. I cleared the bed and did so. Later in the day, I packed the things and had Palmer deliver them to Jean-Pierre's apartment.

The second part of the ending took place two or three weeks after this. I had, meanwhile, had to make a field trip.

The day I returned, I heard that there was to be an American jazz concert at the Club des Alliés on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré that night. Of course, I went.

The small hall was crowded and the audience was wide open. I did not know a single one of the musicians personally or even by reputation, but they were excellent men, made welcome sounds, and swung in the first half-hour. Styles in jazz were changing, but I realized, listening to the bop, that it was not so much a change as a mutation.

Intermission.

Sitting on a window sill, facing the main entrance, I was startled to see Jean-Pierre coming in with Irene. I slid off the sill and stared. The sight came into improved focus and Irene turned out to be Edmonde. The mistake had been easy to make since Edmonde was dressed, tip (pink scarf) to toe (pink shoes), in Irene's familiar clothes. Further, Jean-Pierre had informed me that he had long since talked her out of jazz. What, then, were they doing here?

The light in the room was poor and I could not see her face clearly, but she seemed much improved since my last sight of her. All but the area around her mouth, which was out of shape and oddly hollowed. I supposed that the necessary dental work had not yet been completed. Should I ask Hank? No. Time to leave them alone.

The music began again, but instead of concentrating on it, I found myself watching Edmonde. Her eyes were on the musicians, but she was not hearing a thing. She frowned, looked around, once turned to Jean-Pierre and smiled a faint smile. She was miles away. With a sudden movement, almost a spasm, she reached out and grasped Jean-Pierre. He took her hand in one of his and cupped her shoulder with the other.

A lunging tenor-man was raising hell with "Laura." Edmonde seemed to relax now, and getting with it somewhat, began to make contact with the music. Her out-of-practice body moved awkwardly and tentatively, wanting to be one with the beat. I suppose she was enjoying herself but it was painful to observe. A wave of dejection came over me and I went out to the bar. There I found Capa, full of foolish, adolescent schemes. For the next twelve hours, I helped him to execute them. . . .

. . . . Back to reality from the jumbled movie of memory, I found myself in an anxious mood. The recollection of Edmonde, I suppose. I was not to see her or, for that matter, hear anything about her for a long time after that night at the Club des Alliés. On trips to France, in the years which followed, it had sometimes occurred to me to seek her out, but worrying that it might be an intrusion, perhaps an imposition, I had let it go.

Now, in the Chicago night, a dozen lifetimes later, this seemed to have been a mistake. It *all* seemed to have been a mistake. My feet hurt. I had been walking without attention, but in the correct general direction. I looked at my watch. Nine forty-five. Plenty of time. I hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take me to the hotel.

When I got there, I went up and changed my clothes—for some reason—before going over to the theatre.

“What happened?” asked my wife as I kissed her.

“Nothing much,” I said. “He’s not really sick. More like convalescent, I’d say. And he needed some dough. That’s all.”

She was obviously ready to listen to more, but the walk had exhausted me and, in any case, I needed time to sort out my impressions, and to equate what I knew with what I had remembered; in short, time to comprehend the upheaval of imperfect recall.

My wife understood and, since I volunteered no more, did not press the point. She introduced a fresh subject.

Woody and I had dinner the following night. A four-hour sit at Toffenetti’s, on La Salle Street. I had suggested the Buttery by way of celebration, but he had turned down that idea. He had similarly declined my invitation to the Blackstone Theatre.

“I’ll do it,” he said in a don’t-rush-me tone. “I want to, in fact. But not tonight.”

“Okay.”

“I know it seems ungracious and sounds it, too, but bear with me, huh? I need some patience, pal.”

“You’ve got it.”

“That’s no falling off a log, for me to meet your wife. I want to make an impression.”

“You will.”

“Not with this shirt,” he said testily.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s frayed and it doesn’t fit. I’m going into Sulka’s tomorrow.”

Something about the way in which I repeated, “Sulka’s?” made him snap, “Certainly, why not?”

“Who said not?”

“All right, I know it’s your money. What about it?”

“Woody—”

“One thing I’ve learned,” he interrupted heatedly. “Buy the best. Then you’ve got something. Cheap, you’ve got

nothing. Or bargains. I never beat a bargain in my life. You? I know what I'm doing."

The time for candor had arrived.

"All right, Woody," I said, topping him. "Now sip your soup and shut your trap and listen for one minute."

"One minute," he said. "Remember that."

"I know you're a difficult bastard," I began. "You always were and in the years in between here I guess you've had time to perfect your technique. So be difficult if you have to, but for chrissake don't go impossible on me, because if you do—I can arrange for another twenty-five-year intermission!"

"Your minute is up," he said.

"Thanks," I said. "Now *you've* got one."

I attacked my soup while he talked.

"I need a few days. Not only to collect some clothes, although that, too—but more collect my thoughts, you know?" He regarded me studiously as though he were trying to recall my familiar face. Or was he looking beyond what he saw, for the young man he had known? "I look at you," he said, "and I see a lot of my what they call misspent youth." He paused, pushed away his soup, and took a breath. "There's something I have to—something big I have to tell you—no, ask you—well, both. You may be the only one I can ever—Not right now and don't bug me on it or I may never. Give me time. I'll get to it. I've been lost and way off the track. I got into one of those distended jams where you forget what the hell tune you're playing and what key you started in. One of those. But this thing. I'll tell you as soon as—" He stopped, paled, and added, "Excuse me." He rose cautiously, crumpled his napkin onto the table and went off, looking around until he found the men's room.

He was even more pale when he returned. He knocked back the brandy I had ordered for him in his absence.

"Thanks," he said, closing his eyes.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

"No."

"You all right?"

"Yah."

“Sure?”

“Where was I?” he said, rubbing his forehead. He opened his eyes and went on. “Oh, yes. See, you’re a chance for me to find my way back, maybe—because that’s where I’d like to go. Not forward like most of these poor pushful twentieth-century slobs—but back. To where it was better—where I could—for instance, where I could *play!*”

The last word cracked in his throat, as though it were a badly attacked high note on his horn.

“You can play now,” I said, calmly.

“How do *you* know?”

“I’m sure of it. No reason in the world—barring some physical jamup, that you shouldn’t be playing better than ever. Time counts, nobody’s technique ever got *too* good. Creativity, maybe—that’s different—maybe that fades with age, though I’m willing to argue that, too. But execution, hell, should improve with time. Unless, as I say, it’s physical. If a man’s sick—all bets off. I heard Rubinstein here the other night. What’s he? Sixty-six, seven. Holy man! He froze ‘em. Better than ever.”

“There’s something in what you say,” said Woody, after the waitress had removed our soup tureens, “except for one thing.”

“And what’s that?”

“That you don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

“I don’t, huh?”

“You never were any kind of a musician yourself, we all know that—”

“Give me back my money,” I said.

“But God Almighty, how come you never even got the idea of what playing an instrument is?” He looked at me, pityingly. “Just sitting there all those thousands of hours I’d’ve thought some faint notion would’ve penetrated. But no.”

“No, huh?”

Sudden anger brought the color back to his face as he burst out, “What the hell do you think I play with? My fingers or lips or tongue and lungs?”

"No. Obviously a man plays a trumpet with his nose. Anybody knows that."

"With his guts, you bubblehead."

"Oh," I said, trying to change the mood, "is that what they mean by a gutty sound?"

"Not all his guts, only a part." (He was obviously not listening.) "And my part—went."

The waitress returned, served him the Real Irish Stew, and me the Succulent Roast Turkey. We began to eat, Woody talking through his food.

"Three years ago. About. I looked out some old records—the trio, the quartet—remember?"

"Vaguely," I said.

"I played one of them—'Japanese Sandman'—"

At this point, I took off and sang the whole of Woody's chorus from that record, note for note, drawing considerable attention to our table. Woody was as surprised and as touched as I had meant him to be. He listened, smiling.

"Yah," he said when I had finished. "That's the one. I played it on the machine. Then I tried to play it myself again. No go. I could play the notes, but I couldn't transfuse any life into it. I tried playing it with the machine. Better. Then alone. No good. I did this for maybe a week. Then I broke the goddam record and that was that."

"Proves nothing."

"It doesn't?"

"Proves you can't go back. You can't grow younger and clocks don't go counterclockwise unless they're as nutty as you are. I don't know anything about playing—we all know that—but I do know that trying to play a twenty-year-old chorus is a drag."

"Anyway," he said, "this has nothing to do with going to the show and meeting your wife or the Butterly. Isn't that what started us on this quadrille?"

"What started us was shirts. Sulka shirts."

"Shirts," said Woody, contemplating the well-presented bosom of one of the girls at the next table. "Who does that make you think of?"

"Who else?"

We both smiled, recalling our friend.

"Lordy," he said. "I wonder if he still drops his women overboard the minute they mess with his shirts."

"Probably. You ever see him?" I asked.

"No. You?"

"Hardly ever. Once about, I don't know, maybe seven, eight years ago, I took some visiting firemen down to Bird-land and there he was."

"Don?"

"Sure. On bass and going like a goose. I went over and talked to him between sets. He acted like he'd seen me every day that week—high on something, I suppose. I remember he said to me, 'How do you like this *hairy* jazz we do now, Dad?' Oh, that Don."

"Me, I haven't laid eyes on him since the Army," said Woody. "I don't know how long ago that was. I've lost track of time. But Don, that's who I wish I were. Him. And I wish he were me. No. Why should I wish him that? What'd he ever do to me? A good man. He could always find his way to the top of any situation. He never let anything pin him."

"Usually had a little help with the float to the top, wouldn't you say?"

"What of it? Look, I'm no moralist. Are you? Nobody makes it alone. Everybody uses something to help get them through the—the unfaceable idiocy of day after day. Power or faith or work or some other grog. Or *love*." He gave the word an empty sound. "Take a preacher. He's only really alive when he's preaching. Or a miser only when he's counting his pile. A gambler, gambling. A mother, whatevering a kid. Me, playing. It's all hop. The trick is to find the hop that suits you. He found his, Don. He takes it straight."

"So why's that any good?"

"Because time," said Woody. "It's how he licks it. You don't see that?"

"No."

"Time," said Woody. "That's everybody's load. The main terror. It's going it's going it's running out. Sure, maybe it

heals all wounds; and along with chance, it sure in hell happeneth to us all—but it's the enemy. It ages us and robs us blind every minute and in the end, it ends us. Life's getting to be too long these days, anyhow. Thirty, thirty-five—that's enough. Like the Elizabethans. They most of them had a one-two-three ball and quit while they were winning. Hell, who wants to be a shrunken old hide sitting on a porch somewhere—in somebody's way—remembering all his mistakes and injustices. The ones he got and the ones he gave—and what he could have, should have done, if only, if only, if and if. Not me."

This man, I thought, watching Woody, and taking him in, but understanding only a part of what he was saying, has been alone too much.

He pushed aside his half-finished plate of stew, made a desultory pass at the skimpy salad, and went on. "So everybody works to beat it. There are hard ways and harder ones, but one of the easiest is to get loose from the beat. That's why there's a bar every three hundred feet in any direction—spread all over this fair land. Out where I live, we have eleven bars on one block and one delicatessen. Why? Because everybody wants to get the edge off their sensibilities fast and cheap and you can't do that with a slice of salami. Time. Of course, Don is advanced. He doesn't horse around with prosaic pap like getting stoned. He goes for full-sized cutoffs. He really gets himself up there into the horse latitudes, and makes himself a nice little world of his own. That's why I wish I were Don."

"I can't connect you and hop, you're too sensible."

"Well, hell. Didn't he have *you* on it for a time?"

"Not for long."

"But long enough to get the point?"

"Long enough for it to scare hell out of me," I said.

Yet what Woody had been saying was correct to a point. The principal effect of Don's drugs was surely the destruction of the time factor. That terrifying long, long walk from one point in the room to another came back to me, like the memory of a nightmare.

Woody was laughing, and shaking his head.

"What?" I asked.

"You ever hear about our fun-lovin' boy while he was in the ranks?"

"No."

"That was when I saw him—as I say. He was already in when they nabbed me. Why California, I never got straight, but then I never understood *anything* about the Army. Or the Navy, come to think. Maybe next time around, I'll try the Marines. But California it was. Up came the number and they laid the Greetings on me and next thing I was stomping around inside a big office building in downtown Los Angeles, naked, with a thousand other nakeds, up and down in the elevators; in and out of rooms—and in each one there were a couple of men in white interested in only one part of your anatomy. What a day. I got to feeling like a figure in one of those surrealist razzmatazzes by Hieronymus Bosch. It was still going on at midnight at Fort MacArthur. For those of us who luckily made it, that is, and weren't sent home for pimples or somesuch. We got there in a bus, and I remember they gave us two lunch boxes each. Somebody miscalculated so we all wound up with heartburn. Here we were in a room—like a schoolroom, taking an intelligence test. I think my score was two below zero. By that time I didn't care. First thing in the morning—and I mean morning—I feel my cheek being slapped and when I opened my eyes—or maybe it was only one eye—who do I see?"

"Don."

"Our boy! So he got me up and showed me the ropes and made things a lot easier. He was already set in the permanent company there—in the post band. And quick as a flash, I made it, too. And there we were, special privileges and all." The waitress was clearing the table, but he continued, "He had things organized, that guy. My second day, I'm walking along with him and we pass a chicken colonel and we forget to salute, and as we pass the brass he says, 'Hi, Don!' and Don says, 'What say, Pops?'—so I knew we were all right. They'd made him a sergeant or he'd made himself

a sergeant—what did they call it?—jawbone! that's it—a jawbone sergeant. Don kept saying, 'I hate these stripes on my arm, they're so heavy, but you don't get to sleep in an end room if you ain't.' He used to say he was a *non-non-commis-sioned* officer. Anyway, he had it taped. He had a room at the end of one of the barracks—and he put me right in there with him. But now here's what I want to tell you. Being where he was, he was away from all his connections and no way to get to them and he got to worrying about his supply of reefers. So what he did was go down to L.A. one weekend and buy a few marijuana roots and he brought them back up to camp and in the middle of the night one night, he planted them next to the barracks, right outside our window."

"Good God!"

"Wait. This stuff grows like a weed—well, hell, that's what it is, a weed—and before we knew it, it was spreading. And Don. Every morning and every evening, he'd be out there, on his knees—planting and replanting—and he had a little box of garden tools he kept under his bunk and a little lavender watering can and the stuff started to spread and pretty soon it was growing right around the whole damn barracks. Now he took to cutting it and drying it in his foot locker in our room until it was ready and then, every so often, he'd roll it and smoke it and go!"

I laughed, and resolved to look Don up as soon as I could. How could I have let such a character get out of my life?

"Yah," said Woody, "I guess it does seem funny at that. Now, that is to say. But I swear, back then, it was no joke. Not to me. I could see him landing in real trouble. The hours I spent trying to talk him out of it. No use. The longer he went, the less he worried. Then, of course, his supply got so full, that he began handling it. *He* became the connection—and you should've seen the parade through there. Every rank, a general's wife, two of the doctors—the damnedest people turned out to be puffers. Don made himself a fortune, bought a Buick and was really Rileying it up—but. One morning, we're standing formation and the adjutant is spieling out the gong and all of a sudden I hear through the amplification

system—good and lousy it was, too—I hear the voice say, 'Acting Sergeant Donald L. Kirkus. Front and center.' So I knew the jig was up—and I looked over at Don and boy he knew it, too, because I could see him starting the shakes and remember, I knew this clown pretty well. Not only played with him for forever, but slept in this closet-sized room with him night after night, and I could damn near read his mind and I could see him hesitating and I knew he was considering just making a break for it and hoping to get the hell out of there fast in the confusion. He told me later that's just what he *had* been thinking of—he figured to try straight for Mexico and shmear his way across the border with the traveler's checks he had in the glove compartment. But we looked at each other and the guy bawled his name out again, this time a little on the edgy side and I shook my head at Don—meaning, of course, don't take off—he told me later he thought I was sending: Don't step out. But he did and I watched him. So now the post commander—a two-star general, no less, puts on his glasses and starts to read and I don't remember the words, naturally, but it was sort of: 'Sergeant Kirkus: Because you have provided a fine example for your men and so and so; because you have shown an interest in the appearance of your barracks and made it a model for others to follow; and so forth and on like that—because, using your own time and money and imagination you have made your part of this encampment more beautiful—you are hereby named Soldier of the Month, awarded this post citation, and invested with a special cluster for the Good Conduct Ribbon.' Something like that. And oh yes, a week's leave, too. Don started to sneeze. I don't know why. He said after it was a nervous allergy. And the general kept trying to pin this ribbon on him and Don kept sneezing all over the general and couldn't stop and I started laughing—not so much at that as at the whole thing and relief, too—and our Lieutenant leaped over and said, 'What's so funny, boy?' and I stiffened up and said, 'Nothing, sir' and he said, 'All right then, cork it up or I'll have you on KP so long you'll think you're the *cook*!' He said it in a way that made me

think it had been said to him once. More than once. Any-way, I corked it. I closed my eyes and thought of tragic things and awful happenings and wrong notes and I got through the hour somehow. But later—honestly—I damn near collapsed a lung. I will say this for Don, though. He didn't press his luck. We drove into town that afternoon and bought some bulbs and flowers and pulled up all the weeds and replanted. But he always kept his decoration."

"A charmed life," I said. "Isn't that what it's called?"

"I believe so."

"Where is he now, do you know?"

"San Francisco, the last I heard. Rooting around with the progressives."

"You against them?" I asked.

"No, why?"

"The way you said it."

"No, not against. Maybe they're going somewhere—but so far it's too much head stuff for my ears. Brainy, all right—but most of it's got no more feeling than a Univac. What do you make of it?"

"Well," I confessed, "I haven't heard enough to know. Brubeck, some. Mulligan, Rogers, Perkins. Lennie Niehaus. Konitz. I guess I like it. I'll let you know. I'll be out there in June—for a month."

"That a fact?"

"Yes. I'm sticking right with this tour of my wife's."

"Well, you can look him up, then. If he's there, that is. I'll see if I can find out for you."

"Do that."

Dessert was served. I had ordered stewed fruit and he had ordered lemon meringue pie, but when the waitress brought both, she reversed the dishes and such was our state that he ate mine and I ate his before we realized the mistake. What is more, we did so in silence. A breather.

Over coffee, Woody looked at me seriously and asked, "How long are you here for?"

"This was supposed to be her last week," I said, "but it's been extended for two more."

“Thank God!” he said fervently.

“What?”

“I need the time,” he said.

I was not sure what he meant, exactly, but recalled that he had said there was something he was not ready to tell me yet. Or ask me.

It was almost time for me to go. I asked if I could take him home, since I had a car.

“No,” he said.

“No trouble.”

“No. How about tomorrow? You free?”

“Well, no, Woody. I’m not.” I had made a dinner date with some Chicago friends.

He frowned and said, “Don’t fade away on me, now.”

“No, why would I?”

“Because I’m a nuisance.”

“Cut it out.”

“Okay. Call me. No, don’t do that.”

“Sure.”

“No. See, I don’t have a phone in my room and it’s a big scene to get hollered down—so I’ll call you.”

“When?”

“Day after.”

“Don’t forget.”

“Don’t worry.”

“Any time after one,” I said.

“How’s this?” he suggested. “The hell with the telephone. It’s an instrument I hate anyway—never learned to play the telephone. Let’s fix a time.”

“How about Saturday?” I suggested. “Matinée day, so I can do the afternoon and then later the evening, too.”

“Fine,” he said, as we shook hands. “Remember how we used to say—‘Solid!?’”

“I do.”

“Then it all went mushy, huh?”

“Some of it,” I agreed.

We parted.

I was glad of the two intervening days before our next

meeting. Woody, and what he had opened up, was turning out to be a considerable distraction, causing me to neglect some pressing necessities. As to the play I was supposed to be working on, I put it away, knowing that it would have to wait until I left Chicago.

Still, on Saturday morning, I found myself eager to see him again, to hear him—and perhaps, soon, to understand him. He telephoned me from the lobby at one—and I asked him to come up.

He looked especially well. A new, dark suit, a fine shirt (Sulka?), pale tie, shoes highly polished, and a head which had been attended to by experts at the barbershop—where else could he have acquired his sudden tan?

He removed his jacket, kicked off his gleaming moccasins and stretched out on the sofa.

He laughed and said, "All you have to do is pull up a chair and sit down there behind me and I'll feel I'm back at the noggin-knocker's."

It was the first mention of his psychoanalysis.

"When was that?" I asked.

"Couple years ago. I figured I'd tried everything else, so why not *that*?"

"Anything?"

"Expensive, yes. And interesting, too, in a way. Pleasant, you know? Lying there hour after hour full of pentothal, listening to yourself talking about yourself. You know anyone whose favorite subject that is not?"

"I suppose."

"But I flunked out."

"How do you mean?"

"He gave me up. I did about ten months, three a week, and then he bounced me."

"Why?"

"He said it was no use because I wasn't opening up all the way. Accused me of holding out."

"Were you?"

"Damn right!"

"Then what was the point?"

"Couldn't handle it. Could you?"

"Handle what?"

"Tell somebody absolutely every bloody thing about yourself from start to last?"

"Certainly not," I said. "That's why I've never gone in for it, even though *my* corkscrew could use some straightening, believe me. But once you do dive in, I don't see the point in not leveling."

"I thought I'd get *some* help."

"You're like a guy I know in California—an agent," I said. "This power climbed himself right up into a heart attack at forty, forty-one. So when he got better, his doctor let him go back to business on condition that he take two rest periods every day. An hour and a half each. So he did it for a while, then one day he tells me—laughing all the way—he tells me how he's made a deal with the doctor—instead of an hour and a half twice a day, he's got the doctor to agree—conned him, I think was the way my friend put it—into letting him do *five* periods a day of a half-hour each. So I said, 'What's the idea?'—and he said, 'You don't see it? Honest, you're as big a shmoe as *he* is. You don't *see* it? Look. His way: two times one and a half, that's three hours. My way: five times one half, that's two and a half hours. You see it now? I've beat him out of a half an hour and he probably doesn't *realize* it *yet!*'"

My anecdote failed.

"And I remind you of this cretin?" asked Woody, offended.

"In a way, yes. Kidding around with a doctor who's trying to help you."

"It was no good for me, anyway," said Woody, swinging off the sofa, and starting to put on his shoes. "Let's go walk."

He knew the quiet byways of the city and we walked them, slowly. I sensed that unless I wanted to be dropped in the way that he had dropped the doctor, I had better let him lead. He did. He talked of trends in jazz. Surprisingly, he was full of reservations about Charlie Parker.

"He had more going for him than anybody," said Woody. "But he never gave himself a chance to get it organized—not

for my ear. He never grew up, even after in and out of the depths. He certainly had a gift—but he gave it back."

"You may think this is good and kooky," I said. "But you know who Parker always reminded me of? Well, not Parker, but his playing."

"Who?"

"Slug," I said.

We walked in silence until Woody said, "Why's that kooky?"

"Well, I mean," I said. "One is drums and the other alto so why should they?"

"No," said Woody. "I see what you mean. I don't agree, but I see. It's like a theory I used to have about the movies—when I used to go a lot—my theory was that Greta Garbo and Gary Cooper were really the same person. Couldn't prove it, of course, but did you ever notice they never had them in the same picture?"

Woody. The things that went on in that head.

"What ever happened to the Davises?" I asked. "Do you know?"

"I ought to," he said. "I'm living with them."

I stopped in my tracks.

"What?" I demanded, thrown.

"With some of them," he said. "It's Albie and Eunice's house. And Henry lives there and so do I. Gil is with Basie, or was last I heard, so he's not around much."

"Let's sit down," I said.

The brusque introduction of this circumstance had stunned me, and I felt, all at once, tired and overburdened. We sat down on a bench. The next thing I knew, we were having our shoes shined by a pair of park urchins.

Woody and I exchanged a look.

I asked, "How come you never mentioned it before?"

"Hell, man," he said. "I couldn't give it to you all in one sentence. We've had quite a bit of filling in to do."

"How long have you—?"

"With the Davises?"

"Yes."

"Few years." He watched his bootblack for a while, then asked me, "Don't you want to know about Clara?"

"Certainly."

"She lives in Copenhagen."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because she's married to a Dane and speaks Danish, they tell me."

"My, my."

"I asked her to marry *me*, but she turned me down."

I felt lightheaded. This was all coming at me too fast.

"I don't know why," he continued. "Maybe because *I* don't speak Danish."

(Long after, when it was all over, I asked Clara about this. She confirmed the fact that he had asked her and that she had declined.

"Poor Woody," she said. "He tried hard to mean it, but he couldn't."

"Why would he have asked you, then?"

"I wish I knew," said Clara. "I'd give a lot to know."

"Any ideas?"

"Not even a clue," she said. "It had the sick feel of a guilt syndrome, but of course I couldn't be sure."

"What does that mean exactly—guilt syndrome? I don't know the lingo."

"Well, in this case, being part of an oppressing majority. In the long run, it works out it's more damaging to them than to us. Spiritually. I have a theory about Woody, but the more I study it, the less I like it."

"What?"

"It's bound up with music and the kind of horn he used to play. Could it be, I used to think, that he feels an indebtedness to another race that he can never repay except by—? Well, as I told you. I don't like it much. Another notion, and I like this one even less, has to do with his feeling partly responsible for what happened to Slug. I suppose we *all* felt that at the time. I know *I* did. I had the strongest

feeling that what broke him was the mixing—in some way. That's what turned me against the whole bunch after he went." She smiled. "Including you."

"I wondered what."

"That. Sorry, now."

"So am I."

"I adored Slug. Big kid. The only thing I ever had against him was his color."

She saw how much this startled me and went on to explain.

"Oh, yes. I caught the disease. That's what it is, of course. You catch it sometimes, and sometimes they shoot it into you. I had it back then. I suppose I'd have gotten over it and wound up with Slug in time, but he couldn't wait, seems like. And Woody—with that antenna of his, I thought he might have got all this on Slug and me. So about his idea for him and me—I thought it might have been his way of making it up to me. Belatedly. It was years after. Like the Talmudic law that calls for a man to marry his brother's widow." She smiled a smile much older than her face. "Except that Woody was not a Hebrew and not Slug's brother. I'm afraid he was never anyone's brother."

After this talk, I knew that I had been wrong in thinking it possible that Clara knew the truth about Woody and Slug.)

The bootblacks finished our shines at the same moment, with a flourish. I gave mine half a dollar, Woody gave his a quarter. They compared palms.

Woody's boy looked at him and asked, "How come, mister? Hey? How come?"

"Beat it," said Woody.

"How come your friend gives four bits and you on'y two?"

"My friend," said Woody, "is a dying millionaire."

The boys turned to me.

"No crap, hey?"

"You a millionaire?"

"Not quite," I said. "I'm shy seven and a half bucks."

"Then how come you give four bits an' he—"

"Look," I said to my boy, "if it'll make you feel better, give me back a quarter and we'll all be even."

"Yeah?"

"Oh, sure!" said his sidekick, tugging at him.

They scurried off quickly, like park squirrels, without looking back.

"What does she do in Denmark?" I asked.

"Her husband's a guinea-pig doctor," said Woody. "The kind who works with rabbits and guinea pigs, not people. And she teaches at the university. English first, now history of art, I understand."

"She have any children?"

"Dozens."

We went to a nearby bar and he told me more. How he had cracked up on a Chicago date, had been hospitalized and put into a ward and had been surprised one Sunday morning by a visit from Henry and Gil Davis. They had learned of his difficulties from a fellow musician and wanted to help. He thanked them and said that he needed nothing, but they began to call each day. One of them, or both; later, Albie and Eunice joined the shift; still later, Clara. When he was discharged, they insisted that he move in with them. They had fixed a room for him, complete with piano, record player, tape recorder and a trumpet.

He had spent his long period of convalescence there and it was during this time that he and Clara had become close friends and that he had proposed.

Later, he had begun to play again, had found work and eventually had left Chicago, but so firmly had his relationship to the Davises and Albie been cemented, that whenever he returned to Chicago, he went back to his old room. From the time he was back on his feet, he insisted on paying rent and they agreed although, Woody explained, they had no need of his money.

"Why not?" I asked. "How're they so flush?"

"Albie does fine here. He records and plays clubs and

teaches. Full life. He's writing something immense, too, I believe. And that Eunice—she manages like a Granz."

"Henry?"

"He's on contract with CBS and in demand all around. He's got a big aim—he thinks it's big, anyway."

"What is it?"

"To be the man to crack the color bar in the Chicago Symphony. He says it's only a question of time, now. He's so good they can't afford to keep him out much longer."

"What does he play now?"

"Bass clarinet and bassoon. Oh, sure. Forgot to tell you. He's gone all long-hair. Says he likes to listen to jazz but he never plays it any more."

"Woody," I said. "You're making me old. Just sitting here. Talk about change."

"We're half expected there to dinner," said Woody. "To-night. I told them I wasn't sure you could but that I'd ask."

"Fine," I said.

"But if we want to see Henry, we have to go early on account of he's got a session."

My wife had arranged to have dinner sent in to her dressing room between shows that day, so the plan suited me perfectly. At about five, I stopped at the theatre and after urging Woody unsuccessfully for five minutes to come in, I went in alone to check on things. All well.

At six, we arrived at Eunice and Albie's. Henry was there, too. However much Woody had aged me, they restored me. They seemed, all three, well and vital and at the peak of their respective powers. Eunice was not as tall as I had remembered her, Albie had put on a good deal of weight, and Henry had put on true dignity.

Eunice and Albie had three children: a girl of eighteen, a girl of sixteen, and a boy of twelve. Pat, Lillian, and Ben. We were friends at once, and as for the three adults, we picked up precisely where we had left off, so many years before.

We sat around a huge table in the dining room and the children served, although Pat made it clear that Eunice had done the cooking. There was far too much of everything, in-

cluding talk. And it was all about the old days. I knew about those. I wanted to hear more about the intervening years, but every attempt I made to steer in that direction failed.

At seven-thirty, dinner was over. Woody explained that he was going to drive over to Orchestra Hall with Henry, who had arranged with the head of the trumpet section to tell Woody about a few interesting buys.

"I'll be back in an hour or so," said Woody.

The children went off to a movie, after politely shaking hands with me and inviting me to come again.

Albie and Eunice and I cleared the table and went into the kitchen. Eunice loaded the electric dishwasher while we put leftovers into the refrigerator.

We went out into the parlor, Eunice carrying a tray with a pitcher of water and three glasses.

"Well?" she asked. "What do you think of our Woody?"

She certainly was one for coming to the point.

"He surprises me," I replied. "Well, for that matter, you all do."

"That we're still alive?" asked Albie. "Lord, I feel like I'm just beginning to catch on to the idea."

"Woody," I said, as though stating a problem. "Damned if I know. Now and then I get a flash, but mostly he stays in the shadow for me. He hands you the whole range, and you can make anything you want out of him. Depends what you choose. If I want to start tearing him down, I can do it. Or building him up. He's a lot of things."

"He's a man," said Eunice.

"Who worries about him is the doctors," said Albie. "They tell us he doesn't respond like most. One of them—a real advanced type—he claims the whole thing is controlled by Woody in his mind—that he makes himself sick from time to time. That's why the medicines don't work."

"Yes," I said. "Maybe he realizes that himself. He tells me he went to a head man—I suppose that's why."

"It didn't pan out, though," said Albie.

"No," I said.

Eunice poured us each a glass of water. We adjusted to one another in silence.

"Tell about Gil," I said.

"Gil's up on top," said Eunice. "He's still on tenor, but he handles an oboe now, too, and bassoon."

"Like Henry," I said.

"Sure, they switched over to those woodwinds together, but Gil couldn't stay out of jazz."

"Married?" I asked.

"Nine, ten times," said Albie, trying to keep a straight face.

"Three," corrected Eunice, her eyes growing hot.

"So he says now he just plays for kicks and alimony," said Albie.

"But don't worry about Gil," said Eunice. "He's got the joy in him. He can get excited about a new tune or a new player or a good ripe peach. He doesn't take one single thing for granted."

"He's a fine boy," agreed Albie.

"And Clara?" I asked, as casually as I could. "I know about Denmark and all that."

Albie and Eunice exchanged a swift, but eloquent, husband-wife look. How much should they tell me? In the silence, Albie deferred to her.

"She's all right," said Eunice, guardedly. "She gets homesick. But she stays busy day and night. Her husband, Reis—he writes us she's fine."

"I'd sure like to hear her sing again," I said.

"You never will," said Eunice with sudden, crushing finality.

Albie picked up with an aimless discourse on new recording methods and brought us back into shallow waters again, but apparently, Eunice would not have it so.

"Woody," she said, "has got pretty much the same the matter with him as poor Slug."

"Yes," I said. "I know."

"You do?"

"Ulcers," I said. "Isn't it?"

"And a damaged liver," said Eunice.

“Musicianitis,” I said.

“No,” said Eunice. “More to it than that. Slug got his from freddies and whiskey. But Woody?”

“Search me.”

“I never saw him take too much to drink,” said Albie.
“Did you?”

“No.”

“And far as pills go—you know how he is about that,” said Eunice.

“Well,” I said, “as I say—he’s the damnedest mystery to me, this guy.”

I asked them about themselves. Eunice eagerly told about the various talents of their children; and a little later, Albie played a few records of some of his newer work. He had progressed enormously and combined, better than anyone I had ever heard, traditional jazz with mid-century twelve-tone experimentation. His playing had matured in the sense that the frantic need to impress had been replaced by the placid need to express.

Woody returned and joined us in listening. He reported that he had arranged to go and pick out a horn the following day.

“And that,” said Eunice, “is the end of nice, peaceful days on this block.”

“Word of honor,” said Woody, “I won’t blow more than fifteen hours a day.”

“Just scales, please,” said Albie. “They’re so soothing.”

We had hit a carefree tone at last and we stayed on it for the rest of the evening. Before I left, I arranged a theatre party for the following week with Woody, Albie and family, and Henry.

It turned out to be a great success and when we all went out to supper afterward, Woody met my wife at last. They hit it off perfectly, a great relief to me.

In the intervening time, I saw Woody almost daily. The day after our dinner at Albie’s, I went with him to the music supply house. He looked over the used, cut-rate horns which were offered and discarded most of them by look or by a

test of the valve action. He put three possibles aside to try out. I remembered another time we had gone together to buy a trumpet. He took his own mouthpiece out of his pocket and fitted it into one of the three. He looked at me, at the trumpet, at me and said, "Beat it."

"Me?"

"Yah. Go home. I'll see you there in an hour or so."

"What's the—?"

"Just do it, pal, will you? I want to pick the right horn here—it may be my last—and I can't do it with your big ear on me. I thought I could, but it turns out no."

"Sure, Woody."

I left the shop and took a taxi back to the Blackstone. In less than an hour, he turned up and joined me. He carried a second-hand trumpet case, which he soon opened to display his purchase.

"Hell of a horn," he said excitedly. "One of those lucky shots. It's got a better low than I've ever had."

"Be some coincidence, wouldn't it," I teased, "if it turned out to be the same one you threw into the swimming pool that night—or was it morning?" I could see him struggling to control his temper, and said, "Play something. Any ol' thing."

He snapped the case shut.

"For old times' sake," I urged. "One note."

"For old times' sake," responded Woody, "don't itch me."

"Okay."

"When do you leave?" he asked.

I laughed.

"Why?" he snapped. "What's funny?"

"You ask me that every day."

"What of it? I want to know every day."

"But it never changes, goop-o. We leave Sunday afternoon."

"That's for Baltimore."

"Right."

"Yah."

"So play something."

He picked up the case. "You want to have dinner tomorrow night?"

"Sure."

"Pick you up here seven?"

"Six-thirty, if you want."

"Okay. No, make it seven."

"Fine."

"Will you have a car?" he asked.

"I can have. Why?"

"Maybe we'll go out to the stockyards and eat meat."

"Good."

"See y'."

When he came by, the following evening, the first thing I noticed was the dime-sized indentation in the middle of his lips.

"I see you've been woodshedding," I said as we drove off.

"You do?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson," I said. "Either that or somebody with a round ring punched you in the mouth."

"You sure this is okay? The stockyards?"

"Sure. Anything you say."

"What I like about it is," he said, "it's primitive. You ride around and see the captured beasts and you look at them and they look at you and then you go to the dining room. I've had a little bun on out there and got me a real deep down cannibal feeling."

"Is that good?"

"Well, interesting. It releases something. After all, it's only men who've decided that it's wrong to eat one another. But what does Ma Nature have to say on the subject?"

"Don't look at me," I said. "I haven't seen her in weeks."

"Anyway, we do eat one another, one way or another."

"I'd appreciate it," I said, "if you could hold this fascinating theme till after dinner, all right?"

"Why not?"

"How'd the horn go? No bull."

"It's a good horn," he replied evasively.

"Lucky, too," I said.

"In what way?"

"Got itself one of the best of blowers."

"Knock it off!" said Woody, mean.

We drove through the dead, flat edges of the city, dominated by smoke and grime and mountains of rusting junk. In the silence, I wished that we could have been in some spot more related to being alive.

Woody spoke. "You're very patient, ol' fellow."

"I am?"

"You have been for days and days."

"Nothing."

"When do you leave?"

That question again. I took it straight, and replied, "Day after tomorrow."

"Yes," he said. "That's how I had it figured."

"Figured?"

"Sure. Nothing aimless about me, Skinny. Everything according to plan."

"I'd never've guessed."

"That's the trick, see? In any kind of projection. You've got to stay in control, but not show it. Make it look easy. Make it look like nothing. But stay in control. That's the secret of my success—also the secret of my flop. The one time I didn't stay in control—that was the puncture that let all my air out." He stopped talking and took three deep breaths, each of which made the sound of an infant's rasping whimper. I was alarmed until I remembered that after all he had been ill and in the hospital until only a few days ago. He rubbed his right temple and went on. "You'd think a man would be allowed *one* mistake, wouldn't you? Well, he's not, if it's a big one. Know what I mean?"

"No, Woody. I can't say that I do."

He got out a cigarette, lit it, and smoked it thoughtfully, studying it between puffs. He said nothing until he had finished it and snapped the butt away.

He said, "I'm going to lay it on you. The whole allaround tremendous heavy soggy suffocating mud. I don't know why I should, except that we're friends. Aren't we?"

“I hope so.”

“You hope so.”

Another silence followed, a shorter one, during which I tried to grasp a clue from what had been said up to now.

“I don’t know,” he said, “whether to tell it to you backward or forward. Son of a *bitch* if I know.”

“Forward,” I suggested.

“Thank you. I will. First, though, let’s get some food into us. Raise our blood sugar. I’m very hungry. You?”

“I think I can be counted on,” I said.

“I always get hungry when I get scared. Explain that?”

“Scared about what?”

“About you, of course. What you’ll say. Do.”

A mounted stagecoach and a brace of flaming torches loomed up before us. We had reached the front of the Stockyards Inn. We went in. The place was having a quiet night.

He ordered a drink—bourbon and water.

“Nothing for me,” I said to the waiter. “Well, okay. Tomato juice.”

“Have something,” Woody pressed. “Make an exception.”

“Would if I could.”

“That’s it,” he said to the waiter, who moved off, amused.

I said, “William James says that in forming or breaking a habit, the thing to beware of is the single exception.”

Woody did not trouble to conceal his contempt for my pretentiousness, and sneered. “How the hell do you know so much about William James?”

“I don’t,” I confessed. “I just know that.”

“And how do you know that?”

“You taught it to me, Woody.”

His face went soft, and in a voice to match, he asked, “That a fact? Tell the truth.”

“Fact.”

“Sworn I’d never heard anything like it.” He squinted, extra hard, and when he opened his eyes, their shape seemed to have changed. He relaxed, finally, and asked, “Who *were* those guys we used to be?”

“They weren’t so bad,” I said.

After a pause, he said, "Still, it'd sound better to you if you'd had one or two."

"What'd sound?"

"My playing."

I looked at him, puzzled.

"Oh," he continued, "didn't I tell you? I'm giving a little recital this evening."

"You are?" I was delighted.

"Yes. Accompanied by Art Tatum. We've been rehearsing all day. So after dinner—and digestion—off we go."

"Fine."

His drink was served. And my tomato juice. We ordered steaks.

He raised his glass and I responded with mine.

"Tomorrow," he toasted.

I mumbled something.

He took a swallow and I took a sip.

He said, "You'll have to make allowances. Not so much for me as for yourself. Don't ever let anyone tell you that a man plays better when juiced—or on tea or on the needle. That is the whopper of all time. I think it got going on account of a twist. He maybe plays better if the one *listening* is juiced. Follow? I've seen them sitting around crooked sometimes and taking in just nothing but noise—and from the expressions on their potted pusses, you'd think they were hearing the sound of Paradise."

"Why do you do it, then?"

"Lubrication," he said. And for the moment it seemed a sensible explanation.

He went on. "The one who set me straight on all this was *Madame*. I suppose—looking back and taking it all in all—that I owe her more than anyone. What a sweet package of common sense she was!"

"More than that," I said.

"She taught me to listen—before her I don't think I ever did, much. Any more than most. Hardly anybody listens to anybody. Take a day to examine it. You'll see. But she was—what do I mean?—compelling."

He finished his drink and set down the glass. The waiter was at the table at once and picked it up.

"One more?" he asked.

Woody looked at me.

"No," he said to the waiter. "Thanks just the same."

There was a long wait for the food and Woody filled it in with more about Edmonde. He asked me about when I had last seen her and I told him about Paris and the railway station. It upset him greatly, since he had seen her long after that and had had no idea of her ordeal.

"Jesus," he said through a clutched throat. "If I'd known—I would have—I don't know, but I wouldn't have done what I did."

"What *did* you do?" I asked softly, suspecting that we were at last on the verge of his long-promised revelation.

"I piled in," he said. "I'd brooded about it for years and dreamed it and—hell—even played it. Finally, I decided to bull-by-the-horns it. That's when I took off and went looking for her. All the way over—I went on a slow boat, the *Flandre*—I planned it. Not in detail, you understand—but in concept. It's the only way. You've got to have a concept for everything. I've tried both, with and without, and I tell you—there's no choice. A meal or a lay or a chorus. It's got to have a concept."

"Or a life," I said.

"Of course. I remember one time Otis Ferguson saying to me, 'A chorus has to have a spine, like a sentence. It has to have a subject and an object and a verb.' Remember Otis?"

"I'll say."

"So I planned this French thing. And I was going to do it smart. I was going to get set and send up a few flares and see if I couldn't get her to come to me instead of the other way. Worked out. I hadn't been there a month when one Saturday night, there she is." He looked into his empty glass and went on as though he were describing what he saw inside it. "You should have heard me that night, lad. I said it all—and to her—and didn't she just know it! We traded eyes that night but no more. She was with three other peo-

ple. Next day I get a letter, on a letterhead. 'Maison du Jazz,' it says. Typewritten. 'My dear Mr. Woodruff: Blip blip blip—' And it wants to know would I be interested in cutting a few sides for this local label and so on and it's signed, 'Edmonde Kov.' Knocked me out, because I could see I was in for some fancy footwork. Called up and swung on over there. Turned out to be a most fancy record center she ran, with sofas and those earphone things they have. But in the back was her office and that's where we met." He paused and looked at me. "I'm going to leave out a part now, because I'd ball it up if I tried to explain it. And you would if you tried to understand it. Complicated. We did and we didn't. We kept looking for each other. Anyway. We met often, and I made records—mostly dead, but two and a half takes were almost. We spent a lot of time together and in time I met her husband. You ever? Quite a boy."

"Yes. I never liked him."

"You're wrong. He's a prince."

"Oh?"

"Yah. But just the same, we had to make a decision and we made it. To go—together. We decided for ourselves and definitely. But then—just before the break, she let me down. Down, down."

"How?"

It was some time before he replied, carefully, "She turned out to be less than I'd counted on, that's all. Much. It may have been my mistake, but I don't think so. Even now, I don't think so. And it was over and done."

"Listen, Woody," I said, irritated by his lack of clarity. "If you're going to tell it, for God's sake tell it."

"Sure sure," he said. "I know. What happened was that after we decided we could handle the whole thing—"

Two waiters interrupted and made a production out of serving. They were doing no more than their jobs well, but I could have strangled them. At this moment it hardly mattered to me which was rare and which was medium-rare and yes I did want butter on my baked potato, no. And how do I know if I ordered sliced tomatoes? By the time

they had finished, the spell of the telling had been broken and I knew that I would have to wait for the rest. It did not come that night, because after we had eaten, we drove back into the city and on the way Woody talked of music and the plans he had in mind for moving into it again.

In town, he led me to a rehearsal studio he had rented in the quarters of a tacky little recording outfit on Jefferson Street. He had left his trumpet there and a tape machine, in a locked room. He unlocked it, we went in and settled down. He wound the tape into position, turned on the machine, adjusted the volume and I recognized at once the playing of Art Tatum. So that was what he had meant.

Woody unpacked his horn, and warmed it up by blowing breath through it from either side. He put his unattached mouthpiece to his lips and triple-tongued a series of whistle-high notes. Now he fitted the mouthpiece onto the horn and put it down. All this time, Art Tatum was playing. I tried to fade myself out, since I gathered that was what was expected of me. Moving slowly, Woody oiled the valves of the horn and punched them in. At last, he took off his jacket, removed his necktie, unbuttoned his shirt collar, and rolled his cuffs up off his wrists. Much of what he was doing had no important practical application, the routine being simply a device by which he crossed the bridge from reality into that other life where his music was. As an afterthought, he dropped his suspenders from his shoulders. By this time, the suspense had charged me up to a near-breaking point. I thought of the first time I had heard him play, and of the last, and of the broken years between, and I waited, brittle with impatience, knowing that whatever happened next would surprise me. I was not wrong.

He hit a middle note, held it, and ran up a few chords. He played in no relationship to the piano track (neither rhythmically nor harmonically) which was still going strong. He fingered up to a high note, down to a low, up to one still higher, down to one lower. A snatch of a tune now—"Somebody Stole My Gal;" a part of a march—"The Washington Post;" an echo of a classic—Beethoven's "Leonore Overture"

to *Fidelio*, and an original melody. I was reminded that his warmups had always been ear-catching and wild. He was running chords and changes again and now without warning, in a breath-taking burst, made contact with Tatum. Eight bars were enough to choke me up and fill my eyes. It was all there—the past and the hope and the hunger. Wallowing in nostalgia and sentiment, I cannot say that I listened attentively. Eventually, however, I surfaced and was able to put my attention on the music.

The first shock came with a weakly wavering tone on a held note. Was he doing it purposely? Was this an attempt at the new sort of stark, bitter, frustrated sound which Charlie Parker had often made? Or was it, simply, an inability to produce the sound any better? The answer came at once as he tried for a high note, cracked it, tried again and failed, then dropped down into the lower register where the results were even worse. I felt his relief as Tatum left "Tenderly," and moved into "Sittin' and Rockin'." It was as though he hoped that the faster tempo would make it possible for him to obscure his loss of tone with showy and spectacular runs. But this was a night of downfall and it was to be complete. The runs failed, not by much, but decisively. A wispy, banal, grace-noted riff was repeated until I thought he must be joking. Joking, hell. He came on strong and fine for a stretch—but I recognized his blatant imitation of Miles Davis. He caught my shocked look. I could hear the sound of panic, ashamed of itself, and I could hardly bear to look at Woody. When I did, I saw a flushed, damp face strained with effort, and when he opened his eyes, they were full of helpless fear.

He was game, though, and he stayed with it, trying, until the end of the on-and-on tape. That sick, deplorable riff came on again and still again. He finished in a blaze of nothing, blowing an obscene little raspberry as a final note. He shut off the machine, put down his horn, readjusted his suspenders, and sat down.

I thought of several things to say, but hesitated. Should I try a lie? Did I dare the truth? He had gone pale now and the contrast of his white face with the red one I had seen

a few minutes before was confounding. He was two people. Twins. One red and one white.

"And so," he said in an announcer's voice, "as the sinking sun sinks into the sinking sink, we say farewell to Hasbeen, Land of the Clinkermakers!"

The line produced goose flesh, because it was one I had heard him use often, in the past, but at the end of others' auditions.

I gave him a courtesy laugh.

"Best I can do right now," he said hoarsely.

I nodded.

He started a smile which turned into a sneer of self-deprecation and said, "What I should have done was belted a few more boozes. Then, at least, I'd've had an excuse. Mistake. Another one."

I shrugged in an empty, noncommittal way.

"Say something!" he ordered, unnerved by my pantomime.

"I guess you're a little out of practice."

"Thanks," he said tightly. "I knew it was something."

"Would you rather I just said 'great' and let it go at that?"

"I'd rather you hadn't been here at all, but it's too late for that now. I thought—I honestly thought that playing for someone—at someone—it might make a difference. I mean I've been listening to myself. Awful. I never heard *anybody* blow so much stale air. So I thought playing out instead of in—but no. It's gone."

He looked out the window.

I wondered which was more cruel—to dissemble or to level? I compromised. "Maybe the Tatum track is a mistake."

"Why?" His interest was piqued at once, and he was already in agreement.

"Well, he doesn't exactly lay down a beat. He just flourishes around there. All right for him, all that decorative jimmjam, but no help to you."

He stood up, eagerly, threw his cigarette to the floor and stepped on it. He stared at the tape machine.

"You think so?" he asked. I had never before heard that plaintive note in his voice.

"Why don't you get with Albie?" I suggested. "Or somebody, anybody to get your glands going. Somebody in there with you. Like something I ran across the other day. Ruby Braff and a piano—"

"Ellis Larkins," he supplied.

"That's it. I don't know when I've heard anything better. Never."

He was riled. "So what're you going to do—sit there all night telling me how good Braff is, for Christ's sake?"

"No."

"I know how good he is. Just wait till *his* needle gets stuck, though."

"I only meant to point out about the backup he had on these sides."

"Yah."

"I don't have to tell you, Woody. Jazz is something that happens. You know that. God, that I should be telling you! Even so, who is there can't use a reminder about the simple fundamentals once in a while? Jazz. It's discovery. Communication. Remember how you used to say? Male and female. It's action and reaction and—"

"What time is it?" he asked abruptly.

"Nine-thirty," I replied, looking at my watch.

"Come on," he said. "Let's call him."

"Who?"

"Albie. Isn't that what we're talking about?"

"Right now?" I asked.

"Sure right now, why not?"

"I have to go pretty soon," I said.

"What the hell do I care?" he replied coldly. "Not my fault you're henpecked."

He went out to the phone and I sat there speculating on the possibility of dropping him and the whole bloody business. He was certainly out of hand and too fresh and quixotic and unpredictable and, for all I knew—dangerous.

Woody—still another Woody—returned with two Cokes. He handed me one of them and we drank. He looked at me, full of admiration.

"You're clever," he said. "In your own dumb little way, clever. You may be right. It's probably Tatum's fault at that. Albie's on the way. The United States Marines."

"Good."

He sat down. "Don't get me wrong. It's not that I think the world needs my playing—there's plenty of lips around blowing real come-to-Jesus horn. But who needs it is me! I'm nothing without it. *Look at me.*"

I looked at him and asked, "What happened with Edmonde?"

"What?" he said, unguarded.

"That time in Paris. You never finished telling me. The waiters came."

He lit a cigarette before speaking.

"She and I," he said. "Like Tatum and I, just now. We couldn't get together. It happens, you know. We couldn't match up. Nothing against either of us. There're people—happily married—love and all that—but they can't produce a kid because their blood-types don't mingle right. That wasn't our trouble. With us it was commoner. A question of rhythm—in small matters and large. You ever noticed it? How most of the frictions and troubles involving people are a question of rhythms? The pace at which they eat together or wake and sleep or walk or talk or understand, or the more obvious ones, controls how they get on. Watch it. That's what adjustment is. That's why everybody likes a swinging band—because they're all on the same beat and it's a comfort." He paused, and I assumed that he was organizing a continuation of the Edmonde account. I held still, but it did not come. "Funny what they'll sit still for over there," he said, to my dismay. "There's nothing wrong with Bechet, mind you, but he's not the one to add to or subtract from, after all."

As he continued his long analysis of transplanted jazz, I realized that he had told me as much about the Edmonde episode as he intended to tell me. I would not press the point. Not tonight.

Albie arrived and lifted our spirits at once. Even after many tens of thousands of hours of playing, he still radiated

enthusiasm and excitement about what might happen in the course of the next five minutes.

First we talked. Woody explained his position and my guess. Albie kept nodding his head. Was it that he agreed or only that he understood?

"Lordy," said Woody. "It's so simple! Maybe that's why we never thought of it, hey?"

"Might be," said Albie.

"Sure," I said, "you have to be simple-minded, like me."

Albie moved to the piano and began a left-hand roll. It was a laydown I had never felt before. Woody smiled as he moved to his horn and picked it up.

"Take your time," said Albie, playing. "Take it slow. Nothing good happens all of a sudden."

"B-flat," said Woody, getting a firm hold on his instrument.

"And look," continued Albie, "if we don't find it tonight, maybe some other night."

"B-flat," said Woody.

Albie modulated into the requested key and sent his right hand in to bounce off high, rhythmic clusters. In between, he played a few figures which I recognized as characteristic of Woody's old playing. Albie was reminding him, subtly.

And now Woody began to blow, cautiously but confidently, a chorus of "Love for Sale." Memory was at work rather than creation, but whatever was happening, it was an improvement over what had happened an hour ago. Here and there, he left his familiar road and tried something new. Albie, sensitive to what Woody missed, played, in a sense, what Woody had meant to play. It might have sounded well to an outsider, but we three knew the trouble. Still, when the song ended, we all privately decided to yes it up before one another:

"And there you are, man," said Albie, smiling.

"What'd I tell you?" I shouted. "Who was right for a change, it turns out?"

"Well well well," said Woody, quietly, looking at his trumpet.

Albie stood up, apparently anxious to leave well enough alone.

"Wait a second," said Woody, like a leader. "Jump something."

Albie looked at me without successfully masking his apprehension. He sat down and, after a moment, began to beat out a medium-fast rhythm. Woody snapped his fingers at the keyboard, on the afterbeat, indicating an acceleration. Albie responded until the bounce was up to speed.

It proved to be a mistake.

Woody executed a fluent upward chromatic run in triplets and screamed into a fast chorus of "I'm Crazy 'bout My Baby." In the desperation of trying to get every note in and yet keep up the breakneck speed he had set himself, he added half a bar and almost threw Albie. Albie improvised grimly, set on making the best of it. He purposely played dissonant, maniacal chord combinations to match Woody's fluffs. At one time his left hand and right hand were playing in different keys. His face was dripping, not because of effort, but because of embarrassment. The end came at last. Woody laughed and laughed. Nerves? Hysteria? Albie strummed easily so as to avoid silence. His harmonies were eerie and atonal, reflecting his inner upset.

I spoke. "See that?" (What did that mean?)

"Albie," said Woody, "you are the man of the hour."

"Imagine what you could do," said Albie, vacantly, "if you had ol' Slug back here bangin' it out for you."

Woody stopped laughing and frowned in sudden pain. I watched him as he moved over to Albie and swung him around on the bench, viciously.

That silence we had tried to avoid was here.

"What did you say?" asked Woody, his mouth tense.

Albie looked at me, then at him and said, "Slug. I just mentioned about Slug. Don't you—?"

Woody emitted a strangled sob and twisted away. For a moment, the position of his body suggested that he was about to run out of the room. Instead, he stiffened, dropped his trumpet, and fell to the floor in a faint. The trumpet

bounced and rolled. The crack of Woody's head on the floor echoed in the room.

Albie jumped up and ran out. I could hear him shouting something at the night attendant.

I kneeled, rolled Woody over, loosened his tie and tried to remember the indicated treatment. Something about bending them forward to get the blood flowing into the head, wasn't it? Easier said. I moved behind his head and tried to lift him into a sitting position. The floor was slippery and I made no progress. Besides, he was still stiff. Dead? That bubbled spittle at the corners of his mouth—significant? I felt for his pulse. It was weak and slow, but steady.

The night attendant, a shaky old man, came in as quickly as he could. He studied the prone Woody and shook his head.

He looked at me, extended his hand, and said politely, "Good evening. My name's Jansen."

We shook hands. Albie ran in with a pitcher of water. He dashed it into Woody's face. We watched for some effect. None. Albie went out, presumably for more water. Jansen helped me to raise Woody, to spread his legs and to force his head between them.

"Can you hold him?" he asked.

"I think so, yes."

"Got a medicine box out there somewhere. Should have, anyway."

He left as Albie returned with another pitcherful of water. This time he poured it slowly over the back of Woody's neck. Nothing.

"Rub his wrists," I said. "Circulation."

Albie put down the pitcher and began rubbing Woody's wrists. I was still holding his head down, wondering if it was the right thing to do.

Jansen came rushing in with a tin box. He opened it, found some ammonia capsules, broke one and held it near Woody's face. Almost at once, I felt movement under my fingers. Woody's head was rolling, trying to escape the acrid

fumes. Jansen kneeled in and forced the broken capsule closer. Woody's head began swinging.

"Okay," I said. "Hold it a minute."

I moved Woody into an upright sitting position. Albie began to slap his cheeks, easily, and to call his name.

"Circulation," I said.

He began coming to, slowly. We lifted him into a chair. Albie was rubbing the back of Woody's head. Jansen was fanning him with a phonograph record.

I stood apart, watching. Now that the moment of emergency had passed, I could no longer avoid a consideration of the unspeakable idea which had exploded like a festering boil inside my head and was spreading, spreading its poison.

Woody—and the end of Slug. He had had something to do with it. Was this what he had been trying to tell me?

At first, I dismissed it and put it all down to a fantasy of night and bad air and the lamentable performance I had suffered through. We think the damnedest things when tired. But my suspicion persisted. Why should a simple reference to Slug knock him unconscious? Perhaps it wasn't that at all. Perhaps it was the fact that in saying what he had said, Albie had revealed that he did not think the trumpet display as impressive as it might have been. Of course. That was it. What the hell was the matter with me, anyway? To be imaginative is one thing, to be neurotic is another. Forget it, I commanded. I obeyed, and put my attention back on Woody.

He was on his feet now. Albie and Jansen were walking him to the open window. The scene put me in mind of a prize-fight ring and a beaten fighter and his solicitous seconds.

I moved over to join the group. Woody stared at me.

"How *about* that?" he asked softly.

"Okay?" I inquired.

"Something we ate, you think?" he asked.

"Must've been," said Albie.

"Just excitement," I said knowingly. "Walk around if you can. Circulation." (Why did I keep saying that?)

Woody drank some water. We sent Jansen down to the

corner Rexall's to get a bottle of brandy. When he came back with it, Woody took a few swallows and the color began to return to his face.

Albie and Jansen each had a drink, too; and I was closer to it than I had been in some time.

It was nearly eleven and I had to go. Albie assured me that he could handle it now.

"How about tomorrow?" I asked Woody.

"Without fail," he said firmly. "I'll pick you up."

"Seven?" I asked.

"Six-thirty."

"Right."

"Your place."

"Take it easy," I suggested.

"That's me," he said, and smiled.

Jansen saw me out. "Thanks," I said to him at the door. "You're a brick."

"I'm show business myself," he said. "I used to be in a trampoline act."

"That a fact."

"Yeah. Business all shot to hell now. All this goddam TV and television. My name's Jansen," he said, as we shook hands.

"Good night," I said, and started off.

"Hate to tell you how many breaks and fractures *I've* had!" he shouted down the hall as I got into the elevator.

It had been a fierce night. I was good and jangled and filled with exasperation and disappointment, to say nothing of the effect of that last scare. I was determined to put the whole thing out of my mind until I could deal with it on morning energy.

At the theatre, I persuaded my wife to come out to supper instead of going straight home as we had planned. We asked a few of the members of her company to join us, and the preoccupation of playing host for a couple of hours helped me to keep my thoughts from dwelling on the troubled earlier part of the evening.

But later, at home, in bed and in the dark, escape was

not so easy. I knew that sleep was impossible on the brink of the fearful new notion. I had never before taken a sleeping pill, but I got up and took one now from a small bottle which my wife carried just in case.

I went out into the sitting room, waiting for the first signs of its effect. Magazines with pictures. I invented a game of trying to think of someone I knew who looked like every one whose picture I saw. A good game. I started to feel drowsy and had difficulty in focusing when the photographs began to seem, one after another, pictures of people I *did* know. I went back to bed. Bleary as I was, scenes and lines and clues kept pushing forward for attention.

At first, I dismissed them all as nonsense and remembered that I had once said to a friend—"Listen, if someone tells you I'm a fairy and you start watching me for it—I'll prove they're right a hundred times a day. Because you'll start reading it into the most ordinary, innocent things I say and do. That's the hell of gossip and slander." Now, to whom had I said that? And in what connection?

Slug. Woody. One. Two. Two and two. Slug, one. Woody, two. Two and one. Two and two. I kept putting the two's together and making four. I could not deceive myself into making them into twenty-two, or even into five. What I was thinking was unthinkable. It was unreal. I am real, I thought. And so is Woody. And what about Slug? I asked myself. Real? No, dead. You don't say. Go on. I went on, and again two and two made four, until four and four made two. A montage of shattering headlines swarmed me into sleep.

I awoke so alert that I thought I must be someone else. There was not so much as a thought of further sleep. I got up, quietly, and left the bedroom. It was seven A.M. I ordered breakfast and looked at the papers while I waited for it to arrive. I was convinced, as I read the papers, that I had seen the identical ones the previous morning. I checked with the calendar. I asked the telephone operator for the day and date. She gave me the information and added the exact time and temperature. No, I could not possibly have seen these papers. It must be the aftereffects of that pill I

had taken. Never again. Breakfast. Is that what I ordered? Thank you. The coffee made a difference and now, in the dim light of a new day, I began to reconsider the events of the night before. Never mind them, I thought, they only indicate where you should look and what for. A tumble of sounds and images assailed my memory.

Woody's feelings about going to Harlem.

Woody turns down Albie. Fights with Don and me. Loses.

Woody after that time with the hoodlum yelling up out of the auditorium at the Strand.

But Woody proposes to Clara.

Slug and Edmonde and Woody. That wild weekend. The two of us in the pool and the trumpet, too.

Woody joins Navy.

Woody cracks up.

Slug on the floor of Woody's room. Woody's room.

Slug in the rest home. Did Woody go to see him? Of course.

I was beginning to feel ashamed of myself and to believe that I had created a fantasticality of wide proportions. Another cup of coffee. I was thinking more clearly now and decided that I was nervous. Chicago had made me nervous, and the strange routine of recent life—must change it—and trying to pick up relationships after too long an interval. Nervous. How had I recently heard the word defined? "A nervous person is a person who makes other people nervous." That's it. That's Woody. Bad company. In any case, we had overdone it. Boring for both, I should think. Skip tonight. Call it off. I leaped eagerly at this plan.

Why, I wondered? Why this sudden fear of more Woody? What was that something he was always about to tell me? He *did* tell me. What? All about Edmonde and all that. That wasn't it. It wasn't? Of course not. Never mind. Whatever, I would call it off for tonight. Tomorrow night was the last possible anyway, so let it go at that. One is enough. Good-bye and that's that for the time being. Where's the number? What's the time?

I drank a final cup of coffee and went over to pick up my address book. It lay next to the phone beside the sofa. I picked it up and sat down. I began to leaf through the pages, forgetting for the moment just what it was that I was looking for. Names became faces, addresses became places. I lay back and started to read from the beginning. How else is one to read a book?

"A and B Booksellers, 600 West 161 St., NY 32, SW 5-1800; ABBOTT, George, 630 Fifth Ave., NY 19, JU 2-0600; ABTIN, Ezzat Mr. and Mrs., 849 South Oxford, Los Angeles, California; ACHARD, Marcel M. and Mme. (Juliette), 8 Rue de Courty, Paris vii, France, Invalides 50-06; Actor's Equity, 226 West 47 St., PL 7-7660."

Fascinated and eager, I fell into one of my worst habits—skipping. "AGER, Cecilia, 350 Park Ave., NY 17, PL 5-7576; ALLEN, Adrienne (Mrs. William Whitney), 2, The Grove, Highgate Village, London N. 6, Mountview 1104. NY: 270 Park Avenue, PL 5-9828." What a good book! I fell asleep.

My wife woke me carefully at ten. She was disturbed to find me on the sofa, until I explained what had happened. I joined her at breakfast. I was hungry.

"What's more," I announced proudly, "I took a sleeping pill!"

"No!"

"I did, yes—and look, I'm still here."

"So I see."

I had believed, for some time, that if I were ever to take a sleeping pill, I would never awaken.

"I sure have had enough of Chicago," I said grumpily.

"Oh? I love it."

"You love everywhere."

"Practically."

"Too full of too many long losts," I complained. "I thought I was going to enjoy it, but—I don't know. Can't cope."

I thought it best to say nothing of the germs of suspicion which had been implanted in me the night before.

"Baltimore'll be restful," she said.

"I'm going to work in Baltimore," I said.

"Many people do," she said.

We read the papers. We dressed and went for a walk. We went to Stop an' Shop and bought fruit. We went to the Cape Cod Room at the Drake for lunch before returning to the Blackstone.

My wife went into the bedroom to write letters and to rest; I began my once-a-day therapy of putting the cluttered sitting room in order. It gave me the illusion, somehow, of putting myself in order. This need probably explains my fondness for shopping in office-supply stores. As I buy holders and folders and staplers and gadgets and clips, I feel that I am taking steps toward Getting It All Arranged. After three decades of such acquisition, however, there seems to be less arranged than ever. Even the *supplies* need arranging now.

And yet, this time, the activity itself was of value. As I ordered the room, I balanced the situation of Woody and myself. I began at the most recent beginning and reviewed our meetings and our exchanges. I completed it coolly and decided that perhaps we had both had enough—for now, at least. If he had something more to tell me about himself and Slug—I really did not wish to hear it. What was the point? What the hell could I do about it? Why tell me? Sinking again into the quicksand of sick imagining—I grasped at a hope: Was I making all this up? What, actually, did I have to go on? What did I know—not think, believe, suspect, wonder, surmise, infer—what did I know? Not much. But someone inside me knew. Who? The younger me, long encrusted in a patina of time and trial. That part of me which was contemporaneous with the living Slug, knew—perhaps had always known—that he had been—What? Well, say, eliminated by Woody. Exactly how, I had no notion—

I made a sudden decision to resign from the whole affair. The only way. I had troubles of my own. Leaving here anyway. Had enough. I would write him a letter (enclose another check?) and tell him—well, something. Send it over by messenger. How about a telegram? No, phone. A letter.

I went to the desk and sat down. A piece of note paper, a pen. I began.

Dear Woody—

I examined these two words for the better part of half an hour. Nothing to follow.

I picked up the phone and asked for the number. Eunice answered.

“Hello, Eunice. It’s me.”

“How are *you*, Me?”

“Fine. How’s Woody?”

“Oh, much better. He’s been blowing away up there all day.”

“He has?” I asked.

“Sure, why?”

“Why what?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?”

“Nothing. Just he was so sick last night.”

“Yuh. Well, that’s Woody. He gets sick and he gets better. I tell him sometimes. I say, ‘You just get sick when you want to and better when you’ve had enough.’ And he says, ‘Cutie, you’re the only one knows my secret.’ He’s some number, that one.”

“Sure is.”

“You want to talk to him?”

“Yes, please. If I may.”

“Hold it.”

I heard her shout his name, twice.

She returned to the phone.

“Be right down,” she said. “What about you? We going to see you before you leave or you giving us the go-by?”

“Oh, sure,” I said, bantering. “I’m pretty sick of the whole damn bunch of you.”

“No kidding,” she said. “Try.”

“I will, Eunice.”

“Here he is,” she said.

I braced myself for the sound of his voice. It came on.

“Yah?”

“How do you feel?” I asked.

“Less.”

“What?”

“Less. I feel less.”

“Listen, Woody. Something’s come up.”

“Yah? What?”

“You know, last minute louse-ups. You know.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Well—” My voice had a lame sound.

“Make it a little later, then,” he said. “After dinner.”

“I’ll try,” I stalled.

“No,” he said evenly. “Don’t try. Do it. See your way clear. It’s important. I have to see you.”

“How about tomorrow afternoon?” I asked.

“Why not tonight?”

“I told you, Woody.”

“That’s just it, you didn’t.”

“I’m really up to my ears.”

“Okay,” he said. “Tomorrow. What time?”

“Lunch?”

“No,” he said. “Make it after lunch. I always get sick when I eat with you. Don’t ask me why.”

“Two o’clock.”

“Pick you up,” he said.

“Sorry,” I said.

“I know you are.”

I hung up and felt relieved. Now all I had to do was to get out of tomorrow. All in good time. That could be handled by letter, by wire.

I dealt with routine mail until five-thirty, when my wife’s dinner came in. I sat with her while she ate it, and, shortly after six, left with her to walk her over to the theatre.

As we stepped out of the elevator into the lobby, I thought I saw Woody walk by. So, I worried, it’s going to be one of those evenings, is it?

“What’s the matter?” asked my wife.

“Me?” I said.

“You shivered.”

“Cold, I guess.”

“You couldn’t be.”

“Am, though.”

“You know where your sweaters are?”

“No.”

“In the bottom drawer of the big trunk.”

“Oh, good.”

“Wear the maroon. Sleeves.”

“Thanks.”

I had been casing the lobby throughout all this. Not a sign. Seeing things. A delayed reaction from that damned sleeping pill?

I left my wife in her dressing room, and on my way out stopped to read every document pinned to the backstage bulletin board. Why?

I stepped out through the stage door and started up the alley. Halfway to the street, I saw Woody coming toward me. I stopped—yes, frightened.

He smiled as he approached me.

“Couldn’t wait,” he said.

I looked at my watch.

“I have to go, Woody,” I said. “I’m late.”

“No, you’re not.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I know about you,” he said. “Just like you know about me. All about. So let’s for God’s sake face it. And each other. Don’t turn your back, huh?”

I saw that it was no use.

“All right,” I said.

He took my arm. We walked up the alley to the street and turned left.

“Where do you want to go?” he asked. “Somewhere quiet?”

“Anywhere,” I said.

“How about up to your place?”

I hesitated for a moment, and ruled against it. I did not

want what was coming to spoil the place where I had to stay—even if only for a couple of days more.

“No,” I said. “Let’s eat.”

We went to Henrici’s and I think that we both welcomed the anonymity of being part of a crowded, noisy room. He knew the hostess and got us a table, away from others, in a far corner of the inside room.

He ordered and I said, “Same.” My mind was not on food.

“Friend,” he said, “this is going to take some time. That’s why I couldn’t wait any more. You know my trouble, I guess.”

“I’ve got an idea.”

“What?”

“Something about Slug’s checkout,” I said, and waited. I was surprisingly calm. We looked at each other in lucid communication. “I take it you had something to do with it.”

“That’s it,” he said.

He picked up a piece of bread and began to butter it. Some of the tautness went out of his face, now that this lay at last open and before us.

The waitress served two bowls of cream of tomato soup. Neither of us made a move toward them.

“I never told anyone for years,” said Woody. “I never even told myself the first few.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Why. Never told myself why. That is, I did tell myself, but I lied.”

He could see that I did not understand and that I was framing another question. He reached out and touched me, across the table.

“Don’t,” he said. “Just listen. This isn’t easy to do. Not for me, not for you. But listen awhile. If you cross-examine me, I’ll fox you. Like I did myself for so long. I’m very tricky on it. Remember I’ve had this to live with since June eleven, nineteen thirty-three. Before, really, when I started *thinking* of it. But from June eleven, there was no turning back. It’s from there on that it counts. That doctor I told you about—he made a point, very interesting to me at the time. He said,

'Don't ever worry about what you think or dream or imagine, you're not responsible for that—you're only responsible for what you do.' For what you do. So until I did it, you understand, it was nothing. Nothing more than millions of people think every day. It only begins to matter when you do it. When I did it. Why I should have been the one or one of the ones, well—"

"Woody—" I said.

"Please!" he begged, his face contorted with pain.

"Just this. I'll listen. I won't interrupt. But Jesus, what's the point of laying it on me? I mean why me, and why after all this time? What can I—?"

"That's part of it!" he said tensely. Then, to the waitress, who was looking oddly at our untouched soup, "Okay. Finished. Take it away."

She did so.

"I beg you," said Woody, "to bear with me."

"Go ahead."

"Norrie Scudder. A fellow I met in the Navy. Fine guy, we became friends. He told me he'd been crocked for twenty-two years. That is to say that over that period of time, twenty-two years, he was never completely sober. Now that might be hard for some people to believe, but not for me and I'll tell you why. Because I was in a daze for almost the same period of time. I was certainly not responsible. I was in a state of shock. I slept and ate and played and went through all the motions, but believe me, boy, I was not there."

The waitress served whitefish with vegetables, and salads. When she had gone, he continued.

"It was when I came to, that I made a beeline for Madame. She could have helped me, but she didn't. We'd waited a long time to get close, and when we did, finally—I told her—and that was the end of us. That was the boner."

I was choking back questions. He went on.

"I'm a fairly brainy type," he said. "You know that, of course. Sometimes I've thought that's what's held back my playing from over the top. You can't think and play. You've

got to be able just to feel and blow. But in the head department, I turned out to be no match for her. She is one deep lady indeed, and what's more, she's been fortified by loads of living, so she knows whereof. She doesn't suffer from that awful sickness of unlived life. I remember the exact moment I put it before her. She said nothing for a hell of a spell and then just one word: 'Why?' So I told her. I said, 'It was you. I was in a panic and thought he was on the way to cutting me out. It was a nightmare—I couldn't believe it was me doing it—but I kept feeding it to him. Sometimes when he knew he was getting it and sometimes when he didn't know, but I knew that enough of it would do him in in time, so I saw to it that he got enough of it.'

I was following carefully. He had begun by re-creating his scene with Edmonde, but now he lost that thread and began to speak to me.

"Why did I tell her? Many reasons. First of all, we were planning to be together for good, weren't we? So I owed her the truth, didn't I? And more important, I had to have somebody forgive me. She was the logical one. The insane thing is that she did—she did forgive me—she said she did and she meant it. But then she said that that was no good—'hopeless' I think was the word she used. She said I would have to forgive myself and could I? And when she dropped the blockbuster on me—How I survived that I'll never know. Maybe I didn't survive it."

He took a sip of water. Neither of us had touched the food before us. It was out of the question. At the next table, four gay ladies in a hat contest were giggling over their second cocktails.

Woody looked at me. "You're listening fine," he said. "Thank you. What she did to me! Took me by the scruff of the neck and shoved my face right into the mess I'd made. Of all the women I could have picked, I had to pick a rock. A realist. Maybe that's good—the thing to be. I'm not sure. I haven't committed myself yet. I'm not sure what I believe. In what's real or in the more convenient puff stuff. I suppose I'd be for the life-in-a-daze, but what troubles me is that

that's the one most people live in and there's something in me that hates being like other people. A quirk. I know so few who can handle the real. You may be one. I'm not sure, mind you, but you may be. I think of the time you came to grips with the fact that there was no future for you in playing. The plain fact. You faced it. You're a fact facer. At least you were, in your twenties—maybe by now you're on some hop—but you were pretty real back then. I hope now, too. Otherwise this is going to turn out an empty, this talking to you, this telling. Big telling. To you and to myself. Who was it said: 'How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?' No matter. Somebody. Some bloody body. Telling you, telling myself. Let's have a drink. I'm shaking like a leaf."

He waved the waitress over. She looked at our plates.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

"Not a thing," said Woody. "Everything is dreamy, but take it away and bring me a double Old Forester, plain water."

She looked at me.

"Same," I said. It seemed the simplest course.

The waitress cleared the table.

"*Madame*," reflected Woody. "How that woman drove it in! She sent about a hundred thousand volts through me in about two minutes. Nailed me up, with no anaesthetic."

He stopped talking for such a long time that I felt it necessary to prompt, however softly, "How do you mean?"

"She told me," he said. "She put it to me right then and there. She said, 'No, Woody. I am not the reason. You don't love me. You never did and you never could.'"

In the trauma of retelling, he began to sound like Edmonde.

He went on. "'Because there is no love in you,' she said. Get this dame! 'No love in you,' she said. 'There is much of hate and you have used it in its final expression.' And I said to her, 'On account of you, remember.' And she gave me the second jolt. She said, 'No, I am only your excuse. If it was because of me, you can forgive yourself, according to jungle law. Men for women. Crimes of passion. But it is not true,

Woody. You are trying to deceive yourself. You did *not* do it for me.' I was almost out, but I managed to ask, 'How do you know?' And she just laid those big clean eyes on me and she said, 'Because *you* know.' And then she got dressed and she left me. And that was, I'm sorry to say, that. I'd never had the belly to open that door inside myself, and there she'd gone ahead and done it. Think of that. How long you can hang on to a fraud in yourself. And then she grabbed it away, and I had to look for another why. I went to Marseilles. You ever been? Six, seven months. I played a joint there. I got worse every night, till finally even they could hear it and canned me. I played a ship home. New York. Here. And soon after that was the first cave-in. Because from that time on, I had to handle the fact of the new why. That God damned *Madame*. She bust my bubble."

The drinks arrived. He mixed his, methodically, and took the first welcome swallow.

After which he said, "Tell you an idea I tried on for size for a while. The suspicion that I was off my rocker—permanently or temporarily, either way. In the circumstances, pretty comforting. Even in law, they make allowances for loonies. That was why I went to that couch man. I can tell you now. I was hoping he'd find a screw loose. I told myself that old one about if you think you're nuts, you're not, because people who are, think they're not. By the way—no truth in that at all, I found out. But that wasn't my situation. What I'd done was an inevitable outgrowth, more or less of a climax, of something that had been building up in me for a long time. A lifetime. The oak out of my acorn, and the acorn had been planted in me long ago. Nobody's born with it. It's acquired or learned or imitated, isn't it? My fault? Well. I suppose it's common for kids to identify something—someone—as The Enemy. Grownups, teachers, other schools, the next block, the next town. Mine was a whole race. There's another angle. The way to feel superior is to find somebody you can believe is inferior—then, of course, the trick is to keep them inferior. Keep them in their place. Under you. I might have outgrown it, but I didn't. I needed

the kind of help I didn't get. Grew older, fell in with ones who had the same idea of enemy. School—I happened to be in one where blacks were kept out, so that reinforced the idea. Officially. College. By then I was ready to pile up an intellectual background for my sickness. A rationalization—you might say. And here and there I found it and ate it and it fed me. It could only end in one way, I suppose. And it did. Afterward, I began to think of how it started. Traced back back back. I suppose it starts when I was a kid. Seven years old, eight."

At this point, my expression must have revealed something of my inner impatience. He sensed it at once and said tightly, "I don't owe you any of this, you know. I'm telling it to you and to myself because I want to and because I feel like it and you're part of it."

"Go ahead," I said calmly.

He finished his drink, reached over, and appropriated mine. As he stirred it, he went on. "We lived in Grand Rapids. My father was in the building business. He'd opened up a big development. Well, I say big—I mean big for then and for him. I suppose there were about a hundred and fifty houses, all pretty much the same, all in a row and they sold for five thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars. I know because I remember the big sign on the corner. That number was the biggest thing on it." His hand traced the numerals in the air. "Five seven five o. He sold them all, except one. The one we lived in. He held the mortgages on most of the rest of them and we were flush. New car. Cottage at the lake. Fine. One day he came in late for lunch, wild. I'd never seen him like that before and it scared the b'Jesus out of me. He got on the phone and he stayed on it getting madder all the time and my mother made us go upstairs, but we listened, my sister and my kid brother and I, and what it turned out was that one of the owners had sold his property to a colored family from Detroit, and my father had to stop it because if he didn't the whole development—all he had—would be nothing. I'll never forget that all-night night. And by morning the house was full of some

of the owners and it was a meeting and they decided to chip in and buy the blacks out, even give them a profit. But they turned it down and there was nothing to be done."

He paused and when he continued it was in a lower tone and at a slower pace.

"So that night a bunch of the owners got together and my father was with them and I wasn't supposed to be but I was and we trooped on over there and—made things tough. Rocks and vegetables and crap and we tore hell out of the place—the fence up by the roots, and clapboard skinned right off the house. And by the time the police came, it was a shambles. But those new owners were stubborn or proud or stupid or whatever the hell and they stayed and fought and that was it. The development went bust and so did my father and there was a bad time for a while. I suppose that's when the sickness started. It grew from that. Economics and emotions in one neat package."

He looked at me, carefully. I tried to keep my expression bland, but his eyes became unfriendly.

"You're not with me," he surmised. "Okay. You don't have to be." His look changed. It was helpless again. "Only do this one thing for me, will you? Think of what you are and do and how you dress and brush your teeth and what food you like or hate and then trace it back and see where it started. It'll end up somewhere back there, like mine. The good things and the bad ones and the others that don't much matter one way or another."

I nodded, meaning nothing.

"Anyway," he continued, "we moved to Hinsdale—where my mother's sister lived—and my father went to work as a mason and didn't stop until well after his first million. It was a nearly all-white town and that's where I grew up. Or tried to. Funny. Any other place, maybe I'd never have played anything, but there, nothing much to do, Elk's Band, free lessons. And we had a barn I liked, and I'd sit up there ten hours at a stretch and blow. Do you think—?"

The waitress interrupted, asking, "Dessert?"

"Apple pie," I said.

"Same," said Woody.

"Cheese?" she asked.

"No," from Woody.

"Yes," from me.

"Coffee?" she asked.

We both nodded. She left.

"Let me ask you a question," said Woody. "It's one I've asked myself many times—and given myself Godknows how many answers. How much difference is there between killing a man and not allowing him to live? Don't give me a top-of-the-head. Just think about it. Never mind. What the hell's the difference how it started? How it ended, that's the killer." He stopped and ran his tongue over his lips. "What a way to put it, huh?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"What can I do?" he asked.

I tried to think of an intelligent answer, but became conscious of the feeling that the place was unbearably overheated; that the noise was distracting (if those women at the next table didn't stop giggling, I was going to throw something); and that the mixed odor of food and smoke was making me ill. What had he asked me? Oh, yes.

"Why ask me?" I replied. "Who am I to know?"

"Who should I ask?"

"Yourself."

"What the hell do you think I've been doing, you half-wit?" he said loudly.

"Ssh. Easy."

"Christ Almighty!" he continued, substituting intensity for volume. "You sit there like some—smug and holier-than-goddam-thou—"

"All right, all right," I soothed.

"All right, all right," he mocked. "You sound like some Major Bowes, for Christ's sake!"

In an instant inner preview, I saw myself rising, dropping a bill on the table, and stalking out. This was followed by an image of him attacking me from behind with a piece of the convenient cutlery. I sat still.

He was still talking. “—and why you look so bloody put upon. I’ve given it to you easy.”

“Thanks.”

“And you can shove that sarcasm, too, ol’ pal.”

I replied with what I hoped was a hard, warning look.

He said, “I could have conveyed some of the more graphic parts. A few of the sights and sounds I’ve had to live with. You don’t appreciate what I’ve spared you.”

“I do, Woody.” (That’s right. Placate him.)

“Right at the end there,” said Woody, his eyes fixed and glazed, “he caught on. He knew. And from the floor he said to me—”

“Don’t tell me!” I blurted in panic, but went unheard.

Woody continued. “—he said, ‘Why?’ Some question, huh? ‘Why’ve you done me this, Woody? I wish you please just tell why.’”

The reproductive ear of Woody’s was at work again, and as the accurately evoked sound of Slug hit me, I turned away. A poor idea, because as the sound continued without visible origin, it was even more spectral. I looked back at Woody, to find him sipping his coffee. When had it been served? And this pie.

He said, “So he asked it and went out for good and left me to answer it. And then later, she asked it—*Madame*—the same God damned Johnny-one-note question. The nearest I ever came to an answer was a few times in the war. The simple idea of wiping out the enemy seemed not so horrible because everyone was at it, and what I’d done—was living with—didn’t seem so unspeakable. But—well, I suppose I was half-nutty in those days.”

More coffee, after which he leaned forward in a concentrated attempt to get through to me. His voice was persuasive.

“You bar a man from a band or a house or a city. That’s not a form of killing? What if he’s barred from *every* place and *every* job? Not killing? It’s a coward’s way of murdering—slowly and painfully, but within the law. I can’t say much for that son of a bitch I was back there—but at least he had

the courage of his—or what he thought were his convictions.”

Something about my answering look made him laugh, suddenly.

“What?” I asked.

“Your silent talk,” he said. “So clear. But you’re wrong. I’m in full possession of my senses—such as they are. I’m only trying to point out that I’ve done this—putting it to you—as gracefully as I know how.”

I took the forming “Thanks” from my tongue and substituted, “Okay.”

He appeared to have grown thinner in the last hour. At any rate, I had never before noticed those hollows in his cheeks.

“Think of it this way,” he said. “What would you do?”

I thought it over and said, “I can’t handle that one, Woody. I don’t know.”

“Try,” he pleaded. “Use your imagination. Put yourself in my place.”

“No,” I said. “I don’t want to.”

“All right, then. Advise me.”

“I don’t know, Woody,” I said. “This is way out of my range and I wish to God you hadn’t curved me into it.”

He covered his eyes and muttered, “Tell me what to do.”

“All I can think of is something pretty conventional. Find a lawyer.” He looked up at me, listening. “That’s what I’d do. Get to a lawyer and lay it out. Tell it all. Let him find out where you stand. What’s destroying you is living with it, bottled up. Well, open it. Lay it on the line. And take the consequences.”

“No,” he said decisively.

“All right, then. No.”

“Don’t you suppose I’ve been through all that? Thought of that?”

“I’m sure of it.”

“Look here—” he began. He swallowed what was left of his coffee and rose. “Let’s go.”

I got up, picked up the check, left a tip and followed him. The waitress, and another waitress who had apparently been

told about these two non-eating oddballs, watched us leave. We were to become, no doubt, a part of the Henrici kitchen legend.

I found him on the sidewalk. We started toward the lake again. He did not speak, nor did I. On the way, he stopped and bought a pint of bourbon.

Half an hour later, we sat in the park, between the lake and the city. Finally, he continued.

“What could happen? I’d be punished. All right. Would that help Slug? Or me? Or anyone? No, it’s too late for that. Or too early, maybe. Punishment. Christ, what do you think’s been happening to me these years? You don’t call that punishment? I used to be able to play, now I can’t. *Was* something, *am* nothing. Is that a heavy enough fine?” He took a drink. “All right, I overstepped the bounds of civilized behavior. Some inside pressure built and built until—Never mind. No excuse. It builds in other people and never blows. I’m aware of that. But what now—I mean short of my own checkout—what now? And even that—would that solve it? Eye for eye? Does that? I’ve hounded myself and punished myself—and I’d have knocked myself off if I’d thought that would.” Another swallow from the pint. “Always been punishment, but has it ended crime? There’s got to be something better.”

“What you want,” I suggested, “is forgiveness.”

He sighed wearily, and shook his head. “Once. No more. Because no good. Trouble is, when you forgive a man for a sin, you begin him a long chain of sin and be forgiven. No. What I have to do is to—to—atone.” It was as though he had never before spoken the word. “How? Live an example. In these things, it turns out in the end that the do-its are worse off than the done-tos. Because they gather strength, have to—while the other ones get eaten away by guilt and remorse and every other stinking negative poison.”

“Why don’t you?” I asked. “Atone.” (Why did the word sound so odd?)

Before replying, he brought out a box of Benzedrine tablets and swallowed two with his next swig. He behaved as

though he expected me to comment. Undoubtedly, he had a ready answer. I fooled him by holding still.

"Sorry," he said. "Had to oil up my turntable." He looked at the pillbox. "Can't get freddies any more. They don't make them. I wish they did. These are the up-to-date version. Too refined, compared." He went on to answer my last question. "I tried to. I came back here to try. When the Davises turned up that first day in the ward, I thought, good God, this is a sign. They, of all people, helping me. Would they if they'd known? No matter. I interpreted it as a kind of design. And I saw a way. Clara. If that had worked out. If she'd been able to help. That would have done a lot. But she turned me down cold. That was when I began to believe that everybody knew. That it showed. Or that I smelled of it. And I went into another spin. I don't know how long that one was. There have been others since and now I'm shot. One night, the other day, you know what I thought? I thought, Christ, man—you died a long, long time ago and this is Hell you've been in."

"Maybe so," I said.

"I can't talk any more," he said in a whisper. "You say something."

In spite of my horror of sitting and sharing a bench with this murderous maniac, I heard myself rambling a long (and silly?) abstraction.

"Woody," I said. "There's an old saw in the theatre. They say that anybody who wants to can write a good first act, but that it takes a professional to do a second act, and a genius for a third. I don't know how true that is, but once in a while it strikes me that the notion applies to the job of making a life, too. I mean, anybody can live the first act of their life, but it gets tougher when you have to handle the second part—and, oh brother! how many with good *third* acts do you know?"

"What's all this triple-tonguing got to do with me?" he said peevishly. The pupils of his eyes had become enlarged. He looked pop-eyed. The bennies.

"This, Woody. I don't think a man can be—or ought to be

—added up until it's over. Until he's done his whole stint. I knew you and I admired you, in many ways and for a long time. What you've told me—I better say it honestly—it's beyond me. I know it's true but I can't believe it. I don't. You came to the wrong guy—or the wrong time. But now? Seems to me the longer I live, the less I know for sure. But there's one thing I believe—and that is that there's nobody anywhere can help you finally. Only you yourself. And that while you live, it's never too late to balance the account."

"Third act, huh?"

"What I mean," I said.

"Thank you, Billy Graham," he intoned.

My spill had been wasted, then.

"You're welcome," I said.

"Will you meet me tomorrow?" he asked.

I thought it over and said, "I don't know. See how I feel."

"How do you feel now?"

"Now?"

"Yah."

"Right now, Woody, I feel that I'd rather never see you again as long as I live."

He sighed and gave a little laugh.

"Well," he said, "you're frank if nothing else. But maybe you'll change your mind."

"Maybe," I said. "But you've scared me good."

"Why? Because you still think there's a chance I'm unstuck?"

"I don't know," I replied miserably.

"Take my word, I'm not. I wish to hell I were. Solve everything, wouldn't it?"

"No."

"Scared," he said. "Look around you. At what goes on. There's things more scary than me. And they get worse if you don't face them."

We had run down, run out. We went to the bar at the Blackstone. He made a single drink last an hour, but took two more Benzedrines. I had some chemical ginger ale which, I reflected, would probably do me more harm than

a drink of excellent liquor. We sat across the room from the spotlit pianist, who was playing show tunes, making them all sound alike with his smothering overlays.

"You want to know one more sign to prove I'm washed up?" asked Woody.

"What?"

"That I can sit here and listen to that joker playing that cocktail tinkle and not heave a table at him."

"People seem to like it."

"Because they don't know any better."

"They're learning, though. I must say, I get a general feeling of go-ahead around."

I looked at my watch.

"I know," he said, "I know. Will you tell me one thing if you can."

"If I can," I said.

He was well off the ground now, I could see from the beatific expression on his face.

"Why is it that if we could all learn to play together the way we did—why is it we couldn't learn to *live* together?"

"Woody," I replied, "if we could—even between us—answer that simple question—seemingly simple—we could turn this into a hip world."

"You're right. The world," he said, "is square."

In front of the Blackstone, we parted without shaking hands. We had often done so, but this time the omission had meaning.

"See you tomorrow," I said.

"No you won't," he replied.

He was right. I did not see him tomorrow, or the day after that, or ever again.

I talked to him, however, on the telephone, several times. Once, the following day. Twice from Baltimore, once from Washington and that last dreadful time from San Francisco.

After he left me that night, I had a family problem. My wife sensed something seriously wrong. I knew that to tell her the whole thing would be a mistake, and that to withhold or stall would be another. I tried a compromise.

"It's some trouble he's in," I explained. "Nothing to do with me. In fact, there's not much I can do to help him—or that anyone can. Nothing to do with money, even. I'll tell you the whole thing someday, but I'd rather not try just now."

"All right," she said, "but I can't believe it's nothing to do with you."

"Why not?"

"Because you're so pale."

"He tires me out, that's a fact."

"Do you *have* to see him again tomorrow?" she asked, concerned.

"I'm not going to."

"Sure?"

"I promise you and I promise myself. How's that?"

"That's good," she said.

But it lay between us, like an unopened telegram, until the time she knew.

He phoned me from the lobby the following afternoon.

"You all tied up?" he asked.

"Yes, I am, sorry."

"Yah. Well, I just happened to be in the neighborhood."

The sound of his voice weakened me.

"If it's important, Woody—" I said.

"No, no. Same ol' groan. Hell with it. I figure we said it all last night. And then some. At least I did—and you—well, you haven't really had time to get inside it."

"No."

"Maybe you will. If you get a notion, we could talk on the electric telephone. Or I'll come where you are—if you send the fare, of course—only listen, one favor. Don't write me. I mean, yes, write me, but not about my cross."

The expression startled me.

"No. Of course not."

"Been nice seeing you," he said. "Surprisingly."

"Well," I said. "It's been quite a thing seeing *you*."

"I know," he said. "What can I do?"

"I wish I knew, Woody."

It was on this unsatisfactory note, on this unresolved chord, that we parted, that day.

The last day in Chicago, an early morning call, a day of travel, a night on the train and settling into Baltimore for the week took my attention. I handled more of the detail than usual this time, in an effort to keep myself occupied, and to avoid reviewing the Woody hours.

By Wednesday, in Baltimore, however, I could no longer contain the matter.

During the matinée, I had gone out to see the celebrated Cone Collection, which had recently been hung in its own wing at the Baltimore Museum of Art. It proved to be an overwhelming experience. A climax of color and form and feeling. The beauty seen by Van Gogh in a worn old pair of shoes. The pristine simplicity of that Picasso mother and child. The yes-sayingness of every single Matisse. One of them was familiar, taunting remembrance with peek-a-boo flashes. I was sure I had seen it before. But where? Special circumstances. Clara. Of course! That show at Gaenzler's. The street fight. Woody.

I left the museum and walked in the public gardens surrounding the structure.

The recent Chicago seemed to be in another world, and Woody's revelation a fiction. Later, when I had made it real again, I wondered exactly what my involvement meant. Despite the fact that I thought it selfish, even cowardly, I resolved to find out where I stood. I had to go up to New York the following day, in any case. I returned to the hotel, phoned my lawyer, and fitted in an appointment.

By the time I kept it, I had sketched out a routine. I would, for the present, betray no confidence. Fortunately, I frequently consulted him about general legal points for fictive purposes. Furthermore, he is the most discreet man in my world.

"Here's a situation," I said. "Suppose a man, a friend, comes to me and tells me that some years before—say twenty—he committed a murder. What's my position? Legally."

"Fill it out," said my lawyer.

"No, that's all."

"Well, was this an unsolved crime? Was someone else—?"

"No," I interrupted, "because no one ever knew it was a crime. Suppose. The man died."

"This is getting a little hard to follow, I'm afraid."

"Let's say he wasn't shot or stabbed or anything like that. He died of natural—well, no, you wouldn't call them— He died of overdosing with stimulants."

"Then where does the murder come in?"

"This other man—the one who tells me, say—provided the stimulants."

"That's not murder, is it?"

"Yes. Because in this layout, he knew the stuff would kill the man—the other man—and he fed it to him. Deliberately. And it did."

"Just a moment. From what you tell me, I'm not sure a murder charge could be framed."

"Why not, Mike? It was premeditated and cold-blooded."

"And very complicated the way you tell it," he said, with a grin. "Is this for a yarn, or for a movie, or what?"

I waited a beat too long before replying, "Yes, for a yarn."

But I was not sure I had fooled him. A question mark passed between us and he said, "I see."

"What I want to know is where do I stand? Legally."

"You know this only because he himself told you?"

"Yes."

"Why?" he asked.

"Why did he tell me?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

"Why doesn't he tell the authorities if it's on his conscience? And let them deal with it."

"He's not prepared to do that. Suppose."

"Well, never mind about him for the moment. Let's get back to you. Since you're not a doctor or a priest or even a lawyer—you're not, as we say, privileged. So, technically, yes—having knowledge of a crime and concealing it makes you an accessory."

“Holy God.”

“What?”

“You’re saying that, strictly within the law, I’m supposed—I would be supposed to go and blow the whistle?”

“Of course.”

“Where?”

“The nearest police station, I should think.”

“Okay. Now suppose I did and they go to him and he denies it—say even denies having told me. Then we’re back where we started, right?”

He laughed. “Not quite. He could then sue you for malicious slander and you might have to prove that—”

“Okay, okay,” I said. “This is deep enough. That’s all I need for now.”

At the door, we shook hands. He smiled. “Little out of your line, this, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “It sure in hell is.”

I returned to Baltimore. There followed two weeks in Washington and one in Cleveland. From there the company made the long jump to San Francisco.

During this time, I dealt, daily, with the problems which Woody in my life again had created.

I phoned him from Baltimore, just to check. He was the same, practicing and trying to get himself into shape to work. The final dental work had been done, he told me.

The first time I called him from Washington, it was with an idea. I suggested to him that he go home, make it up with his father and seek his help. He hung up on me.

The second time, it was to ask him to find out from Albie or Henry if they knew where I would be able to locate Don Kirkus when I got to San Francisco. It was a ruse, really, to get onto a speaking basis with him again, and it succeeded. He had an audition coming up, he told me.

“I think I can handle it,” he said. “It’s just to play section. So all I need is to remember to bring my horn and to keep my spectacles polished.”

“How’s your health?” I asked.

“All right if I eat right,” he said.

I did not call him from Cleveland, although I thought of it several times. I had a letter from Eunice, telling me that Albie had suggested that I get in touch with the union in San Francisco regarding Don. I did so.

To make the Cleveland-San Francisco jump, it was necessary to change trains in Chicago. We had a layover of several hours, and I could have seen Woody again, perhaps I should have—but I doubt that it would have made any great difference in the way things finally worked out.

The cross-country journey seemed long. Perhaps because I had never traveled the northern route before. It was restful. No phone, no mail, strange newspapers (whose news did not, somehow, seem official), congenial company. Most of all, the increasing distance between myself and Chicago resulted in a lessening of tension.

At the Fairmont in San Francisco, I found, among other things, a letter from the local there informing me that Don Kirkus was at present filling an engagement at the Blackhawk. I sent a telegram asking him to call me at ten the next morning.

He did so, but at three in the afternoon.

We exchanged shouted greetings, and he asked, "Where'd you unearth that ten o'clock fright? Man, I don't even *vomit* till two!"

Same old Don.

I went over to see him. He lived in a tiny, cluttered apartment on Telegraph Hill, with a superb view of the bay. He had grown a beard, full and long, like Larry Elgart's. He was having a drink out of one of the tallest glasses I had ever seen.

He regarded me with suspicious alarm when I declined to join him.

"Not even a beer?" he urged.

"No, thanks."

"I keep some instant broads in my freezer. Have one?"

"Not right now."

"What're you going to turn out after all these years, *boring?*"

"Older," I said.

He seemed to settle for that and asked, "You mind staying in here with me awhile? I'm busting to show you around and about the town of towns, but this is Clairol day."

"What?"

"The day I touch up the roots of my fuzz."

I was not sure I knew what he meant, but I was to learn as soon as he had finished his drink. Out came bowls and brushes and bottles and, as we talked, he skillfully applied the light brown dye to the roots of his hair, mustache, and beard.

"It's the only way," he explained. "I reason that if science goes to all this trouble to figure out this sure enough system, the least I can do is co-operate and use it. Another reason. Listen to this. About a year ago, maybe less, I'm in the kip with a—well, let's call her a three-and-a-half-star young chick—and somewhere along the line—after I'd, mind you, knocked myself out making good—she gives me, 'Oh, I just *love* older men. They don't fumble, they know!' How about that? You understand, this popcorn brain meant it as a compliment, but I couldn't wait to get her the hell out of my hair. My gray hair. Man, I sat and x-rayed myself for an hour and a half and I thought, the hell with this, and I started looking into things and that was the end of old graybeard."

"What about your playing?" I asked. "You done a dye job on that, too?"

He laughed. "Come around. Very Berkeley this week. We're putting some brains into the jazz these days. All these boys. They know it from outside in. A few nights ago, guess what? We all of a bing-bang started to rock Bartók. Hey! Title! The Bartók Rock. Make a note. How long you in town for?"

"Four weeks."

"Happy days!" he sang. "You free tonight for a mess of mescaline? Got a dear boy flying in from Mexico City with the pop."

I smiled as I studied this unchanged incorrigible. His ef-

forts to stay young made him seem older than he was. His desperation had increased.

"You had a belt yet?" he asked. "Mescaline?"

"No," I replied.

He rolled his head. "Lad, then you don't know! You do not know. You think there's just: to be or not to be. But! This stuff shows you that there's a *third* possibility!" He went to the open window and shouted out, "Oh, bless you, Aldous!" He came back to me. "You sure you won't drop in for a grain? Nothing to worry about. We have a registered nurse in attendance at all times. With electrical ways-and-means. What're you, I forget, A.C. or D.C.? No matter. Just *be* there!"

"Let me see if I can," I said. "I'll try."

The first stage of the dyeing procedure had ended. He set a timing device and sat down opposite me.

"Well, little man," he said, examining me carefully. "How you enjoying middle age?"

"I like it the best so far."

"So do I. I find I like less, but what I do like, I like more."

"I spent quite some time with Woody recently," I said in an offhand way. "In Chicago."

"That a fact?"

"Yes."

"How is the old fruitcake? I heard somewhere he'd gone with the wind."

"He's been sick," I said.

"Never all the way dug him," said Don. "Is he still on that poetry kick?"

"More or less," I said.

"He ought to come out here while the poetry panic is on. Maybe he'd scratch an angle."

"Like what?" I asked, thinking that there might be something in it, at that.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Don. "That's the new West Coast big bit. The boss brings this clown in one afternoon and he's going to read poetry—what he calls poetry—to the

customers that night. He's going to read it into the mike and we're going to play in the background. Got that? This man wants to stand in *front* while we play *behind* him. Play what? Jazz, he says—as if that was like saying cherry pie. What kind of jazz, mister? So he sucks on his pipe awhile, then he says, 'Here's the stuff, let's run it down a few times.' I take one look and I'm ready to walk, but Boots says no. So we go. Me, I plan to bring a catcher's mask that night, in case of a tie. But no. They sat there and they took it like little majors. And while this big mustache is hamming around out in front there—it struck me. Everybody wants to get into the act—we've known that for a while or two—that's how come all those requests by the mile. When they used to say, 'Hey, do you know "Tiger Rag"?' Or remember in the speaks when it was worth a hundred sometimes for 'Melancholy Baby'? What was, that? A character calls the tune, he figures he's in the band. But this one standing up there in front of us, belting it out with us accompanying him—it struck me—this sonofabitch thinks he's an instrument! He's playing himself like a goddam instrument and taking every chorus. Pretty soft, huh? Where it balls up, though, is—you put them together like that—that poetry and this music—and they cancel each other out. If the words are right, say 'em. They make their own music. Don't put shmaltzy fiddles under 'em like in the movies. A song is different. This clown wasn't fitting words to music—he was setting up a contest and everybody lost. But they like it. Or they think they do for a while—until something else. Something better—or just different."

It was time to resume work on the dye job. He began the second stage, carefully rinsing hair, then beard.

"Tell me about Woody," he said, leaning over the bowl. "Playing?"

"Trying."

He stood up, drying his head with a huge green Turkish towel.

He kept his eyes squinted tightly as he said, "I suppose enough time has passed now so I can say it. I never took to that boy. I'm sorry if he's out of gas and all that, and I'm not

putting down his playing—but him. He was always more away than with. And even when he was with, I never thought he enjoyed it the way he should have. He was against more than he was for. Maybe it caught up with him. We spent a little time in the service, you know."

"Yes, he told me."

"He did? Well, I noticed it then. He always had a time getting on to the team. I'm not saying it's easy. After all, the best swing is still—what? Five men? Six? Seven, the most. After that, it gets to be a shambles. Like Condon says, 'A sales convention.' We just don't know enough yet to blend more than seven selves."

"I saw a lot of Albie and Henry, too. And Eunice."

"How are they?"

"Fine. Henry's out of jazz."

"Yuh, I heard that."

He opened his eyes and sat down again. I had to admit that the job he had done on himself was effective.

"Remember Clara?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," I said. "She lives in Copenhagen now."

"What the hell for?"

"I don't know," I said. "She married this Danish doctor."

"Too bad she and ol' Slug never made it."

"Think so?"

"I'll tell you what I think—but for Christ's sake, don't ever repeat it."

I felt my mouth go dry. He went on. "I think Slug knocked himself off."

"You do?" I managed.

"I feel it. And I think it was because he couldn't get through to her. She had other aims. Glad to hear she made one at least."

"I wonder," I said. I began to see how difficult it was going to be, this hanging on to a deadly confidence.

"Part of a new boilup of mine anyway," he said. "We don't die."

"No?"

"No. We kill ourselves, one way or another, or something

kills us. I go over here on Geary Street to a little judo pad to get my back broken two, three times a week—and this Black-Belt buddy of mine tells me the human machine is made to last two or three hundred years if operated correctly."

"Does he sell a handy book of instructions?" I asked.

"I don't dare ask," said Don. "Those books are always full of what to give up. Me, I'm still looking for more things to *take* up. See, what you people don't understand about us crazy mixed-up kids is that we *like* being crazy mixed-up, see?"

I considered that we had gone far enough, and steered him into a long discussion of his work and his announced decision never to leave San Francisco for as long as he lived.

"It happened in the air," he explained. "I was on this short flying kick—miserable on the ground and couldn't breathe except at six thousand feet. And the more I looked out—down—the more it struck me. What is it down there? Crawling. A big damp ball, crawling with tiny little insects. Slow, fast—far, some of them. Like ants. And I lost the point. So when I came down that day, I'd had it. No more flying, running, driving. Changing. For what? Sit still. It's the same everywhere, more or less. More. Don't let the travel agents tell you different. And there's your story. Here I stay. A happy louse."

In the course of the next few days and nights, I fine-combed what Don had said about Slug, and saw in it a save for Woody. (And for myself?) I sent him a wire and asked him to phone me, collect, so that he would not have to talk on the phone at the house.

"Hello?" I said.

"Here I am."

"Where you calling from?"

"La Salle Street Station," he said.

"What's new?"

"Nothing. I'm hanging on in the section."

"How's it seem?"

"Fair. I guess I'll last till they find somebody better."

"Woody," I said. "Listen. I've been thinking and remembering and reconstructing and talking to Don out here and now listen carefully. I think there's a hell of a chance you may have been torturing yourself on a bum steer. I know it's a Christawful thought to introduce but I feel I have to."

"Go ahead."

"Listen. How do you know Slug didn't do it to *himself*?"

"Oh, Jesus," he said and began to weep. "Don't. Don't get me going on more of that hop. Oh, don't. Can't you see it? Why don't you want to understand it? I stayed on the bunk for so long, I bunked myself—but it's no good. I know the truth and so do you, you sonofabitch, and what I want is a way out—not a back to the idiocy of kidding myself along every day more. That's for hopheads like your friend Don. He can't stand the truth—so he finds conkouts—but I've got to have it! It's all I want! You were helping—you told me—remember?—that it wasn't too late—third act, you said—"

"Listen, Woody!" I insisted.

"Now you want me to bull myself again, you dirty bastard—"

"Woody!"

"No! I'm not going to, just to make you feel better. What the hell do I care about you? I've got myself to worry about. I've got to get with it. The beat. This goddam chorus must have an ending in it somewhere! Where's the one that makes sense? All I want is one still morning—where I wake up with myself and don't have to carry this any more— Because I can't!— Is that too—?"

We were cut off. I phoned the La Salle Street Station, asked for the public phone section and reached a friendly operator at the long-distance service counter. She recognized Woody from my description, and told me that he had left a few minutes earlier.

"Would you do this, please?" I begged. "Would you have somebody look around for him? He's not well. And I'll have some friends of his check with you. Mrs. Salmon or Mr. Salmon."

"Sure. What's your number?"

I gave it to her.

"All right," she said efficiently. "Let me get on with it here."

I phoned Eunice and explained the situation. She promised to round up Albie and Henry and to see what could be done.

Fifteen minutes later, the La Salle Street Station operator phoned and sadly reported failure.

Two hours after this, Albie called. They had not yet located him but not to worry. He had often gone off in this way and had always turned up. I was reassured.

I checked the following day, and the next. No news. On the third day, I told Eunice that I thought the matter should be reported officially. She agreed.

I went on to the Blackhawk and, between sets, told Don about Woody's takeoff. He laughed.

"He'll turn up. Maybe here, for all we know. I know him. He bounces. He gets lost. He gets found. Forget it. Listen to this next set. The Orient is beginning to stick its flat little nose in, but neat. No joke. Real funky. This is a whole new transfusion. The inscrutable East will soon be *scrutable!*"

I stayed and listened, soon caught up in the roaming, affecting, all-embracing concepts of these cerebral young musicians. Young—and Don with a dyed beard.

As he had said, they were experimenting, artfully fusing the music and the rhythms of the East with their own. There was nothing quaint in what they were doing—or coy. No sound of patronization, simply an open attempt to blend two worlds to a single beat. But new? I thought of Hoagy Carmichael's haunting rendition of his own "Hong Kong Blues."

Although what they were doing here tonight was imperfect, and might make an impatient listener uneasy, the shape of the sound indicated that what they were attempting to do could be done. I stayed as late as I could before going to call for my wife.

At the Fairmont desk, the night clerk handed me the key and four phone messages. Each one read: Call Operator 116 Chicago.

"Oh, God," I said aloud and alarmed my wife.

"What is it?" she asked, grabbing my arm.

"Is there anything *I* can do?" asked the night clerk, a kindly prune.

"Yes," I said. "Operator one-sixteen Chicago. One one six. We're on our way up."

Upstairs, I poured a glass of water and placed it near the telephone. I loosened my tie.

"Maybe it's *good* news," said my wife, an instinctive optimist.

"Maybe," I agreed, but braced myself. What was it Don had said? "He gets lost. He gets found."

The voice at the other end was Eunice's and the moment it spoke my name, I knew.

He had been found, all right. In a room at the Stanford Hotel, in New York. His old room? She didn't know. Wait. Albie said yes. He had been dead for two or three days, they thought. How could that be? A Don't Disturb on the door. Until—

"Any messages, anything like that?" I asked.

"No," she said. "Or even if there were, we'll never know."

"Why not?"

"His family's in charge. Well, his father, that is."

"How the hell did *that* happen?"

"The hotel. They had his home address from way back in the old days. And when they found him, they called his father and he flew right in. Fact, he got there ahead of the police. They didn't turn up till morning. Maybe they weren't called. Maybe the old man said not."

"I see."

"I don't know what happened up there, but the old man must've done a lot of taking care of, because it's all put down as just a plain too bad. And in the New York papers today—we got them here—there were only three or four little squibs and in the *Times* it says about a long illness."

"Well, that's true enough," I said.

"But everything about it," she said, "this is what gets us—everything is exactly like Slug. Remember?"

“Yes.”

“It was exactly the same kind of hemorrhage, and they found him right there. On the exactly same floor.”

I shivered as the cold wind of unknown blew over me.

“What are the arrangements?”

“Not yet. Have to let you know.”

“Thanks, Eunice. And for tonight.”

All the way to Chicago, I felt that it was a mistake to be going. From Chicago to Hinsdale, I knew it.

Don was with me. I had not suggested that he accompany me, but in a sudden burst, he had decided for himself. We met Albie, Eunice and both Davises in Chicago and all drove to Hinsdale together in their station wagon. Gil, whom I had not seen in years, was literally unchanged. They had brought instruments along, in the hope that we would be allowed to play something. Henry had even brought along an alto for me.

“I’ll ruin everything,” I said. “I haven’t touched a horn in don’t ask me when.”

“There will be no problem,” said Albie. “We will be told thanks but just sit down and be quiet.”

He was right, except for one thing. We were not asked to sit down.

In the vestibule of the church, we were met by a staff member who, standing in front of the closed door, told us that the services were private.

“And in any event—” he added, then stopped and looked at the Davises and from them to a group of colored people who stood waiting at one end of the vestibule.

They turned out to be the Woodruff servants who attended by standing in the vestibule, although the doors, with a velvet rope across the entry, were opened when the actual services began.

Before this happened, Don and I went around to see if we could find someone in the family with sufficient authority to allow us in.

I sent in a note addressed to Mr. Woodruff, explained that Don and I had come a long way to be here and that we and

the Davises and Albie had been close to Woody. It was a good note.

The appearance of Mr. Woodruff shook me. He was Woody, aged sixty-five. But that was not the surprise. The surprise was the man himself; gentle and kind and concerned. Above all, he appeared to be confused and uncertain. Not at all my guess at him. I had expected to see and to meet an unbending martinet; instead, here was a troubled little spirit behind a permanent frown.

"Yes," he said as he took my hand. "Of course. Woody spoke of you. Yes," he added, touching Don, "and of you. No. I don't think it would be suitable for you to play. No. Thank you. We appreciate your thought, of course, but you will understand, this is a small community. Yes. I'm afraid we're pretty provincial. Appreciate it. Now, as for the rest"—he meant the rest of our group—"there's nothing I can do, I'm afraid. The question has come up before, of course, but there's nothing anyone can do. Strange. Individually, that is to say, one by one, it would seem everyone is against the restriction, but when it comes to an organized decision, it stays as it was. I don't understand it. I'm sorry. Of course, we'll find room for you. And the other friends, couldn't they be with our staff? Arrangements were made for them, I'm sure."

The obvious thought was that we would all remain together, but Eunice directed otherwise.

Don and I took our places in the rear of the church, standing. Albie and Eunice and Henry and Gil stood behind the velvet rope with the others.

The services were standard and without specific meaning, but fortunately, short. The name "Woody" was never uttered, making it difficult to believe that it was he, beneath all those flowers, who was being eulogized.

I spoke a eulogy of my own, in silence and to myself. It was full of questions. Was Woody's end an accident or an execution? What did I feel toward him now—pity, grief, or dismay? How much more was Woody to blame for having done what he had done than many of these mourners here

who do it daily in slower, less violent ways? A point he had once raised. He, at least, had grown to repentance, and the reckoning, though futile, was final, whether deliberate or not.

In the station wagon, we followed the funeral procession, at a respectful distance, to a hilltop burial ground. We were asked to park outside the gates, and by the time we had walked to within sight of the grave, the coffin had been lowered. We hung around for a long time. The funeral party left. The work of closing the grave began and we stepped closer to pay our last respects.

All at once, Mr. Woodruff appeared. He shook hands with each of us and said, over and over again, "Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming."

He touched his head and said, "I seem to have lost my hat." He walked away and down the hill, alone.

After a while, I said, "Let's go," and we did.

We drove back to the city and all had a meal together and talked of Woody.

Don and I returned to the West Coast. Shortly afterward, I left for Los Angeles where my wife's tour was to end. Before leaving San Francisco, I tried to arrange a last meeting with Don. Instead of dropping in at the Blackhawk—I was in no mood for music of any kind—I phoned him one afternoon.

"Don?" I asked as a strange voice came on.

"This is he. Me. She. Be. Tree."

"Don, I'd like to arrange to see you."

"No sooner said. Red. Bed. Fled. Bread. Dead. Dead. Dead. Doornail. Floornail. Whorenail."

He was still babbling on when I hung up. Less fatigued and not so rattled, I might have seen some humor in it, but at the time I could only shudder and be grateful that I was on my way.

I had half expected a postscript of some kind. A piece of news from New York or Chicago—or, perhaps, even from Hinsdale. But no, not a word. Woody's death was as final as most and I was to be left to create a theory, to reconstruct the end as best I could with sparse information.

It was hard to imagine him checking himself out in this cold way. I wanted to know something definite which would absolve me from the gnawing feeling that I was, at least partially, responsible for his act. Act. Was it an act? Again I wondered. Had I any way of knowing for certain that he had done anything but die? True, he had been ill, but—I remembered the last few meetings, the drinks and the pills. Could it be that he had done to himself what he had done to Slug? Would this explain his return to the Stanford? If he had done this, was it consciously or unconsciously?

An electrically typewritten letter arrived from Mr. Woodruff after a few weeks had passed. It read:

Dear Woody's friend,

In examining the effects of my late son, I find a record of a recent loan by you in the amount of five hundred dollars (\$500.00) which you kindly made to him. I feel certain that he would wish this debt repaid and I therefore enclose check in like amount. He was always, from childhood, most exact and correct in the matter of his personal obligations.

My family and I greatly appreciate your expression of sympathy, and often regret that we were not able to know Woody's friends. Perhaps it would have helped us to understand him. As it was, he lived and died a stranger to us—and, I fear, to himself as well.

Sincerely yours,
L. M. Woodruff.

No comment.

Three months later, my wife and I were in Paris. I was back at work on the play which I had put aside in Chicago. Reviewing the act and a half I had written, it seemed to have been done by someone else—someone young, and callow, and curiously lacking in feeling. I had discarded it and had begun anew.

The Woody episode had not faded as I had thought it would, as I had hoped it might.

One long, rain-filled Sunday morning, I told it all to my wife.

“At last,” she said when I had finished.

I did not know whether she meant the telling, or Woody’s death, with which it had ended, and I did not ask.

The rain stopped and we went out to walk. A long walk—across the river and all the way to Lipp’s for dinner. In the air and on the move, it seemed easier to talk of it. My wife had questions, to some of which I had answers. It was she who suggested, after dinner, that I ought to look up Edmonde. I hesitated. I could not imagine what useful purpose would be served by such a meeting. On the other hand, her side of the story might well be contributory. How, was not clear to me, but my memory was unsatisfied. All right. I would call her. But I postponed it from day to day, until we left Paris.

Perhaps if, in Vienna, the French Information Center had not been so close to the Hotel Bristol, where we were staying, it might have turned out otherwise. The idea of getting in touch with Edmonde had been receding and was about to be placed for good with the many other intended but unperformed acts, unwritten letters, and unspoken explanations. But after walking by the French Information Center one afternoon while my wife was having her hair done, I turned back and went in for an aimless browse. Half an hour of looking through the beautifully produced magazines, then to the shelves. One of them was lined with copies of the *Bottin Mondain*, stretching back for years. I had not examined a copy of this fascinating directory in a long time, so I took the current volume from its place and sat down, nosily. After checking on a few famous strangers, I began looking for the dope on French theatre contemporaries. Addresses and family information interested me for a time.

Abruptly, following an impulse, I flipped the pages to find: KOV (Jean-Pierre); *homme de lettres*—et MME. *née* Roussel (Edmonde Thérèse)—etc. etc.

Within the next ten minutes I had written to ask if we

could meet when I returned to Paris, and would she leave word at the Hotel Raphael?

It was waiting. A short note, which had been delivered by hand.

As the taxi drove up to the address I had given the driver, I suspected that he had misunderstood me. It is no simple matter to articulate Rue Hégésippe Moreau. We checked and checked again. Yes, this was it and no mistake. This crumbling court, these unlit hallways and unswept staircases.

I found my way up and rang. The door opened, and there she was. She led me, without a word, into the sitting room of a small, exquisite apartment. The interior had no relationship to the exterior. Jean-Pierre was there. I offered my hand, but he embraced me and kissed me on either cheek. When we separated, he took off his glasses, wiped his eyes, blew his nose, and shook his head.

Edmonde kissed me, too, but only on one cheek.

"Sit down," she said. "And say nothing. We must have a few minutes all to examine the other."

We did just that. Meanwhile, she prepared and served, from an arranged tray, glasses of white wine and soda. I could not help but notice that the wine was of the very cheapest sort. This clued me into a closer look at their clothes and at her jewelry. What had happened? Questions crowded into my throat, but I used the lesson of patience.

Jean-Pierre, in growing older, had shrunk a bit. His face was deeply lined and that slick self-confident look which all exceptionally attractive people develop was gone. It was obvious that he no longer considered himself a stunner. He was wrong. I thought him handsomer than ever. He had lost only his youth and had been amply compensated for it by new dimensions of becoming ripeness, but I doubt that he recognized this.

Edmonde, however, had changed into someone else entirely. I had known her far better and longer than I had known him and so I was sensitive to the change. Her figure was unimpaired. With her head blocked for a moment from

view, she was the other Edmonde. I glanced at once at those etched-in-memory legs, and rejoiced in finding them the same as ever. But this new head of hers made the difference. She had let her hair go gray, for one thing—odd in a city where so few did. Dyed hair is a fashion as common as the powdered wig was in its day. To have let her hair go gray in Paris was a display of nonconformity as unnecessary as it was unattractive. It suits some, but it did not suit her. Not to my eye, anyway. I wished that her hair, and not Don's, had been dyed. Never mind her hair. It was her face which troubled me more. It had become a resigned face, and most of the eagerness which had characterized it was gone. Was it serenity I read there, or boredom? Tranquillity or surrender? I longed to know. She wore that ineffably melancholy mask which is the mark of most French-women over forty or so. What is the cause of it? Some say that it takes about this length of time for the female liver to be exhausted by the work of oxydizing the daily wine—but this explanation is far too clinical for me. It must be more than that, something deeper and more feminine. I believe that they come to possess at this time a great secret which they cannot share. Edmonde's eyes reflected this noted, radiant sadness.

“Enough,” she said at length.

“Eddie!” I shouted, and we all laughed.

Not for years, she explained, had she heard those syllables sounded.

We all talked at once, as the French do, and as I was learning to do, and were old friends again in a matter of minutes.

We exchanged information about ourselves and recalled other times, and discussed the day's news, which on that particular day happened to be chilling.

I handled the subject of old friends gingerly, but told of Albie and the Davises, of Don. About little Palmer, now a TV tycoon on both coasts. We talked of Capa, so needlessly dead. “Useless,” he might have said. Jean-Pierre and I shared surprise at the fact that Irene—with a new name—had be-

come a soaring British film star. Edmonde and I avoided mentioning Woody. At the very moment that I considered the possibility that she had heard the latest on him, she asked, "And our old Woody. You have seen him?"

"Not lately," I said, and veered to a new line.

A rough session lay ahead and I did not relish it.

I began to realize something: that Edmonde might have changed in outward appearance, but that Jean-Pierre was the one in whom all the stuffing had been replaced. I could not find so much as a suggestion of the icy man I had known. This one was tender and thoughtful and complete. His humility when discussing most subjects in which he was less than expert was as attractive as his sound arrogance when on matters in which he was qualified. I wondered what they made of me.

Jean-Pierre had been for the past nine years the editor of what is generally thought to be one of the best monthly reviews in France. He wrote for it, as well.

"And I, too, sometime," said Edmonde. "But only of the jazz."

"Still with it, huh?" I marveled.

"But in the smallest way," she said. "As an aged expert. I find it not so joyful more, you do?" Her English had gone off.

Two hours passed in a swift explosion of reunion, and I had to go. We fixed a date for a week from that time. It happened that there was going to be a concert at the Salle Pleyel. A Jazz at the Philharmonic date. Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, Coleman Hawkins, Stan Getz, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Stitt and others.

Edmonde flushed at the prospect. She seemed, for a blink, as I had remembered her. A bursting-with-life girl-woman, constantly looking forward to promise. As Jean-Pierre laughed at her, teasingly, she reassumed her present being. I rose and prepared to leave.

"You must go?" Jean-Pierre was asking.

"I thought an hour would do us, tell you the truth. I've

done some of these digups before. They can be hell. I had no idea. If I'd known—”

“There is time,” said Edmonde. “We are only old to the young. To one another, we see each as then, no?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Anyway,” she said, “you have heard Picasso's saying since a few days?”

“No, what?”

“Very good. He has sayed to someone—I don't know who—‘It takes a long time to become young!’”

At the door, I knew that I did not want to wait a week.

“How about let's all have lunch tomorrow? I want you to know my wife—and she you—and—”

“Ah! Tomorrow,” said Jean-Pierre. “Impossible. My day before press.”

He and Edmonde exchanged a stream of French too swift for my comprehension.

“No,” she said to me. “It is no use.”

“Oh. Well, I'll call you in a day or so.”

“Take me!” said Edmonde, impetuously. “For tomorrow.”

“Yes, please,” urged Jean-Pierre. “I must not spoil.”

“One-fifteen?” I asked.

“*D'accord*,” she said, glowing. “Excellent.”

A round of kisses—both cheeks—and I left.

I submitted the arrangements to my wife who thought the plans for the concert evening splendid, but suggested that I do the luncheon without her.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because,” she said, “you'll have to tell her so much of what I already know. That makes it hard on you. And I think it's the sort of thing she has a right to hear alone, really.”

“But she's—”

“Tell her I had another date. She'll understand.”

My wife was right. She did understand.

“I knew I would have to wait to meet your wife,” Edmonde said as we started off in the taxi.

“And how did you know that?”

She smiled her tristful French smile, and shrugged a tiny shrug. She smoothed her large package (what was in it?) and said, "Because I see so much of what must be her in you—in what you have become in these years. She is perceptive—you say perceptive?"

"Yes. What's in there?" I asked, indicating the package.

"Ah! A surprise," she said.

"I hate surprises," I said. "Tell me."

"I love surprises," she replied.

I took her to Grand Vefour, mainly because I had planned to bring her slowly up-to-date during lunch and then tell her the bad news afterward. This, I had reasoned, could best be accomplished somewhere other than in a restaurant, and Grand Vefour had the gardens of the Palais Royal conveniently at hand.

She spoiled my plan by asking, as soon as we had ordered, "Tell me about Woody. Where is he? You have seen him soon?"

"Take your time," I said. "I've got a lot to tell you. About him and everybody else. But I'd better do it my own way."

"Of course," she said.

Beneath that smooth and contained exterior, did I detect a quiver of apprehension?

I looked about the lovely room and said, "This place. Every time I see it it's like the first time."

"Yes," she said. "I used to know it well. It has been some long time since." She leaned to me and whispered, "So too expensive!"

"Eddie," I asked, "what the hell happened to all your dough?"

"Ah!" she laughed. "The blunt Americans. To the point, eh?"

"Why not?"

She took a sip of her champagne before replying.

"To begin, it was never my—what did you say?—dough. It was my father's and he was generous to me *always*. But in the war he—in some way—I am not sure how it has happened, why—but he believed in the other side." She punc-

tuated with a short and bitter, but indescribable, sound. "A bad *mistake*, as you may have heard. So. *Everything* lost. He was lucky to remain with his life."

"Is he still—?"

"Oh, yes. In Spain. In Valencia. We go to see him each year. He is gaga—and worse, but—he is my father. He has no guilt, so I carry his."

"I don't see why you should."

That shrug again, before she said, "Somebody must."

The first course arrived. The waiter, having heard my French when I gave the order, assumed that we were tourists and gave his quaintest serving performance. By the time he had finished and had bowed himself off, the thread had been snapped.

Before Edmonde could begin again, I introduced the subject of Jean-Pierre. She spoke of him compassionately, and with deep feeling. As she did so, I studied her face. In the daylight, especially in the sun's rays, which were streaming through the huge windows, she looked different than she had the night before. Her face was gently, discreetly wrinkled. So many of my friends were wrinkling lately. I wish I could send them out to have their faces pressed, I thought. She caught me.

"You don't think *so*?" she asked.

"What?"

She laughed. "Nothing. To see if you are listening."

"I am."

"No. You are thinking how much better I looked last night. Helas! I cannot arrange the lighting here as I do there."

"You look fine. And I'm damned glad to see you and I wish to God I'd looked you up years and years ago."

"I, too."

"I don't know why I didn't."

"There is not time for *everything*," she said, generously.

"You just don't know how important you were to me, Eddie. You couldn't."

I went on and reminded her of her influence on me and remembered to thank her.

She talked of her children: twin boys and a girl. Names? Pierre and Paul, and the girl: Amélie. (What about Jean-Pierre's account of their inability to produce a child? What had happened?)

"How come you didn't name one after me?" I asked.

"The next one, perhaps."

"I can wait."

I told her in some detail of my recent time with Don.

"So he has remained the boy," she commented. "Well, maybe that is a good way. For him. For me, I find the time always new—as it goes on. I don't wish to live again and again the one same day. Once, I have enjoyed to be rich. You saw. Now, I enjoy this way, too. Both are—adventure and both use other parts. You remember when so much our life was the jazz? I have not changed—you know?—only added. Now it is only a *part*—and I am still looking to find more. I have still so much not yet. But—I am grateful to the jazz." She looked out the window before continuing. "In the war—I was away some time—"

"I know," I said.

"—And I have had many days and nights difficult to go through. I used to sing—to myself, sometime to others—all the records I could remember. From the beginning to the end. It has helped me many times. Because the jazz—surely we have talked of this?—the jazz is a celebration of life. Even the blues—remember?"

"I'll say. Bessie Smith?"

"Victoria Spivey," she added.

We smiled together. Now the color of her face changed, and, miraculously, the wrinkles were gone. I do not mean that I thought they were gone or that they seemed to be gone—I mean that they were gone.

"Even there," she said, quickened by contact with her passionate interest. "The blues celebrate with a deep of feeling too far to put in words. Or—if words—they need—No—can *use* or find the help by the sound. You see?"

“No.”

“No? Try. Say: I hate to see the evenin’ sun go down.”

“I hate to see the evenin’ sun go down,” I said.

“Now again and meaning. With—as you say—expressions.”

I did it. “I *hate* to see the evenin’ sun go *down!*”

“And now—sing it. Softly.”

I did so.

“You see?” she asked.

We looked at each other and decades fell away. Youth was here before me, in this responsive, enthusiastic, encompassing minute-to-minute life—not in Don’s Clairol bottle.

The best of being is having some part in making imagination real, not in distorting mescaline flights. I changed my mind about her gray hair, too.

“*Café?*” asked the waiter.

“*Oui.*”

“Yes.”

She said, “You bring back many dear times to me.”

We talked of some of them until it was time to leave.

We left the restaurant, and strolled under the arcade, slowly. It was time to tell her about Woody. I was not eager to do so and continued to postpone the moment, pretending an interest in the shopwindows filled with old books, old jewelry, coins and stamps, hints of pornography, and all those medals and ribbons and decorations.

At the end of the arcade, we turned, moved into the gardens and walked toward the center in silence. We sat on a bench. We were alone.

“And now about Woody,” she said quietly. “You have something bad to tell me.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Because you have avoided until now. You have talked of them all but not of him. What is it?”

“When you know the whole works, Eddie—you’ll see that it’s *not* bad news. It’s good news. Good for him.”

My trembling lips did not match my reassuring tone.

“Yes?” she asked.

“He’s dead,” I said with a dry tongue.

She nodded, stood up, and walked away. She went alone all the way to the end of the gardens and I managed to keep from following her. I sat and waited.

Behind me, a chanted little round was being sung. I turned and saw a group of clumsy children playing a game, all in a circle. I watched more closely and saw that they were blind children. The sound of their laughter was no different from that of sighted children. To be alive, I thought, no matter what.

Edmonde returned.

"I am sorry," she said. "I suspected it and thought I was ready to hear it, but I was not. When?"

"Four or five months ago."

"You don't know the date?"

"Yes." I gave it to her. She put it into her memory and said, "Thank you. What more?"

"Of an intestinal hemorrhage," I said. "Same as Slug, exactly."

"Yes," she said, as though that were logical.

"He'd been all in, more or less, for a long time, Eddie. Ever since here." I laid the next out carefully. "That was when he started fading for good, seems like. After here."

She looked at me and away from me in a single movement.

"You know of that?" she asked. "Of here?"

"Some. His side."

"May I tell you mine?"

"If you want to, sure."

"I don't want," she said. "But I see I must."

"Why must?"

"Because else, you will hold this blame of me you have."

"No," I said, but it sounded like Yes.

She sat down beside me, but did not begin. I considered a further protest, but it seemed wrong to disrespect her wish, and, besides, I was hungry to hear what she had to tell.

"It will embarrass you," she said.

"Why so?"

"Because of—it is—intimate."

Our attention was taken by a pair of passers-by; a man and a woman, both of great age, who moved along the path as though learning to walk. Each used a cane, and their free hands were clasped romantically. When they had passed, Edmonde and I exchanged a glance of shared appreciation of the sight.

Her eyes ceased to regard her present surroundings as she began. "When Woody came. I had known it, that he would. No. Not known. Hoped it. I was waiting. For so long. We have never been together—it was strange. Always in the air, but never have we happened. I tried—of course, you know—you have helped."

"Not much."

"Enough. But—we were never. I didn't know why. In those days, the men were—how shall I say?—*easy* for me." She smiled. "But not he. I could not take him. Only here, a long time later, I have found why."

"Why?"

I saw her tongue moistening her lips before she answered.

"He told me that he has suspected me with Slug Abrams." She shook her head, sadly. "Poor Slug—and he wished only for his drums and for Clara— And she—against him before she has met him, you know?"

I was riffling and rearranging scenes and impressions as swiftly as I could. Manhasset. The rest home. The funeral. And moments and meetings between.

She had stopped talking. This was not all, surely? We watched the children behind us, still at play.

"Go on," I prompted softly.

"No," she said. "I have begun badly. I see now. I must tell you much before." I waited. "I must go back until the bad time here, when all fell. Yes." She took a deep, confused breath. "Jean-Pierre and I—we were become separated by the chaos. It has happened to many and it was very bad—but for us it was not so important, because by then, we were become nothing together."

(Where were we now? 1940.)

"When I came back, I was sick—even worse than sick—almost finished."

(Should I tell her? Is this the time? Should I reveal that I had seen that harrowing return? No.)

"And Jean-Pierre. He found me and was a man. He has helped me—not for love, even old love—but for pity or sympathy—and he did well. Perhaps for simple humanity. And he has brought food and clothings. And a doctor of the Americans—"

(Thanks, Hank.)

"And he has stayed with me. He was like a father to the child. So, when I could, I have tried to pay back, also with help and kindness. But in all this time—there was no love. And we did not pretend it—as many do."

I coughed, nervously. I was beginning to see what she had meant by intimate.

"But it is necessary that you know all this," she said, on the verge of impatience. "If you are to understand."

I nodded.

"He has had others in this time. Jean-Pierre. I, no one. But we have made a life in spite of all."

The blind children, their hour of play over, had all joined hands and were being led past us to wherever they had come from. We watched them until they were gone.

Edmonde got up from our bench, and so did I. We walked off, toward the exit gate. A few minutes later, we had become part of the city's bustle. Navigating the streets took all our concentration, and she did not speak again until we were in the Tuileries, walking down the wide, central path.

"We might have come together," she resumed. "We were sharing all except one another—but something was between."

"Woody?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "So you can see what it has meant when he came. And we have met. And at last."

"And—?" I asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "A *mistake*. Is it not astonishing?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not sure I follow."

"I am dry," she said, and stopped at a refreshment stand. She ordered a *citron pressé*. I had a Coca-Cola.

We continued our walk. She said no more, which was all right with me, as I needed time to register and to assimilate what she had already told me. It had all come too fast. Nearing the end of the Tuileries, she turned and led me out and down to the river. There, in a quiet, shaded spot with which she seemed to be familiar, we sat again.

"Ask me," she said.

"I can't imagine what went wrong, that's all. Maybe you weren't perfectly compatible right away, but—well, hell—after all that time. I mean, I should be telling *you*, Eddie. But these things—they have to be given a chance, don't they? Patience."

"Yes," she said. "But it was like a waking—for the both. What we had carried—it was a fantasy."

"I see."

The color of her voice changed as she said, "Woody was a boy without love. For no one. Not even for himself."

A pigeon landed nearby, and approached. Edmonde did not continue until it had flown off again.

"In the love we have made—tried to make—together," she said in a whisper. "In our exchange. There was no love. Only a conquest and a destruction. I felt—what is it?—punished."

She stopped again, apparently in need of a moment of composure. I used it in a frantic attempt to fit the newest pieces into the puzzle.

She continued. "Here we say, 'Love is a language.' One understands or no. Woody and me—we were friends the one day and strangers in the next. When he went from here—we were both sad for the other, and awkward. It was a bad end."

She got up and moved across the cobbled walk to the river's edge. She watched the river, slowly flowing. I studied her back and thought, Wait. This doesn't jibe. I'll never be able to match her account with his. Now it struck me. I felt myself go pale. Edmonde did not know. She could not possibly know and say what she had said. Could it be that she

knew but was trying to keep it from me? What had given me the idea that she did know? Woody himself, of course. Could he have lied? Why? To explain his failure with her? A pain at the back of my eyes signaled the tension within me.

I moved to her and we watched the river together for a moment.

Before I could speak, she said, "You have heard the reason they tell why the Seine moves so slowly? They say because it is sad that it is leaving Paris."

I gathered that she had handed me this old chestnut in blossom in order to convey that the other subject was closed. Not for me.

"Eddie," I said flatly. "Do you know about Woody and Slug?"

She bent down and picked up a handful of pebbles. She stayed down, squatting (to be away from me without moving away?), and threw a pebble into the water. Watching the spreading, multiplying circles, she replied, "That they did not like one another?" She threw another pebble in. I crouched beside her. She glanced at me, quickly, and I tried to catch what, if anything, her eyes were saying. She went on. "Woody always said because Slug has played too loud and hard. I believe there were other reasons. Woody—he was mad against men of color, I believe. You say bigoted? You don't think so? It was a part of him. I could never follow. Why should he have been so?"

Another pebble in.

She did not know, then. She never had known. She never would, not from me. I felt dizzy. But he had repeated her words, my recollection persisted. No matter. If she did know, it was clear that she did not mean to reveal the confidence to me.

She splashed her handful of remaining pebbles into the water and stood up. So did I.

She moved along the walk slowly, and I followed.

"It spoiled him, I think," she said, "this hate. His music. He lost the—the affirmation. When I have heard him here,

it was a negative playing. Pale—and not manly. I have thought maybe I am listening with too much of emotion. But after—I have heard him many times, and again. It was like nothing inside. Like the end of Charlie Parker."

We stopped walking.

She turned to me and said, "If you wish to hear sometime the sound of a man as he is dying, listen to the Parker 'Lover Man.'"

We walked again.

"With our trying," she continued hauntedly, "Woody and myself—to make our love—we knew it was impossible. It is not easy to make. It is necessary that one has the ingredients."

She swallowed a sudden gasp of air, and seemed, all at once, fatigued. We moved to the nearest bench and sat down. The river sounds were soothing.

"I am wondering," she said, "if I can tell you it all."

"Why not?"

"But are we so close again?"

"Sure."

"Give me your hand," she said. I did so, and she went on. "When he has left, it was my lie gone. Something bad taken away from my eyes, and I saw Jean-Pierre again as my husband. And his goodness and growing and our need for the other and everything we owed each—and now I had only to make one step. To him. And I did. And again, and at last we were as we were meant." She let go my hand. "I am the most fortunate woman in the world," she said, as though introducing herself. "You don't think so?"

"I think so," I said.

We sat motionless, until she said, "Oh, that Woody." She moved her head from side to side in faded despair. "What has happened to his music? To him? They could have been so much, the both. When I have heard it the first time—I thought I have never heard music felt so more pure."

"Yes," I said. "Something happened, all right."

Looking downward as I was, I noticed that the shadows of people passing had become long and slim. I realized that it

had grown late and that this meeting would surely end soon. One more try. I reached across her, touched her chin, and turned her face to mine. In silence, I implored her to share the weight of knowing. She closed her eyes tightly and held them so for a long time. But when she opened them again, they were ready.

Below, on her tense upper lip, there had appeared a glistening little mustache of perspiration beads.

"Yes," she said. "I know."

There was more to say now, a great deal more, but before I could organize a beginning, two sailors approached and one of them said, "*Pardon. Vous avez l'heure?*"

I looked at my watch, translated carefully and said, "*Quatre heure dix.*" It sounded wrong.

"*Merci,*" he said and hurried off with his pal.

A few seconds later, Edmonde turned to me and asked vaguely, "What?"

"Hmnn?"

"What time?"

"Ten after four."

She twitched, startled, and cried, "No! It is a joke!"

"No."

In an unsettling metamorphosis, she turned into a different woman, who stood up as though roughly pulled to her feet, and started off toward the ramp to the street. I had a time keeping up with her.

It was clear that the past had been thrust back into its place, the attic trunk of memory slammed shut, and the present embraced as all that mattered.

"But I am mad!" she cried, striding along and pulling on her gloves. "*C'est une bêtise!* I have shoppings and my dinner and—oh—please *never* take me to lunch often!"

Luck brought a taxi into our path. Edmonde shouted an address and, as we drove off, began a harassed recital of all she had to do in the course of the next three hours. She even went over her menu with me. I approved it. She explained in detail what she had to order in advance for the following day—a holiday—and about the necessity of making a long

journey to the only shop in all Paris where one could buy edible raspberries.

I basked in her passionate dedication to the moment of being and understood once again the charm of the French involvement with the daily daily life. I dropped her at the market near to where she lived. She was flustered with haste and might have forgotten the package—the surprise—had I not held on to her arm while confirming the details of our next date. It was only then that she became aware of the package in her hands.

“Here!” she said, pushing it at me. “Oh, you! I had a long and—oh yes, I say so—a fine speech to make with it. This souvenir. But now, I have not the time. You will see. Good-bye. Until Thursday.”

We kissed—back to *one* cheek—and she ran—actually ran—off into the Felix Potin shop.

I did not wait until returning to the hotel to open the package.

It contained seven double-sided, old Brunswick records. The Woodruff Three. The Woodruff Four. The Woody Woodruff Seven. I handled them carefully, examining the labels, which were made up long before Milt Gabler of Commodore had had the friendly and sensible idea of listing players. So, except to me and perhaps to a few others, the sound—aside from Woody’s—contained in these dusty grooves would be forever anonymous.

I stopped at Pathé-Marconi on the Champs Élysées and bought a portable record player.

At the hotel, without removing my hat, I played each of the fourteen sides three times. It took a long while.

My wife told me later that she had come in during this time and had spoken to me and that I had responded and handed her my hat, but I remember none of this.

I did not sound as bad on these sides as I had been afraid I might. The septet was by far the best.

By present day musical standards, the performance is not much, I suppose. But then, recording was not as good in those days. No excuses, please.

What does it matter? There is something there every now and then which touches perfection. Slug and Woody, especially. Some technically brilliant interplay. A breakout chorus here and there. A demonstration of the warming interdependence of a group of independents.

Beyond anything else, the sound of it is alive and caring. Henry and Gil and I playing as one; Albie filling in everywhere; Don spurring us on; Slug and Woody bringing out the best in each other.

One of the sides is "Night and Day." I remember the take, indelibly. Edmonde in the studio. My fluff. Cookie Raeburn. The signal. The start. Slug and his breathing beat. Woody in high and the rest of us chasing. At last, all together. Giving and taking. Discovering and communicating. The blended feeling and the shared living. The good music. The Woody Woodruff Seven.

I am listening to it now—here and now—and it sounds, it *is*, beautiful. What I call beautiful.



IT WAS A BALL WHILE IT LASTED....

First there were only three of us: Woody on trumpet; Don, who normally played bass, on piano; and myself. We gigged around a little, expanded.

Albie took over on piano, so Don moved back to bass. Then the Davis brothers from Harlem, who made up, with me, the reeds. And, of course, Slug.

Maybe that's where it really started—Slug. Huge, black, consumed by the eerie rhythms he heard in his head, always reaching for something he could never quite touch.

And then there was Edmonde, the dazzling French girl who was half in love with the whole band and dug the music even deeper than we did.

It was a ball while it lasted. Then it began to come apart at the seams. Until finally it blew up in our faces.