Broken Resolutions

This happened in the time of Walton.

Ingmar Asaghian was the second son of an Armenian father and a Swedish mother, a twenty-four-year-old college graduate who had spurned law school to work in the renting office of the family rooming house on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Since childhood he had listened to his mother's stories about how his aunt, her older sister, was a great and saintly woman. She told how Auntie Eve had come in steerage from the poultry and timber farm outside Stockholm owned by their drunken father and made a success of her life first as a nurse and then in the restaurant business and then bought this thirteen-story building and converted the apartments to rooms, and how she sought to make it a way station for missionaries and a permanent residence for other Christian folk. The rooming house fell on hard times and the bank threatened to foreclose on the mortgage but a businessman named Weill offered friendly assistance. He assumed Auntie's debts and gave her a lease on the building in exchange for a transfer of ownership. From childhood Ingmar heard stories from his mother about how Weill was cunning and unscrupulous, how he took money from them that wasn't rightfully his, and how they were powerless over him. "Just one word and he can put us out in the street." she would say.

On the south wall of the building was a sign in old English lettering that read: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23

The scripture verse was framed between two painted Corinthian columns, and he had a sense as a child that all the passersby knew that his aunt had commissioned the work, and further knew of his relation to her. He felt embarrassment about the godliness of his aunt and his mother, who every Sunday rode the IRT subway from 110th Street and Broadway to Thirty-fourth Street, where she would walk through the arcade of Pennsylvania Station to the Eighth Avenue side and up the long stairs to the tabernacle across the street from the massive general post office, modeled on the buildings of ancient Rome. And in this tabernacle she would be visited by the Holy Ghost and cry out and testify to the magnificence of the Lord while he lay back on the bench with his younger sister Vera or older brother Luke, for they would precede her to the church for Sunday school. And sometimes he would be under the bench from where he would stare at the support stockings that his mother wore for her varicose veins. The words or the themes of the thundering sermons he could not retain.

His embarrassment extended to his sister Hannah, seventeen years his elder, who never left home but still lived with his mother and had a son, a boy, outside of the marriage, and who was violent toward Luke and him and dependent emotionally through the years on their mother. And these same feelings extended to his second oldest sister Naomi, who lived in one of the rooms in the building with her alcoholic husband Chuck. Naomi took sedatives and stimulants and sang Judy Garland songs in the lobby of the building, and neither she nor her husband worked but lived there free of rent, and so yes, there were uncomfortable feelings about them, too.

And about Rachel, too, the third oldest, who drank and drank and sometimes ran naked through the streets, but who put down the bottle when their father died several

years before of a heart attack and found God and lived in a room in the building too, now, where she prayed and meditated through the day but did not hold a job and seldom spoke and showed up at the apartment to be fed by their mother in the evenings. Her book was the Bible, and sometimes he would see her on the street in sneakers far too big for her and no socks and not know what to say.

And there was Luke, his older brother, who had the idea that Weill would someday place him in charge of the building when his mother was no longer able to continue, for she had had been the manager since their aunt had become senile. Luke lived in a shack on the roof that he called the penthouse and he drank, too, and rode motorcycles around Manhattan with a spare helmet strapped to the buddy seat looking for women to bring back to this shack. And Ingmar was not exactly embarrassed by him, but he did not go to him much.

Weill could just put them out on the street, as his mother said? Weill was that powerful? Ingmar could not find a way to dispute his mother's words.

Early on he found himself stealing. He boosted change from his mother's red leather bag in the bedroom while she prepared Sunday lunch, and he stole dollar bills from his aunt's ground- floor apartment, using the key taken from his mother's ring to let himself in when his aunt was away. And with the money he had swiped he would sometimes go to the stores in the neighborhood and buy the things he thought he wanted, and was once marched home by the owner of the stationery store where he had tried to pay for a model aircraft carrier with a fifty dollar bill, for the owner could not help his own self-righteousness. His mother took Ingmar to the tabernacle and had the women

gather in a circle and lay hands on his head to exorcise the devil that made him steal, but he ran off, for it did not occur to him that what he was doing was truly wrong.

One day of his senior year of college he was en route to his part-time job at a daycare center in Harlem when suddenly it was revealed to him that his mother and aunt, because they sought power and control, had conspired to keep his father, who to the time of his death had been a cashier in a downtown restaurant, and Ingmar's older brother out of the family business. The flash of insight stunned him, and he resolved that they weren't going to do the same to him. And if Weill was indeed receiving money that wasn't his, maybe it should go to him, Ingmar, instead for safekeeping. Ingmar had heard the Bible story of Saul blinded by the light on the road to Damascus. There on a Harlem street littered with shards of glass he too had been given new vision.

Since childhood he had wanted to save his mother from this man Weill, who oppressed and mentally whiplashed her and Auntie Eve. And now, too, by accumulating some money he was certain to be able to build a life for himself. Perhaps most importantly, he would be able to induce Sarah, beautiful, talented Sarah, to come down from Boston to live with him.

It had all gone pretty much to plan. He had managed to situate himself in the renting office of the building and one spring night two years later he left the premises after closing up and entered the West End Bar on the next block for a beer, as he often did before heading downtown to the Chinatown loft where he now lived with Sarah, who had set up a painting studio there after leaving art school in Boston. It was in the West End Bar that night in that Ingmar watched the championship game of the NCAA tournament in which UCLA defeated Memphis State and Bill Walton came to his attention, and knew

this Bill Walton who moved with grace and agility and exuberance must be a part of his life.

A studio apartment in Berkeley
Sun dipping down over horizon
A bicycle left on a tree-lined street
Aching memories of a childhood
I never spent on that particular coast.
How can it be?

These lines he wrote on the inside back cover of *Père Goriot,* as the IRT subway pulled out of the One Hundred Sixteenth Street station, below "Mona 773-4281," the phone numbers of young women being on the inside cover of many of his books.

He changed over at Forty-second street to the shuttle and then caught the IRT Lexington Avenue line downtown. Ahead of him was a "Yo, Bro" brigade of Spanish in denim with the cuffs rolled up and spiked wrist bands. Hearing the incoming uptown train that would take them to the South Bronx, they began to run. He brushed his hand against his back pocket and felt the bulge of his wallet, in which he had stuffed ninety-five dollars in rent money before closing the office. From day one in the office, he had been doing the same thing, and no one had mentioned to him the falloff in income. His mind returned to feasting on the UCLA victory, as the train downtown hit the local stops. Happiness was UCLA winning again and again, back to the time in the middle Sixties when he had been in high school.

GAIL GOODRICH, KEITH ERICKSON, WALT HAZZARD

His stop should have been Canal Street, but the voice told him to get off one stop before, and soon he was drinking more beer at another bar and going higher on this Walton thing that had come into his life. En route he called Sarah from a pay phone and told her he would be home in an hour. He could hear her cleaning a brush in a can of turpentine as she spoke. Yes, it would be all right, she said. Her beautiful breasts beneath the blue work shirt. The last couple of years in Boston there had been men in her life. A genius painter named Lane whom she had held off and held off before giving in; a black Harvard law student who came on to her one balmy spring day in Cambridge as she was headed for her psychiatrist. The law student had said he wanted her to hang with him, and so she did.

How did you know these things, Ingmar Asaghian?

I knew them through reading her journals. It's only the truth.

A woman in a pink cotton jump suit and with a very French accent told her friend for the night that she would like some cocaine and a bearded man directed the woman he was with off her stool to the center of the room, where he said the flow of energy was strongest. And the bartender with the furrowed brow and sharply sloping forehead patiently explained to the patron sitting beside Ingmar why the Arabs and Israelis could never be friends because the Arabs were bent on the extermination of the Israeli state. He referred the patron to some passage or other in the Koran.

The amber softness of the lights. Walton only a sophomore. Only a sophomore.

He bought drinks for a woman in khaki pants and a flowered shirt, and after she played "Window Shopping," sung by Hank Williams, they walked to a truck lot by the Hudson River, where they drank from a pint of Old Mr. Boston blackberry-flavored brandy in the back of an empty bread truck, where he opened her shirt and exposed her breasts. He entered her as she lay on the ribbed metal floor of the truck, and in less than five minutes the thing was over and for the next period of time he was immersed in remorse, thinking, Sarah, Sarah, I wanted to be home but here I am instead. I'm always struggling to get back to you.

Her name was Elma. She lived with a sociology professor, a gay man with a large pornographic literature collection. She had been busy the past several days grading examination papers for the man. The evening had been her reward. From North Carolina. Ingmar asked her about her teenage lovemaking habits. Yes, she had done it in the back of cars, she said.

On the corner of Mulberry and Broome, as he headed home, a bum lay stiff. The ambulance attendants and the police were in conference.

"Looks like you've got a dead rigor mortis," the officer said.

The attendant giggled. "Have you ever seen a live one?"

They had met when he was a sophomore at CCNY and she was in her last year at the High School of Music and Art. Sarah blamed him for stunting her growth by keeping a relationship going which she sometimes said should have been allowed to end with her enrollment in art school in Boston. All those harassing phone calls he would make from New York City and his envy of her family's wealth and her fear that he would murder her

rather than accept the end of the relationship. Through the forceful repetition of her dark vision, he had come to believe these things of himself and that she should have remained with the genius and star of the art school she attended, and whose father owned half of Boston. There was in his mind the idea that that was the way it ought to have been.

Sarah's younger sister, Lenore, took her own life at age sixteen over the loss of her druggie boyfriend. Maybe that turned Sarah against men. She accused them of being hateful toward women and repressive of women because they were afraid of women's power. She began to talk of her father as a "fucking fag," for he had had affairs with men before marrying her wealthy mother. She said he harbored secretly disdainful attitudes toward women. She claimed as evidence his comment about an actress on television having "formidable breasts." So she was building a case, slowly, moving into the anger zone.

The winter following the suicide—that would be in December of 1968—Ingmar detected signs of moroseness in Sarah and reported them to her mother, for he was vigilant on Sarah's behalf. Lydia thanked Ingmar for his alertness and he glowed with happiness over having been of some assistance to this family and for having showed them how well-meaning he was toward their daughter. They arranged for her to enter psychotherapy with a Cambridge doctor, who leaned toward silence, and one night shortly thereafter she saw from the window of her apartment along the Fenway a police officer molesting a young woman under a bishop's lamp and ran downstairs to defend her only to find that the two were merely engaged in conversation.

Sarah's father would start his day holding forth to Lydia. The theme in general was the evils of the American economic system and how he had been harmed by the

American culture, such as it was. He stood outside the work world by virtue of the family wealth and wrote his books of history and railed at this vicious system that sought to make his life miserable. Sarah would complain of this tendency toward monomania in her father, but Ingmar saw in a way the same mental pattern developing in her.

She remained in her studio when he arrived home from his date in the back of the bread truck, and so he sat on the edge of the box spring mattress sipping a beer. He had himself a few more beers, while to the other side of the partition he heard her footsteps and the frequent tapping of the brush against the can of turps. He had his beer. He had his image of Walton running the hardwood court. And the next day he would feast on the write-ups. He passed out to the sound of Sarah cleaning her brushes.

The mornings were somewhat embarrassing to Ingmar because the mail would be dropped through a slot in the front door for everyone to see that those who corresponded with him were impersonal parties like Con Edison and New York Telephone. One night he did his socializing out the window after a few drinks, calling to a woman with hennaed hair who wore a purple jump suit as she strode up East Broadway. "Dada, Dada," he called to this woman who lived with snakes and lizards.

"You were calling to that woman. Don't deny it," Sarah said the following morning. But he did deny it.

So Ingmar was stealing money from his mother or his aunt or Weill, because he never really knew which, and drinking every night and writing in his journal and typing up

stories and planning a book about his family and sitting opposite pretty women on the New York City subway system. He was also running to the freight trains up at the Seventy-second street rail yard over by the Hudson River every night. Behind a pint bottle of blackberry brandy he would jump in a gondola car as the midnight freight pulled out on its run and sit amid rotted railroad ties or debris as the train made its way through the dimly lighted tunnel and inhale the pleasant fumes of the diesel fuel and think how as a child he had come to this tunnel with other kids like Johnny Malitano and Jerry Jones-Nobleonian and how it had given them great pleasure to pepper the passing trains with rocks from the roadbed. His thing for the trains Sarah knew about. He said it was a necessary experience and she would let him out the door without any fuss, only telling him to be careful before going back to her canvas.

Do you remember how it was with the knives, Ingmar, how one day you and she were riding the IRT subway to a downtown movie theater? You had been seeing her for three months and she was fast becoming everything to you and you were so afraid that she would find out that you were not what you were not the romantic loner she thought you to be. You were trying not to read the newspaper but even then you were powerless over newspapers and your eye hit on an article about a murder. This is the way it was. A young man from "the other side of the tracks" fell in love with a girl from a family with means. The family had him over frequently for dinner. He became a regular guest, almost a member of the family. The girl traveled overseas to France, and while in Paris decided she must end her relationship with this intense and needy young man. But he somehow managed to scrape together the money for a one-way ticket and appeared at her

hotel room door in in the Latin Quarter. The girl told him that she would shortly be leaving for a trip to the Costa Brava with an instructor at the Sorbonne she had recently met. The young man stabbed her to death on the spot. There was a postscript. The young woman's father, a professor of anthropology, made the trip to identify the body and arranged to have it flown back to the states. In an interview one Parisian reporter asked about his feelings toward the murderer of his daughter. Was he seething with vindictive rage? But the professor had a philosophical and detached viewpoint. The price the young man would pay for losing his head would be a lifetime of misery, and thus the professor could only feel sorry for him, he was quoted as saying.

You remember several things about that day, Ingmar. That Sarah wore a mauve top under a suede jacket that had once belonged to her mother. That across from you was an advertisement for Preparation H. You remember the disconcerted look on Sarah's face when you told her you identified with the murderer, and the complete understanding that you had made a grievously imprudent disclosure to her. You remember that right well, Ingmar.

Before the time of Walton he had sought professional help at a neo-Freudian clinic on the East Side of New York. His analyst was a German woman in training. In those first few months he told her repeatedly that he was stupid, having failed the SAT and gone to CCNY instead of Harvard, and that he was unfit to be in her company. She had him take some tests and told him the results showed he could go right to the top, and he told her about the building and the money he was taking and Weill and his older sisters and how they were dependent on his mother and abusive of his mother and how his older brother

Luke was living in the same building with his mother and sisters and how he, Ingmar, hoped never to be like them and perhaps wouldn't be because he had Sarah, who was beautiful and talented, and because he was on schedule for graduation from college, taking fifteen credits a semester and reading the paperback books assigned by the professors. He begged her for pills to calm his fears about Sarah and her doings up in Boston. And though he was taking steps against the possibility that she would betray him by going to bed with other women as often as he could so he could be one step ahead of her and then two, three, four, five, fifteen, twenty-nine ahead of her, she caught up and surpassed him the night she slept with the black law student from Harvard, sent him reeling into anxiety and turmoil, and later when there was Lane the genius painter there was more of the same anxiety and turmoil, for he had been ticking the days off the calendar since she had gone up to Boston for her freshman year intent on having her come back to New York after graduation "intact" and devoid of sexual experience with other men. And so he asked this German analyst for pills to calm him, but she said that she was not authorized by the clinic to write such a prescription and finally told him to try the "old-fashioned tranquilizer," and so he went across the street from his Hell's Kitchen apartment to a liquor store on Tenth Avenue and bought a bottle of burgundy and missed his first session, for he drank the whole bottle and got drunk.

So while he was with this German analyst he was also working in the renting office at the rooming house and taking the money that he knew his passive mother and aunt would otherwise turn over to this Simon Weill, and the German analyst did not denounce him for what he was doing, but she had things to say about his nature and the direction in which he was going concerning another matter. He talked of Sarah's beauty

and talent and wealth, and how he was helping her and how he and she would one day live together and everything would be all right thereafter, but there was something in what he said that made the German analyst see red and say, "It is your social scheme I object to." Maybe too she offered this outburst because he had made a big thing when he came to her of going to law school, but after his acceptance he declined to go, for the writing thing had come over him by this time and maybe law was a too prosaic route to travel. "You chickened out. You chickened out. You are an American chicken. I believe in calling a spade a spade," the German analyst shouted. And while he laughed silently at her outburst, there was also a dawning understanding of her in terms of her own experience. While she had not told him as much, he intuited that there had been a deprived adolescence in war-ravaged Germany, and now a surging and uncontrollable fury at the good fortune of young Americans.

One day, in January 1972, she let him go. He had begun to talk to her of his drinking, but she said he was merely worried because of what had happened to his older sisters and that now because of his years with her at the clinic he was fine and should go out in the world and do the things he needed to do.

This was just a short while before the first NCAA championship of UCLA in the time of Walton.

So he left the clinic and embarked on a new life, taking graduate courses in English at the City College of New York and attending writing workshops, and in the fall of 1972 there was a writing professor who liked his work and an older woman enrolled in these workshops who liked him. She was over thirty and there were lines in the corners of her sad eyes and she seemed to him depressed and reminded him in some way of the

darkness of his older sisters. As a graduate of the clinic, he considered himself capable of knowing who he wanted and did not want in his life. And this chain-smoking, lanky woman Marge, who could not keep her eyes off him during the writing class, was someone to avoid. She was not a woman to wear a skirt, jeans being a staple of her dress, as were a pair of hiking boots with lug soles. For variety she showed herself in tops from expensive boutiques.

She was from another world, an aristocratic New England family and Vassar College. When Ingmar learned that she lived near his family's building, his resolve to stay away from her intensified, for his future depended on keeping those who could do harm from his treasure. No, he could not bear for her to discover the building where he had spent his childhood and adolescence and where he now 'worked" in the renting office, taking for himself the money that would otherwise go to Simon Weill.

When other students at the snooty private school he somehow had been enrolled in asked where he lived, he would give them a geographical region. The Upper West Side. They had Park Avenue and Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue addresses, and those few who lived on the West Side had West End Avenue and Riverside Drive addresses, and they did not have fathers who were violent and worked as cashiers at downtown restaurants or mothers who were forty-four at the time of their birth or older sisters with raging tongues and failure-doomed ways, nor did they live in buildings with New Testament truths written large on their walls. He had a friend from the seventh grade on at this school who lived nearby on Riverside Drive, and when they got together, at the friend's request, as to go to a basketball game at Madison Square Garden, they would

meet at the subway station and after a time this friend, whose parents were professors, stopped asking where he lived.

And there was something else. Before the time of the friend whose parents were professors, he was best friends with a black boy whose family lived in the welfare hotel down the block. Together Ingmar and he would trick or treat in the buildings along Riverside Drive, and there was the time that they knocked over the fire extinguisher in the hallway of the building where this woman named Marge now lived.

But the woman had a car, and one night when the class had gone on late, she offered to drive him out of Harlem and down to a subway stop in the Columbia area, and from there he could continue his journey. She asked him where he lived and if he lived alone, and he told her proudly that he lived in Chinatown but stopped short of telling her that he lived with a woman, as instinct led him to keep the details of his life private from her. But he said in an offhand way that maybe they could go for coffee sometime.

She gave him a lift twice more in her battered Chevrolet sedan, and in each instance he said casually that one day they would go for coffee. Then one afternoon he was home when the phone rang. He picked up the receiver and it was this woman named Marge on the line. She said she was furious. She said he had been leading her on. She said her therapist said so. "I'm getting very impatient," she said. He didn't quite know what to say, because he was shocked to hear her voice on the other end.

"But how did you get my number?" he asked.

"I went to the registrar's window at the administration building and told the person there that you were a student of mine and that you had been missing classes," she said, and at this information he grew angry, but when he told her so, she dismissed his feelings

as insignificant. Sarah came in from her studio to clean her brushes in the sink and asked who had called.

"Just a woman named Marge. It's nothing, really," he said, and she let it go.

But the time came when he did go to the West End Bar with this woman, never with the intention of ending up in bed with her, as he was put off by her sadness and hos strongly she reminded him of his sisters. But in this bar, only a half block from his family's building, she told him he was an eccentric talent and that she wanted to get to know him better. While he drank draft beer, she sipped on ginger ale, having ordered two glasses at a time from the bar. She stayed away from alcohol, she said, and relied on medications prescribed by her therapist to get through the day.

If he had allowed the woman an opening into his life, he did so with the idea that their acquaintance was temporary and distance would soon be reestablished. Over further drinks she told him that her father was an inventor who had gained wealth through a patent on a special kind of screw. He had left New England for Florida with his new wife, spent many days on his yacht, and spoke with Marge through a ship-to-shore one-way communication system. She didn't care for the fact that her father could call her but she couldn't ring him up. She thought he was controlling her. She herself lived alone, her boyfriend of some years having left her. Prior to his departure she had burned his wardrobe in the bathtub in a fit of jealousy over another woman.

Her flattery of him was a strong hook, making it all the more necessary that she not find out about his family's building. If she did, she would replace praise with mockery. Worse, he would be unable to write about this world he came from, though he wondered if this was an unfounded fear.

He became more accepting of her calls, although the underhanded way she had gotten his number still nettled. One morning she expressed great anger at him over the phone. The night before she had tried to scale the locked gate leading to and from the college so she could get to her car. Because the gate was rain-slick and her footing on the rungs was unsure and her belly was poised above the gate's sharp points, he persuaded her, with some effort, that it would be easier and safer to walk to the open exit fifty yards away. But now she was applying a different perspective to his concern. He had been interfering with her growth by coaxing her down from the top of the gate. It was something she had worked out with her therapist that morning, she said, and she was furious, because it was just like the time her car got a flat tire on a country road and some men pulled up and insisted on fixing it for her. All he could do was laugh, but it was laughter brought on by a feeling of helpless anger rather than because what she was saying was funny.

Sarah told Ingmar that this Marge woman who called so frequently had her worried. Sarah had this fear that he was sleeping with this woman, but because Ingmar was not sleeping with this woman and it was the furthest thing from his mind to sleep with her, he was dismissive of Sarah's concern. "I'm allowed to have friends, aren't I?" he asked. How could the great Sarah, who had thrown him over for the genius Lane for a while, threatened in any way by someone like Marge? It was something new for him to have someone, even someone like Marge, in his life who said he was great and to be valued by Sarah after those years when she compared him so unfavorably with the genius Lane.

During this period Sarah's trust fund money was running out. Ingmar encouraged her to take her paintings and monoprints to the art gallery owners. He began to notice that she was barely eating. A little boiled shrimp, some yogurt, a piece of fruit. Day after day of this severe regimen. The family doctor had informed her that her thin body would thicken and one day she would be fat like her mother.

One night, as he was trying to sleep, he could hear Sarah pacing in her studio. Soon she was turning the lock on the door. She was just going out for a walk, she said, but returned to her studio. A short while later she was at the door again. Again she retreated to her studio only to reappear some minutes later at the door. It was now past 3 a.m. When he got up, she tried to bull past him and out the door. It was a long night. She would sit on the edge of the bed and say, "I'm really not trying to hurt you. But you know I must go to them," and then pace some more, the floorboards creaking, in the full-length brown Bloomingdale's overcoat she refused to take off.

When morning came they rode uptown on the subway, as she still insisted on seeing her parents. He was watchful of her on the platforms as the trains came rushing in and nervous when they sat opposite menacing-looking persons, his fear being that she would become bellicose and go against them with words. They arrived at her parents' Riverside Drive apartment where her mother put aside her New York Times crossword puzzle and suggested Sarah and Ingmar take a trip, possibly to Ireland, about which she had been reading in the travel section. Sarah's father, apart from a few pleasantries about the weather, remained quiet, a bemused expression on his weathered face.

Sensing that Sarah's parents had not picked up on Sarah's turmoil, Ingmar felt weighed down and alone as he left the apartment with their daughter. "You don't have to

worry. I'm not going to hurt you. I should probably go back to them right now, because I can hear them calling to me," she said. When she refused to pass through the turnstile leading to the subway platform at Eighty-Sixth Street and Broadway, he reached for a public phone and said to Sarah's father, "We're coming back."

Lydia was not surprised by their return. She had seen more than she let on, she said, and swung into action, arranging a consultation with a psychiatrist who came highly recommended by the family physician. Dr. Bertram Banko had a Fifth Avenue address, and en route in the cab through the Eighty-sixth Street tranverse, Sarah had to be restrained by Ingmar from bolting out of the rear door of the cab. Ingmar could see from the apparent confusion on Dr. Banko's young face that he didn't know which of the four was the patient—himself or Sarah or Lydia or Peter—but Sarah's bluntness brought his attention to bear on her. She told him that he looked overweight and insecure and that all the heavy furniture in his office wouldn't protect him in the long run, but he won her to a temporary state of quiescence with his steady professional manner. Outside his office she turned to Ingmar and said, "I'm sorry, Ingmar. I was always in love with Lane. I never stopped loving him. I think of him every day. Does it hurt you to know this?" and he told himself it was the sickness and not truth speaking in regard to her Boston artist lover.

En route to Gracie Square Hospital, where Dr. Banko suggested she be admitted, Sarah once again tried to jump from the cab, this time into the flow of Fifth Avenue traffic.

The afternoon following Sarah's hospitalization, he carried the garbage down four flights of stairs, trying to hold still the plastic bag containing mostly wine bottles and tallboy

cans he had drained the night before. His neighbor was just coming in as Ingmar stepped out onto the sidewalk with trash in hand. This neighbor was a taciturn architect from Waco, Texas, who lived in the loft on the floor below. Ingmar and Sarah frequently discussed Ron Doug because he had recently separated from his wife and they weren't sure how well he was doing. Ingmar generally tried his best to avoid Ron Doug, who after all while a professional while Ingmar was living a less than exemplary life. But on this day Ingmar turned to Ron Doug and, with tears in his eyes, told him about Sarah's situation. Ron asked him upstairs and showed him a toy, a mechanical windup monkey in a peppermint-striped suit and a top hat. When he cranked the key in the back, the monkey jumped about wearing a happy expression. Ron Doug laughed very hard, and because Ingmar could see that he wanted him to share in his mirth, he laughed, too, though not as hard as Ron Doug.

"I'm having a party tonight. Why don't you come? It'll pick you up," Ron Doug said.

That afternoon Ingmar drank cheap red wine from Spain, and as he drank the idea of the party grew appealing. And with the alcohol in him, others doors began to fly open as well. He reached for the phone and invited Marge to the party. Marge said she would be delighted. Though the invitation broke a promise he had made to himself to keep her away from his living situation, the wine magically eliminated any sense of betrayal.

In preparation, he placed an Al Green record on the hi-fi and did some solo dancing, and when he felt properly soulful he descended to Ron Doug's party, where he poured a large glass of wine at the bar and hung back by the bookshelves before seating himself on a sofa beside a woman in a black evening dress.

"Are you a friend of Ron's?" she asked.

"I live in the loft right above this one," Ingmar said. It made him proud to identify himself as a loft dweller.

"So you're an artist?" she inquired.

"Well, I write. That's what I do. I write stories."

"And do you publish?" she asked.

"Well, yes," he said. Two stories in a small literary quarterly qualified as publishing, he was sure.

She told him that she worked with Ron at the same architectural firm.

"Then you have a very structured mind, the kind that doesn't collapse upon itself but builds sturdy shelves on which to place things."

"Really?" she said.

Ingmar had some more wine and offered his thoughts about the Chinese. "They're a funny people. Very reserved and all. But look at the hallway. It's bright as can be. And on their New Year they go about throwing firecrackers for days. They drive our poor cats crazy." He told her too about the trains and the research he was doing down at a rail yard for a novel he was planning to write. He had a sense that she was drifting, but that the chasm wasn't such that it couldn't be bridged in the course of things.

Then Marge walked in, wearing her fringed suede jacket and a blue satin top with her trademark jeans. The wine was sufficient to keep at bay any feelings of panic that she was almost in his loft and seeing some of his world. Suddenly it occurred to him to call a woman named Jean, whom he had met in a bar the year before. She lived over on Broome Street in an apartment that shook as the trucks rolled into the nearby Holland

Tunnel. Why not invite her, so Ron Doug could see that he had friends, too, and not entirely unattractive ones.

"Would you mind if I was to use your phone? There's someone I'm supposed to call," he said to the host, who was off in a corner chatting with another man.

"What?" Ron Doug asked.

Ingmar repeated his question, because he did not want to use Ron Doug's telephone without permission. He got a positive, if distracted response from Ron.

Jean had other plans. "The music sounds pretty loud. It sounds like a lot of people." Her words pleased him. Even if she did not come, she now knew that there were people in his life and he wasn't just this gaunt figure who had come on to her one night the year before in the Spring Street Bar.

Looking around, he saw, to his extreme discomfort, Ron Doug deep in conversation with Marge. Suppose they became the answer to each other's loneliness problem and Marge became a fixture in Ron Doug's loft? No, Ingmar could not have her so close to his border. "I was thinking of leaving. Why don't we do that?" he asked, intruding on their conversation.

The gray Impala with the dented front door was parked outside.

"But Ingmar, where do you want to go? I was beginning to enjoy myself," she said, having allowed him to take the wheel.

Previously, she had mentioned a female artist friend. "Let's go visit her."

"Why, that's crazy. We can't just bust in on her without an invitation."

The car offered a cushioned ride over the bumps and potholes along the Bowery and Third Avenue. Several times Gideon circled the same block in the east sixties, having

heard Marge mention that particular street as being where the woman lived, and as he began the fourth loop she relented. in the marble-lined hallway of an old walkup building, Marge pressed the buzzer beneath a brass mailbox building as Gideon peered through the frosted glass of the locked front door, but even with all the drinking he had done, something told him the visit would not turn out well, and so he was relieved when the woman did not buzz them in.

The car came up on the curb, knocking down a garbage can, as he tried to maneuver out of the parking space.

"I had this girlfriend in boarding school, and you remind me so much of her. She'd do these crazy things and I'd egg her on and she wound up trying to commit suicide over and over again." Marge laughed.

Ingmar left Marge and went to the SoHo bars looking for someone to be with, but it was not that kind of night. Near closing time, he called Jean, the woman he had earlier phoned at the party, but she hung up the phone. Along Canal Street he walked, trucks rumbling toward the Holland Tunnel or in the other direction toward the Manhattan Bridge. He stopped at the Hong Fat on Mott Street for a take-out order of shrimp fried rice and picked up some tallboys on Chatham Square, where a prostitute called to him, and so he went into a parking lot with her for a few minutes, placing his food and drink on the tarred ground. All was quiet in the loft of Ron Doug as he passed it on the way home.

Before his first visit, he had asked Sarah if she wanted any reading material. "Samuel Beckett and *War and Peace,"* she had said, and so he stopped asking.

The rail yard called to him some nights. He would drink a pint of blackberry-flavored brandy to find up the courage to hop a north-bound freight for a ride through the tunnel under Riverside Park that ran parallel to the West Side Highway and the Hudson River. The tunnel ended up near Grant's Tomb, where he would jump off, never quite satisfied that he had found the thing he had been looking for, and not even knowing exactly what that was. As a child he had thrown rocks at the passing trains in this same tunnel.

Following her four-week hospitalization, Sarah stayed at her parents' country place in Ulster County, New York, at a time when the Walton thing in Ingmar was intensifying, as UCLA had been jarred by a couple of losses on the road just as the NCAA tournament was nearing.

The day he was to join her in the country he bought a copy of the *New York Post* at the newsstand by the East Broadway subway station and devoured the sports section on the F train uptown. He also read the articles by the columnists on the president. Every day there were articles by the columnists on the president.

His right pocket containing four twenties, he left the renting office after a couple of hours and stopped at the West End for a beer. UCLA was playing North Carolina State in the semifinals of the NCAA tournament. The score was close throughout.

He would be catching the train. He told Sarah that he wanted to reacquaint himself with the Hudson River route, which he had not taken since childhood, when his mother would dispatch him to various Bible camps upstate. Yes, of course the bus would have been easier, as it would leave him within a mile of her parents' house. Though she

would be required to make a long drive to the Poughkeepsie station in her parents' car, she was understanding, for childhood meant a lot to her, too.

Fear gripped him as the game progressed, as it could when the team to which he had given himself was not routing its opponent. When it went into overtime and double overtime he knew he had no choice but to get up and leave or else miss his train.

A checker cab took him through Harlem. But why did the driver have to wind them up in a traffic snarl on a narrow street rather than choose another route? Why did he choose to put him in danger of the angry-looking black men outside the corner liquor store? You're stalling me, quit stalling me, Ingmar thought. Don't do these things to me on purpose, as you are doing.

On the station platform a man in a suit and wearing gloves read from the Scribner paperback edition of *The Great Gatsby,* causing Ingmar to wonder for a second or two about the worlds people came from to find the domain of literature. During the ride Ingmar swigged hard on a bottle of cough medicine a doctor had prescribed for his strep throat. The codeine turned the ride into a slow-motion event, and eased his fear that Sarah might be unable handle the long drive along twisting roads, given that the month before she didn't know if she was coming or going.

Frantically, he ran back and forth from one end to the other of the Poughkeepsie train station. "I'll give you a lift if you like," a pretty girl with sex in her smile said, but even as she spoke these words, he groaned, seeing the red Volkswagen making its way down the steep road. Even from a distance Sarah's eyes were locked on his.

He kissed Sarah on the cheek several times as she drove them to her parents' home, but his thoughts were of the woman who had gotten away and how she was

probably from Vassar and how things could have happened. The woman's dark beauty reminded him of Lane, Sarah's genius lover back in Boston. Her smile, in his mind's eye, was the same one he had seen on Lane's face. Oh, the world he was missing. A deeper gloom settled over him when he heard on the car radio that North Carolina State had defeated UCLA in triple overtime.

That night, as Sarah diced the carrots and breaded the veal, he said the thing he had been terrified to say through the two years of their living together. "Sarah, I think I have a drinking problem," he said, as her back was turned to him. Almost involuntarily the words had flown from his mouth.

"I'm so lonesome, Uncle Albert," Sarah replied.

Dr. Banko recommended that Sarah see him three times a week, but the fee was sizeable. Ingmar was not anxious to subsidize her therapy, and it was doubtful he could, and her parents, while having means, also balked at making the outlay involved. Moreover, Dr. Banko thought it would be healthy for Sarah to reduce her financial dependence on her parents. Why not seek public assistance?

Fogged Plexiglas walls separating the offices. Plastic pastel chairs. Poor, grungy supplicants of the state. Cold and indifferent staff. The Medicaid office, on Thirty-Fourth street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, was not a cheery place. The bureaucratic hopelessness inspired in him the desire to flee, but that was not an option, considering the size of Dr. Banko's fee. How incongruous for a woman with her upper middle class background and talents to be there amid the hoi polloi.

The area west of Macy's and Herald Square was familiar to him. On the next block was the tabernacle where he had attended Friday Bible School and Sunday school and the afternoon service, at which he would be joined by his mother, who stood and talked in the tongues of the angels before sinking back into the pew, softly weeping, while he lay on the floor gazing at her special support shoes and the rubber stockings that she wore for her varicose veins. And what about the mother and son team for Christ who thundered their sermons Sunday after Sunday and the Automat on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Thirty-Third Street where his mother had taken him and his brother and younger sister for normal food, as she called it? But it was not the right time to be reminiscing about those things with Sarah, and besides, he had already told her.

The morning started off so full of promise. It seemed like such a simple matter for Sarah to apply for and receive Medicaid, but the social worker asked questions about her finances that Sarah had difficulty answering, and so another visit would be required.

Ingmar, aware that he walked at a fast clip, consciously slowed his pace out on the street. Even so did Sarah continue to fall behind. The only explanation he could find was a subtle contrariness on her part. He turned and waited for her with his hands on his hips. "You're stalling me. Just cut it out. Do you think you can?" At that moment he was back in childhood experiencing his mother's tactic of stalling him, just stalling him, the way she would wait for him to sit down and get really engrossed in the Yankees or the Dodgers game on TV before coming to him and saying, "You with your long legs, I need a few groceries from the store. Could I ask you to do this for me?" And then she would make him wait while she made out the list and when he finally returned with the various items she would say, "Oh, could I ask you to go out just once more? I forgot to add a

stick of butter" and then he would have to stand and wait while she fumbled in her purse and he would say, "You're stalling me, quit stalling me" and she would chuckle at his anger and maybe the same thing would happen one time more because she forgot the heavy cream and two innings had gone by and there were tears of rage because he knew that she was stalling him, stalling him that's all she wanted to do was to be stalling him, and his fury would promote in her a still bigger chuckle, which in turn would magnify his rage to the point where he somehow made her part ways with the chuckle, to give it up for something more sober and penitent, although he could never force from her the confession that she had been vicious and cruel. That he could never get from her.

“I'm sorry I have been such trouble. I know I am a burden," she said, as they negotiated a steep staircase down into the subway. His temper was a problem. He recognized that one angry word could lead to a tirade. But the air-conditioned F train calmed him down. But then she had to do something as they entered the loft. Then she went and did something. The wire that attached to the buzzer for the downstairs door had come loose from the wall, and now she managed to pull it loose from the bell. His soreness came right back. He yelled at her as if she had dislodged the wire on purpose. He didn’t have time to be fixing things and taking care of her.

She swallowed a couple more of the Mellaril that Dr. Banko had prescribed for her and cried helplessly. Seeing her so distraught summoned a moment of terror that he might be destroying her, and he spent the rest of the day trying to make it up to her even as he drank. It wouldn’t be good to go too far with his destructive rage if he wanted to hit the comeback trail in earnest.

Because the young woman who had offered him the ride at the Poughkeepsie train station had staying power in his mind, he said to Sarah, " I think I will do the train trip to Poughkeepsie again. There may be something more for me to learn on such a ride." But it was not merely the prospect of again meeting the woman that drew him to Grand Central Station. Passenger service was being resumed from New York to Montreal, by way of Vermont. "The railroads are making a comeback," he said to Sarah, jubilation in his voice. The rust would vanish from the rails and he would sit by the tracks on a clearing through some forest playing with the ballast and warmed by the sun, as when he was a child.

So he took a second train trip to Poughkeepsie, with the idea that he and the woman would take the drive that he had turned down. Over drinks in some bar he would impress her with his gentle, unthreatening manner and decent looks and they would go back to her dormitory room and make love after smoking a joint or two. Autumn would come and the wind would blow through the trees and sweep along the fallen leaves and the air would be crisp as he returned to New York after one of many visits.

Arrived in Poughkeepsie on a Sunday afternoon, he followed the winding road to town. The day was hot, and he explored the streets walking as he thought Walton might walk--he did not know exactly how the superstar walked off the court, never having seen him do so, but he imagined it to be an effusive walk with much movement of the arms. Some shyness came over him about continuing his search on the campus of Vassar College. Better to leave it to fate to decide if they were to meet again. A feeling of fatigue and drowsiness came over him as he passed the shuttered shops along the main street. What was the purpose of all this? He began to wonder. A sense of desolation drove him

back toward the station. Nearby stood a bar, where he had a beer and then three more. How good they tasted, and how much they did for him. Another time he would meet the woman.

Afterward, he wandered by the riverbank. In the middle of the river a man fished from a rowboat. Maybe he would put together some gear--a line and hooks and a lure and wading boots and a creel--and set out for striped bass as this man was probably doing. Better yet, he would purchase a sleeping bag and a portable stove fueled by Sterno and other gear and sleep out on the banks some night. There would be the river to one side and to the other the railroad tracks, and after the midnight train had sped past he would enter sleep with the knowledge that he was upriver away from the teeming city and faithful to his beloved railroad. Some childhood thing it was, and he could see that it had never left him.

On the next trip he did not get so far as the center of town. Instead he went directly to the bar by the station. Again he walked with the image of Walton in his mind, but there was less conviction in his step than on the previous outing.

And yet, a couple of weeks passed and the urge was there again to travel upriver, though once aboard, the *New York Post*, particularly the sports section, interested him more than the sights outside the window. At Croton he lifted his eyes from the paper and saw walking toward him up the aisle the woman he had been seeking. Her bold stare defeated him, and he looked away quickly, the image of a stalker having filled his mind. For the second that he had dared to look, he saw that she was even more beautiful, in provocative white painter's overalls with no shirt underneath, her browned shoulders bared. She slid into the seat in front of him and was quickly joined by two young men in

the facing seat. Though he was unable to hear exactly what they were saying—something about a party that night—his impression was of people who could function in groups free of sexual tension, and he felt freakish and unhealthy by comparison. All the way to Poughkeepsie he had the chance to study the tanned hand she had casually rested atop her chair— the long thin fingers and polished red nails— and drink in the luster of her bowl-cut black hair.

He waited to see which end of the car they would exit from and chose the other, then dawdled on the station platform to give them a good head start up the long stairs. The young woman brought up the rear, and though he held out hope that she would turn and look back, she didn't.

Ingmar returned to the bar, where with each drink, the hope grew stronger that the woman would reappear.

"You live around here?" the bartender asked, after serving Ingmar his fifth beer.

"I'm here to see a friend," Ingmar said.

"That's your friend, pal," the bartender said, pointing to the beer.

In the centerfold of the *Daily News* appeared a photo of a young woman with long, thin legs and silky black hair sitting in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art. Gideon cut out the picture and thought of all the good things he and the young woman would do if he ever got the chance to meet her. He placed the picture in his scrapbook and stared at it often while in the confines of the loft. Maybe he did not have to go to Poughkeepsie to find what he was looking for. Maybe it was all around him.

One afternoon Ingmar showed up at the renting office, but there sat Simon Weill, the building owner.

"You don't work here anymore," Simon Weill said.

"But my family manages this building."

"Your mother has withdrawn as manager of the property. She signed all the necessary papers."

Everything Simon Weill said was true. Ingmar's mother had canceled his family's lease to manage the building in exchange for the assurance that she could stay on in the apartment. "I will sign anything," his mother said. "I am tired. You would be, too, if you were seventy-four and worn down by arthritis. All I care about is that we all be in heaven together, but if we aren't, that will be all right, too."

The following week his older sister Naomi was found dead. A patient at Manhattan State Hospital, she had been committed to the psychiatric facility after standing on the narrow ledge outside her room, with Broadway nine floors below. Some of the more violent patients demanded cigarettes and money from her, and would hit her even after she had given them what she had. Institutions of this kind had become a second home to her. A police boat found her body floating in the East River near the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge. A suicide, the authorities said, though at the Bellevue morgue her corpse showed black and blue marks, leaving Ingmar to wonder if she hadn't been battered and then tossed into the river. "Throw dirt on all of us,' Ingmar shouted, in his drunken state. "For the living as well as the dead let there be dirt. Smother us into oblivion." Five years before his father had died and gotten dirt thrown on him and then the same thing happened to Auntie Eve and that was kind of all right, too.

It was not a small thing for Simon Weill to take the building operation away from his family, as Ingmar had no belief in his ability to negotiate his way in the world beyond. He would need a little something in addition to the alcohol to see him through the day and to record all the events of his life so it could have some meaning to him as well as to others. He visited a doctor who had been free with prescriptions for Naomi. He told the doctor that he felt depressed. The doctor showed understanding. While amphetamines had been banned by the Federal government, there was a drug with a similar action but no damaging side effects that might prove useful to him. "Of course you may just dissolve into air, you are so thin," the doctor said, as he handed him a prescription for a new diet pill on the market, and his chunky assistant covered her mouth in an attempt to stifle her chuckling.

Monthly Ingmar would renew the prescription, so he could start every day with the fortification of a pill that produced a glow of good feeling and love and provided him with the confidence that he could put his writing affairs in order. The pills even gave him a buoyant feeling about Walton, hampered by bone spurs in his first year with the Portland Trail Blazers, who had drafted and signed him to play in the National Basketball Association. So that while Walton was on his mind he was not heavy on his mind.

Someday soon Walton would be on the comeback trail, as Sarah already was on the comeback trail. She worked part-time as a waitress and continued with her painting and her sculpting and she often had the look of love when she came home from her thrice-weekly sessions with Dr. Banko.

Ingmar would sit at his typewriter in a state of bliss. He had extracted enough money from the building that he didn’t have to work, and so he had a one full day after

another to devote to his projects. Why not devote a little time to cleaning his desk, and this urge to clean would then spread to cleaning the refrigerator or other dusting the bookshelves. Or he would suddenly feel a void and run up to St. Mark's Place to try to fill this hole with a book-buying binge. There was the day and night he devoted to reading all of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* before heading over to Chatham Square where Sam the newspaperman was just opening his stand, his hands already black from the ink of the dailies.

Often Sarah would come home with a look of love from her session with Dr. Banko and make dinner on the hotplate they used, not having a stove. By then his bliss had turned to soreness and he would tell her to just leave him the hell alone so he could do some work for a change without her hanging around his neck. Or he would see her loitering near the refrigerator nibbling at a piece of ham and he'd know that she was dawdling just to annoy him and he'd have to explode at her and tell her exactly what she was doing. Or the night he heard her singing softly a bit of "Moondance," by Van Morrison, and understood in a flash that she was doing so to provoke him and so he had to go into her studio to let her know exactly what was happening and why it had to stop.

Then there were the nights he screamed at her to go back to her parents if she wasn't happy, and she would race out the door. As the hours passed without word from her, he could not drink himself free of the pain, as she had gone before the time was right for her to go. He would humiliate himself with calls to her parents' apartment, but no, they hadn't seen or heard from her. During such times there could be no reading of Erica Jong or paperback books by any other author, for that matter—not Susan Sontag or Donald Barthelme or the works of Kleist—for they could not help him. There was a

Collins edition, leatherbound and with gold edges, of the King James version of the Bible, given him by his mother and father, but he could not read the Bible, seeing it as a quagmire into which people slowly sank. Had it not pulled in his older sister Rachel, who too had a problem with alcohol and sometimes ran naked through the streets at night while tanked before her sudden change after their father's death, when she gave up alcohol and embraced the Bible and returned to the church.

That inscription, in blue ink. "Dedicated to our dear son Ingmar?" Were they the authors? Why did they not know any better?

And yet he held on to the leather-bound volume, packing it each time he moved. And when it fell to the floor one time, he immediately picked it up, because his mother had said the word of God did not belong on any floor.

"Dr. Banko says you're looking for a parent. That's why you drink," Sarah said. And so, whether it was the Three Roses Bar on Canal Street, where the drinks were cheap, or the more expensive Spring Street Bar on West Broadway, he would say "Hi, Pop," when lifting a glass of scotch.

It was in the Spring Street Bar that a young man named Eric said to him, "I don't understand. You're living with Sarah but you're here every night." There was a look of perplexity on Eric's innocent face. Eric had known Sarah when Ingmar first began seeing her. Several years younger than Ingmar, he was just out of Cooper Union, where he had won all kinds of awards in art. Ingmar tried to laugh off the observation, but in the days that followed, he came to wonder if Eric was trying to harass him out of the normal pattern of his life. Now Ingmar could not go to this Spring Street Bar where the bartenders preened without worrying that this Eric would arrive. To cover his aloneness

and not give the appearance of seeking out women, he would talk with Gil, another regular. Gil was a quiet sort of guy, always with his pack of Lucky Strikes and his lighter sitting on the bar as he drank one rum collins after another. A quiet guy, He hung paintings up at the Castelli Gallery. Gil said only creeps with no lives came to the Spring Street Bar on a regular basis, causing Ingmar to feel like he had been hit by shrapnel from this casual, snickering blast of honesty.

They shared the language of sports, and so he could talk with Gil about Bobby Bonds, the slugging outfielder newly acquired by the New York Yankees from the San Francisco Giants. For some years Bobby Bonds had been stealing bases and denting the seats of National League ballparks with his downtown swing. Ingmar was doubly excited because there were rumors about the outfielder that he drank and drugged, but where was the real proof. Sure, Bobby Bonds had been stopped for drunk driving and found slumped behind the wheel of his car, but that didn't prove anything about his habits in general. This hearsay that the new Yankee had a drinking problem upset Ingmar and caused him to give Bobby Bonds all his support in this new league where he had to learn to deal with the soft stuff the American League hurlers offered after facing constant heat in the Senior Circuit. By June even Phil Rizzuto was whooping and hollering about the outfielder and his tomahawking of high fastballs into the seats. So Ingmar could talk to Gil about the greatness of Bonds that summer and in the fall about the even greater greatness of Walton, and got from Gil the grudging admission, "Yeah, he's OK, I guess," Ingmar seeing that this Gil would rather speak of Jabbar and Cowens.

Then one night Eric reappeared in the company of a young woman, the two of them sharing an air of the ethereal. After a few scotches Ingmar went over to them as if to

make pleasant conversation and not merely one of the lonely creeps that Gil, who was not around, had been referring to in his laconic sneering way. He talked about his good life with Sarah, how she was back at the loft working and the possibility that soon she might be having a show. He talked about how he was doing a lot of writing and how things were pretty good in general and ordered some more drinks for himself from the waitress while trying to maintain a pose of dignity and well-being. He noticed as he drank that the young woman was giving him signals, so more and more he talked to her and followed them out of the bar and the last thing he knew that were moving quickly away from him. There was another night that involved a similar scene. A woman had left the bar, and because she was giving him signals he trailed behind her up Wooster Street. She turned and seeing him ran along the street with the lived-in cast iron buildings signaled by the plants in the windows and there remained in his memory the look of fear and even horror on her face.

In addition to his stories, he was trying to write two novels. One had a character who had become a thief and showed how he got that way, a character with an aunt who was a saint according to his mother, and how the two women ran a building and how the mother said there wasn't a lease and the owner could throw them out in the street any old time when in fact there was a lease. He wrote how the mother was on the books as making $52.00 per week but took money whenever she pleased, and how he followed after her. He wrote about an ineffectual father who liked to smack and an oldest sister who liked to smack, too. And he put these writings in one folder.

In the next folder was the novel he was trying to write about Sarah and his experiences with her--his brutalization of her--but he didn't see how he could write about

her and still live with her. It scared him to do so, and not even the pills could dull this fear, because the writing was a threat to his life with her. So he went to the bar and drank, and it became all all right.

So one night he was in there standing at the end of the bar watching the owner with the Cheshire cat smile and the beard and the designer T-shirt walk back and forth in his preening manner and he thought how he would like to play a song or two on the juke box. Like Freddy Fender singing one of his sad lonesome songs, and maybe Wilson Pickett to pick up the place for three minutes or so. He went over to the Wurlitzer and there was this copy of the New York Times on it obscuring the selections, so he lifted the paper in order to make his choices. Only this woman says to him, "Stealing my newspaper?" and he looks and sees this heavyset woman with a modest moustache and she's grinning at him in a way he doesn't understand and he sees a male friend of hers and he's grinning, too. Instantly he's angry and says, because he thinks they're laughing at him, "Find someone else to talk to" and puts the paper back. He went back to his corner and listened to Freddy Fender but he didn't enjoy him as much as he might have if there hadn't been the words with the woman, in this bar with the amber lights where people drank and ate and pissed and shat. And Wilson Pickett didn't make his spirits soar like he wanted them to, either. He ordered another drink and looked out the plate glass window bisected by a beam of wood. He saw West Broadway and a street deserted except for a cabbie stretching his legs outside his Checker cab, and wondered if maybe that was something he would be able to do when his money ran out in the various savings accounts. He turned and there was the heavyset woman right in his chest and she had

hold of his wrists and was keeping him transfixed with a mesmerizing stare while she began to claw the backs of his hands with her long nails.

"You have no psychology. You have no nothing. I'll bet your dick is an inch big," she shouted, and after she had done the damage she set out to do she ran out of the bar crying with her smiling friend trailing behind.

He stood a few minutes before leaving, wanting or needing to gauge the reaction of the patrons to the event. People seemed to move away, to give him a long look before turning in gestures of dismissal back to their conversations. For some reason it was necessary to be absolutely nonchalant about what had just happened, and so he turned as casually as he could and with a half-smile of the imbecile on his face stepped out the door. He headed home along Spring Street and then turned down Greene Street, in case people had come out of the bar to watch him. He walked close to the buildings and tried to turn his thoughts to Walton, in whom all grace and power resided, but he was full of rage and humiliation and could take no refuge in the superstar this night. His hands were stinging and bleeding and he dabbed at them with a napkin and bought two sixpacks of beer in a Chinese grocery on Mott Street with one hand in his pocket, and walked out without taking the change from the ten-dollar bill, for he knew that the withered owner was trying to stall and humiliate him.

"Do you see what some goddamn bitch does to me for minding my own business?" he shouted when he got home, finding Sarah asleep in the box spring bed and waking her.

"What? What are you talking about?" she asked, sitting up, and fear and anger were in her voice.

"Look what some bitch did to my goddamn hands just because I was minding my own business," he continued.

"Oh shut the hell up. I didn't do it," she said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he said, but went off, because even though he was drunk he could see that she was working toward a righteous soreness against which he did not want to have to stand. So he went off to her studio and sat on the small cot in the corner by the window amid boxes coated with dried latex and other sculpture pieces of hers. It was the same window he had once called to that woman Dada across the street from and he drank one king-sized can after another full of fury that he hadn't dealt severely with the aggressive fat woman, and toward morning fell into bed with his bad and alcoholic breath.

Ingmar continued to read Sarah's journals, so he could know what she was about. One day he found a new name in its pages, not Lane the genius-boyfriend from Boston, but someone named Raul. She wrote that he was handsome and that he had pleasing straight black hair and a very beautiful body. She wrote that he was a college student and intelligent and ambitious. She wrote that he was obviously attracted to her. These entries interested Ingmar very much. It could be said that they made his day.

Sarah knew that he had been reading her journals, but probably she thought that now she was effectively hiding them from him by placing the composition books in which she wrote under the dresser or under the cot in her studio, or burying them at the back of the closet. She did not know that he gave hours over to the search for these journals, and that there was nothing that could make him so happy as to come upon them.

Once the idea entered his mind that he must see what she was about through the pages of her journal, the search was on, and back and forth through the loft he would go while she was outdoors maybe thinking that he was getting on with his stories and novels. So yes his heart did sing when he came upon the hiding place and could open the latest composition book.

She was due back from work at four o'clock, except on the days when she saw Dr. Banko. On those occasions she would arrive home two hours later. He waited for the time when she would arrive home late on a non-Banko day, for that would be the one on which he knew that she had stepped out on him. He was most excited when he would read in her journal that things were warming up between her and Raul. He read that Raul followed her about and talked to her at every opportunity. He read that Raul wanted to do something with her some day after work. Finding the patience to wait for that day to happen was a difficult thing to do, to sit through dinner and movies and go to sleep next to Sarah who was on the verge of this adventure.

And then one day she did come home late, very late, and her breath smelled of alcohol. He was sure they had done it, and he wondered where it had been done. But of course there was no way of knowing for sure, because she wouldn't have had time to make the entry in her journal. And so he had to restrain himself from questioning her closely, and it was a hard, hard thing to do. But he was also aware in this period of uncertainty of another emotion pushing in on the one of excitation, and its rival was anger and indignation leading to resentment at the speculated fact of her betrayal.

The following day he read that they had almost done this thing together in bed, that they had gone to a bar for drinks before driving to an apartment Raul had arranged to

borrow. But there was a screwup and the tenant happened to be there. Ingmar didn't like to admit it to himself, but he was actually relieved that they had not gone to bed together, and while it was hard to forgive her intended infidelity, he did a pretty good job of it.

With the pills came a heightening of the yearning for sexual experience, and some nights or afternoons or even mornings he would go out to the theaters where pornography was shown in order to witness the men with monstrous members doing it to women who actually wanted it done to them. At such times as these Walton was not with him, for he could not link Walton with this lower order of things. It was a little like the need to drink. Once the thought occurred to him he had to go to the stores of the Chinese people and turn over his money to them for beer or wine or scotch or gin, or go to the bar on Spring Street where the bearded owner walked ceaselessly back and forth in his preening way. And it was that way too with the pornographic movies; his thoughts had only to turn in their direction and he was out the door and moving toward them.

So while Sarah was on the road to seeming recovery Ingmar would stay alone in the loft and count up the money in the bank books and dust the desk instead of writing the novel about family that he intended to write, and sometimes it was not the need for the paperback books in the stores along St. Mark's Place that he had but he would go instead and buy Screw and Pleasure and other tabloids and read about how men and their wives fucked other couples and the hunger increased for knowledge of this world and the people in it. He would go to the pornographic bookshops and buy eight-dollar magazines and take them home and read about couples in every different state of the nation willing to share their bodies for a night with likeminded couples and he would be thrilled when

some in the photographs truly did not look seedy but normal and intelligent and purposeful, although there were those with tattoos on their arms and grease in their hair and sporting other manifestations of tastelessness. He was drugged and drunk and on fire sexually and in Sarah's absence would masturbate and then go back to the magazines because he could not tear himself away from them for long. As attractive as some of the people were he could stay with those on any one page only briefly. He had always to be flipping from one set of couples to another looking for the perfect pair but unable to ever find it. And there would be terror that Sarah would find these magazines, for he had heard about a friend of hers in Boston, a sculptor named Julie, who took a lover named Hank and allowed him to move in with her only to find some months later that he was squirreling away these magazines in which people in different combinations fucked each other and she summarily trashed him, just told him to get out. Beneath the layers of manuscripts in his file cabinet the magazines were stashed, and though they were out of view he had this notion that Sarah's eyes could bore holes in the olive green metal and that his corruption would be exposed and that Banko would be informed.

So even as this decadence was growing Sarah was being rebuilt. There was a reconstruction underway, and Dr. Banko was the architect. Every day she seemed to have a new insight into her family that hopefully put her further on the path of liberation. And while he had only met Dr. Banko that once when he and the family ushered Sarah into his office he felt the doctor's approval of him and was warmed by it. He was Sarah's helper. He was helping her toward health, and Dr. Banko had said that he was A-OK.

And during this 1974-75 period he would go to the bars and sometimes see this woman named Marge with whom he never slept with and would sing Sarah's praises to

her, tell her how Sarah was progressing and really doing just fine and was on the comeback trail. And he would say similar things to the woman named Jean, the one he had met in the Spring Street Bar back in 1972. But she seemed harder to win over to the merits of Sarah. She seemed dubious. He was never satisfied that he had convinced her of the greatness of Sarah and sometimes they would still go to bed with each other, but he would rather that Jean have a fuller apreciation of Sarah and her wondrousness.

One evening Sarah and he were shopping in a Brentano's bookstore on Eighth Street and University Place for paperback books and he came upon an album of photographs taken many years before in prerevolutionary Cuba, and the prints showed Cuban women gorging themselves on penises and having it done to them in various positions and in various combinations. They were sepia photos carefully developed and printed so that they had the look of art to legitimize the pornographic content and make possible their sale at a decent store like Brentano's. So Ingmar said, What the hell, why not spend the ten dollars, because he saw it as a way to interest Sarah in the things that interested him without too much risk. At the counter he put the volume down among the other paperback books and the clerk rang up the sale and asked for the money. "Oh, by the way, I want you to know that they are not having real sex in that book. They are only simulating sex," he said, and when Ingmar looked at him skeptically, the man continued, "I know it for a fact that the sex is not real. You will have to believe me. You will just have to believe me. That is not real sex." And after paying for the purchase they went outside and there came the clerk following after them, and as they walked off he shouted "Fuck you if you don't believe me. Just fuck you," and he and Sarah talked some words at each other about what the clerk's insistence might have been all about, but they had to

admit that in the final analysis it had them stumped. In his sly way he left the volume about the loft, but he could see that she really wasn't taken with it.

Soon thoughts of Jean or any other individual woman did not satisfy him, because the sexual torment was increasing, and he knew that his highest ambition now was not to write or assist Sarah with her comeback but to be fucking in a room with other couples, and while the idea of broaching the idea with Sarah terrified him he nevertheless found himself talking in oblique ways about experimentation, despite her lack of enthusiasm for the Cuban women. He would over a bottle of wine chat about how everyone was basically bisexual, and while she warmed to the conversation somewhat he couldn't convince himself that they were really speaking the same language.

There was a weekend in the country where it was pills in the morning and Jack Daniel's through the afternoon and evening and night and he simply didn't put the question to her about doing it with others one minute at a time, but he was in fact consumed by the idea as they walked through the woods or hiked to the leanto atop the mountain, part of which was owned by her parents, or simply sat by the roaring fire. The vision would come of Bob and Pat R. in Boulder, Colorado, and he would long to be with them, particularly Pat, who posed in the snapshot-sized photograph in her white lace underpants sitting cross-legged and braless on the carpeted floor of what he took to be their living room. Or long to be with Dolores and Ronald M. of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Dolores, who posed lying on a big brass bed underwearless in a black garter belt and black lace bra. Nature had no value for him, neither the crisp smell of the burning logs in the fall air or the racket-making flight of the pheasants in the surounding woods. This was the period when Walton was living with his girlfriend in a house outside Portland,

and it was a sort of open house, with friends dropping by all the time and another couple living with them. And sometimes he would get to thinking that maybe these couples were doing as did Bob and Pat R. in Boulder, but something about Walton radiated health and intelligence and no, drugged as Ingmar was, he came to reject such a notion.

The time came when he decided to take matters into his own hands and use initiative to further himself. To expand socially, he placed ads in The Village Voice and other publications advertising himself as a bisexual in search of similarly oriented individuals and rented a post office box at the Canal Street station, so that he would have a private place to receive the letters of these equally desirous persons rather than have them dropped through the slot in the door downstairs with his Con Edison bills and New York Telephone bills and the other non-personal mail he received with regularity.

Letters came from female graduate students and secretaries, from a librarian and a dental assistant, and from a "soc." major at a midwestern college. For a while it reduced his sense of isolation to know that people were coming toward him at least with their correspondence, rather than he having to pursue them in the bars and on the city streets. By two o'clock in the afternoon he would be yearning for a run down to the Canal Street post office to see what the day had brought and yes, in the winter of 74-75 he met through the ads a secretary named Jo from Brooklyn, a woman with blond razor-cut hair and an overbite and tending toward heaviness, a woman who wore designer jeans that were a little strained in the seat, a woman who was practically breastless. She had working- class Italian parents who did not live far from her apartment down in Carroll Gardens. Sometimes she would pick him up at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge in her Peugot, a risky move since Sarah could have spotted them, while at other times he would

ride the subway down to her cramped apartment, and at this time he was doing many Times crossword puzzles and doing them obsessively, for the diet pills contributed to his compulsiveness, and he would struggle for completion of them while riding these trains and learned such words as "obi." He told her how there were certain difficulties between Sarah and himself, and she told him that with her tax refund she was going to buy a Pentax 35mm camera. She gave him beer and they smoked dope and there were a couple of things about her: she didn't wear underpants under her jeans and she swallowed his come. She said the Italian boys from her neighborhood were macho nothings and that she was looking for something more than their muscled offerings. She said her parents didn't understand her and that there simply wasn't room to grow in that particular household. He noticed that there was a panic to be away from her as soon as sex was done, for then it was time to go back to Sarah and make things right with her in their home.

And though Walton was having trouble with bone spurs in his foot in this, his initial pro season, Ingmar had every confidence that things would turn out right, for in the early part of the schedule he was doing the reject better than anyone else in the league. So Ingmar could luxuriate in thoughts of an endless virtuoso professional performance and many glowing newspaper reviews for his redhaired man.

When the novelty of Jo wore off he lacked the audacity to ask her to join him in a search for other couples--he just could not bring himself to do so. And so he turned to the advertisers in Screw and Pleasure and other tabloids and received phone numbers, which he would sometimes dial even as Sarah slept. There was the call to the man in Queens who had advertised himself and his wife as swingers. Over the phone the man gave their

measurements, his gin voice competing with the sound of a crying baby in the background, a noise that saddened and depressed Ingmar and made him ashamed temporarily of his exploration.

But there were other ads to answer, and finally there came in the mail a Manhattan possibility, a man and woman who represented themselves as undergraduate students. And so a date was made. He found himself one Saturday afternoon in a messy Morningside Drive apartment with a burly and outgoing and aggressive young man and his passive Indian wife. Her thinness bordering on emaciation shocked and depressed him, as did the way the man had of ordering her about the place, for his intimidating authority too strongly revealed the male will behind the swinging thing and malleable women questing for patriarchs.

Ingmar and the woman were sent into the bedroom and did things to each other and then the man came in shortly thereafter and all three did things to each other. Ingmar found it hard to conceal his discomfort at the fact of the woman's undernourishment, her prominent ribs and bony elbows and jutting hipbones. The dark beauty mark in the shape of a pendant under her collar bone was also discomforting. The man was feasting on her body in an endlessly hungry way; they seemed to have an energy and enthusiasm he couldn't match. He was disturbed to find that the man had entered her from behind while they were making love face to face.

Afterward the couple talked about the shelves they were planning to put up in the bedroom and the plants that would go on them. The woman said she was a business student at Pace College and how Frank--that was his name--wrote all her papers for her.

"He can write a paper on anything in just one night," the woman said, as they sat in the kitchen at a table covered with an oilskin checkerboard cloth.

"I had enough of school. There was nothing there for me," the man said. "Would you like something to drink? Would you like a glass of wine?"

Ingmar said yes, and the man flared up when the woman was slow to bring the glasses. There were other instances of flaring irritability, coming when she was slow to refill a glass or find an ashtray or bring a book of matches or in other ways not doing what he wanted her to do when he wanted her to do it. It saddened Ingmar to know that nature of the relationship, and he was happy to be away from them, for there had been growing in him, as they sat there in the kitchen, the sense that they might decide to murder him.

So later that night he met the unsuspecting Sarah at her parents' apartment, where he drank two bottle of vermouth and pledged to himself that he would start his life anew and that thenceforth he would not do as he had just done.

That night they returned to the loft and while Sarah slept he noticed that there had been an onslaught of roaches. They were feasting on the glue in the bindings of their books and marauding through the kitchen and even incubating their eggs in the warmth of the grill behind the refrigerator. His mother had made a gift of insecticide to him when the building operation closed down, and he poured some solution from one of the two gallon cans out on the landing into a little hand sprayer he had purchased and began to give the bugs a whiff, spraying here and there and soon everywhere. But he was brought to a sudden halt. "What is that smell?" It was Sarah, sitting up in bed. She saw the sprayer in his hand and didn't need an answer. "Are you crazy spraying that stuff here in

the loft at two o'clock in the morning?" She was quite outraged. He put the hand sprayer down at that point and opened some windows and felt really put down, but he also saw that good results had been obtained because the little ones were dropping all over the loft and this did give him a sense of strong if temporary satisfaction.

Into the fall and winter of 1975 Ingmar continued with his novel about the building and maintained his visits to the post office to study the responses to the advertisements he had placed, and sometimes he would call these people. Sometimes there would be more fights with Sarah and he would challenge her to get out and go be with her parents and she would fall to his knees in an agony of guilt and remorse as the hours passed and she failed to return, but the next day she would reappear and things would proceed evenly for a while until the next flareup. He even went uptown and consulted a doctor about his drinking. The doctor told him to go visit an AA group two blocks down the way. "They'll help you with your drinking," the doctor said. But he had not come for that kind of advice. There was something too drastic about the suggestion. The mention of AA made him shudder with fear, for it conjured up a picture of gray, washed-out men and his friend Marge with the father who wired her ship-to-shore had said with authority, "There is nothing more depressing than a sober and reformed alcoholic." He left without telling the doctor about the pills, and took the subway back downtown to do some more drinking. And in the fall he read the basketball predictions for the coming season and was not pleased to learn that there were now doubters about the greatness of Walton after his disappointing first year in the pro ranks, and he was hurt and fearful reading that some were predicting that Portland even with Walton would come in no higher than third in the

Pacific Division of the Western Conference of the National Basketball Association. He could sense danger, the danger that Walton would be dismissed or permanently devalued, and such a gross injustice must not be allowed to happen, for Walton had done so many things and could do so much more and Ingmar could see that he would have to take a hand in his future.

He was also in frequent contact with his mother, who called him on the telephone and sent him booklets with religious themes and notes exhorting him to pray and come with her to the tabernacle on west Thirty-third street where he had gone as a child and where she continued to worship.

You will have to find the Lord. There is no other way.You will have to find him as your father found Himbefore he passed away. Your father was a walking man. He was a restless and agitated man and he knew no peace until the Lord entered his heart. I know that it must be the same for you and all my children.

Ingmar had no answer for her except silence.

So by December of 1975 they had decided to move, and he placed an ad for the loft in The Village Voice. A young Italian man by the name of Romo was the first to make an appointment. He was an architecture student at Columbia University and was living with relatives. The thing was that Romo's girlfriend was flying to New York from Switzerland

and he was eager to have a place of his own where he could take her. Ingmar was very patient with him, for the pill was in him every morning and put him in the right and loving mood to deal with this Romo who would come up the stairs in the early afternoon to ask his questions about the heat and the neighborhood and things of this nature. He wanted to know too if he was assured of getting his fixture fee back when it came time for him to leave, and Ingmar could only say that it was a good bet. So Romo left a deposit.

On one visit Romo wanted to know what it was that Ingmar did, and Ingmar mumbled that he wrote.

"What is it that you write?" Romo asked in his Italian way, and Ingmar offered some more mumbling to him.

Then Sarah returned home with the glow on her from having been with Dr. Banko, and they all went out for some Chinese food and Romo said that he was most impressed with her canvas sculptures. Ingmar could see a bond forming between them, and that was quite all right with him, for he knew that there was between them the sympathy found between artists. Sarah spoke about the painter Morandi. She said she admired the stillness in his work. While at the restaurant Romo had this to say. "I think I smell gas back there at your loft. Is it so?" But Ingmar denied that there was any smell of gas.

Some days later when Romo came back with another payment he again remarked on the smell of gas, and this time Sarah acknowledged that yes, there had been a problem when they moved in. There had been a garden hose running from the main gas fixture to the water heater that had been joined at both ends by duct tape. Ingmar had replaced the

hose with regulation gas piping. Still, there was some seepage, she had to admit. Romo took all this in in his Italian way.

When next Romo came to visit he did so with his Swiss girlfriend who had bobbed brown hair and wore an Irish wool sweater, and Ingmar was secretly in love with her because of her boarding school breeding. It was on this visit that Romo said, again in his Italian way, and for one of the few times breaking out of his seriousness and producing a smile, "Ingmar seems like such a practical person. And yet it is a little odd, is it not, to be living with all this gas around him?"

Before leaving Romo said something else. He said, "I think Ingmar drinks too much. It is what I think."

It hurt Ingmar to hear Romo reveal a source of his shame, but he smiled in an attempt to conceal the wound that had been inflicted.

After they had left, Ingmar sat in Sarah's studio among the canvas sacks that Romo had liked so much and realized that Romo had not inflicted a really serious wound, for since Romo and his Swiss girlfriend were gone he was already feeling better about his life and his habits and thinking that all he needed to put things in better order was a normal apartment like everyday people lived in instead of one of these open loft spaces. He took some long belts on the sixpack he was working on and opened the green vinyl notebook in which he kept his journal entries and turned to the back, where he had started a record of the doings of Portland in the 1975-76 season. Walton's totals he placed in parentheses and there were asterisks after those games in which he did not play, and there had been more than a few. Romo had talked his architecture talk to Sarah, and he was a serious kind of guy, but he, Ingmar, was kind of serious too in an American way, he

thought, as he examined the Walton record. And yes it was going to be all all right as soon as they were out of the loft and Walton got himself back together and Sarah began hitting the comeback trail in earnest by going out there with her portfolio to the galleries.

Now the Christmas season was upon them and he took the train down to the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, for he had the idea that Brooklyn would be a nice borough in which to live, that it would somehow give them some of the things they needed to be happier. Maybe they could find a two-bedroom apartment with a nice modern kitchen fairly cheap. Romo was to move in at the beginning of the New Year, and Ingmar figured that three weeks would be sufficient time to find a new place. So he made several trips across the water to Brooklyn while Sarah did her waitressing. There were floors for rent in Fort Greene brownstones, but the area was afflicted with the blight. There was a three-room apartment, so advertised, but the rooms were closet-sized. But because the pill was in him each morning he did not entirely lose hope, though seeing the Christmas decorations in the windows and the Santas on the street with their bells and the shoppers with their packages he felt outside the spirit of the holiday--Christmas cheer had not come to him yet. One dark mid-December late afternoon he was in a Zum Zums in downtown Brooklyn having a bratwurst and then a piece of carrot cake and a cup of coffee so he could easier smoke his cigarettes and there were two men at the other side of the counter in leather jackets talking at each other about a lawyer they were supposed to shortly meet and when he left the Brooklyn Zum Zums he found himself all of a sudden crying. He didn't know why he was crying but the tears wouldn't stop and he walked quickly so people wouldn't have the chance to stare. He really just didn't know what was going on. Back on East Broadway at last he went to the liquor store of the Chinese man

and bought two bottles of his Spanish red wine and poured himself a glassful when he got home and then rang up his high school girlfriend Jane, who was now a secretary out in Los Angeles trying to get a singing career going. He didn't know what this was about, since he almost never called her. She was the one to ring him up once a year and ask how things were going. She had left him after their senior year of high school, having gone off to Mexico City on a two-week vacation. He got a letter shortly before she was due to come back saying that she had decided to stay down in Mexico City for the next year, and the gulf grew wider and wider between them while he waited for her to return. Then one day several years later--after Sarah had entered his life--she came to see him, and he didn't treat her well, and since then she had been the one to call and pursue him. His voice must have sounded a bit like he'd been drinking, because she said to him, "Are you all right?" and he quickly got off the phone. She was someone he had rolled in the grass of Dead Man's Hill in Riverside Park with, and he could not see himself rolling in the grass of Dead Man's Hill with Sarah, for their relationship did not lend itself to that. He finished the rest of the wine, and was asleep when Sarah returned home.

The next few days brought no better luck regarding finding an apartment, and he said, what the hell, surely her parents wouldn't mind if they stayed with them while they looked around. He did a little packing in between the drinking and even a little Christmas shopping for the family and for Sarah--for her he got a blue cardigan sweater. In conflict whether to go to his family's house or her parents' house that Christmas day he went to a pornographic movie theater on upper Broadway almost at the midway point between the two residences and watched the men with big things do it to the women who

were wanting to have it done to them, and since he was on his pill (he took two, it being Christmas) it was all all right.

Then there came New Year's Eve and Romo came by with his final payment and it was clear that he was eager to be away from his relatives and with his Swiss girlfriend in the East Broadway loft. Ingmar by this time had also come to understand that while Romo might have fingered him for his drinking, he did not know about the pills, which Ingmar considered the primary source of his right relationship with the world, and so he needn't be too uncomfortable. As the evening moved along and the New Year approached Ingmar drank steadily while Sarah made entries in her diary. Then he began thinking how they should really go out and have a good time and he chose a discotheque up in the Times Square area for them to visit. They drove up in her parents' car. The police had come to cordon off the expected crowd and in the artificial atmosphere of colored lights and frenzied music in the discotheque he hoped to find couples off in the corners in the act. He himself did not dance with Sarah, and while she was off getting drinks for them he let his leg graze against that of the woman seated next to him, and his real hope was not for a new year but to be transported to a room where people were drinking and fucking and doing nothing else, a room from which they would never have to come out.

The New Year came and they woke in their own bed, and he put down in his journal that they had gone to a discotheque the night before but he left out the rest, for he wanted to believe that the omission would help make things all all right. And he could reflect at the beginning of the New Year that he had in his own way been good to Sarah and proven her wrong. All the prophecies that had flowed from her lips in the course of

anger outbursts to the effect that someday he would murder her, that someday he would pick up the knife and do it to her, had not come to pass. He had not done it to her. He had showed himself to be a reasonable and trustworthy man, and one day at a time he was continuing to prove that he had no potential for murder, although when he would be totally exonerated in her eyes and those of Dr. Banko he couldn't say. It might even be a lifetime job for all he knew; nevertheless, the satisfaction was keen.

Now they were in Sarah's childhood room with the canopied bed and the heavy oak desk and the view down to the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. This was the apartment in the Riverside Drive building where he used to spend weekends with her when she would come down from Boston in her student days. They had decided that they wanted to divest themselves of things, and so their books and her paintings had gone to the country for storage. In their apartment only that which was essential would find a place.

They did some more looking around. The outings were in a widening arc to the Bronx and Queens and Washington Heights and even Hoboken, where they saw the iron fence against which Eva Marie Saint and Marlon Brando stood in On the Waterfront. But after each day they were really no closer to a new home.

On a night in early January Ingmar had the opportunity to watch Bill Walton and the Portland Trail Blazers take on the New York Knickerbockers out in Portland, and because the game was from the coast it had a starting time of 11:30 pm EST. Ingmar poured himself a little something to drink before the contest began, choosing the parents' seldom used bottle of Jack Daniels. Seated alone in front of the set he was aware that he was actually seeing Walton in a white basketball uniform with a colored slash diagonally

across the jersey, and he wished that somehow he could make the moments last and last even as they flew by and he was also aware that he was continually asking himself if the event was everything he had hoped and anticipated it would be. It was frustrating to see Walton perform with a splint on two fingers and a cast on one wrist. The announcer conveyed from his tone that he had reservations about Walton. Ingmar was very much bothered by the announcer, for how could anyone doubt that a man who was out there in a splint and a cast was doing the very best he could and how could anyone speak of the best basketball player in the world with such contemptuous skepticism. But his tone changed when Walton did his thing on the boards and controlled the game. Still, it frightened and angered Ingmar that people could show a susceptibility to overlooking the greatness of Walton.

That was the night Peter Van Dine came out in his terrycloth bathrobe and Ingmar felt guilty sitting in front of the television set watching a basketball game late at night and drinking up all their Jack Daniels. It did not show him in an industrious light and he worried that they would check the level of the bottle in the morning. But Peter wanted to talk about the new book he was writing, a study of the Hudson River, so Ingmar had nothing to do but listen to him talk of various chronicles by fifteenth and sixteenth century explorers, for Peter was keen on history. He had a plaque on his desk that read: Peter Van Dine, PhD. Suddenly, Ingmar interrupted.

"Do you think I'm unstable?" He didn't know where the words had come from, amidst the flow of words that Peter Van Dine was throwing at him about these explorers and their chronicles.

Peter looked at him in a perplexed way. "No, I see no instability in you at all," he finally said.

Ingmar rebuked himself for having asked, and before falling asleep recorded all pertinent statistics in his red vinyl notebook, and the next morning after he had taken his pill went to the rundown baths on 73rd Street off Broadway in search of something. He couldn't say what, but there was the feeling of something coming over him.

The sun shone through the south window of the apartment and warmed his back. The light was going to be real good for their plants--the ficus exotica and the poinsettia would thrive. The light was one of the things what made him want to take the apartment in the first place. Sarah had this little reservation. She was worried that maybe it was too small for two people, but he said no, it was going to be all all right. After all, they had the large living room. They had a roomy kitchen and he could set up a typewriter stand off in the corner of it. He didn't need a room of his own in which to write; he was sure of that, he told her. And she could have the small room off the short hallway as you entered the front door. She could have that room to set up her studio in, although he was a little concerned, because the room was on the courtyard, which cut down on the natural light.

"The light isn't the problem. It's the smallness of the place," she insisted, but his burst of enthusiasm over having found something decent convinced her that it was going to be okay.

So they took the apartment, which was on East Sixth Street between First Avenue and Avenue A and neighboring a large middle-income housing project. Ingmar thought how things would be stable now that they had a normal place to live with a normal

kitchen instead of their cavernous and crudely-fixtured loft. And the low rent would help to improve matters, too, he had been sure. Of course, sometimes he got a little upset thinking that he had done Sarah a disservice by sticking them both in the East Village. Sometimes he would think that it was just too out of the way for her, and that a Broadway loft might be closer to what she needed. An artist could kind of get forgotten in the East Village. And sometimes he was afraid that they were easier targets for violence in the East Village, that there were men walking about with long knives wanting to do it to them.

He walked back to his typewriter this particular morning. With the pill in him he could look at his notes for the novel about the building. The pill was uplifting. Without the pill he might be ready to pull his hair out over the seeming lack of time to get his affairs in order.

He had heard the score on the radio that morning. Portland had lost and Walton, injured again, hadn't played. He had called a Portland newspaper the night before, wanting a report on the nature and seriousness of the problem and a prediction as to when he would be back in the lineup. On the other end of the line he had gotten a staff reporter with a whiskey voice. He imagined him as forty-five years old, a family man with three children and scraping by. There seemed to Ingmar to be a flippancy on the man's part in discussing Walton, a note of dubiousness about the legitimacy of the injury. Ingmar wanted the whole world to sing Walton's praises. Maybe he would call back tonight. Maybe he would get someone with better insight and understanding and liking for Walton.

He felt so good that he got up and strolled out the door to buy a newspaper and read what he could on the Walton thing. It was early February and there was dirty snow on the East Village streets. He picked up the Times and the Post and the Daily News at a luncheonette and read about Walton in the sports section of the Post as he meandered through the aisles of a nearby supermarket, where he had gone to buy kitchen matches, for he thought it was an important item that was missing from the house. He wandered oblivious of the noontime shoppers, and his heart was glad with what he was reading, for Red Auerbach of the Boston Celtics was referring in glowing terms and giving full due to the talents of Walton. He took the kitchen matches--and sponges, for they were necessary, too--and some beer he picked up along the way and read the article over and over and over again, and his heart sang with joy, for he knew that no one knew basketball excellence like Red Auerbach knew basketball excellence. And here was the master confirming what he had known all along, that Walton was the very best. And he spent some of the day thinking about the relationship those two would have if Walton was a member of the Boston Celtics, how Red would invite him to his house and allow Walton his eccentricities of dress and lifestyle for he knew how really good he was. And he could imagine him speaking in a fatherly way about the young star.

When Sarah returned home from work in the evening, he had a can of Endust in one hand and a rag in the other. He knew she was used to finding him in a distracted pursuit like reading a book or cleaning the floors or washing down the shower when she would come home from a busy day, but at least she hadn't been there to see the several newspapers that he had read or the numerous cups of coffee that he had gulped or to witness the precious little time that he had spent at the typewriter. As he wouldn't have

liked her to know about the spansule he had taken that morning and every morning over the past year and a half.

As he helped her unpack the large brown bag of groceries he felt her cheek, which was cold from the winter wind. He was inwardly relieved to see her extract four cans of beer from the bottom of the bag and put them in the refrigerator. Good beer, too--Budweiser. He was so afraid that Dr. Banko was going to come down on him, and this had been a day for one of her visits to him. He had this fear that she would tell him exactly how much he drank. The beer meant two things to him. No, Banko had not told her to split, and no, she was not protesting his drinking. Dr. Banko was a giant eye on their relationship, in his mind, and sometimes he found himself saying and doing things with the idea of Sarah reporting his words or actions to her doctor at a future session. He liked to think of Dr. Banko as being on his side. He liked to think of Dr. Banko as approving of the assistance he was giving Sarah. She had once discussed a dream with Dr. Banko. There was a bird in her dream with a broken wing and she and Ingmar nursed it and helped it to fly and Dr. Banko and she both agreed that the dream signified the ways in which Ingmar was helping her get free of her death-trap family. Lenore, the youngest sister, at age sixteen took her life but not before saying that Sarah would be the only one to escape the tug of the parents. It put Ingmar into ecstasy to hear the doctor's good words about him, but they had been spoken a couple of years ago. He longed for reassurance that Dr. Banko's good opinion of him had not changed. And the best way of knowing where he stood was to question Sarah closely after one of her sessions. So Ingmar had a picture of himself as rescuing Sarah from her cultured, wealthy, but threatening family. He had charged in to engage them in combat in order to free her from

what he diagnosed as the incestuous hold of her father, who she looked strikingly like. He wanted to be recognized as aiding in the recovery and comeback of Sarah.

What would Banko say if he knew that he had dropped a pill in the morning and after two cups of coffee gone out on the slushy street to buy the newspapers and read up on Bill Walton back in the apartment? What would her psychiatrist say if he knew that his thoughts were all of Bill Walton and not really of the book that he said he was trying to write at this point? What would he say if he was told that Ingmar was going to make things all all right for Walton by keeping on top of his career through recording scores and other data of the games in the back of his notebook? Sarah was going to soar, and Walton was going to soar, too--he was going to slam dunk and do the reject and throw graceful outlet passes over NBA floorboards across the nation. All Ingmar had to do was buy the paper every day and look everywhere for the name of Walton and keep a record of the games in which he played and place an asterisk beside those in which he didn't participate. All he had to do was give his entire attention to the matter of Walton and things would be all right for the center, but he knew furthermore that if he let his attention lapse there would be real trouble ahead for the redhead. There was the matter of the Trail Blazer road trip. Portland would be coming East soon. He had gone and sent away for tickets to their game against the Sixers at the Philadelphia Spectrum. This was the kind of attention and dedication the matter of Walton required.

"How was your session today?" he asked.

"It was really good," she said in a cheerful voice.

Her bosom swelled in the white waitress blouse she was required to wear along with a tight black skirt. A red bow added a touch of color and he thought how sexy she

looked. she had recently cut her shoulder length blond hair and the page boy style gave her an androgynous look.

"I told Dr. Banko that I feared my mother has always wanted me to fail. She's secretly competitive with me and is terrified of showing it. So she tried to hurt and undermine me in her little ways. Dr. Banko agrees with me that this may be so. She hates herself for giving up her career in the theater to have children, and hates me for trying to fulfill myself."

Ingmar listened sympathetically, relieved that she was forthcoming about the session, for he did not like to be shut out of this relationship.

"Yes, I've always been able to see that in her," Ingmar said, as he slugged on the beer and watched her baste the chicken legs and shred the lettuce for the salad on the counter, noting her ability to make wherever she lived somehow comfortable and appealing. She had done the same with the dingy room she rented in a Boston single room occupancy her first year of art school as she later did with their Chinatown loft. Her well-bred being flowed into the place and transformed it.

He took the beer to the corner of the living room before pulling the tab. He sat on the edge of the bed, and looked south across sixth street into the projects. Night had fallen over the city and in some of the windows of the red brick constructions in the complex he could see people moving about. The pill was losing its joy power, and he was now gulping the beer. Halfway through he was thinking of the next one, and there was a small measure of security in knowing that there were two more after that.

He came back around. From the courtyard, where the windowsills were caked with pigeon crap, he could hear the voices of black women rising from the apartment

below. "You know what I told him he could do, coming around me with an attitude like that. I told him right quick where he could put it. Coming up on me chesty like that, that sucker. I put him down, down, low to the ground." As the evening wore on there would be more of the same. Did they drink? Was that what fueled their grievanced tongues?

"Romo called. You'll never guess what it was about," Ingmar said, reaching for another beer as Sarah washed the dishes in the sudsy sink water.

"What?" She turned quickly, signaling her interest.

"'Bogs. Filthy bogs. I'm being overrun by bogs.'" That's how he pronounced bugs. 'Bogs,' he called them"

Sarah laughed. They both laughed helplessly. "Bogs? Did he really say bogs? That's funny," she said. Sarah liked Romo. She would laugh about him and his bogs for the rest of the night, Ingmar was sure.

"I'll be right back," he said after dinner, seeing that she was preparing to go to her room and begin to work. "I just want to get a few things."

"Okay," she said.

At the front door he turned. "Do you need anything?"

"No," she said.

It was the answer he expected.

He took the stairs down to the main floor. On the stairs he could run if someone came at him. The elevator was a trap. The other evening a musclebound Puerto Rican kid had been caught in someone's apartment on the next floor. The police had confiscated a switchblade knife and led him out in handcuffs. It happened that the tenant returned

just as the prowler was being led away. He was young and white and too had some muscles. He threw some words at the man in handcuffs. He wanted to go right at him. He was screaming that his wife could have been in the apartment. The police pushed him away and when he kept straining to get free their words got tougher. Ingmar could see that the tenant was not a honkie on a guilt trip.

Knives, there was something about knives that was growing in him.

He crossed the avenue to the corner liquor shop with the red neon sign and asked for two bottles of burgundy from the owner, a silverhaired man who wore a blue smock over his shirt and tie. He asked in a polite voice, seeking to be courteous to men with power. Walking past policemen he thought courteous thoughts, too, hoping that the officers would sense that he was on their side and had no desire for their guns.

The hours passed and she remained in her studio with the door closed. Occasionally he would hear one of her plastic plates sliding through the rollers of the monoprint press. Her ability to concentrate and stay with something once she got going was impressive to him. He turned on the Knicks game, as in the summer he listened to Yankee baseball and the soothing voice of Phil Rizzuto coming from the radio set. His mother had given him the black Panasonic radio several years before. She told him he was to turn to Bible stations on Sunday. He was to use the radio to receive sermons about God's love for one and all. Instead, he was now listening to Knicks basketball. Was Marv Albert's sidekick Richie Guerin a reformed alcoholic? He talked like one, but how did a reformed alcoholic talk? Marv Albert was no alcoholic. Marv Albert was cool and ironic and humorous. That's what it was--Richie Guerin was a reformed alcoholic

because of the quality of dreary earnestness in his voice. Ingmar was certain that he was right.

Some hours later she emerged from her studio.

"I just want to be up for a while longer," he said, impatient for her to go to sleep so he could continue drinking through the night without attention oppressively focused on him. She said goodnight and was soon in bed.

"I may just go out for a paper and a few things," he said, and repeated himself when he didn't get a response.

"Okay," she said.

He had drunk below the long neck of the second bottle of wine and into the wider part. What is the point of all this concealment? he suddenly thought. I know what it is I want. I am attracted to Walton. And he began putting on his socks and sneakers and gathered together his wallet and his keys and within minutes he was out the door and streaking for the baths down on Second Street, alert to the seeming truth of where his sexual orientation was. He alternately ran and walked down the avenue and cursed passersby and cars that intersected his path and slowed his progress. Through the slick streets, the light from the overhead lamps blurry in the wet asphalt, he carried the idea of gorging himself on a huge penis and ran in fear of the desire abondoning him. He did not feel the cold rain that soaked his Levis and his sneakers, and his morning resolution to save money was now forgotten.

Inside the door of the building he handed the cashier his graduate school identification, with the idea of getting in at a discount.

"But this expired four years ago," the cashier said, and so he paid the extra three dollars and took his locker key and towel inside the second door, which was buzzed open for him.

Within a minute he was in the basement passing others wrapped only in towels and disappeared into the mist of the steam room. When his eyes adjusted to the fog, he saw men sitting on tile benches or standing against the wet walls. The smell of come was strong.

There came a sliver of doubt, and he soon found his motivation for being there waning. Was the alcohol being steamed out of his system? Within five minutes he was out on the street and walking toward home with a ravenous hunger.

The tickets arrived. PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS vs. PHILADELPHIA 76ers. He stared at the red and black lettering on a white background. Walton might not play, but maybe he would be with the team on the road trip in spite of his injury.

Ingmar had told Sarah so much about Walton, how he had suffered much from the envious and the small-minded. He had told her of the persecution of Walton by the press for his countercultural ways--his pacifism and his vegetarianism and all-round enlightened views. He had told her so much about his college exploits, trying to impress upon her what Walton meant to his life. He omitted that in a dream the previous night Walton was behind the counter at a drugstore serving as a pharmacist.

She was spreading her paints on the palette as they spoke about the upcoming game on this one day, and the purposefulness with which she was preparing to work made him mindful that he shouldn't overdo his stay.

"Would you close the door when you go out?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

It had been one of her complaints at the loft that he would walk into her studio as she was working on a canvas and casually interrupt her. She viewed the intrusion as being disrespectful of her, and although he tried to see it another way, as a less serious transgression, he didn't want a bad report along these lines getting back to Dr. Banko.

He spent the rest of the late afternoon hours reading a biography of Babe Ruth, which he had taken out of the library. Maybe if he could just get involved with a good book he would not drink and do as he did two nights before when he went to the baths. Maybe he could stay within his budget for the day. Someone was quoted as saying that the Babe fell out of a tree. He wished he could speak in such a colorful way. The Babe was quoted as saying that he had tried to sleep with several women in one night and to satisfy them all. But the Babe couldn't do it this one particular night and was distraught. Ingmar thought it was pretty brave of him to even try. It was probably kind of nice being the Babe, even if he ate lots of frankfurters and peanuts and had a simian-like face. It might be nice to fall out of a tree and not be frail and effete. He liked reading that the Babe had wept at his first wife's funeral after her death in a fire. It showed that the Babe was human. He was sure that the Babe had been very human.

Feeling better, he later went out with the thought of browsing in the department stores. He took the IRT Lexington Avenue local up to 59th Street and entered Bloomingdales from the station. In the women's section he found a cotton sleeveless top in a lavender color and though it was still winter chose to buy it for Sarah. And while he was there moving against the flow of shoppers the thought passed through his mind that

he should go to see a movie and it grew very overpowering in his mind, to the point where he was impatient for his change from the heavily made up salesperson. So he ran to the theater on 59th Street east of Third Avenue where he had been before and where high-class films were shown and had his five dollars out as he walked down the street with the marquee looming larger and larger so the cashier could not keep him in view of the passersby and thus stall and humiliate him. He passed through the lobby and entered the dark theater where the men sat somber and with empty chairs between them and counted himself so lucky to have come upon a good film of its kind, one in color with women without needlemarks on their arms or pimples on their buttocks. He settled down in an aisle seat and began to enjoy the visual feast, frame after frame of men doing it to women who wanted to have it done to them, and was very happy to watch the giant organs sliding in and out of their mouths and cunts and even anuses. And he was so grateful that these women who were having it done to them had the look of health on their clean and radiant faces. It meant a great deal to him. And when he reached a point of extreme excitement, brought there by a segment showing a willing woman gorging herself on a giant member, he left his seat and climbed the stairs and passed a room where the bored projectionist sat slumped in his chair and entered the bathroom. There he stood over the urinal with his excited member out, and soon was joined by another man at whom he did not look. Turning, he saw a short man in a beige trench coat. He wore glasses with a gold frame and had a mottled nose. White gauze covered the man's left eye. Perhaps, Ingmar thought, the man had been punched out. There was revulsion but there was also hunger as he glanced at the protruding member, because he was remembering the action of the woman on the screen with the radiant and healthy face

gorging and gorging and doing more gorging. So he lowered himself and did it to the man, who flashed a badge and said "I'm a detective, but don't worry about it." There could be no disputing this claim, for the badge looked real. It was becoming all very strange. Ingmar had the idea that the man was going to arrest him, but that passed. He couldn't understand why he was showing him the badge except possibly to flaunt himself as a symbol of authority and humiliate him with this authority. Ingmar was aware of a feeling of shame. It hadn't really to do with taking the man's member in his mouth. Rather, he felt that the man was breaking something in him by showing him the badge, he felt that he was breaking him to authority. The man now had a fistful of his hair and pulled it tighter as the member became more tense and jammed it farther in Ingmar's mouth. "Come on, now, come on, all the way in, I want you to swallow it, goddamnit," he said, clutching his hair tighter still and releasing him only when the warm spurt was over. Ingmar spit into the toilet bowl and got to his feet but the man stopped him at the door. "You stay here. A couple of us are going downtown in a few minutes." Ingmar murmured something and pushed past out into the street where there was now a cold drizzle and spit a couple of times more before descending into the subway and going one stop after another away from the man with the badge and the eye that had been punched out but the subway could not take him from the feeling that something in his pride had been hurt by the wielding of the badge. He was home after a time and gave Sarah her top and drank some more that night to chase the feeling that had come over him and he even called Portland in the hope that he could get a different reporter or a more respectful tone from the one he had spoken with the other night. But no, it was the same one. "Are you the guy who called the other night?"

"Yes, it is. You see, it is just that I am very concerned. I'm not a gambler or anything like that. I'm just an interested fan," and he could hear this uncaring reporter cup the receiver and mutter "Jesus" and it was painful to endure this humiliation, but the ordeal was made bearable by the knowledge that he was on the line for a good purpose and that he would somehow emerge the stronger for pursuing the query and ignoring as best he could the man's lack of understanding of what it meant to be a true fan.

"Charlie, you heard anything more about Walton's latest injury? I've got this guy from New York on the line. Says he's got tickets to Portland games on the East Coast."

Ingmar heard laughter. " Come on man, I just want to know is he all right?" Ingmar said into the receiver, but all he heard was some more laughter.

"What? Oh, okay. You're a fount of information, Charlie." And so this reporter came back on the line with no update on the Walton thing and Ingmar hung up the phone. By this time Sarah was asleep, for she had an early morning session with Dr. Banko the next day. Ingmar finished the rest of the wine down to the dregs but this night the urge to run to the baths was not there and he didn't make any more phone calls. And so after brushing his teeth for the third time he fell into bed next to Sarah and woke in the morning feeling that he must stay away from Fifty-ninth street for the day but that otherwise things were okay.

The car was doubleparked on the side street. He sat and waited for Sarah to emerge from the white brick building where she was having her session with Dr. Banko. It was a gray March day, and the cold put speed into people's step.

Farther on down the block was the high school he had attended, a graystone building that had once been a hospital with large windows cut into the face of it. When on the East Side he always thought of his high school--he didn't need to be down the street from it. He watched the boys and girls emerging from the school and congregating outside. Under their heavy coats he wondered if they still had the same gold crests on their blazers. It was as if only a second in time had passed since he had been enrolled there when in fact ten years had elapsed. He was always having dreams about high school. He would be back walking its corridors and sitting in the old classrooms. The dreams would vary, but the feeling was always the same, of being presented with a second chance and striving to do better socially and academically and yet inevitably failing.

Maybe Mr. Fredericks, his high school coach, would emerge from the front door, too. Mr. Fredericks, who thought he had the ability to play basketball at the college level and tried to keep him from dropping out in the eleventh grade and helped to get him readmitted for his senior year. Mr. Fredericks had been one of the less sophisticated teachers at the school, a tall rangy man from the South. He also taught tenth-grade biology and worked summers in construction and had a gash up his arm from a wound suffered during the Korean War.

Ingmar remembered that he had attended the graduation ceremony because his mother insisted that he do so, not because it was something he looked forward to. He had been down on himself about school. He hadn't gotten into the college of his choice and besides, he didn't particularly want the others to see his aging mother when theirs were so youthful. At ceremony's end Mr. Fredericks had rushed up and said, "I'd be proud to have

you for a son," before disappearing. He had not seen or been in touch with him since. Even now he could not entirely believe that Mr. Fredericks had really said that. It disturbed him more than pleased him.

And now he was sitting in a car owned by Sarah's parents, a green Volkswagen that they had been willing to lend them for the trip. He pressed his hands into the foam rubber padding on the steering wheel. He sort of took the car for granted, as he took for granted so many of the things that they had given him. All the free weekends in the country, the use of their apartment in the city, the trip to Puerto Rico they had paid for when Sarah was completing art school, the books they had loaned him and the time they had bailed him out of jail when as a sophomore in college he had been busted for possession of marijuana.

Something was happening. Something was a little off. The knife came to mind. He dismissed the image, but then it came back, and with it a surge of anxiety. He put on the parking brake and got out of the car. Maybe he could walk the thing off.

Sarah emerged past the doorman and walked toward him wrapped in a brown wool overcoat. He saw her wearing the look of love that she often had when she came from Dr. Banko. The cold added lustre to her radiant expression.

"This is really going to be fun," she said as he put the car in gear.

"Yes," he said. The knife thing was growing. Maybe, he thought, when they hit the Lincoln Tunnel and then got onto the Jersey Turnpike this thing would go away. Maybe the open road would chase it away.

How was he to explain what he was feeling as they sped through the tunnel behind the Trailways bus belching exhaust? How was he to explain that the knife had

come? It was embedded in the windshield and he saw it high in the air as they motored down the turnpike and whiffed the industrial stench of southern New Jersey. It was not the jackknife he had seen a boy use to peel the bark from a sapling at camp when he was a kid. Nor was it the blue-handled stiletto with which he had wandered through the streets of Manhattan as a sixth grader until the police picked him up and took him home. It was along the lines of a large-handled bowie knife with a hilt and it followed him wherever his eyes wandered across the industrialized terrain. He groaned silently as he saw it headed for Sarah's breast.

Walton was not at the Spectrum. He was probably back in the Pacific Northwest somewhere being attended to by a physician, but Ingmar could say that he had followed through and demonstrated his commitment to Walton by showing up. No one could say that he had backed off in his dedication to Bill Walton in any way, although he had some small doubt about that, for he would not be following the team up to Boston nor to some of the other East Coast cities on the schedule.

They did such strange things in Philadelphia, he thought, observing a man in red double knit pants who had bought pretzels with mustard on them for his wife and two teenage sons. What was this thing they had in Philadelphia for pretzels with mustard?

He saw Billy Cunningham leap three feet off the floor and Train Hollins drive to the hoop and beard the announcer say "George McGinnis to shoot two" and he pronounced the word "two" in the deepest voice. And throughout the rout of a game he worried about Sarah, who gazed out at the hardwood floor with an intelligent interest. He wondered when she would become impatient and demand to know why he had brought her to this city to see these men run up and down the floor in their shorts and demand to

know what this Walton thing was. The fear was in him of the knife and he just didn't know how a man could wear red doubleknits and have a fat wife and two noisy overeating kids and how he could have that responsibility in a city so unwelcoming as Philadelphia where surely there was no love but instead a mocking and insensitive announcer saying over the P.A. system "George McGinnis to shoot two." Suddenly his buffer from the world was gone and he no longer felt safe. The pills had lost their effectiveness; they could not keep him in the circle of love. Would he have felt stronger if Walton was there throwing it down and doing the reject and controlling the boards? Maybe this thing would go away, this thing of the knife and Sarah, when he got home and recorded the score in his notebook.

"Honey, you will have to go and stay with your parents," Ingmar said, when they were approaching the city. "I don't feel well and need to be alone tonight. In the morning I will call you."

"It's almost midnight. Are you all right?"

"Yes. No," he said.

She made the call and came back to the car angry but they had given their consent and soon he watched her disappear inside the Riverside Drive building past the doorman in the long blue coat with epaulets. On the way home he stopped off at a deli because the liquor stores had closed and bought three tallboy sixpacks of beer to ease him through the night. Inside the apartment he took the knives from the silver tray and put them in a pail in the cabinet below the sink and threw some rags over them. Then he sat alone with the force that wanted him to take Sarah's life and alternately his own life and he said to

himself that one minute at a time he did not have to do any such thing, nor did he have to go out in the street and scream profanities so the violent would come with their long knives and do their sticking thing to him. These things he did not have to do one minute at a time and he drank his beer one after another and they tasted so good and the minutes did pass and he was no closer to the knife than he had been half an hour before so maybe it would be all right and he wouldn't have to do it to Sarah or himself or anyone else, either.

He was in touch with Sarah and she was understanding because she was still in the circle of Dr. Banko's paid-for love. She said she would speak with Dr. Banko about the matter of some professional aid for him. And later in the day she called back to say that Dr. Banko had come through for Ingmar. "I told him that you did not get along with men too well and that you would have an easier time speaking with a woman," Sarah said. She went on to say that the doctor had gone to the extra length of selecting a therapist who was Armenian, and that her name was Ms. Louise Rache-Pfeffer, although Ingmar said, "What do you mean, she's Armenian? Her name is Rache whatever and that's not Armenian." But Sarah said that she must have been Armenian by birth only she married someone who wasn't. Still, Ingmar, while he understood the power and sensitivity of Dr. Banko, was loathto give him his due in this instance.

He was noticing something. He was noticing that he had put a power move on Sarah in some way, because now it was she who was coming forth with a manner of guilt and solicitude, however slight. It was his show now, and they were interested and concerned onlookers. He was free to strut some of his own stuff. He did some more

drinking, because he could not get enough, and was steadily filling a big plastic garbage bag out in the kitchen with the empties. And with the sense of the knives coming in on him, he spun the rotary dial of the phone and talked to this Rache-Pfeffer's answering service and left his name and number and a short while later she got back to him and an appointment was made for the following day, which gave him time to prepare himself with some more drinking.

He appeared in her office wearing a sports jacket that he had had for some years, a jacket with a ripped lining from his college days, and a gray sweater with pilled wool. She would look at his hands as he spoke, for he was asking her if she thought he was a candidate for violence. "Tell me a little about yourself and why you've come to me," she said in reply. So he told her about Walton and Sarah and how they were both on the comeback trail but how he was getting tired of rooting them on. She asked him about his background and he told her about his sisters and how one was a drinker but was now on God's track and how another had been found dead in the East River. She inquired about his parents and he told her how he had a mother who lived with God and a father who had found God before dying some years before, and she said, in her Armenian way, and throwing him a of look special concern, "Well, you must be grieving for him." He did not know what she was talking about and offered her silent contempt, because he did not want to explain to her that grief as he had seen it displayed in relation to his father was essentially phony. So he did not talk on this point about the supposed grief of his family at his father's passing, it was a matter of no consequence, for he knew in his heart that his father had no relation to him, that he was his mother's son. He was now even confused about the year in which it had occurred. (Springtime, he knew, for he had been walking

coatless in the park and had a few belts in a bar before stepping over to the funeral parlor.) "I think you could benefit by a man. I think it is about time you had a man in your life, because surely you have been missing your father and grieving for him," she went on, and he looked at her and said that yes, he could use some men in his life because there were no men in his life besides Walton, because you couldn't count on Walton even showing up and getting his rebounds and doing his rejecting on a daily basis and maybe he didn't want the responsibility of Walton anymore, thinking of his notebook. He remembered a dream in which it was pouring rain and he and Sarah were living in a small house down the road from her parents' country place. He was frantic in anticipation of their visit. A kind-looking elderly man came to the house and told them everything would be all right. Oh, he had seemed so kind. "I would like someone with a European background. I would like someone who knows something about archetypes. Someone like Jung. Yes, get me a Jung," he piped up, for he guessed that a Jung would better understand this thing about Sarah and Walton and knives. Dr. Rache-Pfeffer said in her earnest but noncommittal way that she would see what she could do and as he got to the door he asked her again if he was a candidate for violence but she really had no words for him because his time was up and she was looking ahead to the next patient--that is what she had been trained to do, he figured, that is, future-orient herself and he had her prescription for powerful tranquilizers in his hand as he vacated the premises.

He knew that he could not go down into the subway because to do so would be to put himself in danger from the trains. He might place himself on the rails against his will and his mind flashed to the flanges of the steel wheels of the train cars cutting flesh and bone. He went to this German frankfurter joint on 86th Street and Third Avenue and said

to the counterman to give him a frank with a lot of sauerkraut. And he ordered a couple of German beers in the brown bottles and the silver foil around the neck and top. Sitting at the table he watched the counterman manning his position and saw the great pride he took in doing so, while still going over in his mind how he was going to get home. He began thinking of the hundreds and thousands of rides he had taken on the subway and why it should be that he could not go down there at this time of day and he knew it was because the blacks and the Puerto Ricans were waiting underground in the bathrooms and on the cars and platforms to stick him, for that is what they had decided was their earthly mission, the sticking of white people, and he thought these thoughts in spite of the fact that he was wearing his liberal glasses, the ones with the wire frames, for they were proving no defense against the tide of prejudice rising in him, and he thought how all his life they had been coming after him and his brother and others and taking away space from them like the time they swarmed on them in Riverside Park and took their fireworks--their ash cans and cherry bombs and helicopters and roman candles--or the time they had swarmed over them on Lenox Avenue where they had gone on a fireworks buying expedition and took their bicycles as well as their money. So in the German frankfurter joint he was turning this problem over in his mind he had an inclination to say to the counterman "You dumb fuck" but instead he let out a bit of his venom by only murmuring the words. Then as a demonstration of his good will toward everyone in the establishment and to show how respectful he truly was, he picked up the pieces of tissue that came with the frankfurters and put them in the trash can and after wiping his mouth on a couple of napkins he crumpled them and disposed of them in the same place self-consciously. Then he straightened the salt and pepper shaker and took the empty brown

bottles back to the counter as a further manifestation of his good will and thoughtfulness and as he got out into the street he continued to wipe his mouth, because he had this idea that there was a stain of yellow from the mustard in the corner and he licked at it with his tongue and wiped some more.

So up on Lexington Avenue with the joypill not working so well--he was in need of more chemicals--he got on a bus where there was less chance of being stuck because you were out in the open and not underground and put his fare in the box real nicely and waited for the reaction of the bus driver to his honesty. The driver had woolly hair, being black, and Ingmar sat down thinking how one minute at a time he wasn't going to shout racial epithets at him, although he did not think the driver would stick him because he was coming from a position of responsibility with his blue uniform on and he thought how the desire to stick must have been trained out of him. But then a less socially integrated black got on and he was toting with him a sound box the size of a small radiator and challenging everybody around with his disco noise. And there was this white threesome, two men and woman. The men wore expensive wool overcoats and the woman, who signaled her waspdom with gold clasp earrings, wore a cashmere coat. And they put on their faces smiles of appreciation for the sound from the box of the disco-playing black man, trying very earnestly to show their accord with his taste in music. They snapped their fingers and even did a little dancing with their arms while sitting down, but the black beyond the social pale had no use for them. Suddenly the bus driver brought the bus to a stop and put on the emergency brake and slid under the pole next to his seat and was standing over the disco-playing finger-snapping black man and challenging him with all the authority that his blue uniform could summon in him. "You

don't be playing that sound on my bus, man," the driver said, and Ingmar could feel the flow of righteousness coming from him. "You got to get off my bus you keep that sound up."

"What's the matter that you can't axe me nicely. You think maybe you my father? You ain't my fucking father," the sound box black said, keeping his hand on his back pocket, as if it was a possibility that he would reach for his weapon. Ingmar was frightened but mesmerized by the threat of violence. But the passenger did as he was asked and the music stopped. Ingmar settled back and continued to look his way but the sound box black said suddenly, "You spitting at me? Did I see you spitting at me?"

"No, I wasn't spitting at you. I really wasn't," Ingmar said, and the sound box black settled back and Ingmar knew that his desire to challenge him had been ludicrous.

So he went home and took some of Rache-Pfeffer's pills as well as another of his own and those of the doctor gave him a funny feeling like he wanted to jump out of his skin. He couldn't bear to be wearing his clothes and when he went to bed after undressing he couldn't bear to be under the blankets, so he got up and paced trying to suck in air and drank some more of the tall cans of beer he had bought down at the bodega. He made a decision to shun Rache-Pfeffer's pills because he knew they had been the cause of his problem and he didn't want anything more to do with her. He thought how if he continued to drink the tall cans of beer and went with the pills he liked best and chewed on them everything would be all right. He was sure that he could wash the poison that she had given him out of his system with the cold beer that tasted so very good in his mouth. After emptying each can he would throw them in the garbage bag using a skyhook and sometimes a jump hook or he would float a jumper from ten feet

away or he would dunk from right up close. He could feel the beer sloshing around in his belly as he jumped up and down.

The phone rang. Sarah's mother was on the line. "Hello, Ingmar, how are you today?" she asked.

"I'm doing just fine," Ingmar said to her.

"Because we know what a trying time you have been having with Sarah after her own difficulties and we wanted you to know how grateful we are to you for all the help you have given her and we all want to be sure that you get some good professional help yourself." She talked some more of her caring talk and then got off the telephone. Of this he was very glad because it was hard to swallow the beer from the can while holding the receiver near.

Night had fallen and looking into the mirror he saw that he was in need of a shave and that his eyes were bloodshot. He had begun to grind his teeth and was having trouble holding the razor steady. All he could think of as he removed the growth from his face was the Spring Street Bar. He thought a lot of people might be there and he could find someone and have that person come back home with him, which is what he had always really wanted anyway, a proper place to bring a woman to do it with instead of having to do it in trucks and the like. And though he had not really been drinking in bars for some time now, he brought along enough money so that no matter how fast he drank he would still have sufficient funds to buy more.

On the way over he walked along the Bowery where the bums on Houston Street huddled over a blazing fire in a steel trash basket. He watched them run out into the intersection to wipe the windshields of the cars with their dirty rags and saw the drivers snarl at them or inch into the intersection to avoid their filthy rags or throw money at them to get them away from their immaculate vehicles. Farther along he saw two more and they were standing in confrontation with each other with jagged bottle necks clutched in their scabbed hands and one had open cuts on his face and scars where other cuts had closed. Further down the Bowery a couple of blocks above Canal Street he went into a bar near the flophouses just to get a quick beer, telling himself that it was all right every once in a while to go into such a dive for a fast one, it wasn't like he was parking himself in the place. The bartender was prompt to serve, and he was obviously a hitting kind of person with his white shirt rolled up to reveal powerful forearms, and a scar-tissued face and misshapen nose, probably from many breaks. He did not say here you are or thanks when the money was put down but instead took the bill that was wet from the moisture on the bottle that had condensed on the bar and slammed down his change. Looking around he did not judge himself so bad as some of the others who had bought whole quart bottles of Budweiser/Schlitz/Piels. That looked really sick, drinking from a whole quart bottle in the bar. The beer was great in his mouth--he swirled it around before swallowing it--and smoked some cigarettes and ordered small bottle after small bottle and used the bathroom, its urinals stinking and the toilet bowl turned brown. He checked himself in the cracked mirror and saw that he looked kind of all right and started walking west past packs of Chinese, some in padded coats, and the vegetable and fish stands and remembered Chinatown as a thing of the past.

At the Spring Street Bar there was a bartender with long black hair parted in the middle. He was wearing a gold medallion that you could easily see because the top three buttons of his work shirt were undone and the medallion dangled prettily from the chain against his bronzed chest, and many times his hand would go to his hair delicately. Ingmar had moved on from beer to bourbon on the rocks and was putting them away steadily as the women from the other boroughs began arriving and they were very tough and seemed to know what they were looking for and had no words for him but instead got all gushy for the bartender whose hand was always going to his hair and thought how they would love to place their heads on his bronzed chest. And then the owner with the Cheshire cat smile reappeared and as was his way he walkled back and forth from one end of the bar to the other stroking his neatly clipped beard, and the women from the other boroughs were going wild, and every once in a while one of these tough women would go up to him and he would throw a few words their way and then continue with his pacing.

So after putting more drinks in him he tried to talk with one of these women from another borough. The drinks made him minimize the fact that they had been ignoring him and that he was not able to catch their eye. He did not see that because they talked to the preening manager there was any reason why they would not talk to him, too. He thought the woman next to him would have some words for him because he still had his curly hair and wire-frame glasses but in fact she did not have any words for him and turned back to her conversation with the women that she was running with for protection on that night and he thought how they must be from Brooklyn because they were very very tough.

So then he was brought more drinks from the bartender who went to his hair a lot and as he turned to scout around for more people to have words with--he couldn't keep his head still try as he would--he saw Romo the Italian coming in the door in his sheepskin coat with a lining of white fleece and at the moment he saw him he was pulling off his gloves in an elegant way. And there was a cold look of recognition on the face of Romo but no smile for him. He could see that Romo was with a woman, but she was not the woman from Switzerland. Ingmar was hurt. He did not like to see people go from one partner to another, it hurt him to see transient relationships. Down the bar Romo came with this new woman in his life and she too was pulling off her gloves. Ingmar thought how surely he was going to stop and talk about "bogs" in his loft but Romo just nodded and kept on going to the dining area. This bypassing of him shocked Ingmar, made him wonder why Romo should be doing this to him. But then he understood that it was just Romo's Italian way of putting him in his place. Suddenly, whether it was the courage from the bourbon in combination with the pills he couldn't be certain, but he was now saying to himself that he was a somebody, that he had a right to be there, and nobody, not even Romo with his Italian ways, was going to drive him out. So he said to the bartender who went with his hand to his hair, "Hit me with another." And on his way to the bathroom he said to the preening manager, "I like the way you pace. I like it very much," but the manager had no words for him, he just gave him a look that was smiling but not friendly. In the bathroom he directed a stream into the urinal but saved a little for the floor after checking that no one else was around. He returned to the bar longing for solid contact, and yet, how many times had he met someone in relation to the number of times he had been there? The ratio was not high, he knew, but with the joypills in him

and the shots of bourbon on top of the beer he he felt there was reason for hope, because now he had his freedom for a while at least with Sarah and her mother and the good doctor Banko looking on with concern from the sidelines. So he ground his teeth some more and stepped back outside and resuming his position at the bar, he aped the manner of the manager as he walked, with his arms folded and stroking his chin although he did not have a beard, let alone a stylish beard, as the manager had. He downed his drink in two gulps and crunched the ice. Then he adressed himself to the woman next to him from another borough. "Do you see that mirror?" he asked. "Well, I once had a dream. There were a lot of men behind it and they were all in the act of masturbation. I thought at the time that it was a very profound dream, but now I'm not sure. Do you think it conveys any particular truth about this place?"

"Look, why don't you fly off to Forty-second Street? I hear it's a happening scene," the gum-chewing woman snapped, before showing him her back again.

The bartender who went delicately and often to his long hair parted in the middle leaned on the bar. "This one is on the house. We want you to have a good night after that."

"We? Who is we?" Ingar asked. Hand-to-his-hair-often went over to the manager, who gave Ingmar a wink while holding his smile. Neither of them was drinking. Ingmar saw that it was part of their system of power and control to abstain so they could laugh at others as they got soused and soberly pace and preen and raise their hands to their hair and have the women from the other boroughs swarm around them. So the preening manager had the women from the other boroughs and all of the men of the bar in support of him. Ingmar could see that they were gloating over the fact that they

had given him the word and could see that they were now scrutinizing his face for signs of hurt, that they were waiting for him to cry. Hand-to-his-hair-often came down the bar to service a man who had just arrived. Ingmar said, "Give me another drink, longhaired motherfucking pal of mine," cracking his voice on him, whereupon hand-to-his-hair-often turned to the others with the look of the justifiably outraged and all the power and control tendencies were now coming into play. "Hey man, now cool out. You've had your drink and it's time to split."

"What's going on, longhaired motherfucker?" Ingmar asked.

"Oh, man," hand-to-his-hair-often said, before leaping the bar as he had probably done many times as just one of the phony displays of athletic toughness he practiced to impress the women from the other boroughs.

"You ain't got the macho, longhair motherfucker," Ingmar said, but quickly a delegation of the just and the honorable swarmed over him in aid of the bartender and bum's rushed him toward the door in a phalanx. Someone gave him a punch in the mouth and he fell backward out the door and there followed a kick in the chest but they weren't the stomp your prey to death type so they left it at that.

"He isn't going to bother anybody now," a voice said, and those who had rushed him out the door returned to the bar, and a kind of peace came to him while on his knees on the cold pavement.

He walked home along the Bowery past the bums with the rags who ran to the cars and bought some tallboys at the bodega for the rest of the night. As he was turning into his side street he saw coming toward him a muscular young man and in his hand was an open blade--at least eight inches of steel held flat against his thigh. The man was

walking aimlessly. Ingmar averted his eyes from the blade and sensed that chance would decide whom the man would stick that particular night. He was allowed to pass--the knife did not have his name on it--and he went upstairs to the apartment and drank the beer that helped him not to feel the physical pain, checked that he had enough joy pills, looked briefly at the knives that he had put away and passed out with the dawn.

The next evening his chest still hurt where he had been kicked, and he saw in the bathroom mirror that he had a split lip. He walked up Third Avenue to Fourteenth Street where the junkies and the prostitutes gathered on the corners, and entered a shop with opaque windows. Metal racks on pegboards held pornographic magazines and films and he started with the heterosexual glossies before going to the gay rack and flipping through those magazines. The cashier stood on a foot-high platform. He wore a floppy canvas hat and a white T-shirt under his windbreaker and was watching a soap opera on a small TV. Behind him was a baseball bat with a taped handle. Ingmar asked for the seven-inch dildo he had seen in the case in the middle of the floor. The man reached under the counter and handed him one wrapped in a clear plastic and Ingmar paid the amount and returned home in a rush with this dildo in his pocket, stopping along the way for several gallon bottles of red wine and copies of Pleasure and Screw and a bottle of Vaseline so he could grease the thing. At home he played with the thing successfully, though the pain was terrible. Now I am a woman as well as a man. Now I am what I have always wanted to be, he thought.

He chose not to go to a theater where men were doing it to women. Instead he sought out a gay theater along Third Avenue because he wanted to see on film men pronging each other, the definitive proof of which he had not been able to get from the magazines at the bookstore. The theater was not crowded. There were men hanging back at the low wall to the rear of the seats and to the right of the entranceway a narrow staircase marked with a red bulb led down to the men's room. He sat on the aisle and watched as men on the screen in motorcycle jackets and jeans disrobed in a large garage with their Harleys all around them and began taking their enormous members in each other's mouths and then mounting each other and in ten minutes with those images for stimulation he stood and made his way to the back of the theater and descended the winding stairs, at the bottom of which men were milling in the dank basement. And there were all kinds down there, white and black, Hispanic and Asian, old and young. He pushed open the bathroom door only to see two men occupied inside. So he withdrew and shortly noticed that men were disappearing through a large hole in the wall, disappearing into the darkness, these men seeking relief from women or who lived against women or without the emotional apparatus that would enable them to do it to women. He turned back and there staring at him was a powerfully built black man in a denim jacket and jeans with a porkpie hat atop his enormous head. His nose was flat and broad and his lips were thick and visible was a hard pipe-like bulge on the inside of his groin and as Ingmar walked past him he said, "I like to rape white boys. That's where I get my thrill, man. I've had sex with women but men is where it's at. That's a fact I learned in prison. Don't matter how big the man is I'll get into it with him. I've nailed some big dudes, much bigger than me, just wore them down. I've thrown them down and pronged them no matter how they fought me. I think

maybe I want to rape you, white boy." Ingmar did not say to him that he could or couldn't, he just said "You're an angry man" and walked through the hole and turning back saw the man's eyes grow wide.

He followed after the men before him whom the darkness had devoured. Standing still far beyond the hole to get his bearings he could only feel the presence of other bodies and occasionally hear the movement of feet. Some he could track by the tips of their lighted cigarettes burning in the blackness. And occasionally a match would be struck, dimly illuminating a scene against one of the peeling walls of men in contact with other men. By degrees his eyes adjusted to the lack of light and he could make out forms more easily. The area seemed vast and shapelessly expanding and looking back he could not see the light of the entranceway. He knew he would have trouble finding the light once again but this did not worry him. He liked wandering through the space and opened a bottle of blackberry brandy that he had brought along to fortify himself, drank the contents in two swigs, washed down another joy pill with the sweetened alcohol, and slid the bottle along the hard cement floor. The alcohol and the pill fired up his insides once again and boosted his resolve to keep going, just as they had given him the courage to ride through the tunnel of his childhood in the gondola car of the freight train. For small periods of time he would even forget where he was, and his mind would drift to the future-oriented Rache-Pfeffer and her improbable ideas about his father and he still could not in any way understand her notion that there would be such a thing as grief over his father. You had grief if you were good and the person who died was good but you did not have grief without good, then what you had was feigned grief, you had the phony tears, you had the crying with one eye out for others who you hoped would see you in the act of

your so-called grief. So now he could not be one of Rache-Pfeffer's grievers. He had drained the bottle too fast and now weaved slightly but managed to slip his feet out of his shoes and climb out of his pants. Walking with them in hand he suddenly felt a tremendous blow in the middle of his back and fell to the floor on all fours. The weight of a man's body fell and covered him immediately before flipping him over on his back. Powerful arms drove under his legs and pushed his thighs back toward his stomach and somehow a hand managed to clamp itself firmly over his mouth and Ingmar's shriek was muffled as he felt a giant rod being driven inside him. The pain was severe but he could not move under the man's dead weight. "I told you I like to rape, I told you so. And you're so easy, you're easy. Now we're going to have some fun," as Ingmar whimpered into the palm of his rough hand from the pain of the impaling. The man filled his other hand with his hair and repeatedly knocked his head into the cement so he felt his skull would crack and the man began to drive with his pelvis and the tearing pain was very great but he could not scream or move so the man had his way and had his way. "Now you pay for your mouth," he heard him faintly say, for he was losing consciousness, and there came another pain that was much sharper and more awful than the one from the man's member being lodged in his sphincter, a horrible, hot cramp-like pain as the blade was extracted and the air rushed into his side, and there were no words for this pain, it was much more than he could every have believed, and his last thought on this side of consciousness was not of Sarah or Walton but his father in his tattered robe in his rocking chair, and his mother explaining how he was a man who didn't like to be disturbed.