

HENRIETTA

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Cover art by James Wiggs

To Professor Raymond Denigri

From the back cover:

Meet Charles Killpatrick... knight in worn Chemise Lacoste, mystic, lover, tennis shark, philosopher, gambler, renaissance man for whom an iced Dos XX, a good book, a close match, a fast horse and a scrupulous bookie comprise the good life.

Broker in SoCal with a real estate market in full bloom, life for Charles is as smooth as the purr of his BMW, Blackie. A man whose life, like his tennis service, crowds the line, Charles is in the habit of taking what life serves. Deep in debt to a bookie whose husband is a debt collector with a pro-lineman physique, Charles is sanguine. Accused of cheating at tennis by his world famous sparring partner, he is placid. Bribed to act as shill in high-stakes racetrack grift, he is serene. But all that was before he met Henrietta.

Now all he can think of is her...the look of her, the feel of her, the sound of her mangled English...and for the first time in a very long time...the future. But his Frenchfry, Henrietta, is not all Charles has to worry about.

There is her special forces lover, Roadrunner, shadowing their every rendezvous. And now, just as Charles has begun to contemplate tomorrow he must entertain the possibility that, if Roadrunner has his way, he won't have one. True as only fiction can be, Henrietta is more than picaresque farce, more than diary of failed love, more than tour of pro tennis, more than morality play....

It's a window on a man's soul. And, for all his myriad faults, Charles Killpatrick is a man worth knowing. Bounder, romantic, ne'er do well, visionary, man of honor...when Charles joins battle with fate the score is love all, and the results unpredictable as the course of a 100 mph Penn spun off the racket of a pro.

Art

(A poem)

(To Theophile Gautier: 1811-1872)

Things pass,

Save those made well;

The bust outlasts The citadel.

Often the plowman's share,

Turning an ancient sod,

Will bare

The face of Caesar or a god.
Rome and Apollo perished too,
But the poet's sovereign songs,
Constant and true,
Survive the postured bronze.

Raymond Denegri

one

I guess you wind up where you are supposed to because of what you've done in the past. Sometimes you make a conscious decision and it leads to bad results for you. And sometimes you know you should have done something one way, and you didn't do it, and your life didn't turn out as well for you as it would have if you had done it. You often need the perspective of time to realize this.

You think of this girl, Kimberley, in Florida though. All she does is she goes to the dentist, and her dentist who has AIDS, and she doesn't know he has AIDS, because he isn't required to tell her he has AIDS, infects her with AIDS while he is working on her. How could Kimberley be blamed for the consequence of her decision? She couldn't but her decision led to her death all the same.

So what it is is a lot of times you basically make bad decisions because you don't have the right information. C.I.A., take note. Well, if I hadn't made so many bad decisions I wouldn't be where I am now: Hugo Weatherbee's, 8453 Via Barona, La Costa, California. Hugo has a two bedroom condominium. He has one bedroom. I the other. His bedroom is a lot bigger than mine, and he has a shower and a bathroom in his bedroom. My bathroom is down the hall slightly from my bedroom, and I don't have a shower. I have a bath. I hate baths. I have never relished soaking in my own gore.

Sometimes when Hugo is not there, or, sometimes in the morning after he has had a shower, I go in his room to take a shower. It's almost mysterious in there, because he always keeps his door shut. I keep the door to my bedroom shut as well. If you want to know the truth, neither one of us could qualify as the most open, giving guy of the century.

On one wall of his bedroom is this big huge picture of a leafy forest in autumn. On another wall is an almost life size photograph of Marilyn Monroe in shorts, high heels, and a midriff blouse. She's standing on one leg, and the other leg is bent at the knee, and the calf is horizontal to the ground.

His sink is a miracle of detritus. There were a couple of cans of Edge Gel shaving cream with the tops off both of them and the top of the cans were rusty. There was a box of Q-tips. There were used safety razors. There were stacks and stacks of old pari-mutuel tickets that I knew he wasn't saving for tax purposes. They were just there along with the rest of the detritus. There were two spiral notebooks. One recorded the date he went jogging and however long it took him to jog or run however long he ran. There were thousands of entries. Then the other notebook told the date he played someone a tennis

match, the name of the someone, and the set scores. Hugo's a tennis pro. Then there were coin wrappers all over the place. And for toothpaste he had one of those tubes of toothpaste that has colored stripes in it. What a child. The man is nearly fifty, and he has stripes in his toothpaste.

I checked his room a few times for Playboy or other girl magazines or pornography. Nothing. And you can bet your last dollar, honey chile, that I searched that room. I would have made a good detective.

I'm sure he probably searched my room as well. If he did all he found were my books, including *Death of Arthur* by Malory. And I was reading a lot about Lawrence of Arabia at the time, and I had books from the library about Lawrence, including the one by Lowell Thomas. And propped up against the wall on top of the bureau that held my clothes I had the Lucky Strike advertisement, mounted on cardboard, of famous athletes of the '40's with Luckys in their hands, including our friend Jasper Kyle, who gave me the advertisement.

Also in Hugo's room he had piles of Racing Forms all over the place. The whole house had piles of Racing Forms. You'd open a closet and the closet to eye level would be filled with Racing Forms.

They were stacked at one end of the couch that Hugo sat on or lay down on to watch his dammed television shows, including Regis and Cathy Lee in the morning. And they were all over another couch that we didn't use at all. It was as if a gigantic beast with diarrhea had come through the house and shat out Racing Forms everywhere.

The carpet of the house is like mouse hides have been sewn together. That is the texture. That is the color. And the mouse hide carpet and the rest of the house have not been cleaned in over two years. It was cleaned two years ago because someone else inhabited the house. Not Weatherbee. I'd rented his condo for him while he was living on the other side of La Costa with his mother.

Sleeping in the place is like sleeping in a grain elevator. You wake up with a swollen head and eyes shut even after you have opened them. Then begins a long artillery attack of sneezing. This happened only to me. Weatherbee, long ago, had inured himself to squalor and filth. The decor: As I say, a carpet of mouse hides sewn together. And this was mainly where two years of dust resided. The living room was a dining room living room combination. No one ever ate at the dining room table.

The day that I came to live with Hugo, he threw a brown blanket—a brown blanket corrugated with electric circuits—over the table so that I could use the dining room table as a work desk. That was probably one of the more decent things the man ever did in his life.

There was a phone with a long extension cord over by the dining room table on a side table. (Hugo had his own phone in his room. And he thought the phone was tapped.) There was a nice bright hanging globe light over the dining room table, so it was fine to see there at night. And there were windows next to the table with a southern exposure so it was nice and bright during the day.

The kitchen was right next to the dining room. There on the tile sink lay Hugo's potato peeler with potato peelings still on it or carrot peelings. In one of the cabinets he had his supply of Happy Jack Mashed Potatoes.

In the freezer of the refrigerator was food I guarantee you had been there for years and would remain frozen there for more years. There was some Zacky's frozen chickens that didn't do anybody any good that Zacky's chickens were grown in California. And that woman, Mrs. Zacky, who did the commercials on radio most likely would have committed suicide if she had known about them. She pulls up next to this trucker in a gas station, and he has this truck load of chickens, and she says to him, "Where are your chickens from?" And the guy says, "All the way from New Orleans." And she says, "We grow them right here in California."

Well, maybe the guy just didn't piss on himself right then and there, like he'd made the trip for nothing. And old lady Zacky is pretty coy too. She doesn't tell the trucker she's married to Zacky the chicken entrepreneur. Well, I'd like to show Mrs. Zacky Hugo's chickens. As far as freshness is concerned, they might as well have been flown in from Saturn tied to the back of a buzzard.

Anyhow, for four hundred dollars a month I got a bedroom and all the entertainment Hugo could provide me.

"Jasper's on the phone."

I took the phone from Hugo in the living room.

"Charles! Charles!" Jasper was always screaming because he couldn't hear well.

"Jasper! Jasper!" I screamed back at him. I sort of liked the screaming.

"Let's meet down at the deli for breakfast!" he screamed.

"When?"

"I'm leaving the house right now! Bring Hugo!"

"He wants to meet at the deli," I said to Hugo.

"When?" Hugo said.

"Now," I said.

"That means he could be there now or in an hour from now," Hugo said.

"What difference does it make?" I said.

"We'll go down there, get something to drink, and look at the sports page while we wait for him."

"You're right," said Hugo. "I'll see you there."

He went down the stairs and climbed into his gray Mercury Cougar two door that was fairly new that used to be his dad's but his dad died last year and his mom didn't drive, so Hugo had it now. His car was parked in the driveway to the garage, because the garage was so filled with things—furniture, tennis trophies, old tennis magazines, more Racing Forms, clothes racks with clothes on them that winos would have been circumspect about

accepting—Hugo should have been the curator for the Smithsonian—there was no room for a good sized rat, so there was no room for his car, so he had to park the car outside.

I parked my car across the drive in guest parking. I had Blackie, my 1972 Mercedes 280 S.E. 4.5 sedan. Blackie was badly in need of a paint job. I used to look out the apartment window and see his discolored roof. The trunk was discolored, the hood was discolored, and the paint on the door panels was flaking. The leather on the front seat was starting to tear. Only one window would slide down, the left back one. By spitting out the window I could have easily gotten into a head on. But don't worry, honey chile, I got pretty good at it.

I backed up Blackie, went out Via Barona to Xana, Xana to Unicornio, Unicornio to Alga, right on Alga—as soon as you turned on Alga you saw the great blue expanse of the ocean—and down the hill to El Camino and down El Camino about a mile and a half to the Grand Central Deli in the La Costa Plaza.

Hugo and I found a booth. I slipped out, went over to the news racks in front of the drug store across the street and bought U.S.A. Today, came back and gave Hugo the sports page so he could look at the lines.

A little while later in came Jasper. He was wearing tennis shoes, green cords that I called his frog leg pants, a white tennis shirt and a long sleeve pink sweater. He slid in next to Hugo.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Just as I left the house I got a call. Charles, good to see you." He leaned over and grabbed my hand. "What shall we have to eat? Charles? Hugo? Charles, what do you want? Do you want to split an omelette then Hugo can get what he wants?"

Hugo said, "That sounds fine to me."

I said, "What kind of omelette do you want?" We went through this ritual thousands of times. It never varied.

But Jasper seemed to like it. He didn't like it if you changed the ritual.

"Let's get the Grand Central Deli omelette," he said with great enthusiasm.

"Do you want Ortega peppers on it?" I said.

"No! No! No Ortega chili peppers!" He screwed up his face. He seemed to be in great consternation I brought up putting Ortega peppers in the omelette, but I brought up Ortegass almost every time we ordered the omelette. Sometimes he even got seriously angry when I told the waitress to put Ortegass in the omelette, saying, "You have to make a joke about everything. You can't let one thing go by that isn't a joke. You know I don't like Ortegass. You keep doing that and some asshole in the kitchen is going to put Ortegass in the omelette. Why do you do it!" Then Hugo would try to calm him down. Other people in the restaurant would be looking our way. But this time he let it go by.

The waitress came over and stood with her pad, ready to write the order.

Jasper said, "Go 'head, Hugo."

Hugo said, "I'll take a diet coke, pancakes, and bacon."

Jasper said, “We want to split an omelette. Two plates. We’ll take the Grand Central Deli omelette. Make it nice and moist. Plenty of cheese and mushrooms. No Ortega chili peppers.” (Here he looked at me with a look that was in between laughter and collusion.) “Home fries. And we’ll split an English muffin. Bring us ice tea to drink. Plenty of sliced lemons.”

She brought out a pitcher of ice tea and plenty of sliced lemons. She poured the iced teas and left the pitcher on the table. She had been through this routine before.

“Charles, what do you hear from Ripley?” Jasper said.

Ripley was Jasper’s doubles partner in the old days. Ripley had been the pro at the L.A. Country Club. He and Jasper both owned condominiums on the bluff above the ocean at a place called Sea Bluff in Leucadia, about three miles from where we were having breakfast. There were five tennis courts over there. Ripley was about seventy. Jasper sixty-eight. Ripley also had a home in Palm Springs. And that’s where he was now. Ripley and I were very good friends. He phoned us all though, me, Hugo, and Jasper. Ripley had married a woman who had a couple of million, Victoria. Of course, Jasper was worth a couple of million, maybe more. Hugo and I were bust outs. Of course, Hugo owned his own condo and everything. But Hugo’s mom financed him in many of his endeavors.

I was on my own. There is no scale in the realm of human imagination that could have compared me to J.P. Morgan.

“Ben’s fine,” I said.

“Is he playing tennis?”

“He’s playing. But he’s frustrated because he’s not moving that well. When he gets to the ball though he drills it.”

Jasper said, “He can get so damned mad.”

“And you can’t?” I said.

His eyes opened wide in mock disbelief.

The omelette and an extra plate for me and Hugo’s breakfast arrived.

“Ah,” Jasper said, looking at it, “nice and moist.” He carefully divided it, giving me half, half the home fries, and half the English muffin with a patty of butter.

Hugo was pouring syrup on his pancakes—I noticed that some was getting on the bacon as well—and I started looking around for all the condiments: salt, pepper, Tabasco, and ketchup.

We finished breakfast. Hugo had to go see his mom, Florence, who was in a rest home.

Jasper looked at me. The bill came. Jasper took care of it. Hugo and I were broke. He left a decent tip.

“Charles,” he said, “you want to play some tennis?”

“Why not?” I said.

“You got your racket with you?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll meet you over at Sea Bluff then.”

“I’ll see you there.”

We all went out the door of the Grand Central Deli and got in our cars. Jasper drove a big green Lincoln Town Car and he drove pretty fast. I got in old Blackie and drove past the La Costa Drug that Mr. and Mrs. Ganz owned and past Rancho La Costa Properties, took a right on La Costa Avenue, waited for the light by the Arco Station there, run by old Walt, and then drove west on La Costa Avenue past the big swamp, the bird sanctuary, the bird hotel I called it, over the bridge that went over I-5, through the part of Leucadia that has all those nice streets that have the trees on them like Sheridan, then over the bridge that went over the railroad tracks of Amtrak, stopped at the light on 101 where you are right next to the ocean now, the beach real rocky with millions of rocks and small waves breaking on the shore, turned left and drove past the taco shop and Handy Man and that two storied motel where all the Mexicans live with all the kids playing around and the beat up cars parked in the courtyard, past an apartment house where there was an art store and a big courtyard with a tree with a nice green umbrella of green leaves on its branches, past the gas station that the Indians from India owned and then right into Sea Bluff.

As you drive in the tennis courts are on the left and there’s a place to park in front of them. I pulled in, turned a U in front of the guard gate to the Sea Bluff development, and parked in front of the tennis courts. Jasper’s car, besides mine, was the only one there.

He was sitting in his car. He had his red baseball cap on. I tapped on the window. He got out and got a new container of Penn’s and his racket out of the trunk, which also housed twenty or so more new containers of Penns, another five rackets, and his golf clubs.

He used the Fox racket, which wasn’t being made anymore. For me, it was a bit unwieldy racket. I’d tried it. I couldn’t play with it. He loved it. And he had magnificent touch with it. I used a Prince Graphite with chrome twist gut. Jasper walked around sort of splay footed. He didn’t change clothes, just wore what he’d been wearing in the Deli. I was wearing cotton tennis shorts, a white t-shirt, and Jack Purcell tennis shoes. Jasper wore glasses.

We walked towards the gate of court one. There wasn’t even a bird around.

There was a little silver flat square that you had to insert into a slot on the lock on the gate to get into the court. You put this metal thing into the lock and you rotated it counter clockwise and the gate was supposed to open. Jasper handed me all his keys and the metal gate opener on his key ring. He was horrible opening the gate. So was I. He knew it. “Open the goddamned gate!” he screamed.

“Why don’t you?”

“Now, don’t give me any shit. Just open the fucking gate.”

I put the little metal thing in the slot, and I rotated it with firmness and resolution while he peered at the procedure with great curiosity.

Sure as hell it opened right away. In the past, he and I had stood there for a fucking half hour while I tried every fucking rotation trick in the world.

“There you go,” he said, looking at me and smiling.

Hugo was perfect at opening the gate. It always opened right away for him. Not for me. Not for Jasper.

We went in the first court. Court number one. He gave me the plastic container of Penns, brand new and yellow.

I opened them and put the tin top in the trash container there, one of those where the door releases on pressure and comes back again when you let it go.

He walked to the south side of the court. I to the north.

I hit a ball to him. He hit it back effortlessly, not putting any pace on it at all. We hit about fifteen shots on one ball. He hit it right to me. I hit it right back to him. I started to increase the pace on my side. I started to drill the ball into him. I undercut the ball tremendously, the ball staying very low when it hit. He always hit it back the same way, effortlessly, almost as if he were handing a waiter a tip. The ball came over the net high, landed in front of me so it was easy to hit and it had no pace on it at all. He hit pillows, and all the time there was this wicked little smile on his face.

“All right, Charles, let’s start,” he said.

“Okay,” I said. “How many games are you going to give me?”

“Four and serve.”

“How much?” I said.

“Twenty a set and the loser of the first set has the right to double.”

“I’ll go for ten a set.”

“Ten!”

“Ten.”

“All right, fucking ten! You serve.” He walked back to the base line. He waved his racket at me. “Good luck to you, Charles.” He smiled. He almost laughed.

I am thinking to myself, “You won’t be laughing long you sonofabitch.”

I took a few practice serves. I always took four practice serves whether I needed them or not. Like when showering I always rinsed off by turning around three times under the shower head in honor of the trinity and the number 3. In practice serves I always took four.

I looked at him. He was favoring the forehand serve. I never serve to his forehand. He had one of the most underrated forehands in the world. He could really nail the forehand. So, automatic, I hit every serve to his backhand. I was good enough to do that. I’d never let him hit a forehand in a million years.

I threw up the yellow ball captured in a gray sky. It went right down the service line to his backhand. He returned beautifully to my backhand, driving me very deep indeed. I

got it. I made a fairly good defensive shot to the center of the court. He hit this perfect little dropper back. I couldn't get it. No chance. I looked at him. He smiled. Then he actually laughed.

Love-15. I served to his backhand again. He pounded the serve deep to my backhand. I belted it back to his backhand. He drove it down the middle of the court. Now, finally, I had a chance to make a shot on him. I gave him a neat little drop shot on the forehand side. I couldn't believe how fast he still was. He got it and returned it out of play. Thirty-love. He looked at me and laughed. "Be nice, Charles. I don't know how I got that ball. It was just sheer luck. You hit a beautiful dropper."

I looked at him. If I'd had a gun, I would have shot him. The sweat was starting to break out of my head. I served him wide to his backhand again. He got it. I backhanded him again. He backhanded me back. I backhanded him again, deep in the corner. He backhanded me again deep in the corner. I dropped shot him perfect.

He could not get it. He didn't even try. He waved his racket at me. "Beauty, Charles! Great dropper!"

Fifteen-thirty.

Next serve I made a mistake and gave him a forehand. I didn't mean it. The serve just got away from me a little. He knocked it clean across the forehand court so hard I didn't even have a play on it. I just stood there flat footed it came back so fast and way out of my reach.

Fifteen-forty.

I served again, pretty damned hard. He hit me a perfect backhand dropshot off the serve. I don't know how could do it, but he could do it all the time, and you could never see it coming. I started running like a madman towards the net. Bronco Nagurski would have been proud of me. I got it back over the net. But I couldn't make a very good shot on it because I had to do all I could just to get there. He had come in while I was running. He took my ball in the air off his forehand, and lobbed over my head deep in the backhand corner. I turned and ran as hard as I could after the ball, got it, and made a pretty good lob off my own backhand. He moved back from the net and followed my lob and hit a beautiful overhead to the forehand court with such a good angle that it was way out of play for me. Game.

We changed sides. He served me that little serve that just barely clears the net, and when it bounces, bounces very wide. He's got tremendous spin on that serve.

There are two ways to hit it. You can drop shot him off it. Or you can bang the hell out of it down the backhand line so that he can't get it. If you just plain hit it back to him, right away he owns you ten different ways. He can lob you or pass you on either side. You have to run like a monster to even get the ball. And if you start playing the serve in too close, he'll give you a regular hard serve down the service line, and he'll ace you.

I ran like a monster and got his dink, junk-spin serve, and banged it deep and hard down the line for a winner. He gave me the good sign with his palm flat that I had hit a fair shot and that it was inside the line.

Love-fifteen.

He served to the add court. He hit the ball wide to my backhand, came in right behind his serve, and volleyed off my return, 15-15.

Our games went on like that. In the course of a set he would show me every shot in the books: lobs, perfect drop shots, cross court forehands of tremendous velocity that didn't look as if he were hitting the ball especially hard; forehands down the line that would nail the outside of the line deep in the corner; backhands of great delicacy and backhands cross court with great pace; backhand drop shots; lunging volleys on returns that you wouldn't think anyone could get, and then he'd turn and look at me, "Oh, Charles, how did I do that? That was sheer luck." I would have believed him too, but I saw him do it all the time. It was routine. Still, you'd say to yourself, "How did he do it?"

Sometimes we had great rallies, because I could run and I was willing to run.

I'd get drop shots he hit that would surprise him.

But even with the four game spot he gave me, it was only once in awhile I won the set.

One afternoon with the four game spot, I beat him two sets. Twenty dollars the first set, and he pressed, so forty dollars the second set, then he was tired so he brought in Hugo for the third set. Hugo had been sitting on the bench. And I demanded and got the four game spot from Hugo after considerable screaming at them both. Jasper bet me the sixty, and I promptly beat Hugo. That kind of day happened once a year.

More often it was like this morning.

I didn't get a game the first set, so he beat me 6-4.

Second set I won the first game. So I had him 5-0. My mouth was watering. But I played too tight, and I never got another game, and he beat me 7-5. I paid him the twenty dollars. I hadn't pressed the second set.

"Charles, you had me 5-0! All you needed was one more game! And one game you had me 40-love. You definitely should have won the second set. I had to play great to beat you. At the same time that he seemed to be commiserating with me, he was in an ecstatic mood. I didn't say anything to him. I just looked at him.

"Look," I said, "why don't we come out here, we sit on the bench, and I just give you twenty bucks, and that way I don't have strained ligaments going after all those drop shots and lobs."

He looked at me mock seriously, and said, "But, Charles, you played great. You were moving like a rocket ship. No one can get my dropper like you. If you could play net, you would be tough."

"The net is for fish," I said. He laughed. And said it to himself as if meditating on it, "The net is for fish." He was right though. If I'd a net game, I would have been a much better player. But I couldn't volley to save my soul, and to play him from the backcourt was like getting into a banana eating contest with King Kong or Mighty Joe Young.

"What are you going to do right now?" he said intensely to me as we sat on the bench next to the courts. His face was about an inch from mine. He had all his teeth, but some of the ones in front grew crazy crooked. The only way I could have seen them more closely than I was was if I had had a microscope. He sprayed me a little as he asked that

question. I pulled my head slightly back and out of range as he repeated the question but he managed to get me again.

“Nothing,” I replied. I loved playing him. I loved the challenge and the sport, but invariably not only was I sort of mentally wiped out afterwards but it was very frustrating to me because I couldn’t beat him.

He grabbed my arm. It was like a German officer talking to a Jewish orderly. “Do you want to go to the Rain Tree? Have a few beers? See J.R.? Do you want some beers?”

The thought of alcohol always cheered me. I could drink beer for breakfast, and sometimes did. There was no conventions for me. I was hot as hell from him moving me around. The thought of going over to the Rain Tree, watching some sports on the T.V. monitors, having an ice cold glass of Mich or Bud in those big tall milkshake glasses they served the amber brew in had great appeal.

“I’ll drive!” He sprayed me again. “Leave your car here! I’ll bring you back. Let’s go over and say hello to old J.R.!”

I threw my racket in the back of his car.

He swung the big Lincoln out of Sea Bluff left on 101. He always drove between seventy and eighty and he pretended he wasn’t watching the road while he talked to you. Hugo called it “white knuckle time.” Hugo wouldn’t let him drive he was so badly shook up by it.

Jasper would drive practically off the road at eighty while he was talking to you and at the last minute before he was going into the dirt or off the shoulder or off the highway or over the curb into the grass, weeds, trees, buildings, etcetera, he’d edge at a very minute oblique back onto the road, and not much later he’d be heading back off the road. I could see him laughing to himself. He thought it was funny as hell to scare the hell out of his passengers. Too, he’d gotten his share of tickets for speeding.

We were driving along like that on a flat stretch, on the right side of the road and down below us on another little road some little houses with motor boats and pickups parked out front or along side of the houses, and a residential house that sold antiques, then there was the office building and parking area for Waste Management, there were the railroad tracks for Amtrak, the beautiful blue and white stripes along the silver train and an occasional freight, and up from that there was Ralph’s shopping center, and just north of Ralph’s was the hotel and Rain Tree where we were going; on the left side of 101, Ponto Beach, the state park where people brought their trailers, their vans, their recreational vehicles off which they stretched their awnings under which they sat in camp chairs; where they put up tents to sleep in, little tents, little colored tents on metal frames, where I imagine they were happy. I never went over there. I’d never been there. I just observed from the road and imagined. I imagined walking from my recreational vehicle down to the public showers after a long swim in the sea.

We were driving at eighty, practically in the gutter, towards Poinsettia to make a right turn to go to the Rain Tree.

Jasper said, “Charles, whatever happened to the French girl?”

Yes, that’s a good question. Whatever happened to the French girl?...

The truth is I didn't know what happened to her. She may be in France. She may be down the road in Rancho Santa Fe. She may be with Alexander. That's my guess. She's with Alexander. Some place. I don't know. The one thing I do know: She's not with me. And somehow it always shocks me she isn't. Somehow I always thought she would be.

This would be about one year before. I wasn't living with Hugo then. I had my own place at Casitas, a condominium development on Estrella de Mar and Alga Road. That's one of the best locations in La Costa.

The condo that I had was a big one bedroom, the bedroom downstairs with a fireplace in the bedroom and a walk in closet and a bath and a shower, and upstairs a powder room, kitchen, living room, dining room, and another fireplace.

The bedroom and the living room had a view of the back country comprised of some small barren mountains with houses on them. The condo was a place I'd talked a client of mine into buying. In between tennis matches, I made desultory attempts at being in the real estate business.

Knowing what I know now, if someone had come up to me twelve years ago and said to me: "You can be a janitor or a real estate salesman. Which do you prefer?" I would have said, "Where is my pail? Where is my mop? Let me embrace you for saving me from the real estate business."

I owned my own company. But I worked out of my home. And all my company was was me, a phone, and some signs in a warehouse in El Cajon.

Four other people had their licenses with me, but they all did other things for a living, and none of them ever sold anything.

I don't know how the world works. Where the hell does everyone productively go on those freeways?

I was visiting a friend of mine, Mark Diamond, after playing tennis with him on the Casitas courts. He had a two bedroom place and we were sitting in the living room having a beer watching a sporting event: a baseball game of San Diego versus the Dodgers, the cool, clear, lucid, intelligent, nothing's wrong-in-the-world voice of Vin Scully announcing.

Mark's wife Sarah is in the kitchen making a tuna salad.

"Low and outside, called a ball. Ball three on the catcher, Santiago, who's been to the plate three times this afternoon, a single and a walk prior to this..."

The doorbell. Sarah gets it and in walks the wife of Mark's cousin, Felicia. They have a condo in the development next to Casitas.

Felicia says, "Charles, I'm glad you're here. I met this sweet French girl and she's looking for a place to rent. I told her I knew just the person to help her." Felicia handed me a piece of paper with a couple of phone numbers on it and a name: Henrietta. "I told her your name, but I didn't know your number. So give her a call."

And that was the beginning of how I met Henrietta.

I usually never phone rentals. I hate rentals. I used to do a lot of resort rentals, and basically not charge the owner or the renters commission, but I got a lot of referral sales business from doing it. But every time something went wrong in the owner's house—the toaster didn't work, the garbage disposal didn't work—the renter would call me. It was natural. I was their only contact. But then the owners weren't so cooperative. Their basic attitude was: "Fuck the guy. Let him buy his own toaster. It worked while I was there. Let him get his toast in a coffee shop like everyone else." A couple thousand one sided conversations like that one later and I shut down the rental business. It was not only making me hate humanity, more important it was driving me nuts.

My original inclination was not to call her. And I didn't. But then one afternoon Blackie had a note stuck under the windshield wiper on the driver's side. I picked it up and read it in the drive to the tennis courts. Felicia must have pointed out the car to her. This message—I had no inkling then—was to be the first of many I was to receive from her.

"Please would you call me at my home: 438-5213 or at my office 438-0065. I am checking my answering machine every two hours. Thank-you for your help. Henrietta"

So I called her. I arranged to meet her in the drive where my car was parked. It was a typical Southern California day, pleasantly warm, No clouds.

I was sitting there in the drive to the tennis courts, which are over the garages to the Casitas. There are two levels of parking, so the courts are up pretty high. The Casitas have tile roofs and there is lots of shrubbery and ivy and all sorts of trees: evergreens with pine cones, and elms, and olive trees.

I was standing there in the drive. This gray Chevrolet van pulled up near me. It was new. This girl gets out. Fairly tall. Nicely dressed in slacks and a sweater.

"Are you Mr. Killpatrick?" she asked.

"Yes. You are?"

"Henrietta," she said, and extended her hand to shake hands with me.

"You are looking for a rental?"

"Yes. Can you help me?"

"Maybe." She was wearing a lady's Rolex and a couple of gold bracelets on her left wrist. She had brown hair, sort of marcelled. She had brown eyes. She had very pretty soft brown eyes. She had eyes like a doe. I don't know why but her eyes always reminded me of autumn, of falling leaves, and of someone burning a fire somewhere. She had sort of a hurt look in her eyes. And sometimes her eyes were laughing. And sometimes they were hurt and laughing at the same time.

"How big a place do you need?"

"Oh, two bedrooms."

"Furnished or unfurnished?"

"Unfurnished."

"Oh, that's too bad. I could probably get you a place here. But all these places are furnished."

“Yeah, I need one unfurnished.”

She spoke English very well, but falteringly. She had a lovely French accent. I found myself enjoying the way she talked. “How much do you want to spend?”

“Oh, seven hundred, a thousand.”

“Lease? Or month to month?”

“Lease of one year.”

I knew some condo rentals up on the hill. There was a rental office up there open every day. I thought they rented for about eight fifty or nine hundred. It was a quiet location. I told her about it. She said she'd like to see them. I told her I'd drive her. But she said she'd follow me in her van.

I opened the door of her van for her, got in Blackie, and she followed me in her van up Alga Road. I turned left when I got to El Fuerte and then I saw the sign of the rental office. She followed me to the parking area. We went into the rental office and the woman gave me the keys to a couple of places that were available. We went to look at them. I was standing with her in the second place.

“Well, what do you think?”

“It won't do.”

“No?”

“No.”

The places were nice enough. They weren't great. But they weren't bad. Quite frankly I didn't think she was going to do so much better anyplace else for the money.

“Do you know anything else?”

“No, but if I think of something I'll call you.”

“Would you please.” We took the keys back. And I walked out to her van with her.

“Thank-you for trying to help me.”

“You're welcome.”

She extended her hand. I shook hands with her again.

She got in her van. I closed the door behind her. The window was down on the driver's side. “Do you like French pastry?” she said.

“Sometimes.”

“I know a place that is the best. It is a bakery there on Rancho Santa Fe Road and Encinitas Boulevard. They have the best bakery.”

“Do they have coffee?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Do you go there?”

“Yes, they know me there.”

“Sometimes maybe I’ll meet you there for coffee and pastry.”

“Yes. Call me.”

I drove home. I was a little confused. I liked the way she talked. I liked the way she said, “Rancho Santa Fe Road.”

Jasper and I went through the doors of the Rain Tree. The door was wood and glass, wood at the bottom and glass at the top. The glass part of the door was embossed with the picture of a big oak tree. It was nice and woody inside. Wood floors. Wood tables. A nice long bar that curved around. Lots of televisions with the baseball game on. The waitresses wore polo shirts and short shorts and basketball shoes. They were cute as hell. You couldn’t stop from looking at their legs. Their nice little calves and the way they got wider and heavier before they went up into their shorts, You couldn’t stop looking at them.

We got a table. A girl came over. She looked like she was about sixteen but she had to be older because she was serving. She had brown eyes and she had long, brown hair. She was my favorite waitress.

Jasper said, “Charles! what are you going to have?”

“I’ll take a Michelob Dry,” I said, “on draft.”

“Do you have Becks on draft?” he said.

“Yes, we do,” she said.

“Give me a Becks then,” Jasper said.

“Where’s J.R.?” he said.

“He’s here someplace.”

“Well, if you see him, tell him to come over.”

In a little while she came back with those big milkshake glasses filled with beer. They looked beautiful to me. Works of art that you could participate in. I was hot. I was thirsty. And looking at those glasses, I wondered to myself, “What difference does art make? Here is something I love and can participate in at the same time. I can look at my glass of beer and love it knowing how it will be before I taste it and then tasting it to confirm my suspicion. I take a long draught. Ah. Nice and cold. Nice and cold, drinking it, and it disappears from the glass. It will be gone soon, and I’ll order another and another and another, amber colored beryl colored with wave break on top, always having the beauty before me and always being able to participate in it.” I did not impart this particular knowledge to Mr. Jasper Kyle. “Here’s to you, pal,” I said.

J.R. came over. “J.R.!” Jasper said, “how are you?” “Fine,” J.R. said. He stood there at the table with us. He was

the owner.

“You guys just finish playing tennis?”

“Yeah,” I said. “He beat the hell out of me as usual.”

Jasper said, "But you played me damned close. You made some great shots. Let's face it I'm supposed to win. J.R., why don't you play Charles sometime?"

"I'll be glad to."

"Who do you like?" I said to him.

"I don't know. I heard J.R. is pretty good. Maybe he can beat you." "I'll bet on myself." "How much?" "A hundred." "It ought to be a good match." "We'll play it someday."

J.R. said, "Jasper, will you autograph a couple of balls for me? A friend of mine wants them." "Sure. Bring them over."

J.R. left. "What do you think my chances are?" I said. "I hear he's pretty good."

J.R. came back with the balls and a felt tipped pen. Jasper signed the balls. We had a few more beers and watched Cincinnati play the Braves. There was a picture of Jasper on one of the wall posts over by the bar. There was an old wooden racket mounted above it. The picture was Jasper in a warm-up jacket and a dumb Prince Valiant haircut on the cover of Sports Illustrated. The caption said, DO NOT BET WITH THIS MAN. Good advice.

Jasper drove me back to my car at Sea Bluff, and I drove on home to Hugo's. I went to my room and got my Lawrence of Arabia book by Lowell Thomas and took the big key off the mantle that opened the gate to the pool, and I walked to the pool and sat down in one of the chairs and sat in the sun. I started thinking about Henrietta again.

A week or so after I met her, I called her at her office phone She answered herself. I asked her if she had found a place number.

"No. Not yet. And you? Have you found anything for me?"

"No."

"Too bad."

"Do you want to meet me for coffee and pastry sometime?"

"Yes. I'll meet you. You'll love the pastry. It's the best."

"How about tomorrow?"

"Okay. What time?"

"Ten?"

"All right."

"I'll see you then."

I found myself looking forward to seeing her. I felt a sense of adventure. I almost felt there might be something between us, but I didn't know why. The next day I drove over to the Fleur de Lys Bakery. Blackie's paint job wasn't so deplorable then. He looked fairly sharp.

I found the bakery in the shopping area. It was near a Mexican bar and restaurant I went to occasionally. It was a big shopping area. There was a Marie Calendars in it. It was

right at the north west entry of Rancho Santa Fe. The name of the bakery was Fleur de Lys.

I went inside. There were all sorts of bakeries for sale in the showcase: bear claws with cherries in the middle, bear claws with apples, with glazed peaches, cookies, no doughnuts, bread, all sorts of French breads, all sorts of elaborate pastries.

An Asian girl was working behind the counter.

“Do you know Henrietta?”

“Yes.”

“Has she been here yet?”

“No.”

“Does she come here?”

“All the time.”

“Well, I’m waiting for her. I’ll have a coffee.”

“Fine. Sit down anywhere. I’ll bring it to you.”

There were tables outside in the sun on the patio. And there were a few white tables with marble tops with white metal chairs with white leather coverings inside.

I sat at one of the tables inside. The girl brought me my coffee. And I waited.

At 10:30 I thought I would leave. What a stupid enterprise. I asked for another refill. The girl brought it to me. At 10:45 I went to the cash register and paid my bill. I left a good tip for the young

lady at the table.

“Tell Henrietta I think she’s rude,” I told the Asian girl.

“I’ll be glad to,” she said.

I subsequently learned that Henrietta had no great love for any Asians—it seemed to be characteristic of her French social set—and consequently it seemed the young Asian girl felt the antipathy and had no great liking for Henrietta.

I left. I didn’t call Henrietta, nor did I receive a call from her. A few days went by. I called her.

“Who is it?”

“Charles Killpatrick. You were going to meet me for pastry a few days ago. I waited for you a long time.”

“Oh. I’m so sorry. Something came up. I couldn’t come. Please excuse me. I was going to call you, but I don’t have your number.”

“You could have called the pastry shop to let me know you weren’t coming.”

She didn’t say anything. Then she said, “Do you want to meet again? I promise I’ll be there this time.”

“How about tomorrow?”

“I can’t this week. Excuse me, I’m moving. I found a place.”

“Where?”

“La Costa Village.”

I knew the place. Some of my friends lived there: Evelyn, and Charlie and Darlene. It was a great development. “How much?”

“A thousand.”

“That’s terrific.”

“Yes, it’s nice.”

“Well, when do you want to meet then?”

“Next Thursday.”

“Fine. But let’s meet for a drink this time. I’m not much on pastry.”

“Where?”

“You know the Olympic Hotel?”

“Yes.”

“How about the bar at eight?”

“All right.”

“Do you want me to pick you up?”

“No. I’ll meet you there.”

“Okay, see you then.”

“Good-by,” she said. She had a lovely voice.

Thursday night, sure as hell, at eight o’clock I was at the old Olympic bar. There were just a couple of other people sitting there, some more at the tables, and some more seated at the banquette with small round tables in front of them. Henrietta wasn’t there yet. I ordered a Bud. The barman was wearing a white duck jacket. I looked around the bar and mellowed out on the Bud brew that went down my palate like cars into the Holland tunnel at five o’clock rush hour.

I was wearing suntans, a white button down, a blue blazer, and some new Jack Purcells with white socks that were calf length and made of Lisle cotton. I’d just shaved and gotten out of a shower. I felt good because I’d played tennis all day and swum a mile in the Olympic sized pool just about fifty yards from where I currently sat.

I looked around. No Henrietta on the horizon. “Give me another Bud please,” I said to the barman. He brought me another in a fresh chilled glass. I had a long draught and dipped my fingers into a bowl of crackers called gold fish and had some. They tasted good with the beer.

“She may not come,” I thought to myself. “She didn’t come before.”

I thought of her pretty face, the nice brown, inquisitive, laughing, sorrowful eyes. I ordered another beer. Well, if she didn't come, I'd just get a little mellow and drive home later and have a couple more Buds and a sandwich. These days you had to be careful driving with too much to drink, though I only lived four miles south on El Camino and left on Alga a block. Unpleasantly, I'd learned the hard way. Years ago I'd gotten two deuces, both within a period of a few weeks. I'd had to pay a couple thousand in fines, a couple thousand more to my Italian attorney, had to go to a school a few hours a week for six months, and alcoholics anonymous meetings, which I detested. A lot of times when I got out of those meetings, I would drive straight home, take a cold can of Bud out of the refrigerator and drain it, and felt a lot better about the whole situation.

At the meetings, sometimes I sat back in the kitchen off the main meeting room so I couldn't hear the people confess. But when I did listen to them, I couldn't wait to get out of there, and usually have a drink. The whole procedure had an adverse effect on me. But I didn't drink and drive too often anymore. Because I didn't want to go back to those meetings anymore. Those people and their confessions depressed the hell out of me. It seemed to me they were very happy not about something they were doing, but about something they were not doing. That to me is existence minus one.

It was eight thirty. She wasn't going to come. I ordered another beer. I was disappointed. Even if she came, what could happen? Undoubtedly she had a boyfriend. Who the hell cared? I was beginning to feel a little silly, sitting there at the bar drinking Bud after Bud, all by myself, waiting for someone who was not going to come. At nine o'clock when I was a little tanked, I turned to my right on the bar stool, and there she was coming towards me.

I got up. She was wearing sort of a one piece blouse slacks affair. Something like a jump suit, but unlike a jump suit not zippered up the front. It was yellow and black, some sort of flower or psychedelic design. I asked her if she wanted a table or if it were okay to sit at the bar.

"This is okay," she said.

I pulled out the bar stool for her. She sat down.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said.

"That's okay," I said. "I didn't think you were coming. I'm glad you came."

I was sorry I had drunk so much. I was sort of drunk, which I had not planned on being, but then I didn't think she was coming. But then there she was sitting right next to me smiling.

"What would you like?" I said.

"Oh, nothing," she said.

"You don't drink?" I said.

"Not very much," she said.

"Have a glass of wine?"

"No."

“A Coke?”

“No.”

“No? Have something then.”

“I’ll have a mineral water.”

“Sir, this young lady will have a mineral water. I’ll have another beer.”

“We have Perrier,” the bartender said.

“That’s fine,” Henrietta said.

We had our drinks in front of us. We touched glasses. She had the prettiest brown eyes. I had another beer. I was getting slightly bombed. She was just drinking a little of her Perrier.

“Would you like to see my new place?” she said.

“I’d love to.”

“Let’s go and see it then.”

“Shall I follow you?”

“Yes.

I paid. We left. I walked her to her van, then got in Blackie, and followed her out of the parking lot down El Camino to Alga, down Alga to Almaden, down Almaden to Pamplona, left there to the first plaza of La Costa Village, which is Plaza de La Costa. There’s a security gate there which she clicked open from her car. I followed her van down to the end of the plaza. We pulled up by a fountain. And she walked to the row of condominiums which would have a view of La Costa Golf Course. She went to one, opened the door, and switched on the lights.

She turned on the hall lights, the kitchen lights, and then the lights to the dining room and living room, which are in one big long room. The place was beautiful. Not since I left San Francisco, a long time ago, had I seen a place so elegantly furnished.

The dining room table was not a big table, but it looked old maybe centuries old—and heavy, and it was a rich brown color. The dining room chairs were simple and classic and the same rich brown color as the table, and obviously made by the same maker of the table.

Against the far wall was a big sofa, also old looking but very nicely upholstered and comfortable. There were a couple of big easy chairs and a coffee table. And on the wall there were two big Audubon paintings. They looked like originals which would make them very valuable indeed.

I felt like a fool for showing her the apartments I did. No wonder she didn’t like them. Hers was a beautiful apartment. She sat down on the sofa. I sat down on one of the easy chairs.

“This is beautiful,” I said.

“Thank you,” she said.

“I don’t imagine you have any Budweiser?” I said.

“No. Maybe you would like a glass of white wine?”

She brought me a glass of white wine. I had a taste.

Here I was alone in a beautiful apartment with a beautiful French girl.

“Do you mind if I sit beside you?”

“As you wish.”

I moved over by her. I took her hand in mine. She did not pull her hand away.

The lighting in the living room was subtle, just a couple of floor lamps. She had turned the lights off in the kitchen and in the entry way when she brought my wine in.

I tried to kiss her. She didn’t pull away, but she didn’t return my kiss either. Her mouth stayed close. I reached behind her and turned off the floor lamp.

“What are you doing?” she said.

“Oh, I just wanted to turn off the lamp.”

I was afraid if I moved away from her too long, I would not be able to resume being with her and next to her.

“You don’t even know me,” she said.

I was sitting close to her again. It was almost dark in the room.

“Are you married?” I said.

“No,” she said.

I had her hand in mine. I tried to kiss her again. She didn’t pull away. But she didn’t return my kiss. I moved my hand up her side till I reached her breast. Her clothes hid her figure, but she had a very full breast. Her bra, was of a very soft material. I felt her nipple under my hand. She moved to pull my hand away but not too strongly. And I kept my hand there, rubbing her nipple. And her mouth opened a little under mine. I took my hand and moved it to her other breast and found the nipple of her breast and started rubbing it. Her mouth opened more. I moved my hand back and forth on her breasts, rubbing where the nipples were, rubbing her entire breasts. Her breasts were very beautiful, and so much bigger than you could tell from her clothes. I took my other hand from her hand and moved it up behind her and found the zipper.

“No,” she said.

I pulled the zipper part way down and moved my other hand up and then down inside the material of her blouse and down inside her bra and found one of her breasts and found the nipple. Then I moved over to the other breast. I took the other hand and pulled the zipper all the way down to her waist. While my hand was down there I put my hand under her panties and onto her ass. She had a beautiful beautiful ass.

She was not fighting me now. As soon as my hand was on her ass it was as if she had given up. There was no more resistance or tension. I kissed her hard.

“What are you doing to me?” she said.

She got up and went into the bedroom and took off her clothes. There were no lights on. She got under the covers. I took off my clothes and got in with her. The way she dressed you could not see her figure. She had a beautiful beautiful butt. Her breasts were large with large beautiful areolas. I kissed her breasts. She felt so warm and good. I opened her legs and I was inside her.

The next morning I woke up, and at first I didn't know where I was.

I opened my eyes. It was still dark. She was leaning on her elbow looking at me.

"What kind of man are you? You come to my house. You were drunk. You got my clothes off. You made love with me. You fell asleep. You farted. What kind of person are you?"

"I farted?"

"Yes."

"I didn't mean to. I must have had too many beers. I never do that."

She didn't look mad.

"I'm sorry." I was trying to collect myself. I didn't want to offend her. "Can I use the bathroom?"

"Yes, there's one there," she said pointing to the other end of the bedroom. "Or there's one in the bedroom at the other end of the house."

I went to the bathroom of the bedroom at the other end of the house, took a leak, splashed some cold water on my face, found a new toothbrush and some toothpaste and brushed my teeth for a long time. The dawn was just coming up and I went back to her bedroom. She was still in bed. I'd put my shorts on when I got up. I got in bed and got behind her. She was still naked. I pulled her around to face me. She didn't say anything. She didn't resist. I loved looking at her eyes,

"Who are you?" she said again. "Why do I let you be with me? I never do this before in my life."

I kissed her. I felt her breasts. I could see her breasts in the dawn light, the big brown areolas, as I pulled the covers slightly down from us. I put my fingers inside her and felt her gorgeous ass and I made love to her, thinking, I'm probably getting someone pregnant. I didn't care.

I got up, went to the other bathroom, took a long shower, and got dressed. When I came back, she had put on a bathrobe. Her feet were bare. Her hair was brushed.

"Where do you go?" she said.

"Home. I've got several things to do. Can I see you later today?"

"If you want."

"I want to see you."

"I'll be home around four or five."

"Is it okay if I come over? I'll phone first."

“Yes.”

I went to her and kissed her. “I’m so happy I met you,” I said.

“Me too.”

I kissed her good-bye. She felt so absolutely wonderful in my arms. She closed her eyes when I kissed her.

I drove home. I was in ecstasy. I hoped nothing would go wrong. There was evidently a lot to the original affinity I felt for her. I went to my condo and sat on the bed downstairs for awhile. Then I got up, went upstairs, and phoned my answering service to see if I had any calls regarding real estate business. None. I had a few big listings too, a couple in the seven hundred thousand dollar price range.

The phone rang.

“What do you do?” It was Henrietta.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Oh, I just wanted to know. Good-bye.”

“Wait a minute. Do you want to do something this evening?”

“Yes.”

“How about dinner?”

“We do not have to go to the dinner.” She accents dinner in a French way.

“I know. But I’d like to take you.”

“You have money?”

“Enough to go to dinner. Where do you want to go?”

“There’s a new place. Scalini’s. I think you like it. It’s very nice.”

“Okay, why don’t I pick you up around six?”

“Okay. What do you do ‘till then?”

“I’m going to make a few phone calls. Then I’m going to play tennis at the Olympic Club, then I’m going to go swimming there, then come home, get dressed, and pick you up. You want to go to the Olympic with me? Swim? Play tennis?”

“No, thank you. I have some errands to do.”

“Good-bye.”

“Au revoir.”

I went to the club, played three sets of tennis, and swam a mile. I got out of the showers, went up to the bar, and had a couple of Buds. The barman and I were the only ones there. The TV was on a sports program. I drove back to the condo, put on a white button down, sun tans, a blue blazer from Brooks, and my Jack Purcells. At six I drove over to her house—I knew the code to the gate—and I rang the bell.

She came to the door. I didn't kiss her. She looked beautiful. She was wearing a nice gray sweater, a long skirt, and flat shoes. She was almost as tall as I am. I'm about five nine. She was probably five seven or eight.

"Are you ready to go?" I said.

"Yes." Her voice was sort of breathy when she said yes. "I'll get my purse."

I opened the passenger door of old Blackie for her. His paint was good then. He looked fine. Scalini's was about ten miles down 5 and then a couple miles east on Via de la Valle like you're going to Fairbank's Ranch. Scalini's is on the second floor of a building, the top floor. I hadn't been there before. She showed me.

I went to the maître d'. The place was pretty crowded. People were pretty well dressed. Lot of chatter.

"I'd like to have a drink at the bar first, then a table for two."

"Yes, sir. Your table is ready and waiting for you when you are ready. You want to sit inside or outside on the patio?"

"Inside please."

The maître d' and waiters wore tuxedos. The cocktail waitresses wore white blouses and black skirts.

We sat down at the bar.

"Henrietta?"

"Just a glass of mineral water please."

"Give me a negroni please."

Our drinks came. I toasted her. Her eyes were so pretty. They just shone. You could see laughter and happiness in them. She seemed happy. I was very happy to be with her.

"What's good?" I said.

"Oh, everything. You like pizza. They make a very good pizza as an hors-d'œuvre."

"I don't think pizza tonight for me. You have it. You have whatever you want."

I had another negroni, and then we went to our table. I ordered a bottle of white burgundy. Henrietta had just a little bit of it in her glass. She didn't drink.

"Your apartment is beautiful," I said.

"Thank you."

We were an island in a sea of conversation.

"You like it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do you live there alone?"

"Yes. I had a boyfriend. But he is gone back to France."

"You don't love him anymore?"

“No.”

“I’m glad. I love being with you.”

“Me too.” She laughed.

I had a big drink of wine. I was the happiest person in the world. She had a pizza, a small pizza like an hors-d’œuvre. And a salad with oil and vinegar. I had a rack of lamb which was well broiled on the outside and pink on the inside. And I had a salad as well. The food was excellent.

“Do you play tennis?” I said.

“I used to. I used to play a lot when I was young.”

“Would you like to play?”

“Yes. But I don’t know how I’ll play.”

“That’s okay. I’ll hit everything right to you. I’ll bring a hamper of balls.”

“I’d love to.”

I drove her home about ten. I walked her to the door.

“Would you like to come in?”

“Yes.” We went in.

“You want something?”

“You have any wine?”

“Yes. What kind you want? White or red?”

“White’s fine.”

She went into the kitchen. I went into the living room. I stood up when she came in and handed me a glass of wine. I sat on the sofa. She sat on the arm chair.

“Come and sit with me.”

She came over. I pulled her to me and kissed her. I reached behind her and turned off the light on the lamp table. She pulled away and looked at me. “I never met anyone like you,” she said. “Who are you?”

I kept hold of her. “I like you so much,” I said.

I pulled her to me and kissed her again. Her mouth felt so warm and pliant, and yet I felt I was still fighting her. She pulled away from me and looked at me again. “I do not know you. I do not know why I am with you. I never do this before.”

I put my left hand under her sweater and moved it up until I felt the lacy material of her bra and the under curve of her breast. The way she wore her clothes or the clothes she wore you never got the idea of how full her figure was. She didn’t show any of her figure at all the way she dressed. You just saw this high-foreheaded, thin-nosed, pretty, sensitive, prim, cultivated looking, demure face on a long beautiful neck.

She pushed my hand down and I pushed it back, up this time over the swell of her breast so that I felt the top of her naked breast and then I pushed my hand down so that it was inside her bra and entirely over her breast and her nipple and I started rubbing her nipple with my thumb.

“No,” she said. But this time she didn’t pull my hand down and I reached my hand up and pulled her strap down over her shoulder so that her breast was free now in my hand and I was stroking it fast over her nipple and feeling her whole breast. Her breast was so very very large for such a thin figured girl. I moved my hand over to the other one and began feeling that nipple. Then I put my other hand up under her sweater. She was leaning back with her eyes closed. I pulled the strap down so that her breast came free in that hand. And I was rubbing both her naked breasts and feeling the large flat nipples and large areoles and they felt so great and large and wonderful in my hands.

Then I reached around behind her with both my hands and pulled the fastenings of her bra apart and pulled her bra off her so that only the shoulder straps kept it on her arms. The bra was black and lacy and hard feeling. I shoved her sweater all the way up to her neck so that I could see the breasts and nipples and areoles now clearly from the light that was still on in the kitchen and I bent my head and kissed the nipple of her left breast and then kissed her breast all over and it felt so large and beautiful and so soft and pliable and then I kissed her other one.

Then I kissed her mouth hard. She wasn’t holding her mouth back now, I reached my hand down and pulled her long skirt up. Her legs were naked under the skirt and I glided my hand along and in between her legs below her knees and then up over her knees and up her thigh, taking the black skirt up with my hand until her skirt was pushed up to her panties and I could just see her beautiful beautiful legs so full and fat at the tops and she had on black panties. And her sweater was pushed up to her neck and her beautiful big breasts, were just lying there naked sort of flat and I didn’t take her panties off but I took my right hand with my fingers and I pushed my fingers up inside her where the legs joined pushed my fingers up under the corner of her panties and my fingers went right up into her vagina and she was so hot and wet and she wasn’t resisting anything I was doing now, and I moved my fingers up into her until I felt her clit and I was rubbing it and her legs were wide apart now and I was rubbing her nipples with my left hand, squeezing them sometimes and I kissed her hard on the mouth with my hand still in her and I pulled the sweater entirely over her head with my left hand.

She had to lean forward a little to help me get it off, and I pulled it over her head and pulled the bra off and now she was entirely naked except for her panties, the beautiful arms and shoulders, the beautiful long neck, the bare breasts, the small waist. I found the zipper to the skirt, released my hand from her vagina, undid the zipper, and pulled the skirt down over her legs, and put it with the bra and sweater, and put my hand back where it was. She was moving on my fingers now, and I was rubbing her clitoris with my middle finger and rubbing her breasts with my left hand.

“Take me to bed,” she said.

I kept my left hand on her breasts, and I removed my right hand from her vagina and I put it in back of her on her butt and inside her panties on her ass and I pulled her panties

down off her. I pulled them down all the way over her long legs and over her feet. Then I put my left hand behind her over her ass and my fingers of my right hand up inside her.

I removed my hand, and got up and pulled her to her feet besides the sofa. I kissed her lovely face. I had my hand on her ass. Her vagina was beautiful. Her legs were so heavy there. She had such a small waist and a large beautiful ass. And then the narrow v of hair.

She walked into the bedroom. I watched her long legs and that lovely ass. She pulled back the covers of the bed and she got in and lay down. The moonlight was shining through the large sliding glass door to the patio. I went over and slid the glass sliding door all the way open. I took off my clothes, dropped them besides the bed. I kneeled over her and kissed her stomach and her breasts and then I entered her. She was like jumping into soft hot pliable warm flames that didn't burn and that you never wanted to leave. I adored her. I exhilarated in her.

When we slept, she slept with her back to me, and I held her breasts in my hands.

I awakened a early. It was just dawn, beginning to be a little light outside.

I went down quietly to the other bathroom in the bedroom at the other end of the apartment so I wouldn't awaken her. I turned on the light, opened the medicine cabinet. There was my toothbrush from the day before. I saw some dental floss. I pulled out a strip. It was sort of wide and dark green. I'd not seen that kind before. I flossed my teeth. It must be some foreign brand. It was nice though. And there was some foreign toothpaste. I brushed my teeth. The toothpaste had a strange but not unpleasant taste to it.

I got in the shower, took a long shower, got out and toweled off, combed my hair with a tortoise shell comb there, kept the towel wrapped around me, and went back to the bedroom.

I climbed in bed, awakened Henrietta, and made love to her again. I got up, put on my shorts, dressed. She was leaning on one elbow looking at me.

"Where do you go?"

"To work."

"You don't work."

"To play tennis then."

"I believe you."

"You want to play?"

"Yes."

"You have a racquet?"

"Yes. An old one."

"Bring it. But if you don't like it, I can get you another one."

"I haven't played in so long. Are you in a hurry?"

"No."

“You want something to eat?”

“I don’t need breakfast. I’ll have a cup of coffee with you.”

“I don’t have the coffee. Tea?”

“That’s fine.”

“Wait for me in the front room. I want to get dressed.”

I went out. I was looking out the glass sliding door in the living room I decided to go outside on the patio. As I opened the door, a big rust colored cat jumped in. The cat looked as if it knew where it was so I let it alone. The cat headed straight for the kitchen.

I heard the shower running in the bedroom. In a moment Henrietta came out wearing a blue silk robe, Her feet were bare. She wore no makeup. Her face was beautiful.

“You are beautiful,” I said.

“No I’m not.”

“You are.”

“I’m going to make the tea,”

She started into the kitchen. The big cat came around the corner. She bent and scooped it up in her arms. “Mimi,” she said, kissing the cat. Then she put it down.

I loved her. I was absolutely in love. I loved being with her.

She started setting the dining room table. I watched her. She put on a table cloth, Then she went in the kitchen and came back with big white cloth napkins folded and silverware. Lots of silverware. Then she came out with huge cups of tea, and then she got butter on a silver plate, and a basket of dark bread, and a crock of jam.

“Come and sit down,” she said.

I sat down at the lovely table. I took a sip of tea. It was hot and strong and wonderful.

I put my napkin in my lap. The setting of the table was so beautiful. The silver was very old and very heavy. And for just a cup of tea and some jam and bread she had quite a bit of silverware out there. In front of me I had a knife and a fork and a couple of different sized spoons,

Somehow she wound her teabag out of her cup without touching it and at the same time she squeezed the tea out of it against the inside of the cup using her spoon to wind the teabag string against the teabag, and deposited the teabag desiccated and neatly bound up in its own twine on the side of her saucer. She never touched the teabag once with her hand.

I left my teabag in the cup and just drank the tea with the old teabag in there.

I had a piece of the dark bread with butter and wonderful berry jam on it. You could see the little seeds of the berries in the jam. “This is delicious,” I said.

“Where do you go?”

“I’m going to work really. I’m going to make some calls at my house.”

“Can I come with you?”

“Sure you can. Do you want to?”

“No. I have some things to do too. Will you come and pick me up at three.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t mind if I play badly?”

“Not at all. I’ll bring a lot of balls. I don’t care how you play.”

I got up. I bent and kissed her forehead. She took my hand, and she got up, and she and the cat came to the door with me when I left.

I came back at three. She had on a white polo shirt with green trim on the collar, white ducks, and tennis shoes.

“Don’t you want to wear shorts?” I said.

“No,” she said. She looked sort of bashful. My legs are too fat. Flabby.”

“You’re crazy. Your legs are beautiful. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone who has as nice as legs as you. Put on some shorts. Get some sun on them.”

“No thank you,” she said.

“Okay,” I said.

I looked at her racquet she had. It was an old Donnay, the kind that Borg had played with. It was definitely outdated. It was made of wood. And it had the long grip on the handle, good for twohanders.

“Are you a two-hander?” I said.

“No.”

She picked up her racquet and out we went. I’d looked around for the cat.

“Where’s Mimi?” I said.

“Oh, she’s out. You like her?”

“Yes.”

We got in the car. Blackie’s seats are black leather. She looked lovely sitting there. We drove up to my place. I parked in the drive. We walked up to the courts which are on top of the garages.

Frankly, I didn’t expect anything from her. That’s why I brought a hamper of balls. At least I’d be able to hit a lot of balls to her whether she hit them back or not. I didn’t think I could hit a ball very well with the racquet she was using.

I was standing a couple of feet behind my baseline. She was over there roughly on her own baseline, facing square towards me just like she should be.

I hit her a slow soft ball deep to her and slightly to her forehand, so all she had to do was get set slightly and she had an easy forehand. She stepped to the side, bent her knees, and stepped into a tremendous forehand. The ball went past me head high and hit the

fence behind me. Her form on the shot was picture perfect. This wasn't someone who had taken up the game yesterday. This girl had played a lot of tennis. I hit her another ball. This time I put a little more into it. She bent her knees, moved right into the ball, and hit a fine forehand with plenty of pace on it right back to me. We had a long rally. She hit the ball beautifully with a lot of pace. She had a classic forehand.

I hit a few to her backhand. Same thing. She had a classic hard backhand. She got low and leaned into the ball with her knees well bent for power. She had a beautiful game. She was fun to play against.

We met at the net. She had a little perspiration on her forehead. Her eyes were happy.

"I didn't know you could play so well. You can really play."

"When I was a teenager, I was number sixteen in France."

"I believe it," I said. "Why don't you play all the time?"

"My boyfriend didn't want me to."

"But why? That's insane. You play so well."

"I think he was jealous."

We played for about forty minutes. Then she was rather tired because she hadn't played in so long. And she wasn't used to working out so hard. Also, I didn't want her to get a blister on her hand, so she would have to interrupt her playing until it healed.

I drove her home.

two

The next few weeks were the most wonderful of my life. Would it be wrong to say she blossomed under my hands or under my guidance? Every day we played tennis. And every day I slept at her house. In my life I have never felt so totally fulfilled. Her face started getting a little browner. I noticed she laughed a lot more. Her game was getting better. She started to hone in.

After Henrietta and I had been playing for a few days, I called Ben Ripley. Ben was seventy-something. He'd been Jasper Kyle's doubles partner. He lived one door away from Jasper at Sea Bluff. His condo also overlooked the ocean.

Ben was a millionaire. When I first met him, I didn't think I liked him. He had what could easily be interpreted as a disdainful streak in his nature. It all depended on whom he was around.

But we became best friends. We played tennis all the time. I sold him his condo at Sea Bluff. He and his wife, Victoria, bought it for three hundred and fifty thousand. Prices went to five hundred thousand in little over a year from when they bought it.

For years we hung around together. We played tennis all day long. He put me in touch with several people who made big purchases from me. We had a few blow ups. One was interesting enough.

Ben was about five eleven. Probably he used to be six foot. I've seen pictures of him when he was young. He was an extremely hand

some man. He was of the Errol Flynn era.

Ben's upper leg structure was massive with muscle. They were athlete's legs. I've never seen legs more heavily muscled. He had the legs of an athlete. At one time he had been the seventh ranked tennis player in the world. I first met him when he was sixty-five and I was in my forties. We had some tremendous matches. They lasted hours. He was by far the superior player. But I could run down shots and he could not run so well anymore. And we had great sets. His face was tanned and weather beaten from the sun.

Ben and I were up at the Olympic. He'd won the first set, I'd won the second, and we were dead even in the third, 5-5. and I was serving.

I've got a nothing serve. I've probably never made more than a couple of aces all the years I've played. Mostly I served deep in the corner to Ben's backhand on the ad court and down the service line to his backhand on the deuce court. Now and then I'd hit a serve to his forehand so he couldn't totally get set on his backhand and whack the ball down the sideline so I wouldn't even have a play on it. He'd already done that about thirty times in this match.

He had the most beautiful classic shots really. He barely looked like he was hitting the ball but it would come over with tremendous depth, pace, and direction. And he was great at moving in behind his good shots and coming to the net.

He was wearing those old yellow flannel shorts that he had and a white T-shirt and a damned red baseball hat. I could see his big old huge brown legs over there. And I wanted to beat him so bad. I wanted to go upstairs to the bar and slam home about ten cold Buds. I was hot as hell and I was frustrated trying to put him away.

It was my ad. I served one deep but not too hard to his backhand corner. He moved around it easily, took it with his forehand, and ripped it down the line out of reach from me,

I didn't say, "Nice shot!" He just moved back over to the deuce court.

I served down the service line to his backhand. He moved on it with his backhand, hit a nice shot down the middle, and came to the net, and I hit a perfect lob to the backhand corner. He couldn't get it.

My ad. I served down the service line to his forehand. I tricked him a little, because he was playing over to the backhand corner. He hit a fairly weak return to my forehand, and I pisted a tremendous forehand shot deep to the backhand corner, and he got to it barely, but his return went into the net.

My game 6-5.

He tied me up on his service. And he called for a tie breaker.

We were five all in the breaker. We'd been out on the court for a couple of hours. We'd changed sides at 4-2 my favor and he'd caught me, I was looking into the sun now, but it wasn't too bad.

We were playing on court one and there were some tables and chairs at the side of the court, and a couple of old people had sat down and were watching us play. Lucky for them they weren't making any noise, because Ben would have stopped play and gone

over and sworn at them. That stuff never bothered me. But etiquette definitely had to be observed when Ben Ripley was on the court.

I was playing very conservatively, hitting deep, but more or less returning the ball right back to Ben and letting him see what he could do with it. My balls were going way over the top of the net and landing almost on the baseline.

He teed off on a forehand. I was playing almost five feet behind the baseline. Here comes his ball. This sucker may go out. I watched it hit. It was out by a few inches.

“Out!” I screamed. And I did not play the ball.

I could see the pained look on his face. He walked up to the net.

He says, “You call that ball out?”

I didn’t go to the net. I said, “Ben, the ball wasn’t out by much, but it was out.”

“You must have wonderful eyesight to call them that close,” he said.

“I can call them closer than that,” I said. “That wasn’t a hard call at all.” He went back to get ready for my serve.

We had this damned long rally. And then he hit another ball out almost the same place he hit the last one. “Out!” I screamed.

I’d won the breaker 7-5. We always played for about ten a set, so I was up ten for the day.

Ben had this incredulous look on his face. “Are you sure the ball was out?”

“It was out, Ben.”

We were standing over by the old folks now who were sitting in the shade under one of the table umbrellas. “How far was it out?” he said.

I moved my thumb and first finger apart making the figure of an open clamp. “About that far,” I said, “not much.”

“Well, maybe you’d like to have that on the end of your dick?”

If there’s one thing I detest it’s anyone questioning calls I give him. If I can’t tell, I call the ball in. If I’m turned around and I have to call the ball by feel, I call it in. Even Ben used to say that I was always giving Jasper good calls on the balls that were clearly out. It was because I couldn’t see them or was guessing so I always called them good, automatically.

I don’t cheat. So when someone questions my calls it doesn’t take much to get me mad. I was hot. I was tired. Ben had just questioned me twice on my calls, and he showed no respect for the old folks—who if truth be known were probably enjoying our dialogue more than they had our match. Somehow I never thought of Ben as old. I don’t know how I thought of him

“No!” I wouldn’t like to have it, but I’ll show you what I think of your remark.”

I’d just bought this Prince graphite ninety. And I’d just got it strung with reverse twist gut. The whole thing cost about two hundred and forty bucks. I walked a little way off

from Ben and the old people. And I too the racquet back over my head like I was going to serve the cannon ball, and I smashed it down with all my might on the concrete apron. The blow crumpled the frame, and I dumped the thing in a big barrel there where you throw used balls and ball containers. Ben was stunned. He knew how much I liked that racquet.

“Your ball was out!” I screamed, and I walked off to the parking lot and got in Blackie and drove home. I wasn’t home for more than twenty minutes. I was upstairs sitting at the counter by the kitchen drinking a cold Bud out of the can, reflecting on life. The phone rang.

“Charles, Ben Ripley. Listen I can’t apologise enough for what I said and the way I acted on the court just now. I’m going to buy you a new racquet.

“I don’t know what gets into me that makes me act that way. I know that you of all people don’t give bad calls. Come on over here, let me buy you lunch, and accept my apology.”

“You don’t have to buy me a new racquet. I got another one. I accept your apology. And I shouldn’t have acted like that myself.”

“Charles! you had every right to!”

“I’ll be over for lunch. I think what it is both of us just want to win so much.”

“I couldn’t agree with you more.”

That was Ben. I really liked him. And he really liked me. But we frequently got into debates and arguments. But somehow the fires always got put out. Down deep—crochety and occasionally obscene—Ben was a decent, generous person.

I phoned him. “Ben, I’ve met this new girl. I want you to meet her. I know you are going to love her.”

“Charles! Anyone you like I know I’ll like. What’s her name?”

“Henrietta.”

“Henrietta?”

“She’s French. She’s so sweet. You’ll love her. And she can play tennis. She hasn’t played for a long time, but she hits the ball a ton. I can’t wait ’till you meet her. You’ll love her.”

“Bring her over to Sea Bluff . We’ll hit together.”

“What time?”

“Four.”

“See you then.” I hung up the phone. I phoned Henrietta.

“Charles?”

Every time I phoned her she always said my name as a question even though she knew who it was. “Yep, it’s me.”

“How did your day go?”

“Ça va, et tu?”

“Ça va.”

“Listen, I got an old friend of mine I want you to meet. He was one of the great tennis players. He was the doubles’ partner of Jasper Kyle. He lives over at Sea Bluff. We’ll drive over there and play.”

“I can’t play.”

“You play great. He’s going to love you. Everyone loves you.”

“I can’t play.”

“I’m coming over about quarter to four. Be ready.” I hung up the phone. I couldn’t wait. At quarter to four, I went over to her house. There she was waiting and ready to go. She still wouldn’t wear shorts. She claimed her legs were too flabby. She was wearing white ducks, a polo shirt with green trim on the collar, and white canvas tennis shoes. Her arms were slim and brown. She had on a ladies’ Rolex with the gold and silver band and she had a thin gold chain around her neck. She had her racquet and Mimi was standing next to her. I loved to look at her eyes, so brown so beautiful, happy and sad. In them you saw the end of the world and forever.

When I was ten or eleven I went to summer camp at Lake Tahoe. Lake Tahoe was pristine pure then. There were very few homes and hardly any gambling. You could put your sleeping bag on any beach. I’d say we were about forty kids, boys and girls. We were at our camp in the forest. There was this kid, Alan Beck, a year older than I was. He was mean as hell, and when the councilors or Mrs. Barkley weren’t around, he took great joy in bullying me. I detested him. But he could play the violin like a champ.

It was about three in the afternoon, and Mrs. Barkley asked him to play. For once we were all silent. He was playing the violin, some song. It wasn’t “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” but some old classical song. All you could hear in that great evergreen forest of pines was Alan playing his song. Pretty soon out of the forest and into the clearing where we were sitting about forty yards from us, a doe and her fawn appeared. They were listening to the music. Alan kept playing. And they stayed until he stopped. Then they went back into the forest. Henrietta was listening to my song. It were as if someone had been cruel to her or had hurt her and she had been afraid to come out. Now she was coming out.

She sat in the car very quiet. Blackie’s seats were black leather. She looked like an angel visiting a coal mine. She sat very straight. She probably had the best posture of anyone I’ve ever known. She never slumped. She looked like a little cadet. And I don’t know why I use “little”. She wasn’t little. She was a good five feet seven, and she wasn’t at all light. I think I say “little” because she seemed so young to me. So young and vulnerable. She seemed like a big kid.

Ben was waiting on the bench of court one. Court one is right by the office of Sea Bluff. There’s the office. Then there’s a big room with a lot of sofas and chairs and tables where there’s a library of books that people who live at Sea Bluff have contributed, both pocket and hard cover, and anyone can take a book he wants, keep it or return it. There is always

a big variety of books there. Ben was sitting on the big wide green bench by the side of the court. He stood as we approached.

Ben looked nice. I could see he was freshly shaven. Sometimes he would walk around with a stubble for days, and he looked like a character actor for *Treasure of Sierra Madre*. He had on nice white flannel shorts and a purple tennis shirt.,

When he saw Henrietta, this nice kindly smile came over his face. I could tell he really liked the way she looked. You could never tell how Ben was going to react to people. He could be a real bastard. But I could tell right away that he was going to like Henrietta, and that made me happy.

“Ben, I’d like you to meet my friend Henrietta. Henrietta Maritain. Henrietta, please meet Ben Ripley.”

She went right up to him and extended her hand which he took and I’ll be darned if she didn’t do sort of a little curtsey. I’d never seen that before. I loved it. And the way she did it wasn’t phony, it was the most natural thing in the world. Ben’s eyes looked so kindly and happy when he held her hand. “We going to play some tennis, Ben? Henrietta can play.”

She sort of blew out her cheeks and said, “No. I cannot play.” We didn’t pay any attention to her.

“I’m sure she can play from what you’ve told me, Charles. You were ranked in France?” he said to her.

“That was when I was a teenager,” she said.

“It’ll come back to you,” Ben said. “Charles and I’ll get you in shape.”

“Why don’t you guys just go ahead and hit, Ben, she’s got a terrible racquet. Do you mind if she uses one of yours? I think she’d play well with your racquet.”

Ben had three Wilson wide bodies, the 120’s. I was using a Prince 90 which I didn’t think would be as good for her as Ben’s racquet. “Good idea.” Ben said. “Here you go.” Ben opened two containers of Penns.

They went out on the court. Ben sailed a high soft one to her, and she whanged it back about a hundred miles an hour. Ben laughed and said, “Great hit.”

It was fun to watch them play. If there ever was a classic player in this world it was Ben. Text book shots. Everything he did was picture perfect. And Henrietta the same. They could have made a film of them called, “How The Game Should Be Played.”

I just sat there on the green bench where I’d seen so many great matches played, mostly involving Jasper Kyle. Henrietta was trying pretty hard, and she played great. Ben started to move her around a little, moving her a little wide to the forehand and then a little wide to the backhand, so she had to do a little running, that sort of thing. They just rallied. They didn’t play a game. After about a half hour, Henrietta said she was tired. “You have a wonderful game,” Ben said to her.

“Ben, can you believe she hasn’t played in years?”

“That’s a shame. But you’re going to start playing now.”

“Henrietta, do you mind if Ben and I play a couple of sets?”

“No, that’s fine. I’ll walk around.”

Ben and I played, and during the course of the sets I looked around to see where she’d gone. She was over by the side of court two where there is a lawn and she was lying on her back looking up at the sky. She was tired. She tried so hard. I loved her.

When we left, Henrietta kissed Ben on the cheek. A big warm smile came over his face. One of the happiest things in life is to see two people you like like each other. Ben was about seventy-two. I’ve seen all the pictures of him with famous actors. He’d been a handsome man. And he’d been one of the greatest tennis players in the world.

I don’t know if this is right, but Ben hated getting old. I knew it. It frustrated him not to be able to run to get balls that a year before he’d gotten easily. It frustrated the hell out of him. Being with Henrietta seemed to make him young again. It was happening in front of me.

She and I drove home. I reached over and held her hand. “Did you like Ben?”

“Oh yes.”

“He sure likes you. You played great.” She leaned over and kissed my cheek too.

It was morning at Henrietta’s. I’d gotten up, showered, shaved, and had tea and bread and butter and jam with her. As usual there was a full setting for each of us at each chair. We ate at the dining room table in the big front room off the kitchen. I looked at the Audobon paintings while I drank tea. After that I went over and sat on the couch.

I was reading a book about the French Revolution. The sliding glass door to the patio was wide open. It was a lovely California morning. I could hear a lawn sprinkler going on somewhere. The cat, Mimi, had come in and was sitting next to me.

I was reading for quite awhile, wishing Louis XVI had been a little more forceful and ingenious in his will to rule. I hadn’t seen or heard Henrietta for a while. I put the book down, marking my place, and went into the bedroom where we slept. She wasn’t there. Then I walked to the other end of the house, to the bedroom that was just there as you entered the house, the one that’s bathroom I liked to use to shower in the morning. Henrietta was lying on top of the bed on her back perfectly still. She was lying on top of the coverlet. She had on her-panties and some sort of sleeveless t-shirt affair. She looked sad. I sat down on the bed besides her. “Are you okay?” She turned her head away from me. I became concerned. “Henrietta, what is wrong? She said nothing. I could see her eyes were moist.

“Henrietta, what is wrong? Have I done something? Tell me. I don’t know what I have done wrong. If it’s me. Is it something else? Are you worried about something?”

She said to the side of the room, facing away from me, “You don’t love me. You don’t want me.”

“Don’t be crazy. I love you madly. I love you. I love you.”

“You don’t want to be with me.”

“I am with you. I’m here. I’m just reading a book. I like to read. I’m right in the next room with Mimi.”

“You like Mimi more than me.”

“Don’t be insane. What is this?” She was quite rigid with her arms down to her sides. “Rape me.”

“How can I rape you if you want me to rape you. If you want me to rape you, it wouldn’t be rape.”

I tried to hold her hand. She pulled her hand away. I leaned over and kissed her tears.

“I love you very very much. I just like to be alone sometimes. But I would never want to be without you.”

I went back to the couch and read my book and sat next to the cat. Later on in the afternoon, she got dressed and she came out of the bedroom and she said, “I do not want to bother you. I do not want to be a burden to you.”

I made her come and sit beside me. I kissed her. She got up. She did some things around the kitchen. Then we went to play tennis. And she was fine.

I’d heard so many stories about Ben Ripley, the ladies’ man tennis pro of Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and the nation, that I was not at all surprised when he started going around a little with this Vietnamese girl. This friend of mine and I used to call her the Vietnameezer. Not to her face. Her name was Susan Lee. And unfortunately Ben was smitten by her. The old stallion was going to jump over the fence into the mare’s pasture one more time.

I had some weak forebodings Ben’s wife might find out, but those forebodings were, as I say, weak. Ben slept in one bedroom of the condo at Sea Bluff, the best one, the one with the glass sliding door onto the balcony, the bedroom that overlooked the ocean.

Victoria’s bedroom was much smaller and at the front of the condo. But she didn’t care.

Nothing would ever happen as long as no one ever told Victoria about the Vietnameezer, and that was unlikely. Susan was an attractive girl. I liked her okay.

Ben was always having me pick her up at this little apartment she lived at in Oceanside. I was what you call the beard when the three of us went to a restaurant. Ben and Victoria had a house in Palm Springs, and even in the summer Victoria was there a lot.

Victoria was in Palm Springs when Henrietta decided to invite Ben over to dinner. “Ask Ben and Victoria.” She pronounced Victoria with sort of a lisp. Phictoria.

“Victoria’s in Palm Springs.” I said.

“Just invite Ben then.”

“Okay.” When I saw Ben I told him.

“Great,” he said, “I’ll come.” Then he thought a moment. “I think I’ll bring Susan.”

“Fine,” I said. I felt a little tremor of doubt, because I knew Henrietta. liked Victoria. I hadn’t told her about Susan Lee, but she was hardly provincial about matters like that. When I saw Henrietta, I said that Ben wanted to bring a date.

She seemed reflective. Her eyebrows went up a little when I told her. “Who is she?” she said. “Well, she’s this girl named Susan Lee. She’s Vietnamese.”

Henrietta got a really stern look on her face. “No Vietnamese will come in this house.”

“Henrietta, I already told him it was okay. I was sure you wouldn’t mind. Just this once. It won’t happen again.”

“No Vietnamese in this house.”

“I don’t know what I’m going to say to Ben.

“No—“

“Okay, but he won’t understand.”

I was secretly amused. Evidently Henrietta was from that part of French society that didn’t think too much of the old Vietnamese, or, for that matter, the old Arabs, or the old Algerians. As it turned out—luckily for me—Ben had to cancel anyhow, before I had to explain to him Henrietta’s attitude towards the Vietnamese.

We were always welcome at Ben’s house. Ben liked me very much, about as much as you can like another man without being a fruit. He adored and loved Henrietta. Her presence thrilled him. I could actually see his eyes change when she came into a room.

As I say, we were always welcome to his house. I used to just drop in on him or him and Victoria. Henrietta insisted on phoning before she went over. I had to have permission. Ben’s answer was always the same. “Charles! Why phone? Come on over. You’re always welcome. You can come over here when Victoria and I aren’t here for Christ’s sake. Of course you’re welcome, buddy.”

“Well, you know Henrietta. She wants you to know we’re coming. It’s okay, isn’t it?”

“Charles!”

“She wants to go swimming.”

“Bring your suits and you can change and shower in my room.”

I hadn’t seen Henrietta swim before. The ocean’s a different thing than a pool. A lot of people are intimidated by the ocean, and rightfully so. If you’re not used to it, the surf can be upsetting. I was one of the best long distance swimmers in the world, but I had enormous respect for the ocean.

Henrietta never went anywhere without taking the person she was visiting a gift. She took Ben and Victoria some Brie and a bottle of dry French wine. She kissed Ben and she kissed Victoria. Ben showed her into his bedroom bathroom so she could get changed.

She came out in a one piece silver lamé swim suit. It looked like something Esther Williams might have worn. It was absolutely beautiful on her. I got changed and we went to the stairs that led to the beach. The wide wooden stairs went down the front of the bluff. It was about eighty to a hundred feet down the face of the bluff. The beach was rocky. Millions of rocks had been thrown up by a storm or a tidal event, so that the shore was embraced by a necklace of rocks. It was pretty sandy though when you waded into the water, but I was always careful wading out, so I didn’t stub my toe on a submerged rock I couldn’t see.

So old Henrietta got ahead of me, and she swam right through the damned surf like a damned dolphin. I didn't think that she would go past wading. But I could see she was an excellent swimmer and that she had been in the ocean a lot.

I was watching her, and then when I was far out chest high I lifted my feet from the sand myself, and I began swimming through the surf also. She was a little ahead of me, about twenty yards and to my right. There were some other swimmers near us but not as far out as we were and they were to the left. One was a young man.

I looked up to see where Henrietta was, and she had let the top of her swimming suit fall off. Her swimsuit had straps so it had not been done by a wave. All the young man had to do was turn his head and he would have seen her, but he didn't.

I wanted to scream at her: Put your suit on! This isn't France. But then I would have alerted others to her condition. She was laughing. How could I get mad at her?

I made an imaginary movement as if I were slipping a strap band on my shoulder. Her eyes laughed and she laughed more. Finally she put her suit back on and I felt more comfortable. And we swam and we caught waves for a long time.

We had dinner with Ben and Victoria. Victoria didn't like too many people, especially women, but she liked Henrietta. Henrietta looked so brown and fresh, having been in the ocean. And her eyes were so lively. She was just like a happy little kid. She knew that everyone she was around loved her and appreciated her and she was safe and having fun. We walked to the house. And she showered in Ben's shower. Then I did.

We started going swimming at night at the nice rectangular pool right across the courtyard from her apartment. The pool looked nice at night with the lights on inside the pool and the spider web signs and designs that the lights made on the sides of the pool. Henrietta always swam real fast. She had a nice little crawl and a good flutter kick. I used to swim behind her underwater and watch her feet kick myriad bubbles filled with light as she swam.

She wore slippers but I just walked barefoot across the courtyard back to the house. She had this thing about taking your shoes off when you came into the house. Not if she didn't know you. Not if you were a guest. But if she knew you. She was always trying to get me to take off my Jack Purcells and walk around in my stocking feet. I wouldn't do it.

Then she was always dumping Johnson's powder in her flat shoes when she went out. I thought it was a good idea. I sort of liked it. When we came back from swimming I'd taken about one step into the apartment on the hardwood floor, she put her hand against my chest to keep me from going further. She looked at me. "Let me see the fit," she said.

"You want me to throw a fit?" I said.

"Let me see the fit," she repeated. I got the idea. I turned around and lifted up one foot like I was a damned horse getting shod. She pulled off a leaf from my foot that I didn't know was there. I put my foot down and lifted the other one up. She didn't see anything. I put my foot down and went into the front bathroom and took a shower. I got dressed and came out. She was dressed. "What do you want for dinner?" she said.

"What had you planned on cooking?"

She looked at me inquiringly. “You want a casserole?”

“I’m casseroled out. You have one.”

“What would you like?”

“How about a hamburger steak and a Bud?”

“Okay, you have to go to the store. I don’t have meat. I don’t have the Budweiser.”

“I’ll go. You want anything from the store?”

“No.”

“Ice cream?”

“No.”

“Chocolate?”

“Okay.” She loved chocolate. She couldn’t turn it down. She was a chocolate freak.

“You want a salad?”

“I’d love one.”

“I’ll make it while you’re gone.”

I got home. She salted the frying pan, and heated it up, then she made a steak from the ground sirloin, and put it in the pan. I watched her. She always made the best salads. She peeled the tomatoes. And the dressing was one she made from scratch. She never would have used anything store bought and already made.

I pulled her chair out for her, seated her, seated myself, put my napkin in my lap, waited for her to begin her salad, I selected the right fork, and bit into a crispy green oiled tang of lemon vinegared piece of Romaine lettuce, had a big swig of Bud, looked at her brown eyes, and she said, “Do you like the salad?”

“Yes,” I said as the lemony taste of the dressing and the bubbly frothy cold taste of the Bud went home to Mama, and I looked at her lovely lovely refined face that centuries and centuries of refined breeding in the south of France in good times and in bad had formed into so lovely a face that she broke my heart each time I looked at her.

I was at Henrietta's house a great deal but I never looked through the closets or the doors. Maybe I would have had I been alone but she was always there with me, I had no great curiosity about what was in her closet. I had this habit about wearing out the T-shirts or polo shirts I wore. I’d wear them until I had little holes in them. I think I sort of liked them that way. Don’t ask me why. Another idiosyncrasy. I had many. Anyhow, I liked to wear my T-shirts and polo shirts so long, and they’d been washed so many times, little holes would start to form on the fabric in the front. One of my clients told me about a favorite La Coste shirt I had that the crocodile wanted to leave it was so worn out. Holes would start to form under the arms of the shirt and down the sides too. Henrietta noticed these shirts with great disapproval.

We were sitting in the living room one morning and she looked at me and she said, “Let me give you some shirts. Your shirt is so worn out.”

“I like these kind with the round neck,” I said. Mine was from a client in Oklahoma, who was in the car business, and it had his name—COOPER—written across the front. It had little holes in the front of it. With this shirt I was wearing some expensive all cotton tennis shorts from Polo that if you didn’t know you would probably say I paid five bucks for.

“I have some shirts like that,” Henrietta said. They’ll fit you. They were my old boyfriend’s.”

I was sort of skeptical that I would like them. And it set my mind to thinking also about her old boyfriend. He never came up in any of our conversations. She never talked about him. I never asked about him.

She went into the closet. She came back and she had a nice white crew neck T-shirt stretched out in both hands. It had a picture of a race car in blue on the front and on either side of the race car were blue checkered flags. I usually liked plain ones, but I sort of liked the shirt. “Try it on. Let me throw the old one away.”

I tried the new one on. It fit perfectly. I gave her my old one. She promptly threw it in the trash. “You want more of them?” she said.

I could see she was happy I liked the new shirt and that I let her throw the old one away. I could be obstinate about keeping old things and not accepting new ones. “Whose are these shirts?”

“They belong to my old boyfriend.”

“Won’t he miss them?”

“He does not care. Take them.” She went in the closet and got three more. I took them. I liked them.

“He has his things here?” I said.

“Yes,” she said.

“Well, won’t he come back for them?”

“Maybe not. He went to France because of law suits. He may not be able to come back for a long time.”

“Are the law suits serious?”

“I think so.”

“How many does he have?”

“Eighty-nine.”

“That’s a lot.”

“I know.”

“When he was here weren’t you with him?”

“Yes, but I didn’t sleep with him. He slept in the other bedroom.”

“What did he do?”

“I don’t know. I think he played with himself.” She walked into the bedroom where I took showers in the morning. She looked behind an easy chair and she pulled out a rolled up picture of a girl in a bathing suit, as if that substantiated her point. I had no reason to doubt her. Her eyes were laughing. I started laughing. She joined me. We were having a good laugh at his difficulty.

“What’s his name?” I said.

“Alexander.” I took the shirts and went home.

We were lying on the bed in the bedroom where I took my showers in the morning. Henrietta had the sheets of the other bed in the laundry in the garage. She put freshly washed and dried sheets on the bed every day. The cover and the top sheet of the bed was pulled to the side and Henrietta was lying on top of the bed naked. She was on her stomach. I was sitting propped by big pillows against the headboard. I was wearing boxer shorts. I looked down at her long slim beautiful body. She was propped up on her elbows looking at me. I could see the areolas of her breasts. “You’ve got a great ass,” I said.

“You know what these boys in Spain said?” she said.

“No.”

“They said, ‘Esta niña tiene un coolo magnifico.’”

“They were right,” I said. I moved down by her side and leaned over and started kissing her back all over with little kisses. I kissed her on the small of her back. She looked around to look at me.

“Do you know what?” I said. “What?” “Usted es una reina por el pueblo y una puta por la casa.” (You are

a queen in town and a whore at home.)

She loved it. She started laughing. “Soy una reina por el pueblo pero una puta por la casa.”

I always had this idea I would gain my financial salvation through gambling. I hated real estate, and I wanted to get out of it by gambling successes. I didn’t get into any metaphysical explanations with old Henrietta. I just told her I wanted to go to the track and that I wanted her to come with me.

She was damned skeptical, but she was generous, and with the couple hundred dollars that she had to help me with on each fore— we only went a few times—she couldn’t see too much harm done. But she had no hope in it at all. I, however, was a nervous though true believer. Those scrambling black, sorrel, bay, chestnut, and gray ponies were going to get me well.

I parked in the regular parking lot. It was somewhat of a walk to the track. Henrietta was wearing her low heeled or rather flat shoes and a long skirt and a dark sweater and I was pumping along in my Brooks Brothers racing jacket. I was happy with the joy that anticipates excitement and winning that only a degenerate gambler can know. But I got the impression that Henrietta was indulging me in something that she did not totally approve of.

As we walked along the route to the track we were joined by other people on their way too. I caught sight of a handsome curly haired man in a beautiful gray suit. It was Ricky Revel the maître d' and owner of one of the most expensive French restaurants in the area. Ricky was quite a devotee of the track. I liked him a lot. He and I had done quite a bit of business over a period of years. I was glad to see him. "Ricky!" I said, "so good to see you." I stuck out my hand.

"Charles!" he said, shaking hands with me as we walked along.

I looked around for Henrietta. I was going to introduce her to Ricky. She was lagging behind some twenty yards. I walked along with Ricky for awhile, then I excused myself, saying that I had to meet someone. Ricky walked on, and I waited for Henrietta. "What is wrong with you?" I said. "I wanted you to meet someone, a good friend of mine. You would have liked him."

"He's French, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"He's a maître d', isn't he?"

"Yes."

"I wanted you to meet him."

"I think I've met him before."

"So, why don't you want to say hello?"

She just kept walking along. She didn't say anything. She could be that way. I was just slightly irritated with her. As irritated as I could get with her. "I don't understand why you don't want to say hello to someone."

"I just don't want all these French people to know my business," she said.

I didn't understand that. It was only later I began to make some sense of the situation.

Another time we went to the track. We went to The Turf Club. Henrietta knew some men who had a table and who were having lunch. The tables are nice at the Del Mar Turf Club with white table cloths and all the silverware and you are actually eating outside but you are under the high roof of the race track. The men had the look of great prosperity. And they made a big to do about seeing her. A couple of them had big cigars poking out of the breast pockets of their suit jackets.

She sat down with them for awhile while I stood to the side. They were obviously delighted to see her. She introduced me all around but it was somewhat apparent they had no great interest in me. We left after a few minutes. "Who are those people?" I asked her.

"The one man I was sitting next to is Jean Briand. The other two work for him. Jean Briand is very wealthy. He's Corsican. He lives in Scotsdale now."

"I thought you did not like French people to know your business. What change came over you?"

"He might move here. Maybe you can sell him something. Maybe I can get some business for you."

We walked over to the bar. She could be inscrutable.

I have been in love a few times in my life. In each love affair I have walked away badly shaken, badly scarred. The last girl I was in love with I never thought I would get over and I never did, but I also thought I would never fall in love again. I had to admit to myself I was falling in love with Henrietta.

When she left me a little note in my car one day which said, “Will you marry me in church?” I said to myself, “Why not?”

Jasper started having Monday night football at his house. Jasper remarried his second wife, Pearl, who twenty some years ago had given him a million dollars to get rid of him. She was the mother of all his children—Steven, Leslie, Ralph—everybody except Vernon, who was his first wife’s son. Pearl was worth about thirty-five million.

When Pearl first arrived from the East, she had a drinking problem and a smoking problem. She was also overweight. She’d drank and smoked to an astonishing degree. As a consequence of her drinking and smoking she spent quite a bit of time in a private room at Scripps Hospital in La Jolla. Jasper and I drove down to see her a few times.

Finally, after frequent bouts with booze and smoking, the doctor said that both or either would kill her. After a few more forays into smoking and drinking, she stopped. As she was a compulsive personality, she took up eating as a substitute in a big way. Already heavy, she got as big as a Sumo wrestler. A few times I helped her get up from the chair. It took all my strength, as I leaned north and she pulled south. “Thank-you, Charles,” she said, as she strode purposefully into her bedroom.

I don’t know who got her off the pot, but it wasn’t going to be me. Ghastly thought. It occurred to me that saying shit or get off the pot might not really apply to her. She might well do it and stay there. Pearl was nice to everyone. She gave her kids new B.M.W.’s or Lexus’s, whatever they wanted. She bought her maid a Mercedes convertible that was only a couple years old.

Later the maid was accused of stealing a couple hundred thousand from Pearl’s account, so Jasper fired her. Who knows. I myself always harbored the suspicion that Jasper himself took it for some reason. He was capable of it. Stuff like that he considered competition, and money was the end reward instead of a trophy. Besides, “What the hell,” he probably thought, “it’s all in the family.”

Jasper’s cousin Gertrude came to take the maid’s place. Maid is not really descriptive of the position, because they had a maid in addition to what Gertrude did. The maid was Celia, an attractive Mexican who drove a new B.M.W., and who called me Don Carlos. Gertrude was more like an amanuensis or a factotum or a major domo. Who the hell knew? Gertrude had her own home in Palos Verdes, and most weekends she went back there.

Pearl took the bedroom that Jasper used to sleep in, the good one next to the balcony and overlooking the ocean. Jasper moved to the other bedroom at the front of the house, but when Gertrude came down she took that bedroom, so Jasper moved up to the little loft where his ex son-in-law, Dan, slept.

In roughly 1600 square feet you had four people, two of whom had a net worth of roughly forty million. Jasper didn't even have his own bathroom. It didn't bother him a bit. Dan, his ex son-in-law was a thin handsome boy. I say boy. He was somewhere between thirty and forty. But he reminded you of a boy. He had definitely never grown up, Maybe Jasper and I hadn't either.

Dan was frequently drunk and he was a ne'r-do-well. He'd met Jasper's daughter in Florida. They had a daughter who was about sixteen now. Dan stayed married to Jasper's daughter Leslie for about ten years,

For awhile Dan lived with Jasper's son Steven, who had a condo in the same place where I lived, Casitas at La Costa. But something went wrong there, and next thing you know Dan's living with Jasper.

When they had the maid who didn't sleep in like Gertrude, Dan slept up in the loft by himself, but now that Gertrude had the other bedroom—except for weekends—Jasper slept up there with him. They had two narrow little beds. It was the weirdest arrangement.

One time when Dan was drunk someplace he fell down a flight of stairs and hit his head and it permanently damaged a nerve around his left eye so that his eye drooped; also he lost the muscle there so that his eye would sometime blink or open and close without Dan being able to control it. It wasn't funny, but it was. Sometimes when he was talking to Jasper or being lectured by Jasper, his eye would start winking. More than once I've heard Jasper ask him, "Are you winking at me?" Dan would say, "No." It was damned funny.

Dan was sort of Jasper's flunky. Jasper could be extremely abusive, and if you didn't know the situation it seemed bad. But Dan didn't work, he frequently slept until twelve or one in the afternoon, and he had a Mercedes convertible.

"Dan! Where the hell is Dan! He's never fucking here when I want him. He knows this is Monday night football. He knows he's supposed to get some chicken from the Colonel. Why can't he do anything for me!"

I looked at him with a smile on my face.

"It isn't goddamned funny! I'm going to throw his ass out of here and you'll be next to go!"

"I can leave now."

"Sit down. You know I don't mean you. But he just gets me so damned mad."

"Hi, Charles," said Pearl. She was sitting in the big white chair in front of the big screen television. I went over and gave her a kiss, "Where's Hugo!" Jasper screamed.

"Don't talk so loud," said Pearl.

"I'm sorry, dear," said Jasper. Then he screamed, "Where the fuck is Dan!" Just then Dan strolled in. "Where have you been? You know it's Monday night. You know we want to eat, You know I want you here. Why weren't you here?"

"I had to go to the library to get some videos for Pearl."

"You always got an excuse."

“That’s right, Jasper, I sent Dan to get some videos,” Pearl said. Dan got a justified look on his face.

“All right you’re here now. But try to do something for me once in awhile. I ask so very little of you. Try to please me once in awhile or I’ll have to throw you out!”

“What do you want?”

“I want you to go to the Colonel’s and get some chicken.”

“Yum, yum, yum,” said Pearl.

“Get a bunch of chicken. I want two thighs for me separate. Some mash potatoes and gravy. Get some corn. Get some cole slaw. some biscuits. You’d better go now. And don’t take all day.”

Jasper took his big roll out of his pants pocket and peeled a ten and two twenties off the top. “That should be enough.”

“Oh, that’s more than enough,” said Dan.

“Good. Bring back the change,” said Jasper.

Out went Dan. In came Hugo.

“It’s good of you to come, Hugo. Glad you could come. Why didn’t you wait ‘till the game was over to see the game?” said Jasper.

Hugo didn’t pay any attention to him. “Who’d you take in the game?” he said to Jasper.

“I got a hundred on the Packers. I gave three, You like it?”

“I love it,” said Hugo. “Can I have ten of it?”

“Okay, I’ll put you down for ten.”

“Can I have ten too, dear?” said Pearl.

“Okay, dear,” said Jasper.

“But why do we have to give three? Why don’t we get three? I don’t think that is fair,” said Pearl.

Jasper looked at the ceiling and rolled his eyes. He contained himself, though, and said, “The odds makers think the Packers are a little better, dear.”

“Oh.”

Even Pearl liked the games, though sometimes she tired of them and went into her bedroom to watch Jeopardy. Gertrude stayed up in the kitchen at the kitchen table. But she also had some of the Colonel.

You couldn’t drink around Pearl. But Jasper knew I liked to have a beer and he liked to have a few too, and he would get Dan aside and say, “Get some Buds for Charles and get some Becks for me.” And we’d go up on the porch and drink a few and Dan would have some too. Gertrude thought it was amusing.

One Sunday Jasper drank too many beers during the day because he just stayed in bed all day and watched the N.F.L, and he drank beers, quite a few of them as a matter of fact, so

the next day he had a little hang over, and he decided there would be no more drinking, but he thought Dan and I might be up to something, so when I'd leave the bedroom to go into the kitchen I'd turn around and there he would be in those black silk pajamas. He looked like a Viet Cong. "What are you doing, Charles?"

"I'm getting a piece of bread. I'm hungry."

"Okay. Nothing to drink though?"

"No."

"Okay."

"Okay."

Dan to me looked as if he had been bombed all day. He'd got an infection on his leg, and he had had to go to the doctor, which Jasper paid for, for antibiotics, and Dan claimed he was heavily medicated. Somehow Jasper did not pick up on it that Dan was bombed. Dan was supposed to get the chicken, but he claimed he was too heavily medicated to drive. Hugo, who'd had a drinking problem, I noticed was looking at Dan suspiciously.

Jasper said, "Charles, you drive Dan to get the Colonel's. Here's the money, Dan." So off Dan and I went. "You're bombed out of your mind," I told him.

"I know it," he said.

On the way back, Dan said he wanted to stop at the gas station there by Sea Bluff to pick up some beer. I stopped and he bought a quart of Bud.

"Is that all you got," I said.

"I got some other stuff at the house," he said.

"I imagine," I said.

Everyone was happy to see us, especially Pearl. We were all eating the chicken. Dan had brought Pearl and Jasper their trays. Then he comes down from the kitchen and he says right in front of everyone, "Charles, do you want a glass of water?" He had this big huge glass of clear liquid with ice in it. "I hate water," I said.

He shoved it right under my nose. It had to be pure gin and maybe a little bit of seven up. I almost burst out laughing.

He sat right next to Jasper on the big white couch and drank the whole thing, got up, then went up to the loft and went to bed. Jasper said, "I guess Dan must be tired."

Pearl said, "Well, he is, Jasper. He's been running around doing things for me all day."

"That's good," Jasper said.

Pearl said, "I wish you wouldn't be so hard on him, dear." Jasper gave her an enigmatic look. I gave Hugo an enigmatic look, and Hugo unleashed a silent laugh.

Henrietta went to France. She told me she had to go back to see her mom and dad. I was not sad to see her go. I felt so sure of her. She wanted me to write her all the time. I told her I'd phone her. She gave me the telephone numbers—where she'd be and when, but she still insisted I write. I telephoned her all the time. I didn't write though. And finally

she told me I wouldn't be able to call her for awhile, but she would get hold of me. Then I stopped hearing from her. I was mystified. I didn't know what to make of it. After a couple months of not hearing from her, I gave up. I thought I would never hear from her again.

I was sitting out by the pool at Casitas one afternoon reading a book. I was pretty intent on the book. I didn't see her come in, because when I looked up from the book she was sitting in front of me in a deck chair very close to me, right in front of me. Her hair was done in a different way. Sort of fluffed up and soft around her face. She never wore it that way. I didn't say anything. "How are you?" she said with that French accent.

I just looked at her. Then I said, "What the hell happened to you? Where the hell have you been? Why did you stop writing? Why didn't you phone?"

"I couldn't."

"Why?"

"I am with Alexander."

"He beat the law suits?"

"Yes."

"You couldn't leave him?"

"I wanted to tell him and I couldn't."

"He's with you at the apartment?"

"Yes."

"Well, good luck to you."

"But I'm still in love of you."

"You have a nice way of showing it."

"I've been with him for seven years."

"I thought you didn't love him anymore. I thought you were leaving him."

"I want to but I couldn't. I will leave him. But give me a little time."

"You want me to wait?"

"Yes. I will see you as often as I can."

I didn't say anything. I would have been great in silent movies.

"I have to go now," she said. "I'll call you." She walked out of the pool.

"HELLO, CHARLES!" It was Jasper on the phone. The way he talked he didn't need a phone. His voice could have easily carried from La Jolla, which was where he was. I elevated the volume of my voice to meet his. "HELLO, JASPER!"

"Listen, Charles, I'm down here in La Jolla! I've got an appointment at two o'clock. It's ten after twelve now. Drive down here and meet me at the Torrey Pines. Should take you

twenty minutes to get here. I'll buy you lunch. Then I'll go to my appointment and you can be on your way."

"All right! How do I get there?"

"Okay! You go south on 5 till you get to Genese."

"Then do I go west?"

"No! You go right on Genese"

That was west. "I go right on Genese!"

"Right on Genese! Then you'll be going along. Then up the top of the hill. Then you get to the base of Genese, and then there's The Torrey Pines Inn. Should take you about twenty minutes. You'd better leave now! I'll be in the lobby."

"Where should we eat?"

"Maybe they have a place here. And if they don't, we'll drive someplace. Don't worry about it."

I went out and got in the car. It was a nice bright sunny day. I headed down La Costa Avenue along the lagoon—the bird hotel—and went south on 5. Then about twenty minutes later I came to Genese. I had a reputation for getting lost, but how could I miss on these directions?

I went up to the top of the hill and then down to the base of Genese, and I was looking for the Torrey Pines Inn or a sign that said Torrey Pines Inn. Genese was quickly becoming Torrey Pines Road, and you could go left or right on Torrey Pines Road. I went left. I found out there's quite a bit of traffic on that particular section of road and it's no place to dawdle along. There are three lanes going one way and three the other and a big traffic island in between and thousands of Eucalyptus all around and occasional glimpses of the old Pacific.

Well, no sign of the Torrey Pines Inn. Just thousands of medical buildings, including the Salk Institute, which is the reason I don't walk with a limp. Well, I came to a street called La Jolla Farms. It was a residential district with beautiful homes up the mountainside overlooking the ocean. I parked the car. I saw two older women walking by. I was going to ask them if they knew where the Torrey Pines Inn was, but I soon realized both of them were wearing head

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sets, Walkmen, one lady had an antennae coming out of her head. They wouldn't have heard me. They wouldn't have heard a diesel coming up behind them to flatten them.

I saw a young man, sweatshirt, basketball shoes, jeans walking along. "Do you know where Torrey Pines Inn is?"

He gave me a blank look. Then he said, "No."

I drove further down the block. Another young man was walking along. I stopped and rolled down the window. "Do you know where the Torrey Pines Inn is?"

"No."

I drove further. There was a mail jeep up ahead of me. I stopped the car behind it, got out, and walked around the side of the jeep. A young lady was the mail...I have to say mail driver. "Do you know where the Torrey Pines Inn is?"

She smiled. "Yes. You turn around, go back to Torrey Pines Road, turn left, and when you get to the signal that says Torrey Pines Road, you turn left and you turn left again after you turned left and there you are at the Inn."

"Thank-you."

I got in the car, turned around, went back to Torrey Pines Road, discovered that I could only go right because the traffic was one way and there was no break in the big traffic island that separated the southbound traffic from the northbound. Finally after about three miles I got to a place in the Eucalyptus trees where I could do a U, went all the way back a mile or so past where I'd originally turned, came to a signal where the street sign said Torrey Pines, turned left, and I went down into this huge big vacant place that was all dirt with about two hundred cars parked down there, and it said Hang Gliding on a building. I never imagined Hang Gliding was that popular.

I saw some hang glider types walking along, and I asked them, "Do you know where Torrey Pines Inn is?"

"Never heard of it," said one.

"Don't know it," said the other.

When I left the hang glider place, I had to turn right again, for a nice long foray amongst the eucalypti. I drove into this medical complex. I had to pay a quarter at a parking meter to park. I saw an old guard checking the meters. "Do you know where Torrey Pines Inn is?"

"Yeah. You're a couple miles from it. You go out here and you have to go right before you can turn back, but when you can make a U. hang a U, then come back by here and down from here about a mile under the underpass it'll say Golf Course. Turn in there and you are at the Inn."

I got lost a couple more times. One time I was headed back to 5, and I had to turn around. But by this time I didn't care if it took me ten years, I was going to get to the Inn. I knew Jasper would be gone. I finally pulled up there in front of the Inn. It was a rickety old place. I went in the restaurant. A lady hostess greeted me with a big menu in her hand. "Was Mr. Kyle here?" I asked her.

"Yes, he left about an hour ago. He said someone might be looking for him."

"Did he eat?"

"Yes."

"Did he have chicken pot pie and ice tea?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. Your hotel is hard to find."

"That's what some people tell us."

That night I went over to Jasper's. "Fine instructions you gave me."

He was sitting up in bed watching a basketball game. Pearl was down in the front room watching Wheel of Fortune.

"What do you mean 'fine instructions?' I gave you excellent instructions. I thought you decided not to come. What happened?"

"You want to know what happened?"

"Yes!"

He was very alert now. I could see he had been fairly lethargic like some sort of sport's zombie while he was watching basketball. But right in front of my eyes he was turning into some sort of meth amphetamine junkie who was in a bitter mood.

"I went down 5, south on 5 until I came to Geneva..."

"Genese."

"Genese. Then I took a right on Genese. I went up the hill and over the hill of Genese until I came to the base of Genese, and I started looking around for the Torrey Pines Hotel."

"I TOLD YOU TO TURN RIGHT!"

"YOU DID NOT! You said get to the base of Genese and there's the Torrey Pines Inn."

"I TOLD YOU TO TURN RIGHT! I DIDN'T SAY THE BASE OF GENESE. BASE ISN'T IN MY VOCABULARY!"

"Base was in your vocabulary this morning."

"I said GO right on 5. Go right on Genese. GO UP THE HILL.

GO DOWN THE HILL. TURN RIGHT, LOOK FOR THE TORREY PINES GOLF COURSE. AND THERE'S THE TORREY PINES INN."

I was starting to see little flecks of foam fly through the air as he screamed repeatedly the instructions he gave me. "ALL RIGHT. I guess I didn't follow your instructions too well."

"WOULD YOU STOP SCREAMING!" Pearl screamed from downstairs.

"YES," I screamed.

I told Jasper about my trip in search of the Inn. He started laughing.

"Did you ever get to the Inn?"

"Yes."

"Did they say that I was there?"

"Yes. I went in there, and the woman said you had chicken pot pie and ice tea. Let's go there tomorrow. I could find my way there in a blackout. I want to eat there every day."

From Jasper's I walked down to Ben Ripley's. There was just one townhouse in between Jasper's and Ben's. Ben was sitting up in bed with his old terrycloth bathrobe on watching an N.B.A. game.

"I just came from Jasper's. We were having a discussion."

"I'm glad I missed that," Ripley said.

"I wish I had," I said.

"What do you hear from Henrietta?"

"She's back."

"She's back. That's wonderful. Bring her over."

"There's a problem."

"What's that?"

"She came back, but it seems she's with her ex boyfriend, a French Count kind of guy."

Ripley gave me a serious look. "I'm sorry to hear that," he said.

"Me too," I said. "I'm sorry to hear that myself."

"Will she still be able to play tennis with us?" he said.

"I don't know," I said. "She told me about him before. I thought she broke up with him. He had to go back to France for some court appearances. It appears he got off. And she had lived with him for seven years, although they never got married, and now it seems she doesn't want to leave him right now, because she feels sorry for him or something. I guess she wants to see him get squared away." Ripley appeared to be pondering this statement without coming to any sort of conclusion. "That's too bad, Charles."

"Thanks," I said.

I watched the game with Ripley. Isiah Thomas was shooting well. And Lambier was being the bully, and also shooting some nice clean shots from outside.

I drove Blackie down La Costa Avenue, turned left on El Camino, went to Arenal, turned right, turned left on Estrella de Mar, drove about a half mile, turned left into the driveway that went to the Casitas and parked in the lower garage beneath the tennis courts. I walked to 1941 E. Alga Road and went into the door where I lived by myself. The place was decorated "The California Look" which meant lime green carpet and a green sofa and a white coffee table and a white dinning room table with white chairs.

You walked in and you were on a small landing and a few stairs leading upstairs to the living room, dinning room, kitchen, powder room and a few stairs leading down to the bedroom with a fireplace, a big walk in closet and a big bathroom.

I walked in and went to the refrigerator upstairs, grabbed a can of cold Bud and went to the window and looked out at the darkness and in the direction of across the golf course to the condo where Henrietta and Alexander were. I didn't want to think about that too much. I took a long drink of the beer. I thought about walking across the street and getting plowed at the Crazy Burro.

Instead, I went downstairs, brushed my teeth, and got in bed and read a great spy book by Somerset Maugham—Ashendon. It was a great book and I loved it—all about the hairless Mexican— and I wished I'd been able to meet Somerset Maugham. But when I shut off the lights my mind turned to Henrietta.

Sometimes I had the thought that if you met someone you loved, someone you felt comfortable with, someone with whom you finally felt complete, someone you might want to marry—if you weren't going to get to stay with her, if you weren't going to get to keep seeing her and being with her, maybe it would have been a hell of a lot better if you'd never met her in the first place, because before maybe you just felt incomplete, and you had a longing for you didn't know what, but now you felt actually complete, and you knew spe

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cifically whom you longed for and specifically who made you complete. You knew the individual, and if this were how it was going to be, maybe it was better before when at least your longings were more vague.

I'd seen a picture of Alexander on a side table in the living room of the Plaza de la Costa apartment, the apartment I used to think of as Henrietta's apartment and the one now I thought of as Alexander's apartment. There was a picture of him. There was a picture of his ex wife. And there was a picture of his two young sons.

Alexander was a nice looking man. He was a little balding. He was younger than I by about ten years. He had a fine thin nose. His nose was a little like Guy Forget's, the tennis player. Forget had a fine thin nose. Henrietta had a thin nose, but her nose had a little dent in it where she said a man who was departing the funicular to ski had drawn back his gloved hand quickly to jump out of the funicular had hit her nose and he had not stopped to apologize.

In a group picture Guy Forget, Alexander, and Henrietta would have all looked a little like foxes. I was sitting upstairs at the pass through counter from the kitchen where the phone was. I was thinking of phoning some client. The phone rang.

“How are you? What do you do?”

“Henrietta?”

“Yes.”

“How are you?”

“Oh, I'm fine. Do you miss me?”

“Yes.”

“Maybe you can come to the gift shop at La Costa Hotel tomorrow afternoon at three. I can see you there.”

“Okay, I'll be there.”

She was beautifully dressed and groomed. Her hair had a part on the side. She wore a black cashmere sweater and a tan poplin skirt. She was looking at a book when I came in the shop.

“Do you want a book? May I buy one for you?”

“No, I’m fine.”

There was no one near us. She grabbed my hand. “I miss you,” she said.

“Come and be with me.”

“I can’t. Not yet. I will.”

“Leave him. I want to marry you.”

“Give me a little time. I will come to your house soon. Also, I can’t call you so much anymore. I thin’ ’ee ’as the phone tapped.”

“He doesn’t have the phone tapped.”

“I think he does. You don’t know him. I think he saw you and me together at the pool when I came to see you. He either knows about you or he suspects. He smells a rat. I have to go now.”

I watched her go. She was so beautiful. And I was so close to her. But was she mine anymore? Had I lost her? I thought she was crazy about the phone being tapped, but as I got to know about Alexander I realize that was a mild fear of what he was capable of doing.

Henrietta took to coming to my apartment at odd times. Sometimes she telephoned. Sometimes she didn’t. When she did, she phoned from a pay telephone to avoid being tapped.

Sometimes when I came home, I found a note from her. “I was here. I love you.” I had the habit of always leaving the door unlocked, so she could always come in. The name of my answering service was Cardinal. As I employed them, I called myself the Pope.

“This is the Pope.”

“Henrietta called.”

“What did she say?”

“She said that she will be at the La Costa Gift Shop at 3:30.”

“Thank-you.”

Sometimes she would come in in the afternoon and I’d be there by the phone and I’d hear a knock at the door and I’d go downstairs and open the door and she’d be there and she’d say, “May I come in if you are not busy?” And she’d come in and we’d go downstairs in the bedroom and I’d kiss her and she’d take my hand and push it up under her sweater and she’d pull the strap of her bra down and pull the side of her bra down where my hand was and place my hand on her breast.

She never stayed long. After we went to bed, she always took a quick shower, but she didn’t get her hair wet. I could hear the shower running while I was still in bed. I’d get up and throw some tennis clothes on to see her to the door. She didn’t want me to see her to the car. She left quickly and delicately on little quick furtive steps like a vixen or a minx making her way.

Sometimes she'd come over at night. Sometimes I'd be asleep. And she'd just come in and wake me up and she'd say, "I don't have much time." And she'd sit up on top of the bed over me and she'd take my hands and put them up under her sweater and she wouldn't be wearing a bra. Then she'd take her sweater off and take her skirt off and one time she had on panties that had no back like the bikinis in Brazil and she turned around so I could see and she laughed.

I was just pulling up to the Market Place there on El Camino near la Costa Avenue. There I saw a gray van like the one Henrietta drove all the time. It was about eight thirty at night. Out of the store walked a rather nice looking man in a white button down—the same kind I wore all the time—blue sweater, and dark slacks. He had a thin nose, dark eyes, and his hair was thinning a bit on top. My nemesis, Monsignor Alexander. Alexander the invincible, Alexander the litigated against, Alexander who had to have the best of everything including Henrietta, he of two families, the great pain in the ass, Alexander.

He had a kindly face. I watched him in fascination as he got into the van. He was only a few feet from me. In Blackie I was hidden, like one of Homer's Greeks in a cloud. I got out of the car and went in and got some sourdough bread, a half pound of Italian salami, and a sixpack of Guinness Stout. My dinner. It was my first sighting of Alexander. Unfortunately for me this Alexander was going to start appearing on the old horizon on a regular basis.

Jasper and I were watching a basketball game in the front bedroom. He liked to come home and get on his black silk pajamas and get in bed and watch sports. About eight Gertrude would bring us our dinner. I sat on the left side of the bed on top of the covers with the special green pillow with arm rests on it. Pearl was down in the living room watching Wheel of Fortune, which both Jasper and I detested.

"Jasper," I said, "in the Civil War which side would you have fought on, the North or the South?"

He gave the question careful consideration.

While he was mulling it over, I said, "Well, I would have fought for the South. I don't believe in slavery, but I don't think the Federal Government had the right to deprive the states of their rights, which established a dangerous precedent which is with us to this very day only much worse.

"If they had waited, slavery would have gone away and then we wouldn't have lost all those wonderful brave men and there wouldn't have been such hard feelings in the South."

While I gave this impassioned speech, Jasper was still thinking. He said, "Slavery is wrong. That's why the war was fought. My ancestors had slaves. But it is wrong to have slaves."

The matter seemed to rest there. Then this little smile came over his face at about the same time there was a close up of Scotty Pippen doing a two handed slam dunk right in the face of Patrick Ewing. "Still," he said, "it wouldn't be so bad to have a few. I wouldn't mind owning a few."

We both laughed.

I asked Henrietta to come over and play tennis with Ripley and me. Ripley liked to hit against her because she hit such a flat hard ball. I usually let them hit together, and I sat on the bench. I enjoyed watching them play. Then Henrietta would get tired—she put so much into it—and Ripley and I would play a couple of sets. She had just driven up in the gray van.

She got out. She brought her racquet with her even though she used Ripley's. Ripley and I were saying hello to her. Then all of a sudden she said to me, "There's Alexander! I've got to go."

She jumped in the van and drove off. I didn't see anyone.

Ripley's eyes were exactly empty, the way they got when he had a big bet on a basketball team and he was getting beat by about fourteen points including the spread with about two minutes left to go in the fourth quarter. "What's that all about?" he said.

"I guess she saw her boyfriend Alexander," I said. "He doesn't want her playing tennis with us, or, better said, me. Or, as I understand from her, he didn't want her to play tennis anyhow. He especially doesn't want her playing with me."

"Well, let's play," Ripley said.

Ripley was a bit of a cynic. I got the impression that he didn't like tragic or distraught scenes or anything that upset the normal run of his life. He didn't like high drama where he was involved in any way at all. It was sort of sad, for he sincerely liked Henrietta. We went in the courts and played two sets.

I knew she would get ahold of me. I couldn't understand why she couldn't shake the guy. I pride myself that James Bond couldn't follow me if I knew that was his intent and I wanted to elude him. I was beginning to think that Alexander could trap Henrietta like a master huntsman could trap a rabbit.

The incident was duplicated in different circumstances a few weeks later. Henrietta said she could meet me for lunch at the La Costa Tennis Club. I got down there before her. Pancho Segura was sitting at a table with some other guys I knew. They invited me over, so I went over and had a Budweiser while I waited for Henrietta.

Soon she came in. She looked lovely. She rarely really dressed, but today she had. She had on a lovely red suit, and she wore high heels. She came right over to the table, and that whole group to a man got up when I got up to greet her. Most of them had stopped standing for their mothers when they were ten. Henrietta just shone, and I was always delighted to be with her.

Pancho, who was noted for ribaldry and profane jokes and profane language in anyone's presence, was the picture of decorum the whole luncheon. Pancho would have ordinarily told a terrible joke in the presence of Queen Victoria or a nun. But they had all been most respectful.

When Henrietta rose to go, they all stood up. I left with her. She was so happy. We were walking up the walk to the drive where her car was parked when suddenly she became as rigid as a deer that has heard a voice in the forest. She said one word—"Alexander!"

I looked all around. I saw no one. She was in great distress. She grabbed my hand. She said, "Go back to your friends now. Thank-you for lunch. I have to go." And she trotted off on her high heels. I went back to the tennis club, sat down, and had a few beers.

"What a lovely girl," said my friend Harry.

"She's a real beauty." said Pancho. "Another Budweiser?" said Dorothy.

"Yes."

My point of view was I could see how it was difficult for Henrietta. She'd been with Alexander for seven years. But she was a Catholic. He was a Catholic. And he had a wife and two children whom he supported in Rancho Santa Fe, a very affluent estates area a few miles south of La Costa. Alexander wasn't going to get a divorce from his wife. He couldn't. His wife didn't want him back, and he didn't want to go back to her.

So where the hell did that leave Henrietta? Oh, they could have had a civil ceremony. But that sort of thing didn't mean anything to those people.

I wanted to marry her. I am a Catholic. And I wanted to marry her in the Catholic Church, and be married to her forever. I wanted to be married to her when I died.

I felt sorry for Alexander. I sympathized with him. But I wanted her to make up her mind. Go live with him. Or marry me. And if she wanted to marry me, that's what I was going to do, and I would have to do what I would have to do to make it work. As far as being in love with her, I was totally in love with her. It was a matter of making a living. I didn't seem to be too good at that.

I hated what I was doing. Hated it! hated it! hated it! And I owed back taxes so that even if I did make some big money, the government was going to take it. I had this romantic vision of going to France with Henrietta. She lived in Aix-en-Provence. God knew what I could do there. I am sure I would have been welcome with open arms by the peasants as another tiller of the soil while old Henrietta eyed me with a jaded eye from a plateau and a scarf around her head. When I came home at night, dog tired, Rover would bound around my heels.

I actually had in mind that since I wasn't a citizen of France and it would probably be hard for me to get work that I would do nothing and Henrietta would work. I know that sounds absurd. But I hated work. I really didn't know how to do a damned thing. I liked that part of Tennyson's poem "The Lotus Eaters"

Hateful is the dark blue sky

Vaulted over the deep blue sea.

Death is the end of life.

Ah why must life all labor be?

That should be inscribed on the simple marker of my resting place. The way I was going, however, I wouldn't even get a simple marker. I'd share a common burial with the indigent.

To be more practical, one idea that had occurred to me—also absurd in retrospect—was that I knew some guys who built and sold tract houses. I could always get a job with them if I were will

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ing to bang around California.

I would have some sort of guarantee so Henrietta wouldn't have to go completely berserk thinking about money.

And taking a job someplace else would have gotten me and Henrietta out of the area of Alexander. Fuck the guy. In retrospect I sincerely believe he would have tracked me down to an outhouse in Zambia. That guy had a passion that some of the really great race horses have for the finish line. He would chase her everywhere until his heart broke or burst or he became absolutely deranged.

I loved her, I thought, as much or more, but I wouldn't chase someone across the street. I wouldn't follow someone out of a room. My philosophy was: What's the good?

As in everything else in life I was wrong about that too. But in retrospect, too, it probably meant that I would have had to kill him. I thought about it.

Let me phrase it this way: Had he died a natural death—a vintage wine—something along the order of Haut 'Brion—would have been called for in an ambience of candle light and violin music. With or without Henrietta. If she were too bereaved, I would have drunk the whole damned bottle by myself, ordered another, and had a good steak in Alexander's memory.

Only occasionally Henrietta called me now and not from home but from a pay telephone. Usually, I got the message from my answering service that "Frenchfry" had called. I had taken to calling her that. We had to devise a better method of communications.

I got a post office box right across the street from where I lived. It was right by the Crazy Burro. Mail Boxes. I got two keys, one for her one for me. She could leave me missives at the post office box. She didn't want the key. She just used to go there during the day and ask them—the owners and the other people who worked at the post office box store—if they would put her letter or note for me in the box. The people there at the post office boxes were somewhat amused but they always accommodated her. She was mad about the thing. The drop box we called it. I hadn't seen her so happy for a long time. I used to get letters or notes almost daily.

I started referring to Alexander as The Road Runner. That was another phrase she loved. She adopted it immediately. By the way, she never just said Alexander like I did. To me it was just plain old Alexander. I didn't accent anything except steaks sometimes. I wasn't good at accenting things even when they put the accent out there for you, like in Spanish which I could speak.

But Henrietta seemed to be putting the accent on the last part of the name. In her mouth it wasn't just plain old Alexander like in mine. Now, however, she almost always called him The Road Runner.

Jasper and I were sitting on the bench down at the courts at Sea Bluff. It was a nice hot day, you know the way it always is in Encinitas. We were just sitting on the bench, and he said to me, "What would you think if someone told you you were going to have to have your balls removed?"

"My balls removed!" I screamed. "I'd rather be dead."

I got up. He looked at me all hot and puffy standing there, He'd just beaten me again for the thousandth time, and I'd just paid him twenty dollars.

"You don't mean it?" he said.

"I do!"

"Well, it looks like I'm going to have to have mine taken off to keep the cancer from spreading. Evidently the cancer likes to piggyback on the testosterone."

"Is that so?" I said.

He'd had cancer for a long time. He'd been up to Stanford and he'd been to Scripps in La Jolla and he'd had a lot of treatments and he'd seemed to have beaten it. "There isn't anything else you can do?" I said.

"No."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to do it."

"Well, you're not screwing around much, are you?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then what difference does it make?"

"You said you'd rather be dead."

"Yes."

"I'm going to do it."

"Go ahead then." I sat down and put my arm around him. We sat there for awhile. And then he and I got in his big Lincoln and went down to Especial del Norte on 101 and had a few beers. We didn't talk about it anymore.

I got out of Blackie in the driveway leading to the tennis courts at Casitas. It was eleven or twelve in the afternoon. Suddenly, Henrietta came walking along. I was surprised but delighted to see her, but she looked distraught and there were circles under her eyes.

"Alexander is here with me," she said. "He wants to talk to you."

"Fine," I said. "Let's all go to the apartment."

"He does not want to go to your house."

"Why not?"

"He doesn't."

"Where is he?"

“He is in the van.

I looked over to where the van was and there was his little French face in the window. My blood was boiling. This was going to be a fight, and if it was, I was going to try and kill him. And if I was going to lose, I was going to conduct myself as best I could. I wasn't going to give up.

He walked over.

“Where do you want to go?” I said to him. “You are welcome to come to my apartment.”

Although Alexander spoke some English, Henrietta acted as the translator. “He says he wants to talk to you in the garage.”

There were two levels of parking below the tennis courts. He was pointing to the lower level. It was dark in there. “No way,” I said. I was strictly a counter puncher and I wanted to see what was going on. “Tell him we can talk up on the tennis courts.”

That was okay so up we trooped to the courts, a stranger little defile the world has never known. I opened the gate with my key. We went inside and I closed the gate behind us. The whole thing had the element of the absurd to me.

“Tell him, I said to Henrietta, “that I didn't know about him, that I didn't think you were seeing him any more, that I thought you were through with him, and that in any case you are not married to him, and that I would like you to marry me. But if what you want to do is stay with Alexander and not see me anymore, I would not even think of interfering with what you and he want to do.”

She said something to him. He said something back to her.

I said, “Would you kindly speak English so I can know what is going on?”

Henrietta had on this black cashmere sweater that was crew neck. The sweater looked like it had just come out of the box. And she had on this long skirt down to her ankles, and she had on patent leather shoes. She looked like a little kid.

We were all standing fairly close together, and I was watching Alexander's hands, from which attitude I was subsequently informed by Henrietta he derived the notion that I was afraid to look him in the face. No. I wanted to see the punch coming.

Then they started talking in English so I could understand. Henrietta's English was quite fluent, whereas it was difficult for Alexander and he really had to work at it.

Then began the wonderful speech from Henrietta. I was hoping this would be the showdown and she would finally decide whether she wanted to come with me or stay with him. I was nervous because I knew if she wanted to come with me I was going to have to change my whole life, that I was going to have to start taking care of someone—something I'd never done before—I include myself in that figure—and I was going to have to start providing for her. I was ready. Ass that I was, I thought she would come with me.

She said, “Charles is my friend. He want me to play tennis with him. He want to take me to dinner and to the movies. He want to make me happy. But I don't love Charles. I love you, Alexander. I want to go back to you. Please.”

That little speech right there brought me to my knees. I'd been watching Alexander, expecting trouble from him. When I listened to that little speech all of a sudden I wasn't worried about getting in a fight with Alexander anymore. I felt myself going slack. Actually, had it been his purpose, it would have been a great time for him to hit me.

Alexander started saying something about her living with me, and about me coming to his house, and about her coming over to see me at my apartment all the time. She looked at him and she said, "No, Alexander." He reverted to French. "No, Alexander!" she said.

If I hadn't been so despondent I would have laughed. I could have been watching a Punch and Judy show. He was obviously contradicting everything she said. Then I liked this part. As she saw she was getting no place with him and that he was going to contradict everything she said, she resorted to the utmost sarcasm and irony saying, "Of course, you are right, Alexander. You know everything."

He'd say something else, and she'd say, "You are right there too, Alexander." And she said it with such tremendous sarcasm. It settled his hash. I had to give her good grades for courage.

Then she made her peroration. "I do not love Charles. Charles is too old. His skin is bad" I didn't think my skin was so bad.

"...I like Charles, but I do not love him, I love you, Alexander." Well, I guess that settled that.

I didn't say anything. I just walked out the gate and walked to the condo where I was living. I was stunned. I just sat there upstairs at the counter where the phone was for awhile. I walked across Alga to the Crazy Burro, ate some chips, and had about ten Budweisers.

Then I came back to the house. The place was dark. I didn't even put on the lights. I decided I needed some more to drink so I got in the car and went down to the Market Place and got three six packs of Guinness, drove back home, and I was sitting there at the counter by the kitchen working on my eighth Guinness, the phone rang. I almost didn't answer it, but then I thought, why not? I picked it up and put it to my ear.

"It's Henrietta," she said.

"Nice speech," I said. "I really enjoyed it, especially the part about Charles being too old and Charles's bad skin. That was great."

She just said, "Oh, I couldn't talk in front of him." As if that took care of it.

"I'm at a pay phone. I'll get in touch with you soon. Are you drinking?"

"Yes. Guinness."

"Don't drink too much. Good-bye."

Now what could I make of that? She was dismissing the whole thing, that whole scene on the tennis courts as if it had never happened, as if the status were quo. You would think after her performance on the tennis court that that should have ended my relationship with Henrietta. Not at all. I was still in love with her—in love of her, she would have said. And too I always thought I would wind up with her. I was a little worried about

what I would do with her once I got her, but it was a concern that would not dissuade me in my pursuit of her.

Very few times in my life have I been decisive about committing myself to anyone or anything. There was no doubt in my mind about her. I did not want to lose her. Whatever I had to do to gain her and keep her I would. If you want to know the truth, I admired the cynicism of her performance. That “I couldn’t talk in front of him” statement impressed me. This girl could have headed up a university for diplomats.

One of the things I loved to do most when I had one of my more thrilling hangovers—you know the kind when you doze fitfully during the night, when you go in front of or kneel in front of the toilet with the idea of puking but you can’t, yet you feel sick, then you go back to bed, and you turn off the light, and you think about money and how you are running out of it, how you are going to die in poverty, how you are going to be relegated to one of those homes, or, a little better, be on call twenty-four hours a day as a manager of Motel Six in Brawley, and then you think about Henrietta in bed with Alexander, and you think you will never go to sleep, and you wonder when it will ever be daylight again and yet you always want it to be night because you never want to face another day or the people in it, you never want to see the light of day, and finally you walk upstairs to the refrigerator not having turned on any lights and when you open the refrigerator you see the white light, the white cube of light with the glass shelves, and there’s God or some beer, and you grab one and you crack one and close the door, put God back in there, and in the encompassing darkness you take a nice long draught, and finally you begin to calm down, and before the night is over you open the refrigerator again and again making little pilgrimages up the stairs until they are all gone the ice cold Buds, and each pilgrimage feeling holier and holier, visiting the tabernacle again and again, until finally at six a.m. you see the horrid light of day, and you decide to get up, and you think it might be better to shave and shower so at least for the rest of the day you can present a face to the world that won’t bear much scrutiny from civilization, and you won’t appear the derelict you are, and the bars are not open yet at least not the ones near you—so as I was saying what you most loved to do was get in old Blackie and drive out to the coast and go in that self pump gas station next to Sea Bluff and run by the Indians from India. Indians with turbans, Indians who are up early in the morning getting the bucks, and buy a cold six pack of Bud from the Indian, and then go next door to Sea Bluff, and go sit in the bleachers at the tennis courts—there’s not a soul around except for the guard way up by the gates—and you sit there in the bleachers drinking the cold Bud, and that’s one of the things you love to do. Cooling out. It’s good as long as the beer lasts. And sometimes that’s a long time. What’s the saying, “There’s more where that came from”? Yeah, right next door at the Indian’s from India.

I saw this big old face a couple of millimeters from mine. His head seemed about twice as big the size of a normal person to me. He actually had a nice looking face. He had nice gray eyes that a times could take on a kindly appearance, but right now they were cynical and jaded and filled with skepticism. Jim Bosco was about six foot three and weighed two forty or so.

“Have I done you favors?” he said.

We were sitting on the second floor of satellite wagering at Del Mar. We were sitting in a room partitioned from the room we ordinarily sat in. I don't know why we were doing that because Bosco and I were men of confirmed habits. Chances are if we sat in one place we'd sit there for the rest of our lives, but for this day for some reason I couldn't understand we'd changed.

I liked the way the track was before they changed it, before they remodeled it. I liked it when it was an old dump and guys could yell out and spit on the floor and get drunk and obnoxious.

Now the place looked like a Vegas Sports Book, all nice and carpeted and those little spot lighting coming from the ceiling. It looked like the Star Dust in Vegas.

You notice how everything in this country is achieving the same dismal look. Every gambling place looks like the Star Dust, every hotel in Southern California is a replica of the Ritz Carlton in Laguna. The bland leading the bland.

"I've done you favors, haven't I?"

"Tons."

"Well, I want you to do me one."

"What is it?" I said, looking into his jaded cynical eyes with my jaded cynical eyes. I'm afraid my eyes weren't quite as clear as his. I'd already had a few of the big cold paper cups of beer.

"Look, I want to know if you'll do me the favor."

He was going to put on the big betrayed, paranoid act if I asked him again what he had in mind, so I simply said, "I'll do you the favor."

The anxiety and unhappiness smoothed from his face. "Okay!"

he said. "No fuck ups. This is important. I want someone to think you got a pick six ticket that's alive. And I want you to sell half of it to him."

"Why don't you just do it yourself?"

"I have my reasons."

"Okay. How much do you want for it?"

"Well, two races are gone. And we got 'em both. I only paid twenty dollars for this particular ticket. I'm going to bring a guy around. He's from the South. He talks with a drawl. I don't want you making fun of him. None of your funny stuff."

I started to smile.

"Godamn it! None of your funny stuff. He'll probably offer you a couple hundred for the ticket. Try to get five but take four if you have to. We don't have a chance with it."

"Okay. Give me the ticket."

"What do you mean?"

"Give me the ticket. He might ask to see it. If he does, it's my ticket and I ought to have it."

He got up and pulled the ticket out of his pocket. "Here it is," he said. "Don't lose it," he said, threatening.

"Don't have a seizure. Do me a favor. Get me another Bud."

"Okay."

I had a hard time carrying a drink that was full up to the top. If I were alone I could carry stuff with beer or gin peeking over the top, but if someone were around I couldn't trust my hand. Many's the time I had to put a glass down on a bar or a table and bend down to drink it rather than pick it up, Bosco knew my problem with carrying things.

Bosco returned with the big beer, It was nice and cold and frothy. The cold streamed down my throat calmed my nerves and made me feel confident. Bosco left to get the guy, I sat there drinking. Pretty soon here comes old Bosco walking along with another big guy who was wearing a warm up jacket, T-shirt, slacks, and rimless glasses. The guy says to me, "I hear you got a ticket that's alive, and you might want to sell part of it."

"I might. I might not. I think this is going to be the winner and I don't exactly feel like sharing it with anyone else."

Bosco's face—slightly behind and to the left of the guy's—had a look of interest, dismay, fury, and collusion. "You mind if I look at the ticket?"

I was digging through my pockets pretending I couldn't find the ticket. This is exactly what Bosco liked to do to his investors to make them nervous. I thought Bosco was going to have a seizure. After about five minutes, I fished it out, and gave it to the Southern dude. Bosco was looking at me like he wanted to kill me. The guy looked at the ticket for awhile, checking it against his program. "I'll give you two hundred for it."

"I can't buy lunch for two hundred. I'll take six for half the ticket and six it is, and after the next race I may not want to sell, and, if I do, it's going to cost you a lot more."

The guy gave me the ticket back and walked away. Bosco walked after him. Then shortly Bosco came back without the guy. "Look!" he said, "I want you to sell this ticket. It's no good. You blew the guy right out of here. It's not your fucking ticket!"

"Hey! I would have bargained a little. You said you wanted four or five hundred. The guy wasn't ready yet. Let's see what happens in the next race."

He didn't say anything. But he didn't look too unhappy because he could see my reasoning. "Give me the ticket."

"Don't I need it?"

"Not anymore. He's already seen it. And don't go through all this bull shit about not being able to find it. The next race is about ready to go off."

I gave him the ticket, and off he marches to watch the race on one of the thousand or so monitors, probably the one that was like a movie screen in the next room. You could hear the low rumble of talking and over that the announcer's voice who would call the race, and pretty soon the level of noise would get much louder when the actual race began. I didn't even know what horses were on the ticket, and while everyone was watching the

race I went over and got a huge draft beer from one of the little bars there. I drank it at the bar and took my time.

Bosco comes up to me. "I was looking all over for you. We're still alive. Sure as hell the guy is going to come back."

I saw one of Bosco's minions, Vic, come up to him. He whispered something to Bosco.

I said, "If he wants to talk to me, let him come over here, I'm having another beer."

"Look, I don't want you getting too fucking drunk so that you screw this thing up. I could use the money today."

"Relax. How much do you want for the ticket now?"

"Try for eight hundred. Take a little less if you have to."

Bosco left. A while later the guy came up to me by himself. "You still want to sell the ticket?"

"Care for a beer?" I said.

"No thanks."

I didn't say anything.

"You still want to sell the ticket?"

I didn't say anything.

"What could make you want to sell it?"

"I've been waiting for this for a long time. I think I'm going to win, but, I'll be honest with you, I could use some money. I'd sell half for a couple thousand. Nothing else would interest me."

"That's crazy," the guy said. The little overhead Star Dust Hotel spot lights glinted off his glasses.

I put this big beer cup to my lips, took a big swig, and said, "No one is exactly putting a gun to your head to buy the ticket. I'd just as soon keep it myself."

The Southern dude left. Pretty soon Bosco comes back, all red in the face.

"All the favors I done you. All the money I loaned you..."

"I paid it back."

"Anytime you needed anything I did it for you and now you have to be the smart ass."

Vic was hanging around on the perimeter. His eyes were big. His hair was jet black but it stood up on his head like a woodpecker's. He was wearing cut-offs, tennis shoes, and a white T-shirt.

He started tugging at Bosco's arm. "The race is getting ready to run," Vic said to Bosco. "That ticket's got a good chance in this one. There is no chance your horse is going to lose in the next race."

Bosco and Vic ran out of the room

I finished my beer, went back to the table where I'd been, and sat down. The hell with it, I said to myself. Pretty soon I'd leave and go over to the Market Cafe, see Willy and Henry and Frankie, and have a couple carne asada tacos and some fresh salsa.

Bosco and Vic came waltzing over. Bosco sits down beside me, "We're alive in four races."

"Great," I said.

"There is no fucking chance we are going to win the next two."

"No?"

"No. Just take my word for it. This guy is going to come back. Sell the fucking ticket. As it turns out, so far you've done great, because we can probably get three thousand for it. Sell it. You're

going to have a nice day. I'm going to give you—not loan you—a few hundred for your services."

At about the end of this speech the guy comes up. Bosco sticks next to me. Vic is pacing around in the background. In a wild animal life film Vic would play one of those wild dogs, or jackals or hyenas waiting for the pride to glut itself on the kill. The guy says to Bosco, "You think your friend still wants to sell?"

"Ask him." Bosco says.

"Well?" he says.

Vic stands still for a little while so he can hear.

"You've outguessed yourself all day long," I said. "You want to bet after the race is over. And each time it has cost you. I know I got one big long shot on the ticket and that knocks all but the heavy players out and even they may not have it. You want half the ticket, it's eight grand. And that's it." Bosco's face was very pale and Richie's eyes were huge.

"Six," he said.

"Eight."

He reached in his back pocket, pulls out a big roll, and counts out eighty hundreds in my hand. "Bosco will hold the ticket," I said. They all marched out.

I walked over to the bar, this bulge in my left pocket was huge. I put my hand in there without pulling out the roll and pulled off a C note. "Give me a Bud, please." I gave the barman a five dollar tip. No one came back for a long time. We never won another race.

Finally Bosco came back. He starts hugging me. He starts walking around in little circles hugging himself and laughing.

"Unbelievable!" he said. "Unbelievable! You are the greatest. You are the greatest of all times. You definitely deserve the academy award. That was the greatest act I have ever seen in all my life. And some people think Richard Burton and Laurence Olivier are actors. You make them look like pikers. "Okay, give me the money."

I pulled out the roll. He didn't count it. He counted out a thousand for me.

We all, Vic and I and Bosco, went to Tracton's for dinner, and Bosco laughed so hard during dinner his head went down hard into his porterhouse, and Vic just sat there with a stunned look on his face. Bosco drove me home and told me to pick up my car tomorrow.

She left a note in the drop box. She was going to the beach the next day with her girlfriend. She wanted to meet me there.

She called me that night. "Can you meet me tomorrow at the beach down by Del Mar, that beach there where the houses are. I'll be with my girlfriend. Then you and I can go to a hotel. I'll pay."

"I don't think it's a good idea."

"Well, if you don't want to..."

"It's not that I don't want to. But he catches you at everything you do, and he'll catch you tomorrow."

"Well, if you change your mind, you know where I'll be."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"I'm not going to tell him anything. I'm going to tell him I'm going shopping and I ran into my friend and she wanted to go to the beach and so I went with her. He cannot search the whole beach, and if he comes along there I can see him."

"I don't think so. I've got bad vibes."

I was right about my vibes but I'd probably been better off in collusion with her than the way it turned out.

I was sitting on my bed downstairs reading. The drapes were wide open and the sliding glass door was wide open, I wanted to meet Henrietta but I decided against it. One of these days Alexander and I were going to kill each other. I was reading Rousseau and Romanticism by Irving S. Babbitt.

There is a planted embankment that leads up to my condo. It's fairly steep. You don't have to be a mountain climber to get up it, but it's definitely nothing a little old lady would walk up.

I heard a car outside. I got up to look out the window at the drive below. There parked was a dark green pickup truck with a visor. It was an old model beautifully restored Henrietta sometime drove. Out stepped Alexander. He looked around and charged straight up the embankment and vaulted over the iron railing that went around my patio. Without waiting to be invited in he pulled aside the sliding screen and came in. "Where is Henrietta?" he said.

"I don't know." I lied.

"Is she here?" He had a look of fury on his face.

"Look around." I said. "Maybe she's upstairs."

"Where is she?" he said.

About that time I noticed I'd left her note on the bed. There was nothing serious in it, just that she'd be at the beach. He saw it. "That's Henrietta's writing."

He grabbed it and read it. I should have hit him. But he looked so nervous and distressed that I felt sorry for him. He sat down then in a lime green easy chair. He held his head in his hands. Sometime I left the screen door open too and some little leaves had blown in, they were sort of dried up, and he started moving them around with his fingers. It struck me the act of a madman. He just sat there with his head down moving the little leaves around.

“I’m sorry for my English,” he said, talking to the floor. “I cannot express myself at all.”

“That’s okay.” I said, “I wish I could speak French. At least you can speak English. I can’t speak French at all.” I got the feeling he wasn’t paying any attention to me.

“You know about the dad?”

“She told me something about him. He’s a doctor and he likes to hunt.”

“He like to hunt but he really like to drink. And he is old now. And he is alone. And he is a drunk. And I have to send him money all the time. That is the dad. And the mother.” He started shaking his head back and forth. “The mother. The mother. The mother is crazy. I have to send her money too.”

I looked at him sitting in that ridiculous lime chair. Here was my foe. I had nothing of animosity for him in my soul.

I said what I’d told him before that I wanted to marry her, that no one could stop me if she wanted to marry me, but that if she wanted to go with him I would never bother him or her again.

He didn’t say anything. Then he said, “You know she thinks she can have a baby.”

“I wouldn’t know.”

A sort of wise cynical look came over his face as if a secret he knew but she didn’t. There was also a sadness and a resignation in his look. “She can’t,” he said with finality. He got up to go.

“Use the front door if you like,” I said.

He opened the screen, easily vaulted the railing, and went down to the green pickup and drove off.

He’s either headed for the beach or home, I thought, and I went back to bed, propped myself up with pillows and continued to read Rousseau and Romanticism.

three

We were down in the market cafe in

Solana Beach, me, Henrietta, Daryl Mackay, and Maggie Calhoun.

I always liked the market Cafe. You could get Budweiser or any other beer that came in a can in a can, and they were freezingly cold. In back of the bar were these big refrigerators with glass doors and you could see the beers sitting in there on the metal gratings waiting for the next dance: the red and white of Budweiser in a can and bottles, the Millers in cans and bottles, same for Coors, the bottles of Dos X, the bottles of Bohemia, the bottles

of Corona, the bottles of Carta Blanca, the big huge bottles of jalapenos in vinegar, the plastic bowls of fresh salsa. "Where should we sit, Willy?"

"Anywhere, Charles. Sit in the back if you want. It's quiet back there."

We went back. It was quiet back there, quiet and dark and cool. The juke box was back there. I put in some quarters and played "Cuando Caliente El Sol" Javier Solis, "Sentimental Journey" Glen Miller, "String of Pearls" Glen Miller, "La Ultima Noche" Xavier Cugat.

We sat down in a big red leather booth. It was empty in the back room except for us. Bosco used to own the restaurant. Now Willy did. Willy had run it for Bosco for years and when Bosco got

out Willy got it. Bosco told me he used to net about a hundred thousand a year but then there got to be too many Mexican restaurants everywhere, and his business dropped off, so he got out of it. For Willy it was a living, a salary. Henry came back and everyone had a beer except Henrietta. I had a cold can of Budweiser. And we got some chips and some fresh salsa and guacamole.

Henrietta had a soda. But I asked her to take one sip of Bud. She did. I don't know why I did that. I just didn't want her to have a block about drinking. I didn't care if she drank or not. But I didn't want her to form a religion against drinking.

Maggie Calhoun was a good looking girl. Maybe a little taller than Henrietta. Maybe about the same height. Tall and thin and athletic. Blond hair, laughing brown eyes. Maggie loved to drink and have a good time. I always had a little crush on her.

Henrietta was wearing a polo shirt and slacks, She never wore any make up that I could discern. I looked at the open neck of her shirt. She was very brown. She didn't have her gold chain necklace on. I looked at her brown arms resting on the table. She had on her ladies Rolex and a small gold bracelet gold against her tan wrist. She didn't wear ear rings. She looked very beautiful. She looked very demure. We had a nice lunch.

On the way out I saw Bosco standing at the bar. I stopped to talk to him. Everyone else went to the car. We were standing at the end of the bar. Bosco was dressed in that old blue windbreaker he always wore. We were by ourselves. "I'm going to marry her," I said.

"You'll never get married," he said. "You're too independent. You're too free. That's what's great about you. You lead the best life of anyone I know. You don't have to listen to anyone."

"I'm going to marry her."

He just laughed in disbelief. I walked out the door.

They were waiting for me, Daryl and Maggie in the back seat of Blackie. Henrietta in the front. I loved her so much. When I looked at her it made me so happy, so complete, so comfortable to know that she was my girl and she always was going to be.

I was selling Margaret Sterne's house. I had sold it to her for four hundred and fifty K. Now a couple years later, she wanted eight hundred and fifty k for it. Fat chance I had. A bird can fly but he can't be an airline pilot.

I'd brought Nate Cohen over to help me do the open house. He and Margaret eventually got together romantically, and because of that I lost the listing. That's how things happen.

I'd put up the directional sign up on El Camino pointing down Alga Road and one at Estrella de Mar and then one at Caleta Court and then the flags and open house sign at the house at the end of the cul-de-sac on Caleta Court.

Nate and I were standing outside. We were wearing sports jackets. We wanted to look nice for the first day of the open house. A sports jacket in California corresponds to an Englishman's idea of a dinner jacket.

This gray van Chevrolet Astro pulls up going pretty fast and to a stop that rocked it back and forth. I knew that van. It was Henrietta's, but it wasn't Henrietta who got out. Old Alexander appeared around the side. His face had the look of one of Cromwell's soldiers on a dedicated mission. He walked right up to me. "You want to go for a ride with me?" he said.

Nate was standing behind me. He knew about Henrietta and me and Alexander.

Nate said, "He's busy, man. He's doing an open house. He can't go now."

I said, "Sure. I'll go. Take care of things, Nate. I'll be back."

"Don't go, Charles." Nate said.

Alexander didn't say anything.

I walked towards the van, opened the passenger side, and got in. Alexander got in, started up the gray van, and off we sped. Henrietta told me Alexander used to race cars. He was driving up Alga as fast as he could go. The trouble for him was a Chevy van will only go so fast, and you can only take a curve so fast or you'll tip it.

He took a couple of corners real fast. We were up on top of the hill, up off Alga on Cazadero where all those little tract houses and duplexes are, each with a Spanish tile roof.

He was driving pretty fast, way too fast for the neighborhood. I think he thought he was going to scare me. Neither one of us was saying anything. Finally he stopped on El Fuerte, up where it's level on the backside of the hill. Where we stopped there are houses on one side of the street and vacant land on the east side. We were parked on the east side, where all that land is just barren with weeds, gorse, and rock on it waiting for the next developer.

He killed the engine and just looked at me, glared at me. Then he started the engine, drove back down the hill, pulled up in front of the house, and I got out. Nate was standing outside watching. What was that all about?" Nate said.

"He's practicing to be a car salesman," I said, "and he gave me a demo ride."

In the meantime Alexander sped away.

What a life. No more tennis for Henry. No more tennis for Frenchfry. If only the French courts had put the bastard in jail forever. Probably home now, soon he would be swearing at Henrietta.

Why hadn't I insisted on marriage right away? Then he could have come back from France and he couldn't have done a damn thing about it. As the French say it would have been a *fait accompli*. I would have *fait accompli* him. And I would have *fait accompli* Henrietta every night in the big bed.

I sold the condo that I'd been living in, but I only sold it for what my friend from Oklahoma paid for it, one hundred six thousand. Because I didn't get anymore money than he paid for it, and because I didn't pay him rent very often, I didn't charge my friend, John Schneider, a commission.

I talked a doctor client of mine into buying the condo right next door. It was a good deal, it was smaller, it was a loft plan. It wasn't my listing, but it was my sale so I made about three grand, and I rented it myself. In the loft I used to sit up for hours listening to French music I had bought.

When I first moved next door the window in the loft wouldn't open. I mean it was made that way. It just wouldn't open. There was no mechanism for opening it.

I thought it should open, so I called Tony my carpenter friend, and he came over. He was dressed in white pants and a T-shirt.

"Ora le, Holmes," he said.

"Ora le, home boy," I replied.

"Got any brews?"

I went to the refrigerator and grabbed a couple of cans of Bud, of which there was an ample harvest that year.

"Ora le, Holmes," Tony said, fastening his simian grip securely around the Bud.

"Ora le," I said, popping the tab on mine. It made the little sound of carbonation escaping free. We both took healthy swigs and then clicked cans. "Holmes!"

"Holmes!"

"What do you need, Holmes?"

"Holmes, these fools who made this window upstairs didn't know what they were doing. They made it so it wouldn't open."

"Let's go up," he said. So we went up and looked at the window.

"So it won't open, eh Holmes?"

"Nope."

"You want me to fix it?"

"That is the idea, prince of peace."

"You sure?"

"Yep."

Tony walked over to the window and kicked it square in the middle and the whole window shattered. "Now it is open," he said.

I laughed. "Homes!"

"Now you will have fresh air."

"Verily, Holmes, thou art a wonderful carpenter. It is a privilege to know you."

We went downstairs and had a few more brews.

Then we went back upstairs and picked up the glass and put it in a garbage bag. And Tony pulled out the pieces that were still hanging in the frame, so that the frame was all nice and smooth.

It took about three months to get the proper size window, but to tell you the truth, I liked it like that. There wasn't even a screen, I liked it like that. I used to sit up there on top of the bed with my clothes on listening to the French music I had bought.

It was nice and dark and cool up there. And I'd listen to the music for hours. I loved the French language. I'd bought a book on how to learn and speak French. I could read it a little, but the truth is I understood very little, but I loved the sound of it, and it sounded as if the singers articulated their words so much more than Americans.

Henrietta never talked French to me. We talked Spanish once and awhile. I was surprised at the facility she had for Spanish, and how perfect her accent was. The only time I heard her talk French was that time at the tennis court with Alexander. I'm sure her French must have been perfect.

One of the cassettes I got was old Edith Piaf. She sang songs like "La Vie En Rose," "Milord," "Pauvre Jean, and my favorite, "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien." I understand that "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien" is the song of the Foreign Legion. It was my favorite.

The thing about old Edith Piaf was that she'd been singing those songs so damned long that some of them would have probably been better if she'd just been accompanied by a piano player, a drummer, and a base rather than by a big full orchestra and a choir. Believe me, they pulled out the stops on "Pauvre Jean" which in American is "Little Jimmy Brown." She'd sing "Pauvre Jean" and the choir would get behind her and the old violins and the cymbals and she was just reaching for the old emotion. I liked it okay. But she sang Non, "Je Ne Regrette Rien" better. Straighter.

Old Edith was somewhat guttural and she probably never saw an R she wouldn't trill. While I was listening I couldn't imagine Henrietta talking gutterally or trilling R's. Her voice was so soft in a way. Not breathy or affected. What she did have was all the expressions and gestures, such as shrugging her shoulders with her arms extended out and the palms of her hands upwards, blowing or puffing out her cheeks to express exasperation or futility or impossibility, looks of scorn, resignation, and her favorite and most used, a look of inquiry. She never looked like an adult when she made those gestures. She looked like a child pretending to be an adult.

Another cassette I had was The Best from France recorded in France. It had "Milord," "I Love Paris," "La Vie En Rose" of course, and my favorite "La Mer," and then there was this chorus of men and girls not singing words but just singing the notes and the rhythm like the way the Ray Coniff singers do. The song was "Maintenant." In English it's "What Now My Love." The boys and the girls took turns keeping the rhythm. I loved it

when the girls sang. Then I had the orchestra music of Xavier Cugat doing “Besame Mucho,” “Tico-Tico,” “Jalousie, and my favorite, “What A Difference A Day Makes.”

I imagined Henrietta and me in a nightclub dancing and the whole orchestra of Xavier Cugat playing and the members of the orchestra would be wearing those big shirts with the ruffles and the full arms. And they’d be playing the marimbas and the xylophone and the violins and the gongs and the piano and old Xavier in a tuxedo right on the dance floor conducting and we’d dance right by him.

Well, I got into a little trip of listening to the music in the afternoons and having these long reveries about moving to Provence and having a house there and walking through the hot countryside, walking by vineyards, going to Aix en Provence where Henrietta had a house and going to one of those cafes with the tables outside, and sitting at a table all by myself in the afternoon with a white table cloth and it being nice and hot and no one at any of the other several tables at the hotel and not knowing any French, and I just put the money out there for the waiter to take, and the waiter is dressed in tuxedo pants and a white shirt and a black bow tie but no tuxedo jacket. The guy sort of looks like Alexander. I just say, “Beer and hors-d’œuvre.” And he brings them.

I’d be in a reverie like that, and all of a sudden I would hear my name. “Charles, Charles.” It was Henrietta. I would rush to the window and look out and the path would be empty. There would be no one down there. I would see the bushes, the foliage, the trees, the empty path. There would be no one there. I would stick my head through the open window so I could see further down the path both ways. No one. I would run down the stairs. Outside, I would see no one. Then I would hear a voice coming from the window. “Charles. Charles.” Back up I would run, in the house and up the stairs. No one there. “La Mer” would be playing.

That illusion happened a few times until I ceased the routine in the afternoons.

Sometimes I listened to the music at night before I went to sleep.

Jasper’s bedroom was the first bedroom, the one that was upstairs, the one that corresponded to Victoria’s in the Ripley household. Had Ripley and Jasper’s condo not been separated by one condo they were in perfect symmetry or they were anyhow despite the separation of one condo. Ripley slept in the master bedroom in his condo. Victoria, who controlled the money, slept in the guest bedroom.

Pearl in Jasper’s household had a lot more money than Jasper and she slept in the master bedroom and Jasper slept in the guest. Neither Victoria nor Jasper gave a damn where they slept. Well, that’s the symmetry.

I noticed on Jasper’s dresser that he had a chocolate bar, a Hershey with nuts. I’d been in and out of there over a period of weeks and it was still there. One day I was in his room watching a football program and he’d gone someplace for about an hour.

I was sitting on top of the bed as usual propped with pillows. I saw the Hershey. It seemed like a good time to eat it. So I went over there and without tearing the foil or the wrapper I lifted the chocolate bar out of there. At first I only meant to have a bite of it, and I did, but then I got back on the top of the bed watching the football analysts and I ate the whole chocolate bar. It wasn’t one of those regular bars either, it was a big economy

sized baby. You had to admit Hershey makes good chocolate, and I liked it with almonds too.

When I got done, I carefully put the foil back in the wrapper and squared the corners of the foil along the lines they'd been before I removed the bar. Then I sort of pushed on the sides of the wrapper so it puffed up with the foil giving it the appearance of a wrapper with a full chocolate bar inside. I put the thing back on the dresser.

Jasper came back about a half hour later. He opens the door. There he is in his little green corduroys, his white tennis shirt, his horn rims. His eyes looked like a wolverine's with horn rims.

"Let's go!" he shouted. "We're going to play some tennis down at the Jasper Kyle tennis club!"

"Stop shouting!" Pearl screamed from the front room.

Out we went, Jasper didn't even hear her. He didn't get onto the chocolate bar for about a week, but eventually he decided to eat it. He evidently grilled the maids. He gave them an intense grilling. I think Celia wept, claiming she was allergic to chocolate.

He grilled Maria and his niece Gertrude. Everyone but Pearl who was too heavy to get up the stairs. She was off the suspect list. Plus she wouldn't have bothered to prepare the wrapper. She was a dictator like Jasper. So we were both sitting on top of the bed watching sports and he said to me casually, "Someone ate my Hershey bar that I had here and was saving to eat."

"No!" I said, feigning great amazement.

"Yes."

"Did you ask the maids?"

"I accused them of it."

"You should report them to the immigration department."

That thought fleetingly appealed to him. I could see he was storing it in his mind for future reference. "They say they didn't do it."

"How about Gertrude?"

"She says she's allergic to chocolate."

"All of a sudden everyone's allergic to chocolate."

"Did you eat it?"

"Yes," I said, "and it was very enjoyable."

"All the dinners and lunches I've bought for you and you stole my Hershey."

"Yes. It'd been on the counter for weeks. As MacArthur said, 'I came, I saw, and I ate it.' It was great. I really enjoyed it. "I was thinking about getting you another one and replacing it.

"That would have been the proper thing to do."

“But then I didn’t.”

On my way out I accused Celia of eating the chocolate.

“No! not me, Carlos. Me no eat it. You! You! eat Mr. Jasper’s Hershey. Me no eat Mr. Jasper’s chocolate. I allergic!”

“You’d lie on a bed of nails.”

“What!”

“Nothing.”

“You ate Mr. Jasper’s chocolate. You bad, Charles. And Mr. Jasper is so good to you. You bad!”

“I’m going to have you reported to the Immigration Department and Mr. Jasper agrees.”

She put her hand to her mouth. And I left before she could come up with a rejoinder. A few days later I saw this big economy sized Hershey on the dresser. Jasper saw me looking at it. I said, “It looks like you got yourself a nice sized Hershey.”

The next evening I came in the bedroom and he was eating the Hershey. “Looks like you’re not letting this Hershey lie around so long. What’s going on?”

“Scavengers,” he said.

One night—this was before Alexander returned—we’d just come in from the pool, a typical California night—warm but the air nice and fresh. Henrietta stopped me just inside the door to make sure no leaves were sticking to my feet. “You have the Roman foot,” she said.

I looked at her quizzically. “What sort of foot do you have?”

“Greek.”

She put her foot beside mine and she showed me how her toes sort of angled back from the big toe to the little, whereas my foot was sort of on a straight line. Henrietta was full of esoteric knowledge like that.

She claimed she could analyze handwriting. One day we were sitting at Burger King on El Camino, the one next to the Chevron station and across from Crown Books.

Don’t ask me why, but I was writing a letter to the editor of The Blade Citizen. And I was fairly intense about it. I was drinking a coffee. Henrietta wasn’t having anything, but I knew she was looking at me write, so I occasionally looked up to see her, because I liked her there even though I was working on this letter to the editor which I knew damned well they wouldn’t publish. The gist of the letter was that Barbara Ebhart couldn’t straighten out her skirt let alone world affairs.

Henrietta said to me, “If the person who is studying or writing doesn’t look up at all he is a genius, if he looks up occasionally he is fairly smart, if he looks up often he is an idiot.”

“What am I?”

“You might be an idiot.”

I laughed. "I look up often, because I like to see you there. If I'd been by myself and you could have seen me unobserved you would know I'm a genius."

Her eyes were laughing. But that's just the kind of knowledge her head was full of.

The worst thing she had, though, was this damned little red dictionary that she carried around. I think she kept it in her purse. And she used to walk around her apartment reading it. I don't think it was French-English English-French but just English descriptions of English or American words.

She hardly ever read books, but she was walking around her apartment in her bare feet because she didn't wear shoes inside her apartment. She was reading her little dictionary. I never looked at it, so I didn't know too much what it was about. She told me it was to explain slang.

"What does dick mean?" she said to me. She was feigning great seriousness, a regular little student of words.

"It's a nickname for Richard."

"That's not what it says here," she said. "It says here that it's the man's prick."

"Where did you get that book!" I made a motion to grab it away from her.

She jumped back in great horror, quickly regained her composure, and looked in her little book again. "Do you know what cunning lingus is?" she said.

"I know what it is."

"You don't," she said.

"It's a language for the crafty."

"You don't know anything," she said. She walked into the kitchen, continuing to read her little book.

Mimi rubbed the side of my leg and I picked her up and took her out on the balcony to sit in my lap in the sun.

I had never paid for any of Henrietta's things, all the clothes, the Hermes purses at about twelve hundred or two thousand a pop. I never paid for the light bills or the heating bills or phone bills. I never paid for the cars she drove or the gas that went in them or the mechanics to maintain them. Alexander did. When I first met her, I presumed the apartment hers.

Later, when she went back to France and she mailed me pictures of her father's home in the country, I got the idea that she came from a very wealthy family. Her father's house was a mansion made of stone. It was imposing and surrounded by trees.

Now, after some of my little fireside chats with Alexander, it seemed that Alexander sent money to both her mom and dad who were separated (her father had taken up living with a young woman who had left him). And Alexander thought they were both nuts.

I had no basis on which to dispute him. I was beginning to think that all of us collectively and individually were deranged.

I don't know quite what I had in mind. I wouldn't have cared if Henrietta left all her clothes and purses or brought them. I wanted her to walk out of that house and come and live with me wherever I was. And I would promise to take care of her. If she wanted to work, she could. She didn't have to.

If to escape Alexander's wrath, we had to leave town, I would use some of my contacts to get a job selling tract houses somewhere. I didn't care where, perhaps back north in the part of the state I'd been born, northern California, not southern.

If necessary I'd have a talk with Alexander, showing him that he'd already been married and that he was a Catholic and that as a Catholic he was still married and that he and Henrietta were simply living an adulterous relationship and that's all it would ever be and that there was nothing he could do about it. Whereas, I... I could marry her. I was going to marry her in the church. And no one could do anything about that.

I wasn't absolutely so sure that his passionate fierce nature would be settled by my logic, but that was the way it was going to be. But I couldn't get Henrietta to go along. I couldn't make her. I couldn't herd her. We kept having trysts. She kept telling me she loved me, but we were in a stasis.

Henrietta decided she wanted to get a place by herself. Margaret Sterne's place had a lovely little guest house with two bedrooms, two baths, its own kitchen, and total privacy. The guest house was completely separate from the main house. Margaret really liked Henrietta, and she told her she could have the guest house for as long as she wanted it.

Henrietta actually went over there for a few hours. Then she gave the key back to Margaret and she went back home. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to push her. But I was making no headway. My position was not tenable.

Bosco had a condo across from Del Mar Race Track. We could watch the races from the balcony. I asked Bosco if I could borrow the condo on Saturday afternoon.

Once I get to a race track it's very unlikely I'll leave. It's like a person who really loves plays would be very unlikely to leave in the fourth act of Julius Ceaser. Once I'm at the track I'm there for the duration.

But today I was going to leave because I was going to meet Henrietta at the condo. And I was always looking forward to seeing her with the knowledge that, also, sometimes she never showed up. But I'd have to be there to find out. Bosco and I were sitting in his seats on the finish line in the grandstand.

"You know where the key is," Bosco said. "Just shut the door. Put it back when you leave."

I nodded.

"One thing though. David and his friends might be over there playing backgammon. If they are, that's okay. Go in, say hello. They'll leave after awhile."

David was Bosco's son. He was a race track maniac just like his dad. I'd known David since he was twelve. He was twenty-one or so now. He and I got on well.

"Okay thanks. I'll see you later then."

I'd left Blackie at the condo. I walked out of the track through acres of cars, past the telephone bank where they didn't care if you telephoned at the track or not, and Bosco and I had gone sometimes to telephone bookmakers, past the outbuilding with the dolphins jumping painted on it, past the outdoor training track and up the long drive that went past the stables and up to gate two and across Via de la Valle and up the steep hill to the entrance of Bosco's condo, little sugar cubes stacked on the side of a hill. There was Blackie parked under the outdoor covering. I pushed on the door. It was open. Inside at the table in the living room that overlooked the Del Mar infield, David and three of his friends were happily playing backgammon.

Why is it that a game I didn't understand, didn't know how to play, and didn't want to know how to play was always following me around? Jasper played it all the time. As soon as he got involved in a backgammon game when I was with him I just left. People really get involved in it, played for hours, and they didn't want to make small talk while they played. I wasn't an enthusiast. I took a seat on the couch and started reading the front page of The Racing Form.

David stopped playing backgammon for a while to watch the third race through some huge binoculars he had there. David called the race, "He's got running room. No! The sonofabitch has got him trapped! He's got no room. What a fool! What a fool!"

He and his friends resumed playing backgammon. I got up and got a beer out of the refrigerator. There was a knock. I went to the door. There was Henrietta. She looked lovely. She was wearing a dark blue roundneck T-shirt and pants with stripes on them. I always called those kind of pants prison pants. Everyone said hello to her, resumed playing backgammon, and Henrietta and I went and sat on the couch. We held hands. We didn't talk much.

No body paid any attention to us. Nor did anyone leave. Of all the days David has to have a backgammon festival, I thought to myself, it has to be today. Finally after about two hours they all left. A couple of times prior to their leaving, Henrietta had said to me quietly, "I have to go." I didn't say anything to her. I just kept holding her hand. When they had gone—the last good hearted hardy backgammon playing soldiers out the door—she again said to me, "I have to go"

We were standing. I was facing her, and she had both my hands in her hands as if pleading with me. She had on her little blue shirt and her Devil's Island prison pants and, of course, a gold Rolex and a soft gold bracelet, dull and gold against her tan wrist.

I said to her, "You don't have to go right now." I led her into the guest bedroom. I closed the door behind me. I don't know why. No one was there. No one was going to come in. She was standing in front of me. Looking at me. With those big brown expressive and intense soft deer eyes. I reached down and pulled the blue shirt out of her trousers and I kept pulling it up off her and over her head. She had to lift her arms over her head to help me do that.

She had on a blue bra. I'd slightly mussed up her hair taking her shirt off her.

It was only after I'd got her shirt off her that I realized again— always with a shock— what a voluptuous beautiful figure she had. Her waist narrowed so much into her trousers. Her breasts were so full. She was like one of those girls of India we see in bas-

relief on the walls of the temples. She had that kind of a figure. The only thing was, she was Western and taller and her legs were longer and more tapered. And she didn't have Oriental eyes but the eyes of a Gaul from a tribe that had seen slaughter on the battlefield in a war with the Moors, the eyes of a tribe that had waited behind the battlements of a castle under siege, the eyes of a tribe that was soon going to die from hunger, the eyes of a tribe that had gone on to achieve the ultimate in civilization and art under the Sun King, the eyes of a tribe whose spirituality and faith and craftsmanship and endeavor and ability had built the Notre Dame, the eyes of a tribe who had spawned Francois Villon, Joan of Arc, Flaubert, and Balzac and Mallarme and Chateau Briand and Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and the eyes of a tribe who had come out of the Dark Ages and various wars to achieve the ultimate in civilization in politeness in refinement in art in literature in cooking in everything that really means culture.

No American who ever lived could stand next to this girl. No gum chewing high schooler or fast food cooking American could stand next to this girl.

Democracy could not give you this girl. It took a thousand years of uninterrupted rule of Catholic Kings and all the homage the people paid to them to build in partnership the nation of France and Henrietta was the end result and now I had her in Bosco's guest bedroom at four o'clock in the afternoon on a bright sunny California day across the street from Del Mar Race Track in Del Mar, California.

I reached around her back and pushed the slides of her bra together so that her bra would come undone. Her bra was loose now and I pulled the straps off her shoulders and pulled it forward off her until she stood naked from the waist up. I put the bra on the bed. "I think your breasts are getting larger," I said.

The way she dressed everything was done to disguise her figure not divulge it so that when I saw her it was always amazing. The really full heavy voluptuous breasts with the rather large areolas, so damned sensitive and inviting. I didn't touch her. I undid the top button of her prison pants and pulled the zipper down.

Then I pulled her pants down over her hips. I pulled them down to her knees. Then she reached down to one leg of her pants and stepped out of them.

Her underwear were blue as well as her bra and probably came from the best lingerie house in France. Her legs were so full and heavy and fat at the top and they tapered down to the knees and a long slim calf and slim delicate ankles. She had removed her flats when she took off her pants. Her bare feet were Greek rather than Roman.

Without removing her lingerie I put the finger of my right hand inside her. She gave a little gasp and arched her back. Her breasts quivered. She was so soft and moist and warm.

"I am always ready for you," she said.

I reached around her waist with my left hand and pulled the elastic slightly off her rump and felt the soft curve and cleft of her ass—pliant, warm, beautiful, large, all curve, no planes, just round, warm, and pliant. With my left hand I pulled her pants down, and she stepped out of them.

I took off my shirt, sat on the bed, removed my shoes and socks. She was standing in front of me. I took off my pants. I pulled the spread and top sheet back off the bed and I started to lay back on the bed.

“No,” she said, “not here. Everyone makes love there.” And she instead went way to the bottom of the bed.

That’s what I loved about her. At a time like that she was going to be practical. At that time that kind of thought was like introducing the thought of John Stuart Mills to an Arab stallion who’s headed towards a mare that is high.’

Henrietta could have gotten me to do it an on the floor, on the kitchen table, on the kitchen floor, or on the leather couch in the living room.

I was in her, and she was saying my name over and over and over. Until she was silent and I saw a bubble of saliva form in her parted lips. I felt so tired, so great, so happy, so fulfilled. I felt like

someone had hit me in the forehead with a sledge hammer and it had made me happy.

“I’m going to take a shower,” she said.

“There’s a nice one in Bosco’s bedroom,” I said. I was looking up at the ceiling. She always took a shower afterwards if we went to bed during the day. It got to be her trademark. The quick running of water. She didn’t get her hair wet. Sometimes I watched her. She didn’t care.

I got up and put my boxer shorts on. Blue. From Swanson’s in La Jolla. She loved them. I went in Boscos room. The bathroom was open off the bedroom and she was facing the spray of the shower soaping off. I watched her. She was only in for a few minutes and then she got out. I found her a big clean towel in one of the cupboards. She got dressed.

“Do you want me to walk to the car with you?” I asked her.

A look of concern came into her eyes. “No! In case the Road Runner is anywhere around.”

I didn’t argue. I was tired. I didn’t really want to go anywhere. She kissed me lightly and went out the door. I sat around in my shorts for awhile, looking out the window in the direction of the track. I didn’t feel like going back to the track. I always felt lonely when she left, not really knowing when I would hear from her again. I hadn’t asked her either. I got dressed.

Bosco wasn’t a drinker, so there weren’t anymore beers in the refrigerator. I’d gotten one before from one of the ones David had brought, and he and his friends had drunk the rest. I drove to the Market Cafe. Only a couple of Mexicans sitting at the bar. I took a bar stool off by myself.

“Charles!” Willy said, “you with Bosco?”

“I was. I had to go someplace. I think he’s still at the track. He’ll probably be along later.”

“What can I get you?”

“How about Bud in the can?”

“Okay.”

“Thanks.”

I played some juke box music, Perez Prado “Patricia” and “Inolvidable Primavera”. Some Glen Miller, And a song called “Amigo”. I sat there in the dark bar. God, why couldn’t I go to Europe with her? Why couldn’t I get away? Why was I trapped? Why did that damned Alexander have me so hemmed in like he was a damned sheep dog and I was a slow but intransigent sheep?

How the hell did I find these people?

“Another beer, Charles?”

“Yeah, I’ll have another, thanks, Willy.”

I sat there meditating, looking through the glass door of refrigerator behind the bar where all the different beers were and the one big can of marinated jalapenos. If you want to try something someday, baby, try those. I wondered what was ever going to become of me and Henrietta. How could this go on? This situation was untenable. This situation was damned stupid.

I remember reading in Fitzgerald’s published notebooks he quoted an ancient author saying, “The worst sadness is happiness remembered.” It certainly doesn’t make a bit of difference how happy you are today if it’s all going to be taken away from you tomorrow.

If you have a custom made suit from Brooks and custom made bench black wing tips and you are driving through the financial district in a new black Mercedes and the next day you don’t have the money to buy a bar of green Palmolive soap—thus the saying “No soap”—what the hell good was affluence? You think you’re going to live off memories? You think you’re going to feed yourself on memory soup? You may try but I guarantee you are not going to get much nutrition. It’s worse for the rich to go through poverty than it is for the poor to always be there.

But then loss of a relationship is much worse, loss of someone you love.

I didn’t have a bit of sympathy with the position of Alexander. I mean to a degree I felt sorry for him, but I didn’t like his position anymore than I was sympathetic to nuns who quit the order and did whatever they did: get married, taught school, became lesbos, who knows? Or priests who quit the priesthood and married. I wasn’t one of those guys who sympathized with apostates.

Alexander had already gotten married, the father of two children. His wife lived in Rancho Santa Fe. She didn’t want him back. He didn’t want to go back. But, as a Catholic, he had no grounds for a divorce. His relationship with Henrietta was adulterous. Mine wouldn’t be. And I was prepared to make the commitment FOREVER. He couldn’t marry her. I could. She couldn’t marry him. She could me. Real knowledge is very simple.

“Charles.” Bosco was at my side interrupting the reverie.

“You want to eat?” he said.

“Sure,”

“You want to eat here?”

“Fine.”

“Willy,” he called to Willy, “we’ll be in the back room. Send Frankie or Henry back. Let’s start off with some nachos and guacamole.”

I grabbed my can of beer and followed Bosco to the back room. There was no one back there and we sat at a big booth in the corner. I took a big swig of the still cold Bud. I wondered how many of these I would have. The answer was as many as I wanted or as many as I could handle. And who could determine that? Sometimes—as in the past—the cops.

“How’d it go?”

“We had a nice time, thank-you. I put the key back over the door sill.”

“Was the game over?”

“Yeah.”

“They leave right away?”

“No. But that’s okay. We just wanted to see each other. They’re nice boys. They were having fun playing backgammon.”

“They’re good kids.”

“Jasper Kyle likes to play backgammon, though.”

“I saw that little sonofabitch in the locker room at La Costa yesterday... He’s not that good at it.”

Bosco and Jasper sort of hated each other in an amiable way. They were really sort of alike—very competitive, full of the hustle, total egomaniacs.

Bosco had gotten a little edge on Jasper, though. Because in a poker game he’d gotten Jasper down for a few thousand and Jasper had never gotten over it. Jasper claimed Bosco had a party in there dealing coolers, claimed the guy confessed to it, that the guy was doing it because Bosco was helping him through college.

Believe me, Bosco was capable of it. I thought it was funny. And I used to bait Jasper by telling him how honest Bosco was. Jasper would work himself into a frenzy when I said stuff like that. After awhile his mouth would start looking like a horse that had been ridden too hard. He’d literally have foam on his mouth, which he’d spray into the air.

“He wanted to know if I wanted to bet on anything. He cheats on everything. I’ve seen him use his golf club like a polo mallet on his ball as he drives along in his cart. I’d kill him if he ever did that to me.”

I started to laugh. “Did he want to bet you on anything?”

“Yeah, he asked me what I wanted to bet on. I said free throws.”

Jasper was real good at free throws. But Bosco was better. Bosco when he was in college had the highest free throw percentage in the country.

“What did he say?” I said.

“He asked me how much I wanted to shoot for. I told him everything I had in my pocket. He asked me to show him. So I pulled out the roll”

I was sure Bosco had several thousand. “Did he go for it?”

“Hell no, he’s too smart. He knows when he’s beat. He’s got the instincts of a wolverine. I’m going to take that little sonofabitch and throw him through a locker one day.”

I laughed. Henry brought the nachos and guacamole. The nacho chips with melted cheddar on them were great with the beer. Bosco was fun to be around.

“Anytime you want to use the condo let me know.”

“Thanks.”

We walked out into the temperate Solana Beach night. I looked up past the big palm trees by the side of the Market Cafe and at the constellations and all the stars. I climbed in Blackie and drove home.

I went up Stevens and took a right on Lomas Santa Fe. The streets were pretty much vacant. I went under the underpass that runs under Highway 5 and took the exit north on 5. The freeway traffic was light. I was a third lane fifty-five mile an hour driver now. The fewer encounters I had with any control group—city, state, federal—the better I liked it. I probably had enough alcohol in me any time I left a bar or a restaurant to be arrestable, and I had been arrested in the past.

I personally didn’t understand how anyone could get through life without a good strong anaesthetic. Granted one felt worse and depressed and anxious and nervy and pissed-off later—what I would call the chair kicking mood—but the temporary reprieve was worth it.

As I drove north on 5 on the nicely lighted highway, I began thinking of Henrietta and Alexander. I began thinking of the things she had asked me to do for her. She had told me not too long ago that she wanted to go back to him, that that was where she really belonged. I always had the feeling that it had something to do with the security of coming home to her little kitchen every night and being sure that she had enough good silverware for several full settings, enough money to purchase organic vegetables, and enough money to make a casserole anytime she wanted to.

With me we might have had to eat Whoppers—with tax, a dollar and six cents apiece—at Burger King. And no drink. I couldn’t fault her for not wanting to change. And I didn’t want her to. I planned on doing something about my own life style. I liked her the way she was. But I also felt with me she would have been nice and slim and brown, outdoors playing tennis, and she would have gone to movies once and awhile, and to dinner when we could afford it, and if I could have afforded it—and I think I could have—I would have made sure I could have—I would have gotten her in a little swimming and tennis club—the Olympic if we’d stayed in La Costa, but we probably would have had to move because of Alexander—so she could have her own friends and play tennis and swim, so that if I were away working she could have her own independence.

She didn’t have more friends because that bastard Alexander was so selfish that he kept her down and broke her spirit. All’s he wanted was a cook, a servant who waited on him

hand and foot, and a great piece of ass. When she showed signs of breaking her bounds, he went nuts. But he did nothing I could see to make up to her for it. She had security, but she sold herself for it. Maybe that's what she wanted.

Anyhow, she wanted me to go and see Alexander—another great meeting—and explain to him that I was the one who started things up, but the extenuating circumstances for me were that I knew she was not married, that I thought she broke up with her boyfriend, and therefore I thought she was fair game. Also, she was very impressed with the fact that I wanted to marry her.

The truth be known, she got the idea of marrying, but by the time she did, I was so much in love with her (“love of her,” she would have said) that I would have done anything for her.

She was even in a good spot—had she known it—to start working on my vices: gambling and booze. She might have controlled them. Who knows? Anyhow she wanted me to meet Alexander. To chat it up with him.

Believe me, I wasn't looking forward to it. I figured we'd finally get into it. And the way I sized him up, he didn't look like a weakling to me. He was thin and a little taller than me, but he had that kind of look about him. He looked like he could handle himself.

My look—had it been apparent—was one of extreme fear and I'm going to stand my ground and if this thing gets going one of us is really going to get hurt but I won't be intimidated and I will go after you. You can see I was trying to avoid the spark that would set the fire that we couldn't put out. Once the fire got going there was going to be no containing it. I think Alexander might have sensed that too, might have known he was going to have his hands full.

He had this warehouse for his bakery stuff up at Palomar Industrial Park, only about three miles from where I lived. There was an office where there was a secretary during the day for sales and you open a door in the side of the office and there was the old office with the bakery stuff. French ovens for French bread and for pastries, I guess. He wanted to meet me there at 8:30 Thursday night.

My friend Jerry Haggerty who knew I was going out with Henrietta and knew about Alexander and thought the whole thing was facetious and insane noticed I was a little down after tennis.

“What's wrong with you?”

“I got to go see that damned Alexander tonight, and I really don't feel like doing it.”

“Hell, don't go. I wouldn't go if I were you.”

“You're not me.”

“Where does he want to meet you?”

“Up at the warehouse at Palomar tonight.”

“Anyone else going to be there?”

“No. And he's got this big assed six shooter. I hope he doesn't bring that. So if you don't see me tomorrow for tennis I'm fertilizing the petunias.”

“Very simple, shine it. Fuck ‘em.”

“I’m going.”

We walked down the steps from the tennis courts. Haggerty was sort of laughing. I wasn’t. I was miserable.

I went home and waited ‘till around eight then I drove up to the industrial park. I’d been there once or twice before with Henrietta when Alexander was in France. There were no cars in the parking lot out front of the glassed in office. I looked in the window of the bakery place. No one in there. There was just a night light on. I pushed a buzzer. I knocked on the glass door. I could see inside a poster of Paris at night. I was just shaking, scared out of my wits. Now I was here. Where was the guy?

I waited around for a while. I went to the car, got a three by five or whatever size cards those are, a pen and I wrote on it: Another no show. Alexander, I was here. Where were you? Charles.

The things guys do. I was scared witless, yet, I had to do some thing like that.

I went home.

I was having a couple beers. I was looking at the view east at the darkness of the east at night. It was a fine view of darkness and a few lights. My telephone rang.

“Charles?” It was Henrietta.

“Yes.”

“Alexander had to go out of town. But he came back. He saw your note at the office. He wants to see you now.”

“All right.”

“You going now?”

“Yes.”

Son of a bitch. Here it comes. I went to the lower garage beneath the tennis courts. There was old faithful Blackie. He would never ask me to do these kind of things. I was dressed for tennis. How else was I ever dressed? I drove back to the office. It was off Yarrow Street.

There was Alexander sitting in the white light of his little French bakery office. His hairline was receding and he had thinning hair. He was thin. And he was pale, definitely not a tennis player. I guess he considered himself some sort of race car driver. Maybe he was. Who knows?

When he saw me, he got up from his desk and came and opened the door and then went back and sat at his desk. He was wearing a white button down and gray slacks and a dark blue sweater. He looked collegiate.

“You wanted to see me? I’ve been here twice now.” I sat down in a chair in front of his desk.

He looked at me. It wasn't an unkindly look, but why did I have the feeling that if he could have pushed the proper button I wouldn't have been on earth anymore? It was always as if he were sort of smiling at me but like a wolf or a coyote might smile. It wasn't to make the other animal feel comfortable.

"Why you play games with me? Why do you still play game? Why do you play games behind my back?"

I wanted to say, "Because there's no place else to play them." But I didn't want to put a cigarette into the snout of a cougar.

I said, "I'm not playing any games, Alexander. I want to marry Henrietta, and there's nothing you can do to stop me if she wants to marry me."

He looked at me, taking this in. If he had been concentrating on me before, he seemed to be concentrating on me even more intently as if he were a scientist and I were something totally new under the microscope. The room was very tense. I wondered if he had his damned six gun in the drawer (Henrietta had showed it to me one day in the closet). It was a big thing, a Wild West apparatus.

The fucker always looked kindly to me and pissed off and maybe just a little crazy. And I had the feeling I was the inspiration for his craziness. Without Henrietta he and I might have been friends. But I doubt it. We didn't have anything in common. We would have gotten along socially.

"You been to my house?"

"I didn't know it was your house. But, yes, I've been there. It's very nice."

"What did you do there?"

"I had lunch a couple of times. I went over to pick up Henrietta to play tennis. By the way, why don't you let her play tennis? She's a nice player, and she doesn't play."

"I don't care if she plays tennis. She can."

"Yeah, but she doesn't."

"What else did you do in my house?"

"Nothing." This little look came over his face.

"Look, Alexander, if Henrietta wants to be with you and that's all she wants, you have my word I will never bother you again."

"You know," he said, "in France I could have your face broken. Or I might do it myself. In my country I was in the Green Berets."

"Yeah, well I was in the American Infantry and between your country and my country we've got a lot better record than the damned Republic."

He sat up a little straighter at that statement. Coming from his background, he'd be no fan of the Republic. Henrietta told me his father was a general and an aristocrat. Alexander's title was count. He wouldn't love the Republic.

"Would you like to go inside?" he said, nodding towards the warehouse,

“Suit yourself. If that’s what you would like to do, that’s what I’m here for. I don’t think it will solve anything. And one of us is going to get hurt.”

He didn’t move. He just looked at me. I was very afraid. I felt my legs weren’t under me. I felt, “How can I really get good leverage behind the punch when I’m floating?” But that’s the way I always felt when I knew a fight was coming. I knew I would conduct myself well. Because I was in shape. And the will is stronger than fear, and I had some experience in this and a very fine punch if I got the opening. Alexander didn’t move from behind the desk.

If I saw some look in his face, he might have seen one in mine. The message was: “As long as we’re talking, I’m fine. But in the warehouse I’m going to try to kill you.”

I saw his shoulders visibly give a little sag. The pissing match was over.

“You know,” he said, “Henrietta wants me. She wants you. Maybe she wants someone else. But I don’t want that.” He wagged his forefinger in front of his face. “You know how many times she went to the beauty shop one month when I was in France?”

I just looked at him. This was something new.

“Twenty-three times. The hair do. The permanent. The leg wax. All this for you.”

“No.”

I was sort of astonished. I had met her at the beauty shop a couple of times on 2nd. Street in Encinitas. One time I had to wait awhile for her and I was reading this article by P.J. O’Rourke in Rolling Stone and they let me keep the magazine. Henrietta seemed to be well known in the beauty shop. That was ridiculous, but she was capable of it.

“You know who pay for that?”

“I have no idea. Maybe her dad.”

That idea actually seemed to amuse him. “The dad have no money. I pay for the beauty shop and I send the dad money.”

“But I thought her father was a doctor.”

“He was, but he leave his wife, the mother of Henrietta, and he goes with younger woman and he spend his money. The woman she leave him. And I send him money. And he is a dronk. All time dronk. And the mother, worse. Crazy.” He rocked his head from side to side to indicate dementia. “And I send her money too.”

He was sending me the message about all the things he was involved in with the family of Henrietta and would I be able to cover those bases too! I wasn’t carrying my own ass. And I think he had some indication of that.

He sat back and looked at me, seeing how I would respond to that statement.

I’ll admit that some information was information I hadn’t had access to before and it surprised me, but in my mind it didn’t make any difference

“Alexander, I didn’t mean to interfere with your life. I didn’t know about you. Henrietta wasn’t married. There was no ring on her finger. I don’t go out with married women. Evidently you’ve been together for some time. Why didn’t you marry her? You could

have avoided this confrontation. And you would have had a perfect right to kill me if I had gone out with her. But I see a single girl not married. I didn't know about you. Why shouldn't I ask her out? You liked her. Why shouldn't I? My problem now is I fell in love with her. And I asked her to marry me.

"If she wants to, I'm going to. If she wants to be with you, I promise you I will never bother you again. I will not phone her, I will not write her. That will be that.

"She told me she wants to come back to you and be with you, but she's not even sure you want her. Do you want her? She won't know what to do. I wish you would be nice to her." He just sat there looking at me. He said nothing.

"I won't bother you anymore," I said. "But it does seem to me that if she wants to marry me, she has that right."

I didn't put in that I knew he was a Catholic and he was married once and that he couldn't get married again, that all they could do was remain in an adulterous relationship.

I'm sure those same thoughts were passing through his mind just then, but I don't know how seriously he took his religion. But I doubted very seriously there would be a civil ceremony for him and Henrietta. They simply wouldn't believe in it. And why give credence to the shim-sham-scum of the Protestants?

If it's not a holy oath and you don't intend to keep it, why take it in the first place? "Through sickness and health..." This is a sacred oath. It is a sacrament of the Creator of the Universe. "What God has joined together let no man rend asunder."

Alexander couldn't rend asunder his marriage. You don't like each other anymore? Too bad. You don't want to live together? Live apart. You aren't getting a divorce.

You didn't know what you were doing? Too bad. You shouldn't have done it. You've got your swell wife, Mrs. Alexander, Alexander. It's Mrs. Alexander and the kids down at Rancho Santa Fe. And that's all you get. One chance at the brass ring. "For better or for worse 'till death do you part."

The divorce stuff started in England with old Henry. And Henry shouldn't have been king anyhow. Henry V shouldn't have been king. Elizabeth shouldn't have been the monarch. The people who are there today shouldn't be there. They were all usurpers. All illegitimate. All this stuff started with the regicide of the king in line. The continuity of the rightful king in England was interrupted. And it led to Henry and Henry led to divorce. But not amongst Catholics. Mr. Alexander was a Catholic. Miss Henrietta was. And so was I.

Alexander walked me to my car. I said good night to him.

I was driving down the street towards home. Someone ran out in the street waving. I almost went past her. It was Henrietta. What a nut. I parked Blackie and rolled down the window.

"Please forgive me and Alexander, Charles. Thank-you for what you did. I will always be loving you. Good-bye."

"You better get home before he catches you."

She shrugged. I drove off.

four

About a week later she called.

“What do you do? It’s me, Frenchfry.”

I thought you wanted to go back to Alexander. I thought that’s why I went to the meeting.”

“I want to. But I’m still in love of you.”

I was too weak to resist her, so on the imbroglio went. I couldn’t stop.

I turned right off 5 on La Costa Avenue. There was no traffic at all on La Costa. I drove along the side of the swamp. There were no street lights on La Costa Avenue by the swamp. So the street and swamp were dark, only my headlights to show me the two lane street.

I turned left on El Camino, right on Arenal there by the little La Costa Fire Station, left on Estrella del Mar, turned right on the drive to the tennis courts and garages of Casitas, and put Blackie in the lower garage. I walked to the condo. I was alone. I remembered one night when we were at the apartment, Alexander’s as it turns out.

Henrietta used to put fresh sheets on the bed every day. She’d just finished doing that. We’d just had a nice dinner. I’d had a few drinks. We’d watched a movie, and we were going to bed. I got in the nice big bed, fresh sheeted and clean smelling. The sliding glass door was open and there was lots of moonlight.

I was still in my boxer shorts propped against the pillows against the headboard. She was taking off her clothes. She was down to her panties.

She took them off and she put them up to her nose and threw them on the floor in a mockery of total disgust.

I started laughing. “Why did you do that?” I said.

“Oh, they always do that in French films,” she said.

I left the light off when I entered the condo.

Usually in our lovemaking I was on top of her. I was slow like trying to park a ship just right at the dock. Or I was like a probe. When she got on top of me, it was like how I imagined it might be to be lying lengthwise on the railroad tracks out by the Coast Highway and have an Amtrak passenger go over you full speed and live. I don’t know why but my main impulse was to break into uproarious laughter, big guffaws, but I knew that that might make her mad, or worse hurt her feelings, and so she took the look in my eyes as ecstasy when it was glee. How I loved her. When I was around the apartment, sometimes I brought a book. I was just happy to be there with her. I was just happy to know she was around.

But that didn’t work for her. She wouldn’t be sullen. She’d be Okay. But she couldn’t really let you alone.

My aunt had a dog when I was young, Bolger. Bolger wouldn't be anywhere near me. Not at all interested what I was doing. But I used to like to get the sports pages of the newspaper and spread them out on the rug to read them. As soon as I did that, invariably Bolger would come and sit right on the paper and look at me. You couldn't keep him off.

I mean what could you do but laugh? You couldn't get mad at him. You could move to a table.

Henrietta would occupy herself for awhile in the kitchen, then she'd go out to the garage and do laundry. Sometimes she herself would pick up a book. But you knew she wanted something from you. I could feel her.

The worst thing was when she went in the bedroom and lay on the bed like a dead crusader in effigy.

But if it hadn't gotten to the crusader in effigy stage, all you had to do was stop and say: "Let's go to a movie." Her eyes would get bright and happy. She'd stop the restlessness. And she'd come up to you, grab your hands and say, "Let's go!"

Or it didn't make any difference if you suggested tennis or swimming or dinner.

Her breasts were like two faded roses floating atop a Sierra Nevada trout stream.

I felt I could put my thumb and forefinger around her waist. She left a pair of underwear in my bed one night. And I never ceased to marvel how small her waist was. I couldn't get her underwear around my leg.

And yet where her thighs were it would have taken a barrel stave to get around her. You would have needed a cooperage to bind her thighs. Her ankles were as thin and as nice as a deer's. Her belly button. What I wouldn't give to drink a nice Vodka or gin fresh out of an ice shaker in that little cavity. Her eyes most resembled a doe's, ready at any moment to be frightened but then sometimes absolutely fearless and also with a cool calm look of centuries of culture.

It wouldn't have even occurred to an American girl to be what Henrietta was. And on Henrietta's part it took very little effort, if any. The place settings, the chic way of dressing, the modesty. If she approached a man she didn't know, she was diffident and never said anything but, "Sir?" It bowled people over I tell you. It bowled me over.

The other part of her, the reproductive part of her, was like a swamp, warm and dark and mysterious and beautiful with beautiful orchids growing in banks down the sides of tall trees into the water. Whenever I was in there it was always a mystery, and I was the most happy person on earth, because I was doing something very mysterious and beautiful. I was very happy there.

I think one of the greatest things on earth is continuity. That's one of the reasons I'm a Catholic. Let me pose this situation. There is a man who sees another man who sees another man who sees another man and that man sees a man who sees another man. But down at the end of this sequence of men seeing other men one man is plowing. And it is reported back through the series of men that a man is plowing.

In the age of Christ, Peter knew Christ. And the man who replaced Peter knew Peter so he knew the man who knew Christ and the next man knew the man who knew the man

who knew Christ, and the next man knew the man who knew the man who knew the man who knew Christ. The chain of contact with Christ has been maintained. So to speak.

Somebody dropped a couple of cats off at the Casitas. Or I guess that's what happened. It would be strange that they just walked there on their own. One was a huge big tom with a head like a bowling ball. He was gray. The other was a female. She was small and thin and gray. They seemed to be in love.

One thing about domestic cats is they usually need some kind of help. I mean they might kill a few mice and some birds, but if someone doesn't feed them they starve. And I wondered who that someone was going to be. Over a period of years, I'd taken responsibility for lots of cats, gotten them lots of homes. It looked like I was going to take on two more.

They were pretty wild. They wouldn't come near me. I left two bowls of food on the porch at night. In the morning the food was gone. During the day they hung out in the development. There were plenty of big pines and all variety of trees and lots of foliage and plenty of places for them to hide. Sometimes I'd see them running like hell down a path. But at night if I didn't put out the food, I saw them press their faces to the sliding glass door leading to the patio. And then I'd take the food out. Then they'd run like hell. I'd go back in the apartment, and they'd come back to eat.

I used to leave the sliding glass door to the patio open at night. Sometimes I left the screen open. They started making a game of running in the condo and running out. I started putting their food on the hearth of the fireplace and they would come in and eat.

The tom was the first to let me pet him. I named him Big Boy. It took months before I could pet the female a little. I named her Martha. I called them Catholics.

A woman next door to me had a big fluffy fixed house cat that she let out once and awhile. I guess Big Boy slapped the hell out of it for sport. That didn't go over too well with the woman. Also, Big Boy let the woman pet the top of his head one day and then he popped her a good one in the side of the leg which bled somewhat.

Luckily for us all, the woman was a pretty nice woman, and did not complain to the board of directors. The people of Casitas were not supposed to have animals. A few did anyhow.

One day all along the patio areas of the condos, construction people had dug this rather deep ditch. It might have been because of drainage problems. I'm not certain. But the porch was torn out. The ditch was about flush with my sliding glass door. They left the ditch open like that for a couple of weeks.

As the porch was gone, the cats had to eat in the house. Their bowls were on the fireplace hearth. I'd left both the slider and the screen open for them.

Well, one night they ate their fill and they were running around in the house, chasing each other like mad up the stairs into the loft and back down the stairs across the red wine carpet of the living room and out the open door and over the ditch.

I was enjoying their antics, but I had some place to go, so I closed the slider when they were both outside. Martha didn't realize it, and she hit the sliding glass door in a leap and then did a slow motion fall into the ditch. I have never seen a look of such puzzlement on

an animal's or human's face as Martha's when she hit the window instead of open space. I went out to make sure she was all right. She was. I laughed for quite a while about it.

I didn't hear from Henrietta. It had been weeks that I hadn't heard from her. That had never happened before. I had several listings in La Costa, and, oddly enough, a couple of them sold. They were big deals too. I hadn't paid all my taxes the year before. I owed another fifteen thousand, so I paid that. And I was about twenty thousand in debt to various people. I paid them.

I didn't really have much out of the commission money by the time I was through. The condo I was living in was my listing. It sold, but I owed the commission in rent, and I had to move again. Haggerty owned a fishing lodge in Canada and he went up there each summer about the month of May, so I offered him eight hundred a month for his place while he was gone. He left in May and got back in October. It was a beautiful place on the Estrella de Mar side of Casitas. I moved my books and a few clothes and the cats followed me. I hung my shirts all up in one place on the rung in the walk in closet downstairs off the master bedroom, and I put my sports jackets in another place, and my slacks in another. There was a shelf up above the closet rung on one wall and I put all my books up there so I could see them. Included amongst them were *The Honeybadger* by Robert Ruark and *Bullet Park* by John Cheever. All my suntans, all my long sleeved button down shirts, all my jackets were from Brooks. No one knew why, and I had been to many doctors, but I only felt comfortable in Jack Purcell tennis shoes. Any other shoe gave me unbearable pain.

The new condo had two levels, same as the one I had before the last one. The master bedroom was downstairs and the living room and kitchen upstairs. Because the glassed in master bedroom had a walkway leading past it and one running in front of it, a wooden lattice work had been built in front of it from the front of the patio and around the patio to the balcony on the second level. This, for privacy, also provided a wonderful cage for Big Boy and Martha to raise hell in and wake me up in the morning. Martha used to use the lattice work to climb to the balcony where I fed her and Big Boy.

Big Boy himself would perch on this upended railroad tie with a night light on the front of it about ten feet in front of the unit and leap to the balcony. It was a great jump, but he did it easily. He'd walk in the place. I always left the screen open. One time he sat on the counter in between the kitchen and the living room. I saw him sitting there, his gray bowling ball head, his big powerful body, his sullen eyes. And I reached out to pet him on the top of his head. He let me. Then he gave me a swat on my wrist with an open paw which drew blood. He looked at me with great satisfaction, not moving anymore than the Sphinx moves.

I made no remonstrance. I was in the living room. I walked around to the kitchen, got a rather heavy spoon out of the top drawer, walked back in the living room, looked at him, and gave him a heavy whack on top of his head. He looked dizzy for a second. He didn't run. After a while he just walked out. He didn't claw me again, though.

I loved those cats. As much as they could love anyone I think they loved me. I mean I couldn't get into a cat's head.

So we lived, I wondering what the hell happened to Henrietta, the cats coming up to the balcony both in the morning and at night and getting fed as much as they wanted, I sitting next to the open sliding glass door and open screen off the balcony reading the novels of Elmore Leonard and Ancient History and Medieval and Modern History by Moon and Hayes. Martha and Big Boy, perfectly secure, wandered around the apartment or stayed gone 'till eating time. And I was going broke. It was odd as hell. My income for the year was eighty thousand. I never saved any of it. I could barely afford to go to the show.

So I sat there in the living room reading *The Fountainhead* wait

ing for my life to perish, feeding the cats. Nothing too eventful. Henrietta had given me these numbers in France to call. She said I could call them any time for the next ten years and the people would know where she was. I called them.

“Henrietta! No we ‘ave not ‘eard from her. No, Charles. If we do, we will tell her.”

Then I’d call back in a few weeks. “No, Charles, we ’ave not heard from her.”

“Thank-you!”

Oh, yes. Oh, yes I could call these numbers for the next ten years, Henrietta simply forgot to say I could call them without results, the same way you could call into an empty cave.

“Big Boy,” I said. He came and stood by my chair. I patted him on his head.

There was a doctor and his wife who lived nearby. They were young. I never really claimed I owned Big Boy and Martha, but I claimed them because I supported them, but I also said they were free to come and go as they pleased.

The doctor’s wife, a pale, puffy non-good looking non-ugly piece of work, came to me one day about the nasty habits of Big Boy. Martha, unbeknownst to me, had a litter of kittens somewhere around the garage area, and one of the kittens had a skewed neck. In other words, it should have been looking front and it looked to the right.

“How could you have permitted this to happen?” she wailed after telling me the other three kittens were normal and she had found homes for them.

“I didn’t exactly know that Big Boy was a skewed neck progenitor.” I said.

“Well, what do you intend to do about it?”

I looked at those secure, frustrated, sterile eyes. “Well, I said, “give me the cat. I didn’t know about it until now and I’ll take care of it.”

“I’ve already taken care of it.”

“Yes? I tell you if the cat’s looking to the right, that’s the way I already always looked.”

“The cat has been destroyed out of kindness.”

“I hope you don’t harbor any kindness for me. But then tell me why are you discussing this with me if you have already taken care of everything on your own?”

“Because I don’t want it to happen again!”

“Only the cat god can prevent it.”

“Charles, I don’t know how you can make fun of it.”

“Well, what are the chances of having another skewed necked cat? Ask your husband.”

“I don’t think Martha and Big Boy should have anymore cats.”

“Me neither. But you’d have a hard time telling them that.”

She flew out the door with tears of frustration in her eyes.

Now and then I’d sit out by the small pool behind my apartment. Her husband was sometimes there. He wore what I’d call black briefs. He was very slim, in good shape, but not at all athletic looking. He had almost a pretty face. I didn’t like briefs because I didn’t like the ugly bulge. He didn’t have to worry. His name was Terry.

“Hi, Charles, how you doing today?”

“Fine thank-you.”

“That’s just dandy.”

One day his wife knocked on my door. There was her little pale face. “I have this leaflet for you that describes cat productivity.”

“I’m not a cat.”

“Very funny. But you take care of cats who are adding to the cat population. You are only a renter. And in the Casitas renters are definitely not supposed to own cats.”

“As you say, I feed them. I don’t own them. Maybe God. God owns me.”

“Will you look at the pamphlet?”

“I’ll be glad to.”

I closed the door. I went upstairs and sat down at the counter by the phone and read the damned pamphlet. It was printed on pink paper. It was all about neutralizing one’s pets, how to stop the dog and cat explosion and prevent the pound from working overtime.

Big Boy walked in at that time. He got up on the counter right next to the phone. “Big Boy,” I said, “you are a very big pain in the ass.” His sullen eyes looked steady at me.

I put food out for him and Martha out on the balcony. And Big Boy was out there eating and soon Martha’s head appeared over the top of the balcony. She climbed up the lattice work. She liked to go to the bowl where Big Boy was and get in his way, using her body to get in front of him. He’d go to the other bowl. This sequence would go on two or three times then Big Boy would leap off the balcony. Martha would soon follow, and they would finish the food later.

One day I was washing the dishes. The sun was coming brightly in the kitchen window. I heard this enormous splash. I leaned over the sink and looked out the kitchen window. Big Boy had thrown this little black and white cat in the stream that ran by the walk. It was so horrible it was funny. Big Boy just stood there as the little soaked cat scrambled out of the stream and tore off through the ivy.

“Have you,” said the doctor’s wife, “read the pamphlet, Charles?”

I was at the pool and trying to be alone when she came up. “Big Boy and I both read it thoroughly,” I told her. “We both disagree with its premises and its conclusions. We are both advocates of animal adventure.”

“Well, something has got to be done, I like animals as much as you, but we can’t have this huge population of unwanted cats.”

“That was one of the points Big Boy mainly disagrees with, He says he’s resigned to it.”

“You think it’s funny.”

“No. It’s not funny, but what can I do about it?”

“Big Boy is not your cat.”

“Who said he was?”

“My husband and I are going to have him fixed.” I looked at her in a funny way. What I wanted to do and what I should have done was club her with the right along side her sterile jaw. Instead I said, “Leave the cat alone. If Martha has kittens, I’ll take care of them. In the meantime I want you to be advised: leave the cat alone.” She didn’t say anything. She left the pool area.

My problem was I’d made Big Boy friendly. He’d go up to people now, sit in their laps, let them pet him. He’d sit in her lap. Not Martha though. She did not go up to people. She ran away.

For a few days I didn’t see either of the cats. I wondered what the hell was going on.

I drove up to the apartment late one night. I was walking up the dark path. A small shadow crossed in front of me. I stopped. Big Boy. I knelt down. I patted his head. Something was wrong with him. I didn’t understand it. I sat down on the brick stairs. He pressed his muzzle into my hand. His nose was wet. “What’s wrong, Big Boy?.” I said. “What’s wrong?” There was something wrong with him.

I turned him around and lifted his tail up. His balls were gone. That’s all.

Why didn’t they just shoot the sonofabitch? Why didn’t they poison him? He was a tom. He defended his turf. He was wild. He was the toughest cat in the area. Now he was gone. I knew he wouldn’t last. And Martha sure as hell would have to hook up with a tom. Big Boy would be run off. I would always feed him. I left the screen of the balcony open for him.

I never saw him again. I never saw Martha either. I didn’t know if someone took them as pets or what happened. But sure as hell they’d killed him. The doctor had this ruby red Mazda convertible that he loved so much. I got a can opener out of my drawer. Then I said, “What the fuck’s the use? It’s done. It won’t bring Big Boy back.” I just never talked to them again.

They had their sterile little life, and they tried to impose it on the world, a clitless woman and a dickless man solving the problems of the animal world in their local community.

I remember the time that Big Boy had the same damned cat he’d thrown in the stream chased up a ninety foot pine. The little black and white cat, black with a white front, sort of a tuxedo effect, was way up the tree. I mean way up. Big Boy was sitting at the base of

the pine. He'd been there for hours. I thought I'd let the little cat escape. So I took a bowl of Big Boy's favorite cat food out to him and showed it to him, and I took it back to the apartment, and he followed me, and I put the food on the balcony for him. He had a few quick bites leaped off the balcony, and went back to the base of the pine.

I called my answering service. "Cardinal, it's the Pope."

"Hi, Pope." She gave me a series of calls.

"No Frenchfry?"

"No Frenchfry, Pope."

"Thank-you, Cardinal."

"You are welcome."

I hadn't heard from her in a long time. I'd called several numbers in France. "Henrietta. No we have not seen 'er. Au revoir.

"Good-bye."

"Mais, oui—Père! Charles. Anglais. Wait one moment."

"Charles. No. No Henrietta. Au revoir."

"Au revoir."

I called Ray Gilbert in Marseilles. Henrietta told me he was her best friend in the world and that if I ever needed anything or if I needed to stay in France that I could stay with Ray Gilbert. He would be happy to have me.

I tried his Paris office a few times in the days past, and I finally tracked him down to Marseilles. He was a chandler. He spoke English.

"Mr. Gilbert, my name is Charles I'm a friend of Henrietta's."

"Oh, yes. She told me about you. She says she likes you very much."

"I know. Thank-you. I like her. But I think she is with Alexander. I don't understand why she goes back to him. He doesn't seem to make her happy."

"I know. She was very happy with you. She told me."

"I don't know where she is. I haven't heard from her in a couple of months. Have you heard from her? She told me you are her best friend."

"No. I have not heard from her. And I don't know where she is."

"Do you think she's in France?"

"Maybe."

"But then again she might be in the United States with Alexander."

"Maybe."

"I don't want to call Alexander."

"I understand."

“Can I call you back in a few weeks to see if you have heard from her?”

“Yes.”

“Is this the best number? Or I have a home number. Where should I call you?”

“Call me at the office. I just got married.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank-you. My wife might not understand.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

“Henrietta told me you read a great deal.”

“Yes.”

“She told me you loved a book *Camp du Sans* by Jean Raspaillet.”

I read it. It was great. Any others?”

“Yes, one on Sartre by Thomas Molnar.”

“I detest Sartre.”

“So does Thomas Molnar. You’ll love the book. Molnar carves Sartre up like a good delicatessen man would thinly slice a ham. He carves him up.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you for your courtesy.”

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

He sounded so nice. Henrietta had a wonderful friend. He had a very kind voice.

Weeks later I called him again in Marseille. He had not heard from her.

You get these rich guys who die of drug overdose. You wonder why. But who knows what goes on in a man’s heart?

When I was with her I still drank. Unfortunately I gambled. But not a lot of either. I knew she didn’t like either. I didn’t need them that much.

Also, if she could have gotten pregnant during that time when Alexander was away in France that might have solved many problems. I kept telling her, “You are going to get pregnant.” I didn’t care. If she wanted to have a baby it was fine with me. But as Alexander said, evidently she could not get pregnant.

I mean had she got pregnant I don’t think there was any doubt she would not have left me. But now she was gone. I was in love with her. I started reaching for other things—booze and gambling.

I’d come home sort of lit and I’d keep a twelve pack of Bud cans in the refrigerator and the number on the dial turned to the coldest—5 I think it was—and I’d just take off my suntans and Jack Purcells and socks and get into bed in my boxer shorts and shirt. I always had all the windows open.

I'd sit there sometimes in total darkness listening to the silence of the night. The lattice work shut out my view. When the cats were here—Big Boy and Martha—sometimes they would be on the patio or scrambling over the lattice work. Now they too were gone. I'd listen to nothing.

Sometimes if I got home before 11:30 there would be old radio programs on K.N.X. 1070, Gene Autry, Roy Rodgers, Orsen Wells as Harry Lime, "Gang Busters", "Texas Rangers". I loved those programs.

I hated hated hated television. It was a stream of everlasting filth or inane stuff that would insult the intelligence of a three year old. I loved a good movie but for the bullshit and commercials one had to watch to get an occasional something good, it wasn't worth it.

If I had a child I wouldn't permit a television in the house. And the child and the mother, Henrietta, could scream and scream as much as they wanted. No television in my home. Me, Henry, and the kid could play cards. At least there'd be some human interchange, some quips, some gossip. Maybe Henrietta would take up cigar smoking. I would have loved that. Everyone I knew, Jasper, Ben Ripley, my mom, had their dumb little faces glued to that little patch of television.

Anyhow, I'd sometime listen to old time radio and then get the sports scores at 12:15. Then I'd just sit there for awhile. Then I'd go up and look in the refrigerator. Scene out of hell. There they were. My people, the soldiers of the revolution, all dressed in red white and blue, ready to obey the orders of El Commandante.

Then I'd go back to bed, drink the cold can of beer, feel a little more mellow, start thinking of going to bed with her, then be just so fucking wide awake you couldn't believe it. I'd put my hand over my heart. In my eardrums I'd hear my heart pounding so fucking hard even though I wasn't moving.

Then I'd turn on the light, get a book, read for awhile, get tired, turn off the light, try to sleep, wouldn't be able to, turn the light back on, sit there for awhile, polish off my beer, go back upstairs for another one, come back down, turn the radio on, turn off the light, listen to the news, any news, the sound of a voice. Turn the radio off, try to sleep for awhile, sometimes actually sleep, wake up an hour later, look at the dark, listen to the dark, think of my beloved, turn on the light, turn on the radio, listen to the news, go back upstairs, snap the tab on another Bud, come back downstairs, turn off the news, light, sip the cold beer. This would go on all night.

And the funny thing, I wanted it to go on forever. I wanted infinite cold beer, infinite news, infinite snatches of reading, infinite thoughts of Henrietta. But the one thing I never wanted to see in my life was the dawn.

Like a vampire, I hated to see it get grey outside my window. I did not want to be caught in the dawn. I never wanted to get up and see people another day in my life.

I never never wanted to see sunlight. I didn't want to talk to people. I did not want to do real estate business. What I really wanted to do was put the old bullet in there. In the mouth. Right in the eye. In the forehead. Luckily, I had no gun. Unfortunately, my religion did not permit such things for a rational man. Of course, who was to say I was rational? But I seemed so. Then? Hell, of course. You never know what God might want to do. But His gift to me I decided I could not take. It was not an option. But I wanted it

so bad I could taste it. Kellogg's Rice Crispies. Snap, crackle, and pop! I wanted pop! One last pop and cut off the old thinking process.

On one of those beautiful occasions the wonderful Henrietta wanted me to talk to the wonderful Alexander, she told me, "If he asks you if we had sex, say 'Once or twice and we used a rubber.'"

I had no intention of discussing my sex life with Monsieur Alexander or anyone else.

But I said, because I was curious, looking into those innocent worried looking brown eyes, "Why should I tell him I used a rubber? Evidently it is difficult for you to become pregnant. Why should I use one?"

"E is afraid of the aids!"

"I'm not a homosexual. Aids in this country is almost totally a homosexual disease. You get it by screwing someone up the ass, which was not meant for that and can cause lesions and the lesions can get infected."

"You never did it that way?" She looked at me with a certain curiosity now.

"No. Have you?"

"Yes."

"How the hell do you do that?"

"You have to be very still."

Jesus. There was another great little dream for me to drive myself nuts with now at night and don't think I didn't. It is wonderful what little tidbits of information a man can use to tantalize himself with at night.

When Henrietta wasn't around anymore gambling seemed to be more interesting to me than it was when she was around. I mean to say, gambling was always interesting to me but Henrietta had been a moderating influence on me regarding gambling and drinking partially because I knew she didn't really approve of either and also because she made me happy and I didn't feel I needed anything else. Now she was gone my two friends Mr. Gambling and Mr. Drinking returned. And Mr. Bosco became more prominent.

I was at the Burro, too drunk for even me to drive. I started with Buds but after about two hours switched to Bombay Gin martinis straight up. They were cold enough, so that when Valerie first served them there were little particles of ice on top of the drink. I took them with two big green olives stuffed with those red pimentos and a small pearl onion.

I'd changed napkins about ten thousand times—the moisture off the glass inundating the old napkin—when a girl next to me asked what I was doing. "Nothing." She had a strange look to her. She was very nice looking in a way. But she looked tough to me. Her face was very pretty. But she was husky. Like a prize fighter. "Would you like a drink?" I asked her as I worked on my fifth martini.

"Delighted," she said.

"Well," I said, "what's up?"

"Not much, how about you?"

“If I weren’t so drunk I’d go to the track. I’ve had far too much to drink.”

“You want to go to the track!”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“I could drive you.”

“Yes!”

We had a couple more drinks. Then I said, “Well, let’s go.”

Blackie wasn’t in the best of shape. One of his tires was almost bald, he was out of alignment, and the radiator wasn’t quite right, so if you got stopped at a long light or caught in slow traffic you were in danger of burning up inside the car. The drive to Del Mar was an average of 105 mph.

She said, “I used to be a race car driver.”

“I believe it,” I said, as we only just missed a truck.

She was missing big eighteen wheelers by a few inches, but as she was doing it about a hundred a hundred and five miles an hour the truckers were too stunned to even honk.

Had one of Blackie’s bald tires given out, Angie and I would have become part of 5 between La Costa and Del Mar. But nothing happened. She had to slow down to make Via de la Valle. We went left on Jimmy Durante, and we drove right into the Del Mar parking area. As soon as she got into the track, she ran into two friends she knew and took off with them.

Swell. Now I arrive at the race track bombed out of my mind on a day even I wouldn’t drive. What to do? I had the better part of a hundred on me. For me at the track that wasn’t much money. That was like showing Moby Dick a minnow.

One of my fantasies: I’m at a track like Del Mar or Santa Anita. I’m at the Turf Club. I’ve got my own table with a nice white table cloth. I’m dressed in a light grey summer suit from Brooks, white button down—the best they make—black knit grenadine tie, black wing tips that are comfortable on me—something that’s impossible in the real world. There’s a bucket of ice next to me in which repose some unopened bottles of Bud, and there’s a nice cold glass of Bud in front of me. I’ve got all the racing papers in front of me—The Digest, The Racing Form, which I don’t know how to read, except for the articles, which I read. I’m all by myself, and I’ve got plenty of money, and I’m betting big. I can’t tell you whether I’m winning or losing. That was my idea of happiness.

I walked over to the closest bar on the first floor. Nina, who used to work the big bar where all the maniacs hung out—lower level grandstand—before they remodeled the track, was there.

“Hi, Charles!”

“Hi there. Howyabeen?”

“Okay.”

“Not like the old track.”

“No. What can I get you?”

“I’ll take a Bud.”

“What size, hun?”

“Medium.” I didn’t like the real big ones. I liked to keep the beer extra cold, not that it took me that long to drink them.

I had to stand there at the little postage stamp bar and let the beer stay on the counter and sort of bend down to drink it because had I tried to pick it up I would have spilled it. I had shaky hands. I drank a good dent in it that way. I left Nina a good tip.

I bought a program and a digest, watched the tote boards for awhile and bet forty on an even money horse that never challenged. I thought to myself, “I better save the rest of this money for drinking.” I went upstairs where they had a bar that served drinks. I had a Bombay Gin martini straight up. I was beginning to feel a little better after the ride and all and the girl who was my driver leaving me.

“Why does one come to a race track?” I said to myself. And I answered myself, “One comes to gamble. This is a sport that arouses the passions of kings and Arab princes. And it arouses your passions too.”

I read The Digest, looked at the morning lines in the program, and picked a two to one shot in the next race. Should be easy. I went downstairs to the phones—I had plenty of time before the race began—and I charged a call to my business number-my twenty-four hour a day answering service okay’d it—to my bookmaker in Hunnington Beach, Saddle Moran. A woman bookmaker.

Saddle herself answered the phone. “Hi. What’s going on?”

“I’m at the track.”

“Oh, how fun. Do you want something?”

“Yeah, fifth race, five hundred to win on Mr. Marco.”

“Fifth race, five hundred to win on Mr. Marco. Is that all?”

“That’s all for now.”

“Good luck, darlin’. ’Bye.”

“Bye.”

My slate was clean with Saddle. That’s part of where the twenty thousand in commission money I earned went. Mr. Marco broke well and dropped back into third position, the catbird’s seat. I thought I had a lock. I was thinking to myself, “This could be a productive day.” I was thinking productive ‘till Mr. Marco got beat at the wire. The horse I liked second best finished first.

Had I bet an exacta box I would have made three grand. Oh well, down five hundred. You’ve been there a million times. I went back to see Nina, and had another Bud. The beer felt good going down. Patrick Valenzuela was up on a good horse in the next race. Back to the phone, five hundred on Simian. I was watching a big television monitor on the lower level. This race was going to be close. Patrick had him up there but he was in traffic. Then at the very last he got through and won. I was jumping up and down screaming. Then the PLEASE HOLD ALL TICKETS warning came up on the screen and

the announcer said it too. A foul had been lodged against Patrick, and sure as hell the foul stood. I hadn't seen it, but Patrick was disqualified for rough riding.

I bet two more races five hundred each, lost them both, my horse came in second each time. So I was down two grand for the day. And I didn't have two grand.

The track was emptying out. I felt that it was my aorta that was emptying. I went to the bar and got another Bombay, this time over. Then I walked to Blackie and got in. I knew I shouldn't be driving. But I thought, "I'll drive to the Market Cafe and have something to drink."

While I was at a stop light, I passed out and took my foot off the brakes and Blackie rolled slowly forward and banged the car in front of me. This woke me up all right. I was probably as wide awake as Hitler when he knew it was all over. I immediately put Blackie in park, turned it off, and ran up to the other car. A young lady in a nice suit got out. She was very pretty.

She looked at the back of her car. You couldn't see a scratch. Blackie's grill was dented. Said her car was okay, but that my grill was dented. And she got back in her car. And drove off. And I quickly drove off to the Market. Thank God she didn't make a big deal out of it. I would have gone to the slammer. I had about ten ice cold Bohemias and some chips and salsa fresca and a jalapeno. A patron drove me home. I left Blackie locked by the side of the restaurant.

The next day I had such a terrible hangover and I was so worried. I went to the Burro again. Angie, my driver, was there. I bought her a drink.

"Thanks a lot for sticking with me," I said to her. "I really needed to drive yesterday."

"I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have left you."

"Don't worry," I said. "That's what friends are for."

"What do you mean?"

"Friends are to leave you."

"Don't talk like that. Say, you don't need a roommate, do you?"

"No. I'm living in someone else's place, and I myself won't be able to stay there much longer."

"Could you give me a ride to Oceanside?"

"I walked over here. Blackie's down by the Market Cafe. You are a nice driver though."

"Thanks."

I got her a ride to Oceanside with one of my friends who was going that way. I sat at the Burro wondering what to do. I had that empty, sick, desolate feeling that was becoming characteristic of my life. I was thinking maybe if I went to work for a company rather than running my own non-company things would be better. And I had to cut down on the drinking and gambling. This very thought, by the way, triggered an order for another Bud, which I quickly slammed home and ordered another.

Sunday I got a ride to the Market. I'd left Blackie under some palm trees where it now became apparent to me pigeons roosted, because Blackie was covered with pigeon droppings. And the grill was crumpled. That would be three or four hundred. And the leather on the seats was splitting. He looked like an old man. God. I went in the Market and had a few Bohemias.

Blackie had looked like a man with white hair. And with the broken seats and caved in grill he looked old and disreputable. I had done things to him and to myself. Where was our girl, Blackie? Where was the girl who could keep us straight and shine us up? I looked at all the beers through the clear glass doors of the refrigerator on the other side of the bar. Willy Gomez came over.

"You want something to eat, Charles?"

"No, just the chips."

I had been so sure of her, so sure she loved me—she said she did—so sure she would never leave me. What I was sure of now was I owed Saddle Moran two thousand and they wanted it tomorrow. I'd have to call her and explain what I did. I'd have to tell her I was drunk and I didn't have the money. I didn't even have any commissions coming up down the line. Of course, I'd had the account for many years and I'd never stiffed them. I didn't like people who stiffed people. It was a cheap shot. It was dishonorable. Was I dishonorable? I was beginning to think so.

After all, the whole world of the bookmaker is based on trust of his client. When a client bets a certain amount the implication is that he has it to pay if he loses. For he certainly expects to be paid if he wins. I wasn't looking forward to making the phone call to Saddle. You get the feeling that you are not doing anything but things are being done to you? Like let's say Angie didn't come to the Burro and so I wouldn't have gone to the track. And not having gone to the track I wouldn't have lost two thousand dollars and dented Blackie's grill. But the funny thing is that no matter how you think like that— if this hadn't happened that wouldn't have happened—you are only left with the results of what you have done. The consequences of your own actions are what you've got to deal with not really how they came about.

I drank a couple more Bohemias, contemplated the glass door refrigerator filled with various beers in cans and bottles all very beautiful to me and this big huge jar of marinated jalapenos and a bowl of fresh jalapenos—some of them are hot as hell—that were lying there on the metal bar shelves. And there was a big bowl of salsa fresca.

I ate some chips and salsa, paid the bill, left a good tip, and went out and got in the sad wreckage that was Blackie. He started right up, loyal soul, and I drove home on my desolate mission. I walked in my condo and called Saddle at her home phone number.

"Hello." It was Saddle.

"Saddle, it's Charles."

"Hi, baby, what's goin' on?"

"Yesterday when I bet that money I was a little drunk."

"Yeah?" I detected just a trace of anxiety in her voice.

“Well, I don’t have the money to pay next week.”

“Don’t do this to me, Charles. I laid those off. And, as you know, it’s been bad times for us. Ordinarily, I’d absorb it, but George and I are hurting. I’m real short right now.”

“Okay, but I thought it was better to phone you.”

“But can you get the money?”

“I’m working on it.”

“What about Bosco?”

“I’ll get hold of him.”

“Okay, honey, get back to me.”

“Okay.”

I’d accomplished nothing, except the great stall. God, I was great at the great stall. It’s too bad you couldn’t stall around until you died. Then they couldn’t get you.

I went to the refrigerator and got out a cold can of Bud. I went and sat in the dining room chair by the window. I could see Blackie and other cars out in front, parked in front of a pond by a waterfall. The window was open. I pulled the screen open too. Typical pleasant California evening. No Henrietta. Even the cats were gone. Who was my company? Well, I had Mr. Big Time Gambling Debt and Saddle Moran’s husband who was about six foot three and knew where I lived. But they weren’t going to do anything. They were my friends. And I’d laid out my friends.

Then I had Mr. Poverty as a guest. He came with his wife, old lady Desolation.

Then there were the wonderful executives, Mr. No Job Outlook and Mr. I Hate My Job.

I served every damned one of them a Bud, but as they were teatotalers, I drank them myself. I called Bosco.

“Yeah, what is it?”

“I got a problem.”

“If it’s money you want, and it’s money you always want from me, you are going to keep your problem.” He laughed.

“Do I owe you any money?”

“No, and you’re not going to.”

“I’ve borrowed money from you before. I’ve always paid you back.”

“That’s true.” He sounded like he was chewing celery or something. He probably was on one of his dumb diets where he ate about a bale of hay a day to keep from being hungry.

“But I loaned you money a hundred times and the last time you borrowed and I agreed to loan you the money if that was the very last time and you agreed.” He laughed again.

“What else?”

“Nothing…”

“Why don’t you quit drinking and go to work and sell a house?”

“Why don’t you become the good humor man?”

“What’s the problem?”

“Why would you want to know? You’re not going to help me.”

“I’m not going to give you any money, but there may be another way out of it.”

“I was at the track. I was drunk. I bet two grand with Saddie and I lost.”

“So your chalk trick didn’t pay off. Too bad you didn’t come and see me, I made twenty thousand the other day, and I could have put you, in an exacta where you would have made five thousand bucks and only put up a couple hundred.”

Yeah, and I was thinking to myself, “The man in the moon is going to serve me tea tonight.” But I didn’t say anything.

“I got an idea for you,” Bosco said.

This is where I really discovered a drowning man will grasp for a straw, or, like Evelyn Waugh said, “When the wells run dry, the people will drink from the mirages.”

“What is it?” I said, wondering why I was going along with this.

“You’ve brought Saddie business before, right?”

“Yeah.” I was beginning to sound like Saddie when she knew I was going to stiff her.

“You ever bring any major players?”

“Yeah.”

“How’d they do?.”

“Some of them won.”

“Did Saddie ever throw you a bone?.”

“No.”

“When a guy goes in, how does it work?”

“You know it’s a code. Usually the guy says his first name and then a number. Like I could be Charles 106.”

“I understand. You ever phone in any bets for them?”

“Yeah.”

“You just say it’s for so and so and then you give the name and code?”

“You know I’ve done it.”

“Well, I want to play, but I don’t want anyone to know it’s me. I don’t want anyone to know I’m playin’. Those fuckin’ bookmakers are afraid of me.”

“Okay.”

“So you open an account for me. You tell ’em you know the guy, but he doesn’t want to be known. So you’re going to be callin’ in.”

“Yeah, what do I get out of it?”

“Who knows? You might get your problem solved. Please, believe me, they’ll be damned interested.”

“What happens if you lose?”

“I’m not going to lose. You lose. I don’t lose.”

“How about too loose la trec?”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Give it a try. Find out what they pay on exactas, quinellas, maximum bets. Find out first thing tomorrow. Get back to me.”

“Okay.” I went to get the cadaver out of the grave, fell in myself.

“Saddie, I got a new player for you.” “Oh, goody. Sports or horses?” “Strictly horses, best I know. He needs a number.” “Okay, what’s his name?” “Raymond. I’ve known him for many years.” “Is he a good pay?” “I’ve seen him do a lot of gambling.” “How about that money you owe. When am I going to see that?”

“Oh, I’m working on it. You should have that soon.”

“Oh, that’s good. Don’t do that again.”

“Don’t worry.”

“When does the guy want to play?”

“Probably tomorrow. I’m going to be phoning in for him I think. He doesn’t want to talk to anyone, He needs to know how much you pay on exactas and do you take quinellas and how much you pay and maximum bets and all that stuff and give me everything.”

“Who is it, Bosco?”

“You figure it out.”

“Oh, goody.”

“So you know, you might want to lay everything off and back it up, but let him go through before you do anything.”

“Oh, I will. Thank-you, darlin’.”

“It’s okay. Just watch yourself. And I’d limit him to about five dimes down before you want to collect.”

“Right.”

“Talk to you tomorrow.”

“Okay, darlin’.”

She was happy. She didn’t even ask me about the two grand. She had a lot more confidence in Bosco than I did. I’d been out there hunting snipe with him too often to feel the same confidence she did. When I’d had money the one I liked the most was the A horses and the B horses. And he was only going to give me the A horses. I did it. I lost.

You find the most sophisticated and intelligent people in the world get robbed in the most inane deals, and it happens every year, and it will keep on happening until the race perishes. But even before I began putting in the bets for the anonymous bettor, I had an ominous feeling. I definitely was not pure of heart, free of spirit, carefree about the whole thing. Plus, I became a prisoner of the whole caper.

One o'clock next day right on the money—the guy was punctual, "Hello, it's me. You got something to write with?"

"I'm ready."

"Okay, take this down. Fifth race Santa Anita 100 dollar box Bo Bo Ritzy and My Matzo. Sixth race 100 dollar Q Pesky Weather and Izzy's Fortune. Eighth race 500 to win on Frieda's Farm. Okay, that's it. Now call me back when you get them in. Call me right back."

I called Sddie.

"Okay, is that it, baby?"

I think that is it. I called Bosco. "All right, you're down. Can I go now?"

"No. There may be something else. You have to stay there. There may be something. There may not. I don't know. This is a business. I will call you back and tell you when we're through."

"Okay."

So that was the beginning of that. Every day except the dark days. Bosco was usually at Del Mar Satellite Wagering. He'd phone me on his portable. I had to be at the condo. I wasn't even at the races. I didn't know anything about the horses. All so Bosco could think he could remain anonymous. And he wasn't even anonymous. Sddie had got it right away. His pattern of betting was like hearing Earl Garner play the piano. We got up a few times. A couple of thousand. Bosco gave me some walking around money. Sddie's husband, George, had come down to give the money to me. And I would run it down to Bosco.

One day I told Bosco, "I'm coming to the track. I'll phone in on the portable."

"Okay meet me upstairs on the right hand side at one o'clock."

During the course of the day, I phoned in the bets for Santa Anita, I had a few beers, and we watched the races on the big T.V. screens. Around the sixth race, I said, "Let me phone in a bet of my own. I'm tired of this stuff."

"Go ahead. I know you're going to bet chalk."

"I don't care."

So, betting 500 a race the next three races I picked three in a row, and I was up roughly three grand, and I said, "I'm going to bet it all on the ninth race. I can't lose today."

"You bet the ninth race," Bosco said to me, "and never talk to me again. You've done enough. I'm going to give you a thousand dollars right now. You get out of here."

"I could go to a pay phone," I said.

“You could, but remember what I said.”

He peeled a grand off the roll. I stayed for the ninth. I didn't say anything to him. My horse won. I would have been up six grand for the day. I didn't say anything to him. Nor did he to me. We left the track. And I went back to my routine at home, writing down bets and calling them into Saddle.

Finally one week we went down five grand. And I said to him, “You're at your limit. You got to pay if you want to keep going.”

“That's it then. Your client just left town.”

“Bosco, that's not right. They have paid us a few times.”

“Too bad. They want my picks. They got to keep going. They know who it is, don't they?”

“Probably. The way you bet isn't exactly like a sixteen year old girl going to the track for the first time.”

“See what they want to do.”

“Saddle.”

“Yes, baby.”

“He doesn't want to pay.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Will he keep playing?”

“He will if you extend him the credit.”

“I want those picks.”

“He knows it.”

“Well, so what do we do?”

“Well, the way it looks to me, I'm down another five grand for a total of seven. I'm tired of this stuff. I'm going to put you and him together, and you work it out. You have to give me time to pay.”

“Do you think he'll talk to me?”

“Take my word for it, you'll get along great.”

“Bosco, I'm dropping out. You can talk to Saddle direct.”

“What about the five grand?”

“I guess that's my problem.”

“You don't have it.”

“Maybe I'll get it some day.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll see you at the restaurant.” I wasn’t even mad. These guys played hardball. I was the backstop. Bosco was my friend. It would have been like getting mad at a dog that had a craving to kill chickens. Once they got started that’s what they did if they could. You had alternatives: You either shot the dog or kept him out of the hen yard. I’d let Bosco in the hen yard. Why should I be surprised when he severed the jugulars of a couple of Rhode Island Red layers?

I sat in the condo thinking to myself, “Well, that’s the end of that.” My friend who was the owner of the condo I was living in was coming back from Canada. It was time, once more, to move. I was beginning to understand the meaning of the word exile and nomad and wanderer. I was beginning to feel like an ancient Jew who had upset old Yowie. For the first time in a long time, I was absolutely failing to produce. I loved to have my own place to live. And now I didn’t even have enough money to pay rent.

I’d always paid about eight hundred a month to have a nice place, some place to hang my clothes, put my books up.

A friend let me store my stuff in his garage.

In case Henrietta were to come over before she stopped coming over, I’d gone one afternoon to the Broadway department store and gone to the sheet and towel department and bought about twelve huge Turkish towels, white, two white blankets (nice ones), an electric blanket, sheets (two sets), pillow slips and big pillows, and a mattress cover. All brand new for her. I liked to sleep with the windows wide open and the heat off, and one night when Henrietta stayed overnight with me at the other place, she was cold.

I decided that would never happen again. Now when I was moving—the stuff cost me about eight fifty. I hadn’t thought it would cost that much—it had to fit in a big box. And there it stayed.

I bought a bunch of boxes to move in. I had a bulky load to carry around. I had this collection of political magazines that I saved—boxes and boxes of magazines—then boxes and boxes of books. Two trips with Blackie and I had everything stored in my friend’s garage. Driving over there to unload my possessions which would not be so readily accessible anymore, I felt like the combination of a nihilist and an Oakie.

Not only was I distraught over Henrietta, if I didn’t make some money soon, I was going to be homeless. It could happen. I’d seen those guys with their shopping carts and their sleeping bags and their pots and pans tooling up and down 101 looking like John the Baptist, a middle class man’s worse dream. Why couldn’t Henrietta have been the shop girl until I figured it out? Why couldn’t I have been in the South of France? I borrowed a few hundred from Ben Ripley.

Hugo had had a roommate before, and he moved out. Ripley suggested I move up there and pay a hundred a week. I did it. Hugo’s favorite program in the morning was Cathy Lee and Regis Philbin. I took a cup of coffee to the pool. Sometimes I used to just go to the parking lot and sit in Blackie.

I started doing a lot of open houses on some listings I had in La Costa at Casitas. In the old days, at the prices they were listed, they would have sold right away. But La Costa wasn’t such a popular place anymore. Fairbanks Ranch, just south of us had taken over in terms of popularity. La Costa was no longer the hot spot with the rich. So what I was

doing to sell something would have worked before but was not working now. I'd pulled out my riding crop and was whacking a dead horse on the haunches.

One day on one of those swell open houses that no one came to but me, towards the end of the football season, Dallas was playing the Raiders in LA. Dallas was a five point favorite, which wasn't very much considering that the Raiders weren't very good that year and Dallas was great. I knew the code numbers of some of the guys I'd put in with Saddle. One guy was a guy I played tennis with all the time, Frank. He didn't bet that often, usually horses, and he scrupulously paid his bills.

Saddle didn't even have the guy's phone number. Frank always had me phone in the bets. If he won, I collected for him, and if he lost he gave me the money to pay. The account was over a year old and was as clean as a hound's tooth.

There was, as I say, no one in the open house. The place was decorated the California look with green carpet. I felt myself moving towards the old phone. I dialed Saddle's number and had the call billed to my business phone.

"Saddle!"

"Hi, baby, what's goin' on?"

"Frank wants to bet a game today."

"Okay."

"What's the line on Dallas and L.A. Raiders?"

"Five. Dallas is favored by five."

"Frank, Dallas by five," I said away from the phone. "He wants Dallas for two thousand."

"Okay, honey, he's got Dallas for two thousand minus five."

"Thanks."

I hung up the phone. "Why should I be broke?" I said to myself. I couldn't even buy a Whopper. Dallas would kill them.

No one came to the open house, except for a couple of people who lived at the development and wanted to see what this one was selling for so that they would know what their's was worth. One o'clock. I looked for the game on television. It wasn't on.

Oh well, there was a radio and I could check the score on KNX 1070 at fifteen minutes after the hour and fifteen minutes before.

"Hi, this is Pete Arbergast for KNX Sports. At the Coliseum the Raiders lead Dallas seven-nothing in the first quarter. The Raiders recovered a Dallas fumble on their own five yard line and took it in for the score. The point after was good... The Washington Redskins..."

I turned it off. That was a fluke.

Anybody could get lucky on a certain play. But, dammit, I wanted to be ahead thirty or forty points. I didn't want to have a bad day. I didn't want to sweat this one.

Next newscast, the first words out of Abergast's mouth, "The Raiders now enjoy a thirteen point lead. Bo Williams went off tackle for thirty-eight yards and the touch down, but Randolph missed the point after..."

I listened, mesmerized to the rest of the sports cast and caught all the scores.

I went outside and got all the open house signs and put them in the hallway. One of the neighbors tried to talk to me. I said, "I've got to go someplace. I'm late. I'll come and see you tomorrow." I hurried off, not waiting for a reply.

The radio was upstairs in the master bedroom. It was a little white one, probably twenty years old. I'd locked the front door. This was serious. I'm down eighteen points in the second half. I put the radio on this little white table, and I was actually kneeling down in front of it as if I were paying homage to an idol.

I dialed around. I got the game.

"This is Hank Stram in Los Angeles where the L.A. Raiders, in a surprising first half, lead the Cowboys thirteen to nothing. Now for all the scores and highlights around the NFL..."

I was doomed. A man going to the gas chamber must feel pretty bad, but if he's singled out for special treatment with electrodes and pinchers he can feel even worse. The chamber starts looking pretty good in retrospect. I didn't like my life before the game started. I liked it a lot less now. Saddy and George would figure it out. I was already in bad with them. Now I'd taken a shot with a client's account. They'd figure it out. I was in trouble.

In the beginning of the first half, Dallas scored a touchdown and the point after. Then shortly thereafter, they scored again. The score was 14-13. I was only four points behind. One more TD puts me over the top. It was getting late in the fourth quarter.

"Aikman takes the snap, steps up into the pocket, looks down field for an open man, going long... Interception!" He's at the forty, the thirty, the twenty, the ten. Touch down Raiders!"

I ran around the room. I beat my chest. This couldn't be happening to me. I got down on the floor and started saying Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Dear God, get me out of this, dear God, please get me out. Get me out and if you do, I'll never gamble again. Hail Mary, mother of God, the lord is with thee... I did about thirty Hail Marys. I was praying in front of the radio.

"Aikman is in the shotgun. He sees a man running down the sideline. He has the defender beat. Aikman throws! He's got it! He's got the defender beat. He's going to score. An eighty yard play from scrimmage... The point after is good..."

I jumped in the air and turned a circle as if I'd been a Thompson Gazelle hit in the ass by a curare dart.

Now stop them and get the ball! Hold them and get the ball. "Hail Mary, mother of God... Our father who art in heaven!"

In the last four minutes of the game the Raiders drove deep into Dallas' territory, but fumbled, and Dallas recovered. I had to have one more touchdown. No field goals. No field goals. "Our father..."

"Dallas is on the ten, third and eight, draw play. He breaks off, tackle, breaks a tackle, and Smith goes in standing up."

Oh, thank-you, God. Thank-you. No more gambling. No more. I went over to the Burrow, I didn't even drive Blackie.

"Great game! Great game!" I said to Jerry, the high school football coach.

"Yeah, San Diego played great."

I didn't even bother to correct him. "Val," I said to Valerie the bartender, "I want to run a tab. Tell Susan I'll pay it next week."

"Of course, what do you want?"

"I'll have a beer and give Coach Jerry whatever he wants." I was walking on the ceiling. After the game I didn't answer my phone for awhile.

I called Bosco.

He said, "Saddie and George figured out it was you who bet on Dallas."

"How did you know about it?"

"She asked me about it."

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'I don't know anything about it.'"

"Pretty good. Pretty good."

"They bringing my money down?"

"Come by the Market Tuesday. I'll have the money for you. George is giving it to me."

"See you Tuesday. I'll take you to lunch."

Well, I paid Ripley back five hundred and had enough left to give Hugo a month's rent. And I had a grand. I felt like King Tut amongst the lumpen proles.

The next week Dallas was playing the Rams at Dallas. The spread was thirteen. The Rams hadn't won a road game all year nor the year before. To bet on Dallas would be stealing despite the spread. I said to God, "This is how I make my living now. Even You can't expect me to give up surviving."

I phoned Saddie and said that Frank 106 wanted to bet 500 on Dallas. She never even brought it up that she and her husband surmised that I might be the real Frank 106.

I went over to Ripley's condo on the beach to watch the great game. No more open houses for me.

Jim Everett played the greatest game of his life and the Rams beat Dallas straight up at Dallas, and I gave up gambling, and stuck to my original oath.

I met Saddie's husband, George Moran, in Denny's on Palomar Airport Road in Carlsbad, had breakfast with him, and gave him 500 for Frank.

"You know, George," I said, "this Frank's a pretty nice guy. You ought to meet him some day."

"I'd like to," said George.

"But he's kind of shy," I said.

"Well, you know some people are like that. Work on that other," he said.

"I will."

I looked out the window as he distributed his big frame in a new fire engine red Porsche that some client had given him in lieu of money.

If God took me to the pock marked face of a full moon, would I have been any lonelier than I was? Give me please a glass of the wine of violence, so that I may better contemplate the horrors of the future.

I decided to close my company which I'd had for about ten years. I was a loner, did not look forward to the prospect of working for someone else. I thought a long time about working for another company. Finally I resolved on the top one of the area, Coldwell Banker.

I went from working for myself to going to work in their Encinitas office that had over a hundred agents. Many of the top producers had assistants who did most of the paper work for them while they concentrated on sales and listings. I decided immediately that I too needed an assistant.

At a cocktail party that Coldwell Banker gave at the Paradise Grill I ran into a married girl who was leaving the firm but who had been an assistant. I asked her if she would like to work with me. She said sure. All I had to do was phone her and drop what I needed done at her home. She lived nearby the office,

She told me she was meeting her husband at eight o'clock next evening at Marie Calenders on Encinitas Boulevard. Why didn't I meet her there then. I'd meet her husband, and we would work out the finances. I said fine.

Who knows why I'd been drinking tremendously before I headed out to Marie Calenders the next day? The bakery shop where I was first supposed to have met Henrietta was located in the same shopping center.

I decided to drive by it to look in the window. There was one girl working at the counter by herself. She looked like Henrietta. I saw her as I slowly drove by. It was Henrietta.

I parked Blackie. I got out and went in. She was looking down, so she didn't see me. When she looked up, saw me, a look of shock came into her face. Her face suffused absolutely red. She recovered somewhat. The deep blush of her face disappeared.

I noticed that she looked very pale and there were big circles under her eyes.

"I would like a loaf of bread," said.

"Which one do you like?"

“That one.” I pointed at one on the glass shelf in front of her. It was a very big round loaf of French bread. I dropped a twenty on the counter in front of her.

“No,” she said, “there is no charge.”

I didn’t insist. “May I see you sometime?”

“No,” she said.

I took my package, turned and went out the door. I got in Blackie and turned on the ignition. I started to drive away. I noticed Henrietta was running along on the passenger side. I stopped the car, pushed the down button on the passenger window. “Get in,” I said. She got in. I parked the car. I looked at her. “Why didn’t you tell me good-bye? I wondered what happened to you. Why didn’t you tell me good-bye?”

“Someone made me promise I wouldn’t talk to you anymore. I promised.”

“Do you want to see me anymore?”

“No.” Then she said, “Do you have a girl?”

“No.”

She didn’t say anything. Then she said, “I have to get back.”

“If you want to call me,” I said, “you can call me here.” I gave her one of the cards of Coldwell Banker. She got out of the car and went back to the bakery. I went to my meeting at Marie Calenders. Weeks went by. Henrietta did not call.

Jasper and I were the only ones at the courts at Seabluff. That was typically the case. It was also typically a nice sunny California day. “Okay what’s the spot?” I asked.

“I can’t give you any spot.”

“What do you mean? I can’t beat you without a spot.”

“I can hardly play. I don’t feel that great. I can’t move.”

“You mean to say we are going to play straight up no spot?”

“No spot.”

“I don’t see how I can win. How much a set?”

“Whatever you say.”

“Okay ten,” I said.

He didn’t say anything. Usually he would have insisted on at least twenty. We hit a few balls to warm up. He never used to warm

up long. He really didn’t even need to warm up. But I did.

“Okay let’s start. Good luck to you, Charles.”

I knew I didn’t have a chance in hell. He gave me the serve. I took four practice serves. And then I served. He had me down love thirty right away.

He made a great backhand to my backhand off my first serve, and I netted it. I was lucky to get it. And I hit his next return out.

“You aren’t playing worth a damn,” I yelled at him. “I’m seeing that now.”

He just waved his racket at me. He wasn’t his usual, enthusiastic, taunting, spry self.

I won the next four points. I was making great shots down the lines, and I hit a dropper that he got to, but I lobbed his weak return almost back to the baseline and he didn’t even try for it.

He didn’t want to change sides after the game, and I didn’t push it, even though I was looking into the sun and I was definitely on the worst side. He wasn’t stretching me out. Consequently I was able to get set up and make great shots into the corners that he couldn’t get. I won the second game easily. I knew something was wrong.

But I kept making the best shots I could. I drop-shotted him. I lobbed him. I hit away from him. I never gave him anything, even though I knew he wasn’t his usual self. His serve wasn’t anything. He was phlegmatic over there. I beat him six love.

“You want to play another set?” I said to him as he walked up to the net.

“No,” he said, “that’s as much as I can play. You played great.”

“Thanks. But we both know I could never beat you. You weren’t yourself today. You got a hangover?”

“No.”

“You want to go to lunch? You want to go to the Rain Tree, see J.R., have a few brews?”

“Maybe tomorrow,” he said. “Maybe we can go bar harping.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

He went over and got in his big green Lincoln Town Car. I walked over with him. I looked at him sitting inside. Then he pulled out and drove off.

I went and sat on the lawn under one of the big trees near the court. After awhile I got in Blackie and went to the Rain Tree by myself.

J.R. said, “Where’s Jasper?” “He’ll be here tomorrow.”

There’s a picture of me in The New York Times as one of the pall bearers at Jasper’s funeral (thank God you couldn’t see my Jack Purcells) People at his funeral—Jack Kramer, Ted Schroder, Pancho Segura—made speeches about the great matches he had played, like the one against McNeil where he lost an important point and finally the match because he touched the net with his foot. Jasper told me that the net was sticking out on the ground on his side a lot further than it should have been, but he touched it all right.

I remember going bar harping with him. We’d have two at each bar. Sometimes more. We’d start at La Costa Country Club, then the Burrow, then the Olympic Resort Hotel, then the Rain Tree, where J.R. always came over and talked to us and bought us a round.

One time his car was out of commission, so we took Pearl’s Cadillac, and he or I, I don’t know who, somehow triggered the alarm system. He didn’t care. He was pretty tight, and we drove from the Burrow to the Olympic Resort Hotel the alarm going all the way. And the alarm was loud, very loud. Had it been me driving, sure as hell I would have been

arrested. But not Jasper. He was lucky. We got to the Olympic, he shut the door on his side of the car and the alarm went off by itself. But he would have gone into the Olympic and let it run. He didn't care.

He and Hugo and I used to go to La Especial on 101 in Encinitas. Mostly we got the Mexico City Special Soup, and we'd see who could come closest to picking the lines in next week's pro football games. It was one of our favorite things to do. Each person got a piece of paper and he'd write down what he thought the line would be. When we got through, Hugo would read the games and we would say what we had written, and Hugo would check it off against the lines published in "The Blade Citizen" Whoever got the closest to the line or on the number won. In case of a tie, each person got a half point.

We weren't too fond of The Los Angeles Times because their policy was not to run the lines. But because of Jim Murray we bought the paper.

Jasper and Hugo were better at guessing the lines than I was.

But I loved those breakfasts, And I loved bar harping. Towards the end of his days, Jasper had to have a colostomy. That was a real pain in the ass. You'd be having lunch with him at the Olympic someone would come to the table to say hello, and he'd have to show him the old colostomy bag. I've seen women run out of the room. I wanted to follow.

He couldn't play singles after awhile. He played doubles a long time after he quit singles.

I was his partner often enough. He'd really get on you when you missed an easy shot,

He played golf almost to the day he died. He was a great golfer. His short game was as good as any pro's. And he'd use his illness to get a better spot. I remember when we were at Lomas Santa Fe and he'd be screaming at Ben Ripley, "Ben!" you know I'm dying right in front of your face. At the very least give me one up on the first nine and one up on the back nine. You're allowed to press when you want to."

"I can't do it, Jasper."

"I can't play you any other way."

"I guess we can't play then."

"Okay straight up."

"Okay."

Ripley would be about ready to tee off, and Jasper would say, "I think I should have one up on you."

He used his illness against everyone he played—to get a better spot—and then frequently he'd beat the hell out of them. Then he'd laugh.

When he couldn't play anymore golf, he spent a lot of time reading modern adventure novels. Or he'd sit in bed watching sports. I spent a lot of time with him reading or watching sports. He never complained. We never talked about death. I thought he might hang on forever. Then one day he left, and I remember him standing on the far side of the court waving his racket at me and saying, "Good luck to you, Charles."

I remember one match we played in the morning. Ben Ripley was there to watch us. The two benches by the court were full. And there were several people in the bleachers outside the fence. Jasper had spotted me four games as usual. I got the serve. I was up thirty love and Jasper got the next point, thirty-five.

I served to his backhand, he returned the ball and hit it over to my forehand side. I cross courted him at a good angle to his forehand. He hit down the line to my backhand, and I made a running backhand cross court deep to his backhand. He had to hustle to get it. And his momentum took him a little off court on the backhand side. He made a weak return down the middle and I made an almost perfect drop shot clear across the court to his forehand. I thought he had no play on it.

But he came running. Jasper could really move. He was one of the greatest get shot players the game has ever known. He was really running towards the dropper when he fell.

The gentleman at the end of the bench got up and stopped him from going into the light pole by the bench where he really would have boinged himself. But the guy broke his fall. He still fell on his knees and tore out both knees of his green cords which he loved. I used to call those his frog legs. His head went back and hit on the court. His glasses fell off when he hit. He lay as still as a dead squirrel. His eyes were closed tight.

Ripley didn't wait long before he decided to go and phone the medics. Before Ripley could get to the gate of the court, I said that if Jasper didn't get up he forfeited the match and the bet for the twenty. I stood over him and I said, "If you don't get up, you forfeit."

Pretty soon his little eyes started to flutter and he said, "If I don't get up, I forfeit?"

"Yes." I screamed, "You forfeit."

He got up. It took him about twenty minutes to gather himself. He walked splay footed. He was looking up at the sky as if he were going to get guidance or help from the Tennis God. He was walking around in circles splay footed, holding his sides with both his hands. He was moaning. Finally he was ready to play. I had him forty five. I served as hard as I could, won the point, and won the game.

Now it was his serve. He proceeded to run off seven straight games in a row and win the match and the twenty bucks. And I played as hard as I could, and I never gave him anything. I knew it could happen. I had him set point several times during the set. I had four add points when it was five four, but I couldn't put him away. He made several sensational gets and this is no kidding he was hitting shots to my backhand that not only were hitting the sideline but the baseline as well. Corner shots. I'd have to scramble to even get the ball, then he'd be right at the net for my desperate return. Had the rules permitted it, I would have shot him.

One interesting thing about Jasper was the way he played when he was setting guys up. When you play a guy for money, you don't want to totally abolish him, except for guys like me who play even though they get beat ten thousand times in a row. Most people won't hang in there if they are beaten all the time.

I was watching Jasper play this ex football player. The guy had played defensive back for the Forty-Niners. I think Jasper was giving him a three game spot. He could have given

him five, but he was working on the guy's ego. And he needed to encourage the guy to hang in there.

You'd think that if you wanted to blow a point, you'd hit the ball into the net or hit it over the baseline or miss the sidelines. Jasper had more finesse than that. He'd give the guy a shot he could work with. He'd hit the ball right down the middle of the court and hit it so that the ball would bounce up high, so his opponent could make a winning shot off it. The guy in his own mind thinks that all of sudden, "I can play against Jasper Kyle."

So Jasper drops a couple of games that way. His opponent's confidence is built up enormously. His ego blinds him. Anyone on the sidelines who is wise to Jasper's act knows what's going on.

So Jasper drops a couple of games. Now he's in the hole. He starts placing his shots so they are not quite so easy to get to. Just by a slight variation in where he's placing the ball, he is stretching the guy out. No more easy kill shots off the forehand. Now his opponent is getting yanked around a little and Jasper starts making the shots and his opponent starts missing.

But in the guy's mind it's just some fluke that he's making mistakes. He's going through a streak of bad luck. And, after he loses, he wants to play Jasper again. He's now sure he can beat him.

I watched the Forty-Niner guy go through over a month of this. Jasper would drop games. He would drop sets. Several days Jasper would let him win the whole thing. But, at the end, by the time Jasper got through with him, he was separated from a few thousand bucks, and the Forty Niner guy didn't want to play Jasper tennis anymore.

Jasper and Hugo and I would laugh about it over a bowl of Mexico City Special soup at La Especial de norte, and then we'd pick the football lines.

I was late one week paying the rent at Hugo's. Hugo gave me a big battle, because he always needed money to bet at satellite wagering at Del Mar, so I took my few things and moved back to Casitas. A tennis pro friend of mine had a two bedroom place and I rented the guest bedroom from him, I took to going to church every day. The church, Elizabeth Seton, was up on the hill in La Costa on Alga Road. Morning mass during the week was at eight. So I'd drive up there and hear mass in the morning.

After mass in a kitchen off the church part of the church, parishioners would serve breakfast to Mexican immigrants who wanted breakfast. One day someone asked me to assist. I did, and as I spoke fluent Spanish, I was considered a good asset.

Gradually I sort of took over the kitchen completely. Someone would assist me, but I could do it all by myself. People who came varied anywhere from one to twenty. Now and then the number was closer to thirty.

We had a couple microwave ovens, and I cooked frozen burritos. My patrons got burritos, apple juice in paper cartons, and coffee. And we had big plastic containers of salsa. We also had big plastic containers of chopped jalapeno peppers which I dispensed to them who wanted them.

So I got to be known as the chef and maître d'hotel with the migrant crowd. When they'd see Blackie going up the hill, they'd flag me down for a ride. They'd also frequently want

a ride after breakfast. Mostly they asked me to drop them off at Vons across El Camino on Alga. I'd leave them in the parking lot. Or some wanted to go a few blocks further up Alga behind a grade school, and from there they would walk to their camp on the hill.

I got the feeling they liked to ride in Blackie. There were usually a couple of girls with their babies. I got to know a lot of illegal aliens really well.

Many of them were from Mexico City, especially from Distrito Federal. I got many invitations to go down there from guys who were going back home for vacation or to stay. We were going to have a mad party there in the California Bar. While serving the Mexicans in the morning, I'd have coffee.

Sergio said, "Charles, I have a bad throat."

"Well, why don't you gargle with a little gasoline?"

That brought jolly laughter to the other eight or so at the two tables. I'd taken to calling them buitres—vultures.

The man who took care the church grounds and interior as well was called Isidros. I usually always talked to him in the parking lot before mass. Sometimes migrants would arrive with me. "Isidros, aquí estan los buitres (Here are the vultures)." And "Isidros, donde se encuentra un pedazo de carne muerto, allí se encontrarán los buitres (Where you find a piece of dead meat there also you will find vultures)."

My friends started inviting me to where they lived. Some lived just on the other side of El Camino by the swamp. Down there in the undergrowth and trees that a stream ran through, they had constructed little shacks. And they used to invite me down there for a few beers, and I used to go. Their place was pretty well hidden. You could be ten yards from it and never know it was there. So we'd go into the camp and they'd get a chair for me to sit on, or I'd sit in the bough of a tree, and they'd have a case of Bud or Coors in cans, and we'd drink those, and we'd talk about politics in Mexico.

My point of view was that it really wasn't so important how much the individual politicians were stealing, because in the big picture even though it might be many millions that was insignificant, it was that their philosophy of economics was wrong, and that Mexico, through groups such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, was being run or influenced too much by foreigners with the collaboration of thieves. And this was what was really hurting the economy. They liked that theory.

They had a radio that they ran off a car battery, and we listened to Spanish music.

Sometimes we'd make several trips to the store in Blackie to get more beer. We'd get wasted. I've seen Adolfo fall right off his chair onto his face and not move. Grande would get ripped. Sergio would be pretty drunk. Felipe didn't drink. La Barilla would get ripped.

One of the boys in the camp was Jose. He wasn't Mexican. He was part Italian and part Vietnamese. His mom, Vietnamese, had a nice house right up the road, but Jose preferred to live in the camp. His mother had this whistle she'd blow, indicating that she wanted him to come home. He'd just shake his head and say, "I'm not going." He was the camp cook. I found out that he'd been an assistant chef at La Costa. He was a good cook. Now

and then, we'd get some money together, buy chicken and some special beef from a Mexican store, get some cans of beer, and we'd really have a fiesta.

There was a big cat black with a white vest and white boots named Chelin.

One day while we were drinking in the camp, Grande, who was a pretty big guy, very thick through the chest and with stout arms, who stood about six feet, always wore a cap with a bill over his thick gray hair, had an aquiline nose, asked me if I had a girlfriend. I told them—Adolfo, Jose, Felipe, Sergio, Grande—of my great love for Henrietta. I told them she finally went with Alexander.

Their solution was to abduct Henrietta and kill Alexander. Believe me after thirteen Buds or so that solution had great appeal to me.

I looked up through the branches of the trees at the bright sky and stroked the head of Chelin, and I thought of Henrietta.

Henrietta had given me quite a few pictures of herself, and three of these I had selected and had framed in silver, I kept them on the night table by my bed.

One day I took one of the pictures over to the camp to show my friends. And we put the picture down at the base of a tree and we put a candle by it and some flowers and we drank a lot of beer. I left it there. Grande was in charge of it to make sure nothing happened to it and no one ever made off with it.

In the kitchen at the church in the mornings sometimes for the migrants someone would bring beans cooked and hard boiled eggs and sometimes fried chicken. And some businesses donated products that were getting dated. We frequently got wonderful pastries that were a day old. I never went to pick them up. Another parishioner, Ralph, did. And I said, "Where does this wonderful pastry come from?"

Max said, "Oh, from the Fleur de Lys Bakery." Alexander's bakery. I looked at the pastries, really expensive stuff if you had to buy them, and it made me sad to see them, but I served them to my friends.

Occasionally some wonderful cakes with cream and strawberries and chocolate would come. The Mexicans had that for breakfast too.

One time Grande, Adolfo, Sergio and I and a couple of other guys were in the camp. The picture of Henrietta was at the base of a tree, a lighted candle beside it and some fresh flowers in front of it. We had a cassette player hooked into the car battery and we were listening to mariachi music. We drank a couple cases of beer and someone was commissioned to go up the block to Von's and get more. Adolfo fell off his little chair and lay asleep where he lay.

Some sort of cotton balls from weeds were blowing through the air so it was like snow in summer. The day was bright. A guy had brought Chelin a rabbit that had got cold cocked and killed by a car, and Chelin was throwing it up in the air, letting it land, and throwing it back up again.

"You want some brandy, Carlos?" Grande asked me.

"You got some?"

“Yeah. A woman I work for gave me a bottle.” He went to his hut and got it. And he brought a glass.

He reached down into the stream to rinse out the glass. I thought to myself, “Oh, this is going to be great. There’s probably everything in that stream.” But I didn’t say anything.

Then he got about half of the glass full of stream water and filled the rest with brandy. He handed it to me. I was sitting down on an old beat up bean bag chair. I took a drink. The water made it surprisingly cold, almost as if it had been iced. It tasted great. I drank it, handed the glass back to him, and he made himself a drink.

“To Henrietta,” I said.

“To Henrietta, la hermosa.” he said.

“I’m going to my home to take a nap, Carlos,” he said.

“Go ahead.” I said.

“Make me another one before you go.”

I held the drink to my breast and looked up through the branches to the California blue sky with small white clouds here and there. I felt quite at home and at peace. This was more how my idea what society should be: Rural, nonproductive, drunk, happy with each other, non-progressive. I was wishing we had a ranch down in Mexico and we could all be together.

There were two full floors of Coldwell Banker salesmen, almost a hundred of us. I sat on the ground floor. I shared a cubicle with a guy who was never there, except at the required Tuesday morning sales meetings. He was a retired commercial pilot. He didn’t need to make any money from real estate, and, from what I could tell, he didn’t. I didn’t either, but I needed to.

I took all my up time. There were a lot of calls that came in, but they were mainly from outside brokers to know if our listings were still available. When I worked the up desk, I wore a coat and tie. The manager didn’t say anything about my Jack Purcells. I wore nice sun tans and a blue blazer from Brooks, clean white button downs and rep ties, and I guess my appearance was not so bad. In six months I actually wrote four deals, which would have kept me in the hunt, but I couldn’t get any of them financed.

And I worked with a doctor and his wife for a couple of months. They were looking in the five to six hundred thousand dollar range. The doctor finally bought from someone else in an area where he hadn’t asked me to look. You could get more house for your money there because it wasn’t in as ritzy an area as Del Mar, Solana Beach, or La Costa. He bought in Vista.

He surprised me when he bought there, because, as I said, I worked with him a couple of months, and Vista was not one of the areas he had me investigate. And I was working with one of the members of a very famous rock group, who had me looking for beach front property for him from Carlsbad to Del Mar. He had one of his back up musicians whose permanent home was in Oceanside go with me and look at properties I’d pick out. Then later on he himself would drive down from L.A. to look at the properties his friend thought might fly.

We got to be good friends, I'd get phone calls from him from the Black Forest in Germany to the Rogue River in Oregon saying that he'd decided to live in the Black Forest or the Rogue River respectively. He never did anything. He was a nice guy. So was the doctor.

At the end of six months without a sale, the branch manager said that maybe I'd do better at another firm. I didn't argue with him nor plead my excuses. But it was the first time in my life that I went to work every day—even gave up tennis in the afternoons—and I didn't score. I couldn't figure it out. What had happened to the buffalo?

five

This English fellow, Richard, friend of mine, who lived at the Casitas, had come up with a computer idea for real estate. He had some partners in England, and their plan was already being successfully used in England for a major real estate company by the name of White's. Richard called the program touch television. I thought it had possibilities.

You turn the program on on the computer and various prices appear, Let's say—you pick 250 K to 350 K. Then—the screen changes to indicate a areas like Encinitas, Solana Beach, Del Mar, Escondido, you pick an area, you push the name of the area you pick on the screen, then the screen changes to number of bedrooms, and you push the number of bedrooms you want on the screen, then one level or two level or both and you push that on the screen, and then the listings in the designations you have picked start appearing. First exterior shots in color of the listing and then interior shots in color with information like square footage and the age of the home.

The agent and the client could operate the program together, or, if the client preferred privacy he could operate it by himself. Coldwell Banker in San Diego didn't want a presentation, but I had some connections who got me into one of the main offices of Century 21 in San Fernando Valley. Richard and I went up there, took

the program that was being used by White's in England, and the executives went nuts about it.

They were talking about using it nationally, six thousand outlets. It would have meant major money to me and Richard—either on a buyout or leasing machines that Richard's company programmed.

As the transaction metamorphosed over a period of months, it occurred to me that if I collected some money from it I was going to leave the United States and go to Mexico. I'd never been there before, but I'd heard about a little fishing village south of Ensenada, Mulegé. I was going there first.

I needed to communicate with Henrietta.

I wanted to find out one last time if she wanted to come with me, out of the country where the Road Runner couldn't track her and me down. Or if I got a lot of money I was going to give her some whether she wanted to come with me or not. I didn't think it would be too discreet for me to show up at the old bakery anymore. I told myself that I should not disturb the life she had chosen, if that were indeed the life she wanted to lead. But I wanted her to phone me to learn of this new development, that is my forthcoming fortune.

Alexander owned three bakeries now, one in Encinitas where I had seen Henrietta, and two in Del Mar. One in Le Auberge, which used to be the Del Mar Hotel, and one on the east side of the freeway in a shopping center. The last one was absolutely beautiful. It belonged in New York in Park Avenue. I had to admit Alexander did have good taste.

I employed the services of Sergio. He and I used to drive to the bakeries. I'd park in some inconspicuous place that could not be seen from the bakery and I'd send Sergio in to get a pastry and or a coffee.

He'd come back to the car and say, "No está, Carlos. La Henrietta no está."

We went on several of these forays, And we never found Henrietta. Sergio's orders were to be discreet. After the rounds, and even during the rounds, we'd have a few beers. We always stopped at Pancho's in Del Mar. Sometimes when we were finished we'd go to La Especial in Encinitas or to the Market Cafe in Solana Beach.

Sergio enjoyed these salidas tremendously. I was always sort of uptight until the tour was finished.

Next door to Coldwell Banker on El Camino just south was a place I used to frequent, the Boll Weevil. It was a great hamburger place with a couple of pool tables and a juke box, The cooks were Mexican, and, as I could see them from the counter where I sat, I used to banter with them. You could get these big milk shake glasses of ice cold Bud.

The waitress, Mary, was from Texas. She'd worked there a long time. Another really sweet girl was from Greece. She was married and went to school. And her dad had been one of the Greek Generals. Boll Weevil was one of my favorite places to go. I went in and ordered an order of fries and onion rings and a Bud.

There's a tray that you make your hamburgers with: raw Bermuda onions, relish, mustard, catsup, dill slices, peppers. I had a few hot peppers and a few slices of Bermuda onion with my french fries and onion rings. The combination with Bud was very good.

I finished off about five beers, got in Blackie, and drove across the street to the Red Robin, went to the bar where a good friend of mine, Jeff, was working. And I had a few large Samuel Adams draft. I was beginning to feel a little mellow.

I don't know whatever possessed me but I decided to drive to the bakery in Encinitas by myself. I just thought I'd drive over there. So I got in Blackie. It was still quite early in the day, about three. I went south on El Camino. At Encinitas Boulevard I turned left, went to the end of Encinitas Boulevard and across the intersection where Encinitas Boulevard becomes another street and goes into Rancho Santa Fe. And there on the south east side of the intersection is the big shopping plaza with Marie Calendars and other stores and offices and a little further on, Fleur de Lys Bakery.

I pulled in a parking space away from the bakery and walked along so I could see in the window of the bakery. There she was, La Henrietta. She was working with another girl. Henrietta was just wearing a white blouse and a skirt. And she looked pale to me.

I started to walk in the bakery. She looked up, saw me, and immediately turned and ran through some swinging doors that probably led to where the pastries were made. I started laughing. She had scuttled away quickly like a crab. The other girl—she looked Spanish—looked at me. "I'd like a loaf of French bread," I said.

She got one for me. I paid for it, left, and gave up my quest for Henrietta.

I had no right to bother her. It was obvious she didn't want to see me. She could have called me at Coldwell Banker had she wanted to talk to me.

And my big scheme to become rich had not come through, so I wouldn't have been able to carry her off to Mulegé nor would I have been able to offer her money independent of any attachment to me.

My quest had been a long one. It seemed as if she had chosen me to be her suitor for awhile. Then I was dismissed. I think though had I more stability to my life, perhaps more financial independence to travel or escape, things might have been different. That is all conjecture.

My motive for the profession I was in was strictly money. I had no love for selling houses. Unfortunately, it was one of those jobs where you have to produce sales in order to make any money at all. I was quite capable of showing up for a job so many days a week. But this wasn't sufficient for this particular job, and I hadn't made a sale in well over six months. And the other scheme with Century 21 was dead.

I stood out on Ben Ripley's balcony and watched a group of pelicans fly by in V formation. Sometimes they flew a V, sometimes in line, one behind the other.

Henrietta and I always had good luck in the movies we picked to go to. We always saw good ones. We used to go to Wiggan's Plaza on El Camino in Encinitas. We used to go in the evening.

The first movie we went to was A Fish Called Wanda. It was extremely funny and she loved it. It was with Jaime Lee Curtis. I let Henrietta pick where she wanted to sit and we sat towards the back of the show but not way back.

During the course of the movie, I looked over at her. You know how you can see someone's face off the light of the screen. And I saw she was wearing glasses. I hadn't noticed her put them on. They were little red horn rims, and she looked very cute, just like a little kid. But when she saw me looking at her, she took off her glasses and put them in her purse. She was bashful about them. She pretended that she hadn't even seen me looking at her, and went right on watching the film without them.

I looked away from her, Then later I looked back at her, and she was wearing her glasses again. But when she saw me looking at her, she took them off. I whispered to her, "Put your glasses on so you can see the show."

But she wouldn't wear them if I looked at her, so I stopped looking at her, and I held her hand. I never felt closer to her, nor loved her more than then.

I frequently had this dream, one where I was a medieval knight. I wasn't dressed in armor, but I had a sword. I was riding a great brown horse out in the country. Henrietta rode behind me on another horse. She rode side saddle. She was wearing a long gown with long sleeves and a scoop neck. She wore no hat. As she rode along, she looked very content and demure.

From the side of the road a giant appeared. He had curly unkempt hair. He had a sword on his belt. He was blocking our path. He was huge.

“Be so good as to get out of the way,” I said to him. “And you must pay obeisance to Lady Henrietta. You must swear eternal allegiance to do her bidding if she calls you.”

“And if I don’t?” he asked.

“I will have to cut off your head.”

He started to laugh. Then he saw the look in my eye, and he went and knelt by the side of the road, and he said, “I swear eternal allegiance to Lady Henrietta and to do her bidding if she calls on me.”

Henrietta, as she was riding side saddle, was looking in the opposite direction from him when he said this. I however, was looking at him. When he finished, we rode by.

When we had ridden some fifty yards or so, I turned around and saw the giant standing in the road. Henrietta looked back. A demure look of amusement was on her face. The giant looked bewildered. Then he began to follow us. He followed us to where we were going, the castle. Another adherent. I would have to find something for him to do. Guard of the battlements, or, maybe waiter. I had a thousand guys working for me in the castle.

I was sitting at the back of this church. It was a huge church, more like a cathedral. Part of the ceiling of the church was gone, so you could see the sky. The sky was very dark filled with rain laden clouds, but it had not begun to rain yet. At the altar a monk with a bald pate was saying mass.

Way up in front of me, many rows in front of me, sat an old lady. She was surrounded by children, most of whom were quite small, three years old, five years old, and also a young girl of thirteen or fourteen. She was very thin, very pretty. Her little gown that she wore was just a rag really, and it was very worn and dirty. Her face was dirty and her hair was unkempt. Despite all this, she appeared very beautiful. She hung onto the old woman, who was looking straight ahead. The other children pressed quite close to her as well.

They were in tremendous fear and agitation, for on the other side of the church way to the left were a group of really bad types. They had spiky hair. They wore leather vests with no shirts beneath them. They had leather bracelets with brass studs.

They were gesturing at the children. One was wagging his tongue rapidly back and forth. Another was making the sign of the horn upward with his hand, another the sign of the horns downward. Another had made a circle of his thumb and forefinger and was rapidly shoving the middle finger of his other hand through the circle. They were laughing and screaming. The object of all these manifestations was clearly the girl.

The monk went on with the mass, oblivious. The young girl clung closely to the old woman. I knew I would have to do something. And I didn’t know that I would be of much good to the children and old lady, for I was one against seven. Maybe my intervention would give them time to run. Surely, however, in the end they would be caught, abused, and killed. I wished I had a machine gun. I would have shot that group on the spot.

But just as I was about ready to make my move towards the rabble, I heard the pounding of horses hooves pounding. It was an enormous sound, as if thousands of horses were approaching from outside. You could hear the occasional jingle of metal. From the right side of the church from the back where I was sitting, nuns dressed in white began

entering the church. They went in and started by filling up the front rows and then on back.

Soon they had surrounded the children. The children were literally sitting in a sea of white. There was every type of nun, some small, some efficient looking, some tall, some homely, some beautiful.

And although they were all uniformly dressed in white, their habits were frequently different, different styles, different coifs, different orders.

I could no longer see the children. The rows of the cathedral kept being filled with nuns dressed in white.

In the meantime on the left side of the church where the menacing villains were, the rows, beginning with the front rows, were being filled by warriors.

The warriors as well as the nuns remained standing. The villains had fled out the side door as soon as the influx began.

Most of the warriors appeared as if they were from medieval times, but occasionally one was dressed in modern garb. I recognized one I knew about, Milan Astray. He had but one leg, one eye—there was a black patch over the other one—one arm, and only a few fingers on his left hand. He was dressed in the light tan dress uniform of the Spanish Foreign Legion. Under the empty sleeve of what remained of his right arm he had tucked his garrison cap. He wore no medals or ribbons on his breast. Like Christ, his medals were his wounds. The legend on his shield could have well been—Manco, Cojo, Tuerto. He was a defender of the priesthood, defender of the nuns, defender of the church, sentinel for Spain, and warrior against all the heresies of modernism.

The cathedral was filled with warriors on the left side and nuns all in white on the other.

The priest-monk continued his offices of the mass.

I looked and standing to the right of the altar was Jesus. He was dressed in a white gown, and there was a heart of red silk sewn on the outside of his garment. You could not look at him long because he gave off a blinding light like when you are looking at the sun you cannot look straight at it.

He was very handsome. He was clean shaven. His eyes were brown and kind. His hair was brown and long and straight coming down both sides of his face.

He pointed to his hair and he said, “Had I been born in modern times, I would have had short hair. I dressed according to the times.”

I could hear his voice very clearly even though I was a long way from him at the very back of the cathedral.

“I come,” he said, “to welcome you who think your love is unrequited, but continue to love.”

I thought to myself, “Maybe he means me.”

There appeared alongside of me in the aisle a gigantic warrior. He was really massive. He must have been six eight at least. He had huge shoulders. He was wearing only a

loincloth, and he was wearing sandals that had leather straps that wrapped over the calf. He had a full head of reddish hair. His eyes were blue.

In his arms he carried a small boy. He looked to be about seven or eight. He looked to be a Mexican boy.

You could see that the boy's legs were atrophied. He was wearing light blue pants and tennis shoes and a white shirt with long sleeves. The giant warrior carried the boy towards Christ. I tried to follow it all. I definitely had to look away frequently for I was being blinded by the light that emanated from Christ.

From behind, the muscles in the shoulders of the warrior looked like he had two barrels under his skin.

He held the boy in front of him as he walked and the muscles in this shoulders just rolled as he walked.

He handed the boy to Christ. Christ was smiling. The boy had a wonderful smile on his face. His little atrophied legs hung down as Christ held him.

"You think," Christ said, "I had forgotten you?"

He tossed the boy up in the air, straight up, and Christ and the boy were gone.

The priest held up the bread of the Eucharist in his hand.

Bread.