

Runner



In the Dark

John Mills

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For Maureen Moore

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light—T.S. Eliot.

Part 1

Terry

One of the things that kept Robert Foster going was the cross-word puzzle in *The Listener*. This English magazine, a BBC house organ, was mailed to him every week from London, and each Thursday he would wait for the mailman's visit to the boxes, ten floors down, with mild anticipation. So it was this warm Thursday in July.

He woke up just after sunrise, drank a glass of orange juice, changed into his running-gear. He tied his shoes, a newish, silvery pair of Brooks Huggers with eyeholes for the laces near the ankle—"for greater heel stability" as the salesman explained—teasing the laces carefully so that the tension in them was uniform all the way to the knot. Outside his apartment block he placed his hands against the wall and stretched his calf muscles. Then he crossed Denman Street and walked with increasing speed toward the sea-wall. Long early-morning shadows spanned the winding road that followed the beach, and the air seemed renewed as if someone had got up before Foster and sprayed the city gently with the odours of salt and seaweed, cleansing it from the oil fumes, french-fried potatoes, beer and popcorn reek of the previous long day.

In three minutes Foster had broken into a slow jog; in five he had picked up a steady seven-and-a-half-minute pace that took him the six-mile circuit of Stanley Park in about three-quarters of an hour. He very rarely these days thought about his slender, wiry body—about its condition or its needs; running was just a moderately pleasurable habit left over from happier times.

Back in his apartment he showered and made coffee. The sun streamed through the window and played joyously with a piece of crystal suspended by a thread. Fragments of rainbows bounced on the almost bare white walls of Foster's kitchen while below him sharp edges of light glanced off the breeze-ruffled waters of Coal Harbour stretched out before the plate-

glass of the window. Foster stared at the scene before him, at the yachts with their clusters of masts, two floating gas stations across the water, a small tug pulling an enormous barge filled with sand—without seeing anything. Nothing called for his attention: there was no duty to perform, no work to go to, nobody's expectations to meet.

Foster had lived like this for about a year. He'd actually been on his own for longer—it was two years since his wife had left Vancouver for the East, but at the time of her departure he and Sally were separated, Sally living in an illegal basement suite in the Point Grey area, up near the University. Their "relationship," as people say on the West Coast, "had become dysfunctional." A trial separation is what Sally and Foster called it then. They would phone one another every day, eat supper in her tiny alcove by the kitchen a couple of times a week and spend alternate weekends in his apartment. The arrangement worked well enough until he began to suspect that she was adapting to this new situation too complacently, too agreeably—attitudes suggestive of possible sexual fulfillment with somebody else. In a period of intense but inarticulate jealousy Foster watched her apartment. He was good at this, he discovered—he found out how to make himself unnoticeable; his patience, and this surprised him, seemed endless. And once he was sure he had caught her. He'd arrived late—10 PM of a winter's evening. She was, though all the lights were off, clearly at home—a candle burned in the bedroom. This angered him, for it was the scene they used to set to make love. Foster bashed at the door, shouted, ran to the bedroom window, pounded at the frame, cracked two panes and gashed himself badly. Sally, terrified, screamed at him to go away; he could hear his own voice rising in pitch to meet hers—lights glared in windows, people yelled at him, the landlord above appeared with a pick handle, and a patrol car, there within minutes, bore Foster off to the downtown police station where he was charged with disturbing the peace.

Sally forgave him, as was her pattern, refused to prosecute,

and Foster was released the next day. Sally swore that there had been no-one with her, that the bedside lamp had lost its bulb, that she needed the candle to read by. *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, as if that mattered. Foster was touched, for it had been one of their favourite books—one they'd read together—and chose to believe her. And oddly their friendship renewed itself and the comic aspects of the episode opened up to them. Their lovemaking regained its intensity, they spent more time together and would even have moved back with one another had the job opportunity in Toronto not been offered. There was no work for her in Vancouver—little work for anybody. Sally had been a student until, newly graduated, she'd married Foster. Her degree in English rendered her pretty well unemployable, but she'd acquired by much abrasive study a real-estate licence and sold three or four houses before the Vancouver market collapsed in the early eighties. Then a friend of her family got her a job selling securities for a stockbroker who moved his business to Toronto—closer, as he put it, "to the centre of the action." He offered, rather diffidently, for he was fond of her husband, Sally a job with him, a more senior job commanding a dramatically raised salary and the need for an instant decision. It was an instant decision they agonized over for some weeks. The outcome was never really in doubt—she should pursue a career wherever she could while they waited for the Ontario boom to include either the teaching profession, his old life, or a job for him as a copywriter—his new.

Thus they parted. For a few months they phoned one another every Saturday night. They spent an Easter together in Toronto, a Christmas at Lake Louise. But after that her letters began to take on a perfunctory quality. Once or twice Foster phoned her number at the agreed time and got no reply. The second time this happened Foster angrily strode out of his apartment into a bar, then another, then another, until he wound up at Stamp's Landing, a pub in False Creek. Here he met a group of youngish people and went home with one of

them, a girl called Cindy. In the morning he was surprised to discover that he felt less guilt than he would have supposed.

He was only slightly disturbed, after a few weeks, when Sally sent him a letter explaining that she had moved into a Beaches apartment with a systems analyst named Mike. Then his job, his good job in advertising, in middle management, collapsed. The cutbacks, a sort of modern disease, had made short work of Foster, three colleagues and Foster's own immediate boss. He had been through this, in a different guise, before—when the Classics Department at which he'd been working was abolished by a stroke of the Dean's pen. But that time Foster could understand it—the study of Classics was an anachronism, fewer and fewer students were electing to take it, Foster himself was bored with teaching and had, in fact, been making overtures to Brinslow Associates when the notice from the Dean had appeared in his mailbox. If the first lay-off was expected, the second was not—the difference between the academic and business worlds. Friday morning he was comfortable and enthusiastic in a well-paid job; Friday afternoon he found himself in the world in an entirely new way.

Time to check the mail. Foster took the elevator down to the lobby and opened his box. *The Listener* was there, all right, but nothing else. The magazine lay tightly furled in its brown cylinder of wrapping-paper. Foster slit it with his thumbnail and opened the magazine up against the roll to flatten it, then, in the elevator again, he turned to the last, the crossword page. Most of the crossword clues were "normal," but some of them, and the compiler didn't specify which, had to be entered in code. Foster's eye ran down the list of clues: *monster's head starts a measure and enters a Russian edifice*. What's Russian for *edifice*? Foster didn't know and it didn't matter. These crosswords didn't hinge on a knowledge of foreign languages unless the words had passed into English or were fairly common: like *yurt*, for instance, if one stuck to Russian. More of a tent than an edifice. Or, to choose another tack, *OGPU*, *Lubyanka* and

stilyagi. Russian edifice suggested *Kremlin*—how did that fit? Kr. What about *Kr*? Sea monster? Well, what about Tennyson's Kraken lying at the bottom of the ocean? Its head is Kr ... and em is a measure, and the "lin" part didn't really need a clue. It fitted. Healthier maybe to concentrate on this trivia instead of the fact that his unemployment insurance money was running out and he was lacking in everything a man in mid-life should have: a wife, family, career, savings, property. Here's another easy one: *US bumbkin removed centre of Rubik's cube*. Answer: rube. Foster pencilled that one too. What can you do best, Mr. Foster? Well, I can solve fancy crossword puzzles, do you a lecture on Sophocles. I'm afraid we have no openings for you at the moment. But you'll let me know? Certainly, just let's make sure we have your telephone number on file. Foster's mind began to wander. He thought of Sally in Toronto making her hundred thousand a year as a stockbroker. Then he thought of her—the dark lustrous hair, the calm eyes, grey as a dove's wing, her air of repose and self possession that contrasted so strangely, in their first years together, with that dependence on him, almost a sort of adulation, which made him so uneasy. It certainly took her a while to get used to him ... she an undergraduate, straight from high school, he a teaching assistant in another department, ten years her senior—a late starter.

The phone burred in Foster's bedroom. With a tiny jump Foster reentered the present moment; it was important to answer the phone though the chances of it producing a job were too slender to reckon with. Something in the same order of probability as all the air molecules in the apartment block suddenly clustering to one corner of the furnace-room.

Baab? In Foster's ear the joviality sounded both fat and false. *Baabie?* This is Terry... Terry Mason...

Hello Terry, Foster said, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

How're you doing, old son? (What *is* this, Foster thought. I've not heard from this guy in over a year... and it's hail fel-

low, well met.)

Hail fellow; well met, Foster said aloud.

Lissen, old hermit, I'm calling to invite you to lunch... today.

Well, Foster said, regretting his ungraciousness. That's nice of you, Terry—I've had a fairly late breakfast. (Terry was a big, husky young man who seemed to be grooming himself for a rubicund, booming, self-satisfied middle-age... brandy and ripe in his bright, bass prime. Foster had never felt close to him—he was a friend of Sally's from her previous job.)

Late breakfast, eh? And now you're busy with your weekly impossible crossword, that right? I remember your habits.

I'm not very sociable these days, Foster replied evenly.

Bob, I know what you've been going through, and something's come up I thought you could handle. I know I haven't kept in contact the last year or so... but I've thought of you and Sally a good deal...

Hear from her?

God no, Bobby, why on earth should I have heard from her? But lissen, why don't you meet me down at the English Bay Café about one... there's something I really need to talk over with you... I won't say it'll lead to a job of any permanent kind, but it may, and in any case there'll be a few dollars in it.

Well, it's short notice, but I guess you know my social calendar isn't full.

Come on, old boy. You sound a bit flat... see you at one. We'll talk money and power.

You win, Foster said. I'll be there.

As he put the phone down Foster experienced a tiny surge of well-being. It was good of Terry—a man, Foster thought ungenerously, shielded behind fat and insincerity. Yet obviously capable of doing a deadbeat a good turn. *Less of your deadbeat.* But... "let's go, old boy, old son." Did Terry always speak like that? Foster couldn't remember. What an odd thing to say, though. As if Terry had spent his formative years at the kind of school where they wear blazers, play cricket and go in

for flagellation.

10 AM. Foster stood facing his bathroom mirror idly planing the tense face he saw there with a new Wilkinson blade. His mind seized eagerly on the trivial but insistent problem of what to wear, as if some underused and unrespected muscle had at last found weight enough to engage it. Was Terry offering him a job? In which case it would be tactful to wear a suit, or at least a jacket and tie. To climb, in other words, into what he called his urban survival gear. Something in Foster rebelled at this, for he'd dressed up many times in the last year for interviews that had proved fruitless. Perhaps the gear was jinxed. In any case, Vancouver is a casual place, and most people who live in it are more comfortable in shorts and sandals. The suit qua suit was an Eastern costume—and wearing it a ritual to which Vancouverites conformed with seeming reluctance. Foster compromised with an open-necked cotton shirt, neat but casual trousers, and shoes—real shoes—the kind for which you need socks.

A thin, slivery rectangle of bright yellow decorated a wall as the sun crept out from behind the next apartment block. The day beckoned like a gay, beribboned figure at a carnival. Outside it was clearly destined to be hot, though not oppressively so. A slight breeze off Georgia Straight cooled things down a bit except, it seemed, along the noisy, densely trafficked streets like Denman and Davie. The noise triggered his depression. He knew he ought to be grateful for this weather, for the perfect West Coast sky, the high-pressure ridge that lies in summer-time along the coast and keeps the rain, like a thirst-driven beast, at bay. (Then in the fall it is as if a giant hand pulls a dark awning over the sky and the monsoon starts with hardly an overture.) Under other circumstances, Foster knew, he would revel in the air of improvisation the crowded streets wear in summer, the casual clothes, sandals, bikinis, the skipping out that people did from their offices to be on the beach, illicitly, for an hour or two during the day. "Oh," might

be an answer if you were trying to phone a businessman between nine and five, "He's just stepped out of the office for a moment." And in Vancouver that is code for "he's ducked out for an hour's windsurfing, or sunbathing, and a paper plate of fish and chips from the concession stand." Now the sun glinted from chromium and window and made his eyes ache and the honk of the traffic, slow and dreamy and tending to go to sleep at lights, seemed extra loud. Four youths in a convertible stopped reluctantly for him at a pedestrian crossing; loud rock music blared from their radio. What animals, Foster thought, grimacing at them—what surly, murderous louts. Small children got under his feet as he walked down the flight of concrete steps to the beach, and he nearly fell over them. An oath died on his lips, but only just. He knew he was being irrational—who cares whether or not a child impedes your progress? What does it matter? And who the hell are you anyway?

Surprised at his stress level, Foster killed some time walking around the Lagoon, buying a *Globe and Mail* from which, sitting on a park bench, he tried to discover what was going on in the wide world beyond the narrow range of his own consciousness.

Reservation for Mason?

This way, sir. Foster's spirits lifted as the hostess showed him upstairs.

Terry already sat at a table by a window overlooking the beach. The room was packed and noisy—there were a few businessmen in jackets and ties, some women in the mid-cult worker's equivalent of white blouse, cravat and recently fixed hair. But the rest were casual as befitted this big, laidback city sprawling in the summer sun.

Terry half stood as Bob Foster approached him and leaned across the table with a wide, shaky smile. His dark, sculpted hair almost hid a bald patch on the crown of his head, though thick black eyebrows gave the impression of great hairiness. Terry's face was white and pudgy, that of a man very evidently

out of condition—he was Foster's age, middle thirties, but looked at least ten years older and ripe for his first coronary. Foster had forgotten about the speech impediment, for it wasn't obvious on the phone. Terry couldn't pronounce an r properly, and sometimes, for emphasis, would pronounce it as a d. Thus, when needing to impress someone, he would introduce himself as "Teddy Mason." It seemed a little precious—Terry might have said perdrevious—as if he were trying to pass for an Englishman in the process of acquiring a mid-Atlantic accent. It was not endearing.

Great to see you, Baab, Terry said, loudly and expansively, switching instantly to another persona—the boisterous American life-insurance drummer. Foster sat down, a little uncertainly, on the edge of his chair.

Without asking, Terry poured him a glass of wine out of a bottle sitting ostentatiously in a silver cooler, and made shovelling gestures at it with his hand.

Cheers, Foster said, sipping cautiously. The wine was cool and dry but his host was not. He was over-eager and too friendly.

You're looking good, Bobbie, Terry said more quietly.

I'm okay.

Still running?

Every day.

Mountain climbing?

Gave that up three or four years ago... when my troubles began.

Been a bad number for you, this recession, hasn't it? Terry pronounced it *decession*. He's chosen, Foster thought, not to take the bait... doesn't want to talk about Sally; don't really blame him. Without waiting for an answer, Terry embarked on a series of horror stories, beginning with the most banal: people with degrees in the arts, even in subjects such as physics or chemistry, on welfare or driving taxis. Then there were men and women in Foster's position—teachers laid off when the school-board budgets were reduced, forced into places like

Prince George or Cranberry Portage, and then only if they were lucky. Men and women in well-paying, middle-management jobs made redundant by the advent of computers. Workers forced into early retirement, into accepting golden handshakes of a derisory amount. Some had been "let go" as the mealy-mouthed expression has it, after 30 years wage slavery with nothing but the words "tough shit, buddy." And there were the jokes: never eat lunch with the boss on Fridays; when you drive into the parking-lot on Monday it's easier on the battery to keep your engine running.

You're not much encouragement, Foster said, frowning at a Coquille St. Jacques that had suddenly appeared in front of him. He'd been intrigued by the stories, not so much by their content as by Terry's agenda in relating them.

Times're tough all over, Bobbie, is what I'm tedrying to say, and there are some damn good men, and women too, out there scratching for nickels and dimes.

Better men and women than me.

Now, Bobbie, I didn't say that... you're taking me the wrong way.

Foster smiled and shrugged slightly. Terry said, totally unexpectedly:

What about the sea?

The sea?

Yes, didn't you use to work on the boats?

Terry, are you serious? I worked on tugboats for a year before going to college. That's more than fifteen years ago. What contacts do you suppose I'd have?

Foster had, in fact, tried to resurrect those contacts, but the company he'd worked for had changed hands and none of its personnel had stayed. The sea was closed to him for other reasons: it was either a career for a professional, or a summer job for a much younger man. And in any case, in the perception of his fellow deckhands he would be a professor and thus a wimp—a candy-ass.

I can do crosswords, Foster said bitterly. And that's about

it.

You've got a gift, Terry replied. A gift for words.

He poured the last of the wine. The bread basket was empty, so was the wine bottle. A strange pause had come over them—the restaurant babble seemed quieter. The sun glinted on a fork, shimmied in a water glass, struck a spark from a car fender in the street below. A windsurfer glided slowly from the sea onto the beach. Lightness falls from the air; children splash, bathers bob and prance, comporting themselves like dolphins.

Words, Terry said. That's kind of what I want to talk to you about.

You stuck with a crossword? Foster said, relieved that Terry was clearly about to make his move. How many letters? What's the clue? Puzzles I can handle.

I know you can.

And there's no money in them.

Don't be so sure. I'm working on something right now... Terry got out a packet of cigarettes and absentmindedly offered it to Foster who, with equal absent-mindedness, took one. He hadn't smoked in years.

A thing right now, Terry continued, that involves words. And I thought of you right away.

Well go ahead, Terry, I'm all ears.

It's finding a name for something.

Terry, please stop being so mysterious. What kind of something?

It's a machine, a sort of computer.

A machine, sort of computer. How many letters?

That's not important, Terry said obtusely.

Well, Terry, if you want me to be serious you have to give me more information. A name depends on the machine's characteristics. Zephyr, Tornado, Bobcat, and so on, are good names for cars because they suggest speed and power and, indirectly, sexuality. But a computer is a static, subtle machine you could give any name you choose. Apple, for

instance: a word that says nothing about the machine itself.

Right, Bobbie, dead right. See, it needs a poet. Apple—what does that suggest to you? Crispness, wholeness, health

...

Sin and cider.

Sin? What's this you're handing me?

Adam and Eve...

What kind of language is that, Bobbie? Jesus Christ...

I didn't mean to upset you. All I meant was that when you choose a name you've got to account for all possible connotations.

That's it, Bobbie. That's why I need you for this job.

Terry seemed to come to a decision. He stubbed out his cigarette with one hand and reached inside his jacket pocket with the other. Out came a manila envelope.

Here's a cheque for you, Terry Mason said. It's for 500 bucks if you take the job. A down-payment, so to speak. You get another \$2,000 on submitting an acceptable word and a percentage of the royalties we'll all have to agree on. If your word becomes household, like Apple, then obviously you'll deserve an extra cut.

Something in Foster advised him to be cautious. He didn't quite trust the yellow discolourations around Terry's eyes, which spoke of stress and heavy living, nor the shiftiness of speech and the weak deceptive mouth. Yet here was a cheque and, on the face of it, a job. A small one, but a job—and the last time he'd worked was to help a friend build a summer cabin up on Lake Shuswap. This cheque, if it were a good one, would double his present bank balance. Foster looked at his doubts and saw them as worthless. There was little risk and even if there were what was life about anyway, and who was he to snub a man trying to do him a good turn. He felt a sudden warmth toward Terry and a strong empathy for the pressures he was undergoing, whatever these were.

Who's this client?

He's a Mr. Rains, Terry said, leaning forward and becom-

ing confidential. Sidney *Dains*, up from the States. I've done some work for him in the past and he figured I could help him with this. Now (Terry became suddenly American again), whaddya say, Baabie?

Okay. Of course. Five hundred dollars is very generous. Money talks, right?

That's *dight*, Bobbie. And it's just a word. That's all we want.

For when?

That I'm not sure about. I'm meeting Sidney tomorrow at the Park Hotel to discuss a few things. Like this time factor and the royalty I spoke of. I'd like you to be there, at the Park, to join us. Doing anything tomorrow?

Terry you know bloody well I'm not. What time?

Ten o'clock. Tomorrow morning. Plus or minus fifteen minutes. So better be there at a quarter to ten. Okay? I'll be there to meet you in the lobby. There may be a bit of a wait, so bring your latest crossword.

Okay. And then we'll be hearing more about this machine of yours?

Right... Dessert? Coffee? No? Well listen, Bobbie, it's been a slice. Do you mind if I get the bill and kind of take off? I've got another appointment, and it's later than I thought. Why don't you stay here awhile with a cognac, or something. I'll put it on the bill too. Play ball with the cheque I gave you if you want—see if it'll bounce.

Terry gave a tiny giggle and rose clumsily to his feet. He was sweating a little and Foster wondered if he were drunk. It seemed unlikely. A bottle of wine of which he, Foster, had drunk the lion's share. Some lion. Whatever it was, Terry gave off an aura of great discomfort—almost of fear. Foster was certain he wanted to leave alone.

I'll take you up on that, Terry, thanks. I'll sit here and see if the colour of your money triggers my verbal skills.

Tomorrow, Terry said with evident relief. Tomorrow morning at ten.

That night Robert Foster dreamed he and Sally were in the car again, the little Alfa-Romeo they'd bought in a period of relative affluence a year after they were married, belting at a terrifying speed down Howe Street, then a left, a right, to Granville, then across the bridge while the Vancouver winter rain, cold, interminable and drenching as a cascade—sluiced the almost empty roadway. (It is a rain that keeps people off the streets at night—it maroons them in the recesses of beer parlours, traps them in the black doorways of deserted shops; it backs up in storm drains and floods underpasses; it transforms gutters into rivers, puddles into lakes; it drowns the night action on Granville Street—the drug peddling, the soliciting, the random driftings of alcoholics enfeebled by poverty and their deteriorating bodies.) What traffic there was swished through the city with arrogance and unconcern like rich launches on the Thames, or Grand Canal. Foster's windshield wipers flapped back and forth at maximum speed while Foster himself, high on wine and cocaine, drove with skill and a panache he never believed himself capable of, while, in this dream, Sally in the back seat begged him to slow down or stop altogether. But Foster couldn't stop—his body surged violently with a mad elation—an acuity of perception and accuracy of response that made driving seem no more than an extension of nerve and muscle into the world of reeling streets and stop signs and traffic lights. Zen. Zen and the art of Impaired Driving. Who would have thought it so easy? The car was *flying*—following the road surface, yes, but a foot above it as if buoyed by a strong magnetic field over which he had total control. No, he said to her, no. Let me be, Sally. She touched him, though, on the neck and Foster turned with a smile, but it was Terry, there, in the back seat, his face leaner, more handsome, and shining with sincerity.

Bobbie, he was saying in a low voice. Let's get home. You'll get us home, I know you will.

Foster looked at Terry with gratitude. The thinner, younger face seemed to radiate warmth and love.

Sally said, Slow down...please...pull over, Bobbie. Bobbie, I love him.

Keep going, Bobbie, Terry said. Yes, she loves me. And I love her. It's the way things are, Bobbie. We're in love. So take us home.

I love him so much, Bobbie. Please let us out.

Foster in his dream laughed delightedly. They were in love! And he with them, and all he wanted was their happiness. He couldn't stop, though, for Terry wanted him to drive even faster; nor could he go on, since Sally wanted to stop and say her goodbyes to him. Bliss it was, in this version of the dream, not to have to decide. The car was driving itself, flying on its own without his willpower to keep it in the air, and could make its own decision. He turned from the wheel and beamed at her. Oh, he'd seen through her, right enough. He hadn't needed her to tell him about how things were between herself and Terry. And that fear of his powerful driving, that fear when they first started off from the party, that was nothing more than a sad attempt to cover things up. Poor deluded woman! How could she have hoped to conceal it from him? He leaned his arms on the back of the seat, and told her these things, his body twisted around to her, gently and lovingly, while the car drove itself. No, he told her, nothing she could ever do would affect his love for her. Look out! She shouted. Get the wheel! But Foster shook his head and smiled. The car was happy enough—knifing through the rain like a jet plane on automatic pilot along the southern end of Granville Street and onto the bridge. Then, in his dream, Foster knew that something was wrong. A wave of fear pulsed through him. It was as if different physical laws were at work, for they were in the same place, or almost the same, as when Terry had told him his news, and before Foster had begun to lecture Sally. The car was suddenly plucked from its own dimensions, thrown reeling out of control, weaving across the street like a drunk floundering each side of a straight line, no longer above the road, skimming its surface, but its victim tossed first one

side, then the other, hurtled into the lane that curves off to Fir Street and Fourth Avenue, back and forth like a bobsled on the Cresta Run, then flailing the concrete guard rails, suddenly thin-walled and vulnerable. Then a huge black hand picked the car up, threw it down again upon its back, then spun it like a skipped stone along the river driving down the exit lane until it fetched up, crumpled and torn apart, against the wall of some building the wrong side of Fourth Avenue. Foster heard himself yelling insanely until suddenly the noise stopped, the car and the world around it lay still, and there was a great, inverted dome of metal above Foster's head and, crushing him, a snake-like entanglement of seatbelts, and wreckage, and twisted metal. Foster fought, desperately in this dream, and in all the others he'd had in which this accident was the dark centre, against these coils of wire: sometimes they formed the body of a huge serpent, at other times they composed Sally's own lacerated and bleeding body, linked to his and, in its death throes, sucking the life out of him like a snake sucking the entrails of some small and defenceless animal. Yet it was Sally, in every version of the dream, who told him to be calm, to push his feet against the windshield and smash it, to kick away the shards of glass and to wriggle his way out, through the small gap, feet first into safety. A car came behind them, switched on its high beam, then swung into the other lane to avoid the wreck. But Foster had found himself unhurt and free of the coils of wire, of webbing strips, whatever else it was, and was tearing at the door to let Sally out. Another car slowed, then accelerated past him, but a third pulled up behind and a man got out to help Foster grapple with the door. It was here that the dream would relate, quite flatly, what had happened that night in actuality but soon, as if bored with the truth, the dreaming self would slide back again, to the coils of python-like strength and terror, to the woman's face, to the drowning and the crushing, the being pulled down into the driving rain, beneath the surface of the river cascading down the exit lane.

The early morning light, a doting parent, crept gently into Foster's bedroom as if reluctant to wake him, yet anxious for its child to begin another day of wonder and surprise. Foster woke slowly, oppressed by his dream. His brain picked delicately among the night's rubble for truths. For instance, it was true that he'd driven too fast that night, and too drunkenly. It was true that Terry might have been at Madge's house-warming—it was said they'd been lovers; untrue that Terry's was a commanding presence either there or later. He most certainly hadn't been in the car. That winsome, personable Terry of years ago was clearly conflated with the Terry of yesterday—not a compelling figure. Sally's love, in the dream, for Terry made him smile—Terry just wasn't her type. She was fond of him but regarded him with mild contempt that took the form, very often, of mimicry. It was true that Foster had been over-watchful of Sally—but then, why not? She was a beautiful, sexually alive woman and, it seemed to him, lusted after by half the population of the city. What had he, Foster, got that those other, richer, more handsome men had not? He suspected her fidelity, couldn't understand it. But with Terry? Not possible.

True he blamed himself for the car crash, untrue that she had blamed him—there was no judge in her, and that was always a problem. She was far too accepting—was that love? Or lack of discrimination?

Those people who spoke of "unconditional love," what else can they mean but a blind, passive, cloying and ultimately controlling acceptance? Something in Foster rebelled against it—something that demanded energy, fire, resistance. To his conscious horror he found himself growing cool toward Sally, irritated by her too willing forgiveness, and soon after the accident he floundered into his first affair. Sally discovered it and, of course, forgave it. It turned out, all passive-aggression

aside, that it paid her to do so; she had already begun a "relationship" with a colleague of his named Ben Miles. He was angered, of course, but also amazed. How badly he had underestimated his wife! Now he was confronted with the problem of forgiving *her*. They disentangled this adulterous knot by agreeing that theirs was clearly a hitherto undeclared Open Marriage. Well, it was the way to go in this modern age, but *at gut level*, as the West Coast idiom has it, what was *really* going on? *What was going down in the here and now?* What *space* were they really in?

What became clear was that the kind of relationship they'd embarked on since their first meeting, the web of careful adjustments and compromises they'd created together, had ceased to exist.

Foster groaned and swung his feet out of bed and onto the floor. He stood up, then crept to the bathroom. That accident had been the end of something. The start of something else. Fallings from us, vanishings.

His natural melancholy, released by the dream, began to wind its way in and around his consciousness like a dark vine. He started the shower and adjusted the jet to its thinnest, most stinging setting, to wake himself up. There was work to do today—\$500, the cheque safely in his pocket, to be earned. The thought did nothing to cheer him. His dream, featuring Terry Mason in a leading role, had undermined his will and his confidence. There seemed no point in embarking on something so intangible yet so tainted. No good could ever come of it. He wished heartily that Terry had not phoned him, that he had never accepted the money, that he had not agreed to meet this Mr. Rains in a downtown hotel. He should have stayed in bed. The realization struck him that he had missed, for the first time in many weeks, his run along the sea-wall. Suddenly and angrily he twisted the cold tap on full force and gasped as the spout of icy water hit him in the chest. It was enough introspection. There was still time. Foster stepped out of the shower and dried himself hastily. He dressed in his shorts and

tee shirt, found his running-shoes from the bottom of the bedroom cupboards and strode purposefully out of the apartment.

When Foster was growing up there was only one big hotel in the city, and that was the Hotel Vancouver, a huge pile of CPR Gothic masonry with tiny windows and a roof of verdigrised copper. The traveller entered the swing doors and encountered a little city within a city—carpets, boutiques, restaurants, strollers, gawkers, flunkies. The Hotel Vancouver was not only the one place in town you could hold a convention, it was said to be Vancouver's tallest building. Now it was dwarfed by concrete, glass and aluminum skyscrapers, some of them hotels—more modern, streamlined and expensive, even, than the Hotel Vancouver. Such was the Park, slender, elegant and shining. Inside, the carpets were thick and white, the reception desk faced with what looked like white suede, and the man at the door dressed in a white suit, gloves, top-hat and bow tie. Foster, got up in full urban survival mode—grey suit, white shirt, discreet tie—and feeling, even at this hour, as if he were dressed in a sauna, sympathized with this doorman. Inside, however, the air conditioning took over, and there was a soft, bland, slurry of muzak.

The Park's frontage was relatively narrow, though there was room for a high-class coffee shop and a few square yards of white carpet decorated with glass-topped tables and white armchairs. Foster allowed one of these to embrace him. It was 9:30. From a briefcase, part of his urban gear, he drew out *The Listener*, opened at the crossword page. He'd completed much of the puzzle, but some of the keyed letters, because a dozen or so words had to be encoded, didn't match. However, he'd made a start on the code, for he noticed that his word Rube crossed with the word Glendoveer (*With hesitation, a pigeon follows the narrow valley leading to the heavenly spirit*) at the "u" of the former and the "n" of the latter. So far, so good.

A group of middle-aged men with quiet suits and loud voices, wearing name tags, milled boisterously for a minute or

so round the reception desk like a herd of gnu. For a moment Foster wondered if one of them could be Mr. Rains...Dains... but they all wandered off in that rackety but desultory way of late-breakfasting conventioners, crowing and slapping one another's shoulders.

There was still no sign of Terry.

Ten o'clock. Then ten past. Then twenty-five minutes past.

All at once, before Foster could entirely register it, an elevator door opened and a sudden entourage poured out onto the white carpet. A big man led it: tall, fleshy, balding and dressed, a rarity in Vancouver, in an expensive tailor-made suit. Foster caught a quick impression of a beaked nose, double chin and air of aristocracy. Half a step behind was a young woman, two blond men who looked like bodyguards, a very handsome dark woman, Pakistani, perhaps, or Indian, dressed like a Vogue model, obviously a confidential secretary. But it was the young woman—slender, vulnerable-looking despite her glossy appearance, her air of being a rich man's consort—who made him gasp with shock, for she was someone Foster knew, knew by virtue of courtship, of intimacy, of marriage, or someone still in his dreams. Behind the coiffed hair, the grey suit, was Sally—a transformed Sally, but Sally nevertheless. Something stopped him uttering her name—he was aware only that he was on his feet, his mouth open, dumbfounded, and that Sally was staring at him almost in horror.

The group had stopped, and the big man cocked his head in a gesture of enquiry.

Mr. Rains? Foster said, rather stupidly.

The man nodded, drew Sally to his side by gently guiding her elbow, and beckoned one of the bodyguards. A blond man stood in front of Foster as the rest of the assembly moved, stately and unhurried as a flotilla of galleons, to the front doors. The blond man smiled at Foster and tapped him familiarly on the chest with something.

Here, he said, this is yours, I think.

The intonation and accent were slightly foreign. German, perhaps, or Scandinavian. Foster stared at the manila envelope thrust at his chest like a dagger—the second envelope in two days, and still stunned by Sally's mysterious appearance, he took it. Now be off, the blond man said in sudden urgency. Be off with you quickly. And he was off himself, caught up with the mysterious crew of which he was clearly a part, through the door with them, to be ushered gently by the doorman in white suit and topper, into a white limousine. Sally was already inside it, a slight but important figure in the back. She did not look at Foster, now outside the hotel himself, nor did anyone else as the limousine drew off, leaving Foster standing on the busy Howe Street amazed and angry, the envelope dangling in his hand like an unwanted consolation prize.

The downtown streets, quiet and almost sedate after the morning rush of workers, were again growing busy with less urgent pedestrians dazed by sunlight and their own leisure: another class of being altogether. There was a whole paunchful of them, pale, hearty, elderly vacationers assembling outside the hotel opposite under the control of a blazered tour guide: the men in shorts and redneck hats, the women in scarves, polyester trousers and white cardigans. Foster glared at them angrily and turned back to the hotel.

Where's that limousine going? He asked the doorman in the white suit, aware that his voice sounded both agitated and garbled. The doorman looked at him with an unsurprising distaste.

I'm afraid I couldn't tell you, he said.

Foster muttered under his breath, cursing his own stupidity. Look, he said, trying to get himself under control, I have an urgent message for Mr. Rains.

So leave it at the desk, the man said, turning his back.

Foster walked as casually as he could through the white reception lounge, past a man in a white jacket wheeling a combination clothes-rack and luggage trolley and waited

with what patience and casualness he could muster for a middle-aged couple checking in and speaking loudly to the receptionist of their home in Michigan.

Sorry to bother you, Foster said when he got the clerk's attention. But I was here earlier visiting Mr. Rains and he accidentally left something of his with me. I'd like to give it back to him.

Unfortunately sir, Mr. Rains has checked out. He left just a few minutes ago. You just missed him.

The clerk, as Foster suspected, seemed to have no recollection of him.

Ah, is he at the airport? Perhaps I can catch him there.

You probably can, sir, if you hurry.

Foster thanked the man, and hurried out.

It took Foster 25 minutes to find a taxi and another twenty minutes to creep through heavy traffic to the airport—traffic through which Rains' limousine would have sailed agile and effortless as a barracuda in a school of codfish. The conviction grew as he paid off the taxi driver with some of his precious, remaining money, that Rains had made a fool of him, and so had Terry—the former had probably left already, soaring back to Toronto in his own Lear jet, while the latter, having set Foster up, was lying low and playing his own peculiar game. Through the automatic doors, though, and Foster was out of the world of ambivalence and enigma into a bright, air-conditioned world of purposeful activity—a swarm of Japanese tourists photographed one another posed against backdrops of escalators, washroom signs and duty-free shops; men with brawny arms, beer bellies and Stetson hats lined up at the Pacific Western counter, on the way to Calgary or the Okanagan. Foster walked quickly from counter to counter, but saw no-one. He checked the waiting areas and lounges but there was no sign of Sally, Rains or any of the bodyguards. It was more than possible this expensive party, travelling first class, had already gone: there would have been no line-up to speak of, no need to arrive at the airport two hours ahead of

departure. He did not associate Mr. Rains with queues of men in ten-gallon hats. Within twenty minutes it became obvious that Rains had in fact left. Quickly Foster checked the arrivals, and then the departure screens.

11:17 Canadian: Los Angeles.

11:20 Air Canada: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal.

11:27 JAL: Tokyo.

11:33 Frontier Airlines: Spokane, Denver, Albuquerque.

11:36 Pacific Western Airlines: Kamloops, Prince George.

11:45 Qantas: Sidney.

Rains and Sally, in other words, could literally have been scattered, or well on their way to such a state of scattering, to the four corners of the globe.

On the way back to town via a city bus filled with midday heat and two screaming babies, Foster had plenty of time to reflect on his own stupidity. What if he'd caught up with Rains? That's my wife you've got there, Rains, let her go. Sally had seen him, recognized him. She could have left Rains' side and come to him—she was obviously not Rains' prisoner. She could at least have spoken—words of reassurance and of ease. The fact is she did nothing, and again Foster felt a wave of anger and sadness: her betrayal was aided and abetted by Terry's, but at least Terry was available and could be pushed for an explanation. Except that he didn't know where Terry lived, let alone where he worked—"business consultant" means anything from higher echelon sales to pushing drugs. Most probably Terry, like many of the independent businessmen Foster knew, scratched for nickels and dimes around the periphery of "large-scale enterprises"—grandiose projects like Expo or North-East Coal of which this Province of British Columbia seemed enamoured.

Foster drew the manila envelope from his briefcase: "Yours, I think." He tucked a finger into the end and slit it open. Inside were three sheets of 8" x 11" paper covered with figures—about 50 columns of them, and the same number of

rows. He put the envelope into his briefcase and pulled out the other containing Terry's cheque. It was signed Terence H. Mason and there was an address in the top left-hand corner: Jannock Enterprises, Lomac Building, Dunsmuir Street. The sheets of figures were "his," but obviously "his" in a different way from the cheque. Were the sheets actually Terry's? Perhaps he'd been hired merely as a messenger boy. The thought failed to increase his comfort.

The bus dropped him at Granville and Robson and Foster walked toward home and that corner of Denman Street where he did what small banking he had to do. He stopped at the Sheraton Landmark and consulted a phonebook in the lobby. There were several T. Masons, a couple of them in the West End, which sounded possible, though Foster vaguely believed that Terry lived across the water in Kitsilano. He phoned both numbers, also an agency on Pender Street, but got no reply from two, a denial from the third, and again a deep silence at the end of the Jannock Enterprises number.

Foster lunched off a BLT and orange juice in the coffee shop and pondered his next move. If Terry wasn't available he would have to hang on to his stupid document—encoded and as valuable as it appeared to be. Perhaps Terry intended him to decode the array of numbers—a job better done by computer—in which case he ought to make himself available. Sally's role in all this he could get straightened out once he'd got his hands on Terry. Meanwhile the envelope had better go into safety.

At his bank, Foster deposited the five hundred dollars less fifty for his groceries, and locked Rains' envelope into his safety-deposit box. This was a leftover from his marriage: Sally had kept some heirloom jewellery in it, insurance policies, wills—the legal paraphernalia of their marriage. The staff, at least the woman who let him through the counter, knew him, and had known Sally. She was a pleasant, middle-aged lady with blond hair, glasses on a cord and a beaked, inquisitive nose.

How's Mrs. Foster, she asked cheerfully.

She's fine, Foster said. At least, she was this morning when I last saw her.

The woman laughed. There was little in the box now—the jewellery had gone, her wills changed, her insurance policies made out to other beneficiaries. At least, that's what Foster assumed. He'd left his own documents in the box unaltered.

The afternoon stretched out before him. Today, however, it was even more desultory and pointless than ever. There was Terry to be found, somewhere in this city, and eventually he would have to come back to his place of business. Foster went home, changed his clothes, and slowly, in the now broiling summer's afternoon, began a long, slow walk to Dunsmuir Street.

The Lomac building was an older, nineteen-twenties office-block of four storeys sitting without much frontage on that part of the street leading toward the war memorial in Victory Square. It had so far escaped development, but had not yet acquired the spurious, boutiquey charm of the nearby renovated district known as Gastown. It was older Vancouver at its most functional and nobody, no yuppie, no-one who wanted to create an impression of success would rent an office space here, on the fringes of another culture: the drunks, dope-dealers, low-end-of-the-scale prostitutes. Inside the door was a small lobby, an elevator and a flight of steps. Through a glass panel Foster could see what looked like a storage-room for cardboard boxes containing old files. A name-plate on the other wall showed a number of tags—a dental technician, a warehouse, finance company, a couple of ordinary names, and several blanks as well as Jannock Enterprises, on the third floor. Foster saw no reason to trust the elevator. He started on the stairs. Somebody from last night or earlier in the day had used a corner of the staircase first as a urinal, than as a vomitorium, the stench of it, empowered even further by the heat, gave way in the next landing to a general odour of dust and

sour tobacco smoke. Terry was clearly on the way down. A door with frosted glass carried the legend "Jannock Enterprises, T. H. Mason." Foster knocked, then tried the handle and, somewhat to his surprise, the door opened.

There was a strip of fraying grey carpet and a large desk, two plastic-and-chrome rummage-sale chairs to one side of the small office and between them a plastic rubber plant sprouting from a brown bin three-quarters filled with cedar bark into which some previous visitor had stubbed a couple of cigarettes. But behind the desk was a woman, blond and rather small and quick in her movements. Foster had obviously taken her by surprise: her head had that second been bowed over a bottom drawer.

Can I help you? she asked briskly.

I'm looking for Terry—Mr. Mason.

He was here earlier, the woman said. I think he's just stepped out for a minute or two. Would you like to wait?

The voice was attractive, rapid and husky, but with a hint of impatience as if Foster had disturbed her in some important work.

So long as that doesn't really mean "he's down in Stanley Park playing Pitch'n Putt," then sure, I'll wait.

This didn't seem to be quite the response expected.

He's unlikely to be in the park, the woman said seriously. And I don't know how long you'll have to wait.

I never knew Terry had a secretary.

I'm not his secretary. I'm a sort of freelance assistant—I help him with his letters and accounts.

Foster nodded and smiled. The woman attracted him. She was a little older than his late thirties—and was brisk, efficient and rather intimidating, as if she would be more at home as a lawyer in a public prosecutor's office than in a low-rent, small-time office block.

On impulse he said: Do you know Sid Rains?

The effect was startling. She stopped sorting through the drawer and looked up at him quickly: her sudden interest was

oddly gratifying.

Rains? Of course. What about him?

Is Terry working for him?

May I ask who you are?

Sorry, my name's Bob Foster.

I'm Julia Reynolds. I'm afraid I can't discuss Mr. Mason's business with anyone, Mr. Foster.

Then I guess I'll continue to wait for him. And no, there's nothing you can help me with...thanks, anyway.

Foster leaned back in his chair. His answer didn't seem to satisfy the woman behind the desk. She sorted through the drawer, closed it impatiently, then looked up at him.

Did Mr. Rains send you? she asked.

I don't feel free, Foster said smugly, to discuss Mr. Rains' business.

That's silly.

Tell me where Terry is, Miss Reynolds. I want to know.

He's with Mr. Rains now.

No, he's not with Mr. Rains. Mr. Rains took off in a limousine on the way to God knows where...and no Terry.

You met with Sid Rains? *You* did? Suddenly the woman seemed agitated. She stood up and pushed the chair back. Why in God's name, she said angrily, didn't you say so?

Because you didn't ask and because you didn't give me a chance, Foster said violently. Because you're as cagey and evasive as Terry is, and the whole damn pack of you can go to hell as far as I'm concerned... At least I cashed his goddam cheque.

Foster stood and moved decisively toward the door.

Wait, Julia Reynolds said. She darted round the desk after him. Mr. Foster...I'm sorry. It was just something of a shock, that's all. I didn't mean to upset you. Please...let's sit down and talk about it.

She was close to him, her hand on his arm. There was a faint odour of expensive perfume and a sudden, radiant smile. It was as if she had switched to another mode—softer, more sensual. He stood for a second irresolute, but her smile was genu-

ine, and he was vulnerable.

All right, he said. He found the plastic chair again and sat in it, but Julia Reynolds did not return to her place behind the desk. She sat on the side near to him and pushed the fake rubber plant aside so she could see him better.

I was surprised, she said, because Terry was supposed to have met Mr. Rains this morning and pick up a package from him. He tell you about that?

No. He just wanted me to meet Rains. But he didn't show up...

So Rains gave you the package.

What's wrong with that?

How would I know? Terry doesn't tell me everything... I'm just part time. Certainly he never said anything about you.

What about Sally?

Who's she?

Sally's my wife.

Your wife? Terry wanted you to take your wife along?

She was with Rains. Sally and I have been separated for a couple of years.

Julia Reynolds stared at him in silence for a moment, then turned away.

I'm sorry, she said.

Me too.

And I still don't understand. Did Terry know she'd be there?

That's one of the things I'm going to ask him.

Julia Reynolds seemed to come to a decision. Look, she said briskly. That's something you and he must sort out personally. But we need the package. We just have to have it. Did you bring it with you?

No, I didn't.

Well, can you get it?

Not until Monday—it's in my safety-deposit box.

There was another silence. Foster said:

Look, Miss Reynolds. Terry paid me good money to do something for him—to choose a word, or a slogan, for some new type of computer. Perhaps picking up the package was part of the deal—I don't know, and he never said so—but perhaps it was, and if this envelope's to be handed over, then I'd much sooner give it to Terry personally. No offence.

Yes, she said softly, that's the correct thing to do. Within a fraction of a second she had lost her hardness, the air of being a super-competent lawyer, or head nurse, or Dean of a Women's college, and had become another person—smiling, and almost sultry. I'm not sure, she said, what point there is in your waiting. Certainly you should hand that package over to him. New computer, did he say? Choosing a slogan?

That's what he told me.

And did you look inside the envelope?

Yes, Foster said, feeling somewhat ashamed. Just a few sheets of paper covered with figures.

She uttered a tiny, exasperated sigh. I know, she said. At least he told me that. Suddenly the tough shop steward, the office manager, returned. Curtly, she said: I see no point in your staying. He's got your phone number? Then I'll make sure he calls you as soon as he's in.

When Foster left the Lomac building it was after five o'clock. For more than an hour the streets had slowly filled with men in suits and women in summer dresses and high heels, salesmen, secretaries, clerks and shop assistants on their way home—a shower, a change of clothes, a garden barbecue if married, a laze on the beaches or in the bars if not. From Granville Island to Stanley Park the bistros, especially those with outside tables, flourished with young, tanned people with money to spend; traffic thickened and grew raucous and for another hour drivers would be obsessed by this desperate urge to get home and embark on the ritual of Supper Time. Pedestrians lined up in liquor stores for beer, in groceries for hamburger buns and ground beef. Whiffs of smoke crept upward from charcoal glowing in suburban gardens and on apartment

balconies. Sunbathers on Spanish Banks, English Bay and Kitsilano Beach pegged out their territories and competed for the logs, laid out in orderly rows, for backrests.

Foster had been cheered by his encounter with Julia Reynolds, by her attractiveness, by her positive response to him, so that the sight of all this activity, of other people's joy in the day, no longer offended him. He walked slowly through this supper-time scene without himself feeling much appetite. The fifty dollars felt warm and comforting in his wallet, but he felt no desire to spend it in bars or restaurants. He let himself into his apartment and changed with relief into shorts, T shirt and sandals. There wasn't much he could do either for Terry or to him until the latter got in touch, nor anything he felt like doing. There was still an explanation owed—Rains and Sally. The image of Sally welled up at him like a figure in a masque suggestive of guilt and remorse and, as if it were a stream of poisoned water tainting a clear spring, his melancholy crept back.

He turned up the electric element under his espresso coffee maker and filled the latter with water. He levelled out two tablespoonfuls of finely ground coffee and tipped it into the machine's top. He opened a can of Campbell's soup and emptied it into a small enamel saucepan. The window was open and he could hear, all around him, the summer evening sounds of Vancouver—footsteps, laughter, sudden bursts of heavily amplified music from prowling cars filled with youths. Conversations were loud, grew louder as the sky darkened and people moved from restaurant, to pub, to disco. Foster reflected that one might almost think this were a place—like Nice, or San Francisco, a city with a long past and a solid basis in the economic life of the country: a town with a thriving future. But Vancouver, like British Columbia, was a place in decline. The surrounding forests had been mercilessly lopped for a hundred years—there was still timber, but it was increasingly inaccessible and expensive to log; and the price of mining coal, as well as the making of forest products, had

become non-competitive. The price of oil, of natural gas, had sunk and was sinking further as it glutted the market. Perhaps things would improve—the oil prices skyrocket again, but the province had been almost destroyed by years of systematic mismanagement and a cynical rape of the natural resources from which recovery was improbable, to say the least.

For some reason, Foster remembered the opening line of a forties thriller: *the night was young. and so was he; but the night was sweet and he was sour*. He smiled to himself, but no amount of self-awareness could disguise the truth of what Terry and he had talked about the day before. There were two classes in the city; the first composed of those with jobs who could think about renting decent accommodation, or buying houses, of eating in restaurants, drinking coffee in the cappuccino bars, riding buses even, and running cars. A member of this class could even consider getting married, having children. The second class, though, was composed of people like himself, the jobless, on Unemployment Insurance, who had to watch every penny, to see what assets they possessed dwindle as the cost of living crept up remorselessly, as the UI vanished and Welfare took its place, as the victim became progressively demoralized while his friends and peers, those with jobs, could live up to the expectations set up for them when they were children, back in the affluent sixties, when the world was an oyster belonging to the young.

Foster was born in London in the year of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and in the same year that his father, entranced by an unemployed ballet dancer he'd met at the hospital where Foster was being born, took off with her, leaving his wife and seven-month-old son. Thus Foster's mother, long before the state became fashionable, lived most reluctantly as a single parent. Foster lived with her in London, then in Sheffield, in Bristol and Cardiff until she died of cancer when she was 47 and he was twelve. Her parents were dead, but there was a sister and her husband living on Vancouver Island, and enough money in an insurance policy to fly Foster

out to them. They were kind people, but rather distant and Foster's relations with them since he left school to work on the tugboats were perfunctory. Certainly he had no desire to call upon them for help in his present situation: they had disapproved of his going to university, and thought Sally a middle-class girl from the West Side of the big city, dangerously above him in social rank. As was to be expected, Sally's parents thought that she herself could do better than to marry a deck-hand. They grew warmer toward him when he became a college teacher, but never lost the suspicion that he was a fraud. Foster, in his own days of temporary affluence, had tried to avoid Sally's relatives and to assist financially his own... His uncle was retired and lived on a tiny pension.

Given this family background, Foster was not surprised at the fits of melancholy that seemed to oppress him more and more these days: dark moods in which nothing seemed possible. They had been frequent enough in childhood, rare until now, in adult life. His education, work life, university career, relationships, including marriage, had been normal enough—all of them both pleasurable and problematic—joy and woe, woven fine. Much as anyone would expect. He was conscious of his prevailing disposition, of course, but this inability to function beyond a basic survival level—this was something new, and it puzzled and disturbed him.

There seemed no way out of it—looking at himself as objectively as he could he saw a youngish, good-looking man; popular, certainly at one time with both men and women; quick, clever, vigorous. Yet utterly buggered. In some deep sense, utterly buggered. Brinslow's lay off was a knife in the back, Sally's defection a disembowelment. Never mind that he had most likely precipitated the latter; never mind that a normal, "well functioning" person would have recovered from both disasters with much greater speed. He knew only that the two blows to him had brought up vital questions to do with relationships, work, the meaning and course of his life—questions he knew were ultimately unanswerable but that

normally fade in immediacy whenever the life urge confronts us with matters of higher, or wider interest.

Foster had been confronted with no such matter.

It was all over, he thought. He had reached his peak and begun the long voyage to penury. For Foster, of course, it was close to the end. Another few weeks and he would have exhausted his last dollar. It would be welfare unless he could find a job—any job. Hamburger stands—he was too old. The Car Wash on Fourth Avenue that seemed to have a daily turnover? Okay, but who wants to live like that? What was the point?

The soup blobbed over the top of the pot onto the electric element. Foster poured the soup into a bowl, the coffee into a mug and sat down with both at his arborite table. He unpacked *The Listener* from the briefcase and idly flipped through it. His attention was mildly caught by the review section. How remote all that seemed—the world where people take an interest in literature and ideas. He remembered something from his undergraduate encounter with the writing of Bertolt Brecht:

Erst kommt das Fressen, dann die Moral.

First we guzzle our food, moralizing comes later. Right on. Job first, then food and shelter. After which we'll have time for culture. Thank God for Terry's cheque—it would pay the rent and a little more before he'd have to start prowling around the interior of the province looking for work as a fruit picker.

He popped a slice of whole-wheat bread into the toaster.

Then the doorbell rang.

This was so unexpected, so unusual, that Foster thought it was ringing in the next apartment. Then, when it became clear it was summoning him to his own door he fantasized that it was Julia Reynolds, unable to resist him. Telling himself it was probably Terry, he walked across and opened the door.

The man in front of him was about Foster's height. He wore a cheap brown suit and a brown tie. His hair was short and quite blond and its colour might have deceived you into

thinking the man was young, but the face was heavily lined and the complexion grey. He was neat without being respectable—a pot-and-pan salesman, perhaps, or a peddler of Bibles. The man's eyes were blue and a little bloodshot: heavy bags lay under them—probable result of bad diet and lack of sleep—and the deep lines suggested that the disappointments of a salesman's life, its cynicism, its false bonhomie, had engraved themselves in the hurt, discontented face. When he spoke it was with a strong Cockney accent.

Mr. Foster? he said. Excuse me, sir, but are you Mr. Foster?

Foster admitted, somewhat warily, that he was.

I'd like to talk to you for a minute, Mr. Foster, if you would be so kind.

Go ahead.

It's sort of private...confidential, you might say.

Sorry, Foster said. Nothing this evening.

My name's Prince, the man said, as if this rebuff had never been made. And Mr. Rains sent me. Now may I step in?

The man's manner was sly, confidential, like that of a music-hall comedian trying to ingratiate himself with his audience before his off-colour jokes got under way. Yet Foster experienced a sudden and odd compassion, as if Prince was a ghost of his own future—the uncomfortable failure, anxious to please. Foster sighed and opened the door enough for the man to step inside.

All right, he said. Let's sit down.

Prince sat on the edge of Foster's couch and nodded as if the bare, white-latexed walls, the cheap temporary-looking furniture, were only too familiar to him. Foster said:

So what's this all about?

It concerns an envelope, Prince said earnestly. An envelope that was given to you this morning in error. Mr. Rains asked me to step by and collect it from you. He's very sorry you've been troubled, and he's authorized me to offer you a small token of his gratitude.

Gratitude for what?

For your trouble.

It's been no trouble, Foster said untruthfully. Was it the man's little smile? Or the uneasiness in his eyes? At any rate, he was aware suddenly of danger.

What does Terry say? he asked. There was a tiny pause.

I haven't seen Terry in a long while, Prince said.

Then you probably don't know that Diane packed up and left him last week.

No, Prince said, his face wrinkling. No, I didn't know. What a sad business.

I'm not so sure... Did you think she was good for him?

Hard to say, Mr. Foster, hard to say in these matters, isn't it?

She's changed, of course, greatly. She got her law degree, you know, Foster continued.

Prince raised an eyebrow. Foster said: when was the last time you saw her?

I can't remember, exactly, but please convey my sympathies to him. And now, if you don't mind...

You'd like the envelope.

If you please, Mr. Foster. And as I mentioned, there's a little something we've earmarked for you.

Foster stood up. Mr. Prince, he said. There isn't any Diane and you obviously have no idea who Terry is. I contracted with him and not with you or with Mr. Rains. I'll give the envelope to Terry if he wants it and to no-one else. So let's not waste any more time.

Prince did not seem at all put out by this minor piece of bluff-calling. He stroked his chin theatrically and pulled down his brows in the manner of one relaxing at a play and beginning to enjoy himself.

Time, he said. Time's what you've got plenty of right now, isn't it Mr. Foster?

Will you please leave? It was not a question. Prince, clearly unintimidated, took no notice.

Plenty of time, he said. It doesn't pay to be hasty, you know,

Mr. Foster. Why not sit down and listen to what we propose? Do yourself a favour.

Prince, in his underdog dialect, pronounced it *five*. Foster almost smiled at him.

I made myself a right Charlie over that Terry business, didn't I? Let's try again and get it right. I got two hundred dollars in my pocket, Mr. Foster. Hand over the envelope and they're yours.

I'm not interested in your money, Foster said. He walked over to the door and said over his shoulder. Come on, Mr. Prince, beat it—I've had a hard day.

Prince stood up with some dignity. He said:

Consequences, Mr. Foster, consequences ensue. There's a legal aspect to it—I wouldn't want you breaking the law, would I? True I handled this wrong...

Stuff your consequences, Foster said jovially. Handle them how you like, I want you out of here.

He flung open the door and gestured at Prince. Then, with terrifying speed, his arm was caught up, he was twisted around with his back to the room, and he received a violent push in the chest that sent him sprawling down the length of the short hall. He caught a fleeting impression of a tall man with dark curly hair and a wide mouth, younger than Prince and filled with a kind of boisterous energy, almost playful. Foster recovered his balance and stumbled forward, but the dark man was on him—what felt like a huge fist sunk into Foster's stomach and, as he gasped and bent forward, a knee smashed into his face and drove him backwards again. As he staggered into his living-room, the dark man punched him, comparatively lightly, but enough to flatten him against the wall. Prince seemed to have disappeared. Foster turned slightly, breathing hard and beginning to retch painfully. He bent his knee upward and, as the dark man came after him, he lashed his foot out in a donkey kick caught the dark man high on the thigh. It was the last thing the latter seemed to expect; he gasped, but recovered almost instantly, smashed through

Foster's feebly protecting hands with his forearm, and clouted him again on the side of the face with the other fist. Foster's consciousness seemed to collapse as the full enormity of the blow swept over him, along with humiliation at his own helplessness. Prince was now visible again: he had closed the door, walked over to the radio and switched it on. Foster's head felt split apart, and at the same time filled with cloudiness. He was conscious of the dark man grabbing him under the arms and lifting him to his feet. He dragged Foster forwards, turned him, then, with a little, sardonic push, shoved him into an armchair. He dusted his hands against one another and grinned widely.

She gives her lover a flower, the radio said, Because it is the Festival of Proj. Horrid little pings and lunar gasps emerged from the speaker.

That'll do for now, Judd boy, Prince said. But if he starts to caper, belt him one.

Foster grunted and opened his eyes. He could see Prince standing by the side of his chair, and this other man—Judd—perhaps three feet in front of him. Judd wore a neat, grey suit, and a wide smile. He was not a big man, but his back was straight as an infantryman's, his hands large and powerful. His face was pallid and slightly fleshy, his eyes a startling blue under the black, curly and abundant hair. He was about Foster's age; indeed, there was a superficial resemblance except that he looked more solid, more directed. Yet most people trusted Foster; this one you couldn't trust. You might have taken him for a pimp or a gigolo, except that he was more conservatively dressed than the first, less foppish than the second. Whatever he was, Foster thought, whoever the hell Prince is, and in the hope that some chance might enable him to break even with these people, it might pay to lie low—pretend to be more injured than he was.

Cup of tea, Mr. Foster? Prince said hospitably. How about a cup of tea?

Fuck you, Foster muttered.

Well, if you don't mind, I'll sort of help myself. It's been a hard day and no mistake.

Prince walked into Foster's mini-bar of a kitchen and plugged in the electric kettle. Foster felt his face with his hand. He felt no blood and, as far as he could tell, there was nothing broken. A savage ache just below his solar plexus weakened and incapacitated him. Humiliated or not, he knew there was nothing he could make happen until Judd turned off his attention and this, judging from the latter's tense and watchful face and sarcastic grin, he was not about to do.

Well, Mr. Foster, Prince said. While we're waiting for the kettle to boil, I'll tell you a little more about ourselves. This is Mr. Judd—you've already met, of course, and my name's Harry Prince—as I've already said. What we want is this property, already referred to, given you this morning in error. It's an envelope, not to put too fine a point on the matter, and if you'll just hand it over, or better still, tell us where it is, you'll hear from us no more. The two hundred dollars still goes in your pocket. A good deal, Mr. Foster—I hope you'll never have to find out what a good deal it is.

Foster said nothing. Prince had suddenly seemed to gain more confidence, more authority. A voice on the radio said: *the lover carries the flower to the forest and hides it behind a stone. Thus begins the final act of Pierrot se Trompe*. Strains of music, tremolos on violins accompanied with sounds like the clattering of fallen masonry, keened loudly from the speakers. Judd said:

For Christ's sake turn that shit off.

Modern, Prince said. Can't say as I much care for it myself. I'll turn it off for now, but if you start to caper, Mr. Foster, I'll have to switch it on while Judd boy has a go at you. Just tell me where the envelope is and we'll be on our way.

Foster stared at him in hatred.

No answer was the loud reply, Prince said. Well, while Mr. Judd keeps an eye on you I shall make myself a cup of tea and kind of look around. I was hoping you'd save me some time.

Fuck off, the pair of you.

There you go: *fuck off the pair of you*, Prince mimicked. Well it's better than nothing, en it? Communication's important, that's what I always say. Distinguishes human kind from the beasts. Speaking of communication, there goes the blower.

The telephone by Foster's bed had begun to ring. It echoed in the matt-walled, relatively barren apartment with an almost inhuman insistence. Once, twice, three times.

Well, arsehole, Judd said. Aren't you going to answer it? He tilted his head back and laughed throatily. Go on, he said. Ain't you got an answering machine? What are you, some cheapskate?

The phone stopped.

Where's your tea-bags, Prince shouted from the kitchen. Never mind, I've got them. Who's this Terry, by the way? He hire you? No? Well, I don't really give a kipper's dick, so long as we get what's ours. It'd better be here, that's all.

Prince came out of the kitchen sipping from one of Foster's mugs. Judd sat on the edge of the chair. Foster lay in it, as still as he could. Prince put his mug down on the occasional table by Foster's side and walked over to the desk. Try here first, he said, opening a drawer and rummaging. No, we don't care who you work for, Mr. Foster. We know you got the envelope from Mr. Rains (he pronounced it Rines). We sent our fellow to collect it but he was a little detained. Then blow me down if you didn't come in and take it from under our noses. And then blow me down if you didn't turn out to be Sally Foster's rightful ball-and-chain. Prince threw a couple of manila folders on the desk and flipped through them. Bit of a coincidence, ennit? Got another bloke to screw with, ent she? He shoved the drawer back and turned to the bookcase. Foster watched him bleakly. What've we got here, then, Prince said, taking one book out, then another, riffling through their pages. Chaucer...T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*...Divine Comedy...Balzac...cor, fuckin 'ell...don't worry about your books, Mr. Foster, we're not vandals. Or rather, I'm not. Judd's a bit lawless, if left to himself, entya, Judd boy? He picked out other

books and shook them. Wouldn't think butter would melt in his mouth, would you Mr. Foster? Looks a bit like a man from Wawanesa Life Insurance don't he? But don't cross him, that's my advice... Well, you're a bit of a highbrow, that's what I think. Been to university, I wouldn't be surprised, doing English Lit. Theory's one thing, ennit, but practice is another. Me? I've studied at the University of Experience. Can't say as I've really missed the other.

You're a real scholar, Harry, Judd said. A real intellectual.

No need to take the piss, Judd boy. He'll stack your books back, Mr. Foster, don't worry... it'll be his first and most likely his last contact with higher things. I don't think our document's among that lot, and there don't seem to be too many other places. Got it under the carpet, have you? Under the old wall to wall? Save us a lot of time and trouble if you just tell us where it is.

Foster said nothing. The ringing in his head was beginning to lose its intensity. He shifted slightly in his chair and felt a sharp pain across his stomach muscles. Not enough to prevent him from fighting when the right time came. Judd stared at him, solemnly. A bead of blood slipped from Foster's nose. Judd threw him a Kleenex tissue from a small packet in his coat pocket.

Don't get ideas, he said.

Mr. Foster's not going to give us any trouble, Harry Prince said. Though he didn't put up a bad show, did he, kicking you in the leg. Not Marquis of Queensbury, of course, but then I suppose neither are we. Prince began searching through a long, low sideboard where Foster kept the fancier plates and cups of his wedding day. Yes, he said. Run off with another bloke. Mr. Rines, no less. There's a happy couple, if ever I saw one.

Shut your mouth, Foster said.

When you start opening yours, Mr. Foster. She got you to pick up the envelope, didn't she? Husbands're reliable, even ditched husbands. One flesh and all that. She paid you, didn't

she? Aren't you ashamed, living off your wife's immoral earnings? The sweat of your Frau? We're going to have to go to the trouble and expense of talking to her.

You'll have to find her first, won't you?

Oh, we know where she is, Prince said. Leastways, we know how to find Mr. Rines. And where he is, can she be more than a stiff cock's length behind?

Foster lunged to his feet, and Judd threw him back into the chair. You son-of-a-bitch, Foster yelled. Sally's nothing to do with this.

Oh no? Well I think she is. She got you to take her boyfriend's property—how was he to know who you are? Wait till Mr. Rines hears about it—he'll blow her out of his ears in bubbles.

The stupid bitch, Judd said.

Listen, Foster said desperately. I have not seen Sally for two years nor heard from her in eighteen months.

I bet not, Prince said. She used a middleman, that's clear enough. Now who's this Terry?

Terry Mason. Foster saw no point in shielding any longer the man who'd let him in for this ordeal.

Right, and who's Terry Mason when he's out?

An old acquaintance. Foster relaxed slightly. Time and luck would one day let him catch up with these two freaks on his own terms. He remembered suddenly Terry's vehement denial of the casual suggestion that he might have heard from Sally. Whatever the two of them were cooking up against Rains, it was none of his business and there was every good reason to give these clowns the envelope. But Foster knew he would do no such thing.

Judd boy, I do believe we've struck the right note here. And has your old mate Terry got the envelope, Mr. Foster?

The envelope, Foster said, is in my safety-deposit box.

Prince turned away from the sideboard and stood in front of Foster.

Am I hearing you right, Mr. Foster? Did you say it's in a

safety-deposit box?

Yes.

Then you'd better give me the key, hadn't you? You stupid sod, Foster said in Cockney. You think that's going to do you any good? They know me in that bank—you couldn't pass that barrier even if you stole my ID.

Judd said: You'll come with us, fucker, and make sure we all get in.

You'll be up to your arseholes in cops, Foster said. That's one thing I'm going to make sure of.

Police, Prince said. You going to call the police?

You'd better believe it.

Prince stared at Foster with pity—the Bible salesman confronting the feeble objections of a liberal agnostic.

I'd call them right now, Mr. Foster, if I were you. Yes, maybe I should have encouraged you right from the start. Phone 'em up. Tell 'em a couple of rough boys've been in to see you. What, out of the blue, sez they. No, sez you, they've come looking for something stolen from the Ministry of Defence. Oh dear, dear, dear, sez they, that ain't for us at all. Much too heavy for us poor boys who don't know nothing from kicking heads. Well, sez they, we'll have to call the Mounties. So they phone the Mounties and you know what happens next, Mr. Foster? The Mounties'll phone me. Harry, sez they. When we send you out after this little spiv suspected of passing on valuable documents to agents of unnamed foreign powers we don't expect him to be still well enough to go shooting off his north and south to the local flatfeet. You understand, Mr. Foster, what I'm telling you? We work for the police, Judd and I, for the government, for me and you, and for all the people of this wide and ample land of ours. I'm a public servant, Mr. Foster, helping to save the likes of you from the Demon Communism. So if you don't want to be charged under the espionage act, tried, sentenced to ten years bird in Kingston pen you'd better have that envelope in my sensitive lily-white hands two minutes after the bank opens tomorrow morning.

Creep, Judd said. Tomorrow's Saturday.

A couple of cheap running dogs like you, Foster said. You think I'd believe you're cops?

Judd stood. He was not tall—a fraction under six feet—but brawny around the shoulders and pectorals. The suit cuff slid back as he moved to reveal a tattoo on the back of his wrist—the word "Mother" and a hand holding four aces and a joker. Judd reached into his back pocket and flipped open a billfold. He took out a card and tossed it into Foster's lap. There was a photograph, some statement as to Judd's position as a special operator and the insignia of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Want to see mine? Prince said, holding his own billfold open a couple of feet from Foster's nose. Satisfied? Call the cops and see. But I warn you, it's you who'll be up to the Khyber in blue uniforms, not us. Frankly, my department tries to keep clear of those buggers in the city. Now, Mr. Foster, you claim the envelope's at the bank, and the bank is closed on a Saturday unless it's one of those that stay open. Is it?

Police, Foster jeered at them. I don't believe you're cops, no matter how many forged credentials you show me. What cops act like you? You're just a couple of cheap hoods. But I've got plenty of time on my hands, Mr. Prince, as you yourself pointed out. I'll find you—wherever you are.

Judd chuckled. Prince shook his head disapprovingly.

Don't be stupid, Mr. Foster, he said. We're cops all right. If you don't like the way we come on, you can put a call in to Amnesty International. The point is, we've no time to waste, even if you have. Prince seemed then to come to a sharp decision. I'm prepared to believe that envelope you were given isn't in this apartment. I'm prepared to believe you when you say it's in your safety-deposit box—it makes sense—it's where I'd put it if I were in your shoes. But we want it, and we're going to get it.

Who told you about me?

That's our business. Yours is to lie low this weekend and get to the bank on Monday while we take the time to dig up this Terry Mason—easy enough, but easier if you tell us where he is... No? I thought not. Doesn't matter. One of our boys will be watching you, so don't get ideas and don't leave town. Monday morning we'll be around at nine-thirty sharp for a cup of tea and a trot to the bank. Come on, Judd boy, time to blow.

Judd, without a word, turned his back on Foster and made for the door.

So have a good weekend, Mr. Foster, Prince said. If I were you I'd wipe that claret off your boat, take a hot bath, have a good night's rest. We'll be back for you on Monday.

3

Foster pushed himself gingerly out of the chair into which Judd had thrust him, more stunned by incomprehension than by the violence that had erupted into his apartment. Judd's battering, though, had seemed more powerful than its residue implied, for the pain in Foster's abdomen had subsided and his face, though still numb and swollen, was no longer acutely sore. He stepped slowly into the bathroom and studied his reflection in the mirror. There was a smear of blood around his mouth and a reddish, swelling patch on his right cheekbone where Judd's fist had caught him that last blow. He would find Judd somehow: and Prince, though the latter would clearly be a pushover. And Judd...Judd was as fit as he, Foster, and stronger. There was a suggestion, though, in Judd's face and a thickening around his waist, of good living. Foster cheered himself with the possibility that the bigger man probably had less stamina. Cop or no cop. Slowly and painfully he wiped the

blood from his face.

It was both outrageous and unbelievable, yet there was the business with the envelope, Rains and Sally. Back in his living-room he discovered a meniscus of scotch in a bottle tucked at the back of his sideboard. He poured it into a tumbler and loaded in ice from the refrigerator. He swirled the scotch around and sipped it. The whiskey sharply stung an abrasion in his mouth. He winced, put the tumbler aside, then sat at his desk. He looked up the number of the RCMP and dialled it.

Could I speak to Sergeant Prince, please?

What name, sir?

Prince.

There's no Sergeant Prince here, I'm afraid.

Judd?

I'm sorry?

Have you anyone there by the name of Judd?

Who are you, sir, and why are you calling?

It doesn't matter.

Foster put the phone down, having proved nothing.

He stood up again, stretched his arms wide and arched his back. He walked over to the window and tilted by a fraction of a degree one of the slats of the Venetian blind. From this window he could see the angle of the apartment building, the dense foliage of the maple trees, green and voluptuous under the soft light of the street lamp, and a car illegally parked opposite the entrance. The car was occupied. Foster could pick out a dark, hunched shape in the back seat. As he watched, the dark-headed figure of Judd walked slowly up to the car and, without communicating with the passenger, leaned casually against the door and lit a cigarette. Foster snapped the Venetian blind-slat back into place, then crossed over to his small desk. He sat down facing his telephone and on the wall above it the print of Picasso's picture of two hands holding a bunch of flowers. It was a light, gay picture filled with sprightly energy—the blossoms were different coloured circles with

extra splotches for petals as in a child's vision of the sun. The hands belonged to two different people—Sally and he had bought the print delightedly at a sale just after they were married: it seemed to symbolize the joyous harvest they might reap from their love. Foster remembered these words, spoken by one or the other of them, half in jest, and the sadness began to well up inside him again. He grabbed the phone and dialled the Jannock Enterprises number and his heart lifted as he heard the clicking of the receiver at the other end.

Good, he said. You're still there.

Who is this? Julia Reynolds said.

Bob Foster. I'm still looking for Terry.

Ah, Mr. Foster. (He'd obviously got the brusque junior executive.) I'm afraid Terry hasn't come back here, nor even called in. And yes, I've been holding the fort here except for an hour or so for supper. I'll let you know if he comes in tonight.

Just give me his telephone number.

I'm afraid I don't have it. And now, if you'll excuse me...

Look, Foster said, desperately. Don't hang up. There were some men looking for him. They came here.

Where? What men? Julia Reynolds was sharp and impatient.

Two men came to my apartment looking for that envelope Rains gave me. I told them I was working for Terry. They took me completely by surprise and knocked me around a little. They've just left.

There was a pause. When Julia Reynolds spoke again she seemed less efficient, less certain of herself. Tell me again, she said. Tell me exactly what happened.

Foster told her—about Judd, Prince and the violation of his apartment. Police, he said. They showed me ID.

You mean they beat you up first, *then* showed you ID? If they were police, why didn't they tell you so right from the start?

That's what I thought. Perhaps they represent somebody else...forged the ID.

JOHN MILLS

There was another long pause. Then she said:
I don't think so. I think they probably *were* police.
Listen, Miss Reynolds—what's Terry into?
I don't know. I don't know at all. You've got *me* worried
about him now.

Foster said: I'm worried about you.

Me? Why me?

They wanted to know about Terry and I see no reason why I
should protect him from them.

Did you give them this address?

No, but whatever else they are, I don't think they're stupid.
They'll find you quickly enough.

Quickly if they're police...not so quickly if they're not.

Anyway, I think you should get out of there.

There was a short silence.

Thank you, Mr. Foster. It was good of you to call.

Foster sighed. Perhaps this was all there was of her for him.
So be conventional.

You're welcome, he said. Bye now.

Wait...wait. Another pause. He held the phone with a
slightly tighter grip. How about you?

I'm okay. I badly need to contact Terry.

Look...I think I know where Terry *might* be.

Finally.

I'm not protecting him from you or anybody else. I had no
idea where he was this afternoon. But I do know he's expected
at this woman's house late tonight. As, in fact, am I.

So will you tell him?

I'll do better than that, Mr. Foster. I'll take you with me...
that's if you want to come, of course. Then you and he can sort
it out.

Foster experienced a surge of rather childish happiness.
Yes, he said, trying to control his eagerness. Yes, I'll come.
These cops...

Are they still there, do you think?

I don't see why they wouldn't be. I'll lose them.

How?

Never you mind. Do you have a car?

Yes.

Then meet me outside the Prospect Point Café in Stanley Park. You know where that is?

Yes. Are you sure you're all right? You sound so different.

I've got claret, Foster said jubilantly. I've got claret over my boat. Otherwise I'm fine. Meet me at Prospect Point in exactly half an hour. Look for a jogger.

Within five minutes Foster had carefully packed his trousers, shoes, socks, and a light jacket into a small hand-grip. He changed into his shorts, a T-shirt and running-shoes. He folded what money he had into the pocket of his shorts, and placed the grip on the kitchen table. He switched on the radio and turned the volume down. He turned off all the lights except the one in the kitchen and peeped outside into the corridor. When he saw it was clear he locked the front door and walked to the elevator.

The promise of some revolution in the pattern of his days sent the adrenalin flowing—it quickened his step and filled his muscles, battered though they still felt in places, with vitality. He thought he could have dealt with anybody in the lobby, even Judd, but there was no-one there. Nor was Judd in the street. The car had vanished from the curb opposite the entrance, but as he began his slow jog he thought he heard the noise of an engine starting up behind him. He turned into Denman Street and the car was still behind him, but he was conscious as pedestrians ambled back and forth at random across the busy streets that no car could keep up with him in this heavy traffic. He looked once over his shoulder and thought he saw a man clamber out of a hastily parked car as if in pursuit, but Foster turned into a side street and, at full pace, headed for Stanley Park. The exercise loosened him; he felt, as he raced along the path leading to Third Beach, as if his feet barely touched the earth. And by the time he'd approached the sea wall it was as if he were running faster than he'd ever

run before. The policeman, hood, whatever he was, could never have kept up with him—dressed in ordinary clothes and dress shoes—had he been Jim Fixx himself. No car could follow him here, for the path was only for cyclists and pedestrians.

There was still daylight of a kind: the sun had set now well below the Tantalus range whose outline was sharp against the dark orange evening sky. The sea was a heavy, pewtery glitter wrinkled by a slight wind. Foster gasped in the cool air and savagely sprinted the last half-mile to the path that cuts across to Prospect Point. He emerged onto the busy parking-lot overlooking the Lions Gate Bridge.

Here there were a good many people about admiring the view of the dark, looming North Shore Mountains, the lights along the shore and up the slope of Hollyburn, and the movement of the small boats battling the strong current under the bridge. The festive air of summer prevailed even here, though the night had grown quite cool. Foster began to walk among the crowds, edging his way to the road. Then he saw her, as good as her word, standing by a Honda Civic. She looked petite, yet full bodied, and her upright posture made her look taller than she was. She was dressed up and her hair, earlier that day somewhat wild and floating, now looked as if it had spent two hours in a hairdresser's salon. She looked quite beautiful to Foster, and very desirable.

He ran up to her eagerly, and was rewarded with a smile. You've changed your clothes, he said.

You too, evidently. Better get in the car.

She opened the door for him and walked around to the other side. I changed hours ago, she said. I went back home then to Terry's office. I wanted to clear up and I've been expecting his call.

Instead, it was I who called.

She turned and smiled warmly at him again, the Shell Oil Executive gone. I'm glad you did. And you don't look too bad. It's the light.

RUNNER IN THE DARK

And they gave you wine, you said. Why was that?

Wine? Oh, claret. Over my boat. That's what Prince told me...he means blood.

Over your boat?

Boat race...face. He sounded like a Londoner.

Julia Reynolds was able to accelerate as the car ahead of her drifted aimlessly, as is the way of Vancouver drivers, to one side of the road.

What I've done, Foster said, is to leave a change of clothes and a towel in a bag on my kitchen table. Would you mind stopping by my place, going in with the key I'll give you, and picking up the bag? Then I can change and we can go to this party of yours.

All right, she said equably. Might as well take whatever adventure fate sends. Where will you be?

In the car with my head down.

How do you know someone won't be watching the apartment?

For all they know I'm just out for a run. There's no reason they should suspect you. We park the car in the garage. You let yourself in like a legitimate resident. If there's anybody in the corridor you just walk straight past as if you had business there.

They were emerging now from the park and settling into busy Georgia Street. Turn right here, Foster said. Then left for two blocks. Then right again.

This place we're going to, Julia Reynolds said, I don't want to mislead you. It's not exactly a party.

Doesn't matter to me what it is. I just need to find Terry and get out from under this. A woman's house, you said. What woman?

She's named Muriel Reisz. You must have heard of her.

No.

Terry never told you?

I haven't seen Terry socially in a long time. We had few mutual friends and she certainly wasn't one of them. And the

last time we spoke it was to set me up for this code nonsense. Turn up this alleyway, now, and the garage is on the left, half-way along, at the end of a white painted wall.

He ducked his head down below the level of the windshield and tried to make himself small, but the car was cramped and, as Julia Reynolds swung into the garage, he felt his jawbone thrown against her thigh. He felt the soft cloth of her skirt and the firm, full flesh beneath it.

The sensuality of this, the remains of the whisky, the runner's high and the excitement of the evening had by this time totally enveloped him; his nerve endings seemed to tingle all over his body, the skin of his arms and legs felt dotted with goose pimples that had nothing to do with the coolness of the air. As if sensing his sexuality and discounting it at least for the time being, Julia Reynolds opened the door and slid out of the seat into the concrete and gasoline and oil-smelling cavern under Foster's apartment block. She closed the door, smiled down at him and was gone.

Foster stayed crouched beneath the level of the windshield barely able to keep from following her, from racing off with her into some adventure, an adventure ending in blood victory over Judd and Prince followed by passionate sex with the heroine. His mind played with this fantasy and with its many delectable variations: in one version he stabbed, after bearing him nearly to unconsciousness, a long-bladed jack-knife into Judd's abdomen, twisted it violently, then watched Judd's eyes turn from their gloating expression of physical superiority, to astonishment, then to the glaze of death. There followed a tussle with Julia Reynolds across a bed in which her initial and purely token resistance was transformed at the first thrust of his loins into a series of highly inventive and lascivious embraces. The image changed to one of gentleness; a soft body melting into his, his hands caressing soft, fragrant skin—he could feel in his mind the texture of silk, of fine cotton, of nylon-clad leg...

A scraping sound—the garage leapt back into focus.

The deep silence of the parking-cave was broken again, by a footstep, then another. Then silence fell again as if the intruder were standing perfectly still. Somebody legitimate would surely have gone straight to his car. Foster's sexual fantasies snapped back into that void such fantasies plunge into; he was instantly alert. Julia Reynolds' car was parked behind a column, so that it was shadowed from the dim light of the electric lightbulb on the ceiling. Very cautiously Foster risked lifting his head to the side window. He saw the far end of the garage, two cars in deep shadow, then the column, then the entrance. He heard no other footsteps. Foster waited until he thought the visitor was gone. Where was Julia? There was a cough. A scraping noise. A man stepped into view, between Foster and the two cars. A tall man with very black hair. Foster ducked down instantly, uncertain as to whether Judd had seen him. Judd stopped moving, and again there was silence broken only by the faint ticking of the clock on the dashboard. His legs grew more and more cramped. He heard Judd take a step forward. Then, mercifully, the sound of high heels—it occurred to Foster that Julia's connection with him might have been discovered and they were watching her too. But the footsteps didn't falter. They grew closer and closer, then all at once she had opened the door, thrust a bag on the backseat and started the car, all, thank God, wordlessly. She reversed the car without hurry, and swung out, through the gate, into the alley behind. There was now no sign of Judd. As she headed out onto Davie Street, Foster cautiously lifted his head and eased himself back into an upright position.

Well done.

That was one of them, wasn't it?

Judd, yes. Did he react to you?

No, he looked as if he were about to open one of the car doors.

I thought for one instant he'd seen me.

I don't think so. You must feel very cramped. How are you going to get into those clothes?

There's a toilet on Kits Beach. Pull into the parking-lot there and I'll go and change.

That's where we're going.

The toilet on Kits Beach?

Julia Reynolds giggled. No, silly, to Muriel's. She's got a house on the Point...right by the sea.

The house on Kits Point was old but highly renovated in contemporary West Coast style, which means cedar cladding, skylights and decks built of weatherproofed fir. A wide and ample wooden stairway built like a stack of decks led up to double-fronted doors of heavy oak tricked out with brass escutcheons, slots and bolts. A woman of means, evidently. The garden smelled of night-scented stock and privet hedge moistened by a discrete watering system. Water still dripped from hanging baskets of fuchsia and geranium and, by the side of the path, two crossed poles bearing flares, positioned like crossed skis on a mountain slope warning of avalanche threat. It was as if they illuminated the path to what somebody thought was a Hawaiian luau. In the garden were no other lights, and tall trees around the property line shielded it completely from streetlamps and surrounding buildings. Foster sensed rather than saw some other guests in this garden: he perceived them as shapes that moved, flitted, almost silently along paths winding through the shrubbery. They talked sibilantly as if their hostess might consign them to flames if they were to raise their voices above a whisper.

Maybe, Foster speculated, they thought they were in a palace dedicated to illicit love.

You're not far from the truth, Julia Reynolds said.

It was not, if it were a party at all, typical of Friday night Vancouver, which tends to run to noise, screeching laughter, diabolically loud rock music, police sirens, vomiting and wrecked cars. As Foster and Julia passed the crossed torches a young girl dressed as a wahine in hula skirt, undulant in her backless gown decorated with a lei of artificial frangipangi

blossoms, approached them with a tray of drinks. Foster took a glass of white wine and drained it.

Is it permitted? Foster added solemnly, the wine instantly going to his head.

The girl nodded shyly and smiled at them. Foster replaced his glass on the tray and took another. A sort of recklessness, a nonchalant energy began to flow through him.

Perhaps the girl's nod were a signal, for the double doors suddenly opened wide and a light blazed forth from the opening. The lights paled the crossed flambeau and illuminated the garden, startling the shy creatures lurking therein into solid beings of this life who thronged onto the steps chattering gaily with sudden loudness. As a phalanx, they trooped through the doors into the house's great hall like a horde of peasantry in an opera invited by the margrave into his baronial residence to celebrate his daughter's wedding.

The entrance hall, though, was less of a hall than a huge living-room. A fireplace of great rough-cut stone slabs occupied a facing wall—the grate was concealed by a large screen of Japanese design. Above it was a huge print depicting the loves of kabuki actors and actresses, though the latter were, on closer inspection, female impersonators. To the right of the fireplace was a great urn and to its left a representation of dragons entwined with sea monsters carved in stone. From this hallway two huge rooms led off at right angles, each separated from the fireplace by a staircase of majestic proportions. The excited throng of materialized spirits seemed to be moving to the room on the right, so Foster, his hand under Julia Reynolds' elbow, guided them to the left. Here was a vast, light and airy room hung with tapestries of an oriental cast on which were portrayed intertwined Indian princesses and princes, their members connected in unnatural and ludicrous postures, their faces either expressionless or suggestive of a bland and rather mindless serenity. Past three tall windows and on the other walls of the room the Indian theme gave way to a reintroduction of livelier, more passionate Japanese

motifs: here was Utamaro's *The Hussy* in the form of a batik cloth—an oyster-coloured background, the girl's face and arms outlined delicately in black, and two colour masses, her black hair and her grey robe, the latter opened to reveal her breasts whose nipples were obscured slightly by the arm busy lifting a glass to the pink, sensuous lips. Foster and Julia Reynolds stood before this wall hanging, gazing at it contentedly. The Hussy's right hand held the glass—in her left she clutched a large, decorative crab.

Why *hussy*? Foster asked.

Well, why the crab?

Perhaps it's an image, he answered, of the consequences of getting entertained in this house.

What about this one?

A tapestry depicted a bare-breasted woman emerging from her bath, a gown around her shoulders, swept behind her, then forward again across her genitals. Her body was the subject of fetishistic admiration from a gat-beaked rooster, who, in turn, was regarded seriously and perhaps jealously by a hen. In another design, to the right of this one, two naked, oddly androgynous figures copulating on a futon stretched across a tea-house floor. Other prints represented similar scenes of life in the Toshiwara brothel district... a drunken courtesan stood woebegone on a verandah desperately trying to sober up while silhouetted figures locked in attitudes of revelry and dalliance were visible against a paper screen.

What do you suppose is going on there? Julia Reynolds said.

People groping for trout in peculiar rivers.

A picture of less obviously raffish import showed three little girls carrying a basket of chrysanthemums while two upper-class women—perhaps courtesans, perhaps not—supervised them from a balcony.

Julia was at his side. He could smell the light perfume, the fragrance of her hair.

Upstairs, she whispered, Muriel's got some Thai paintings

a little more explicitly pornographic. Want to come and see?

Temptress, Foster said. Perhaps later. I'm a little too vulnerable these days. Who is this woman?

A prostitute, I expect.

No, our hostess.

Muriel?

Muriel, right.

Ah, Muriel's Muriel.

I dare say, but who is she? What does she do for a living? How do you know her? How come she knows Terry?

She's a New Age therapist with a private income and a rich, attractive husband who works the stockmarket and for whom I've done some accounting, and with whom Terry has consulted, or for whom he's been a consultant. I met her first at one of her gatherings a few years ago when she had us all sitting cross-legged on the floor recounting our first experiences with masturbation.

Why did people stand for it?

This was the seventies.

Foster nodded and paused before a beautifully designed lithograph of an upcountry farmer castrating a goat. Summer rain, slanting in delicate, hardly visible lines, added to the solemnity of the occasion.

Well tell me about her husband, Foster said. What's his name?

Gemel. He's a Turk. Rich and good looking. We call him Gem.

I'm beginning to change my mind about those etchings upstairs.

They're Muriel's, not mine, and there she is.

Julia Reynolds and Foster had by this time made almost a complete circuit of the room so that now the large entrance hall was visible. There was a crush of people by now, and the noise level had increased to an excited chatter. Two or three people had wandered into the room and a couple of girls had sat down in a pair of facing chairs and had started an urgent

and whispered conversation. A rather dim-looking young woman with ginger hair and a pale complexion walked slowly examining the wall hangings but without manifest pleasure. Now, however, the focus of the house's attention was on the imperious woman standing at the foot of the stairway. She was tall, six feet or thereabouts, made taller by the length of high-heeled black boots, laced, as far as Foster could see, up her legs, though not much of these was visible, for her dress—dark, long and green and trimmed with russet fur—came down almost to her ankles. The dress clung to her tightly from the pelvis up to just above her ample breasts, which it lifted to reveal an impressive cleavage. The skin above was smooth and silky—very white and slightly freckled. Her hair was auburn and flew out from her head like an aureole, her chin jutted forward somewhat aggressively and her green eyes seemed alive with intelligence, insight and hostility. Her nose was straight and proud, suggestive of the Barrymore family profile, but it was Ellen Terry that most immediately came to Foster's mind—Ellen Terry playing Lady Macbeth as portrayed by John Singer Sargent. By Muriel's side stood a shorter person, probably the Turkish husband, in deep and animated conversation with a very aged man, bent and osteoporotic, with a little grey hair left, rather lankly cut, and a grey moustache. The old man seemed to be weeping. Muriel's own eyes were very dry and neither on him nor her husband, but instead seemed to hold everyone's gaze, including Foster's. Foster took Julia's arm and guided her toward their hostess. Gem looked up as they approached. His face was round and tanned and as mobile and sensuous as his wife's was still, commanding and ascetic. He was dressed rather casually in grey slacks and an open-necked white shirt topped off with a navy-blue cravat. Gem projected his own particular force—loose, mobile, fleshy lips and twinkling eyes: a kind of alert and amiable toad—Lord Beaverbrook, perhaps as David Hockney might have painted him.

Julia! Muriel said, in a deep resonant voice. How long it's

been.

Hallo, Julia, the Turk said. His voice was both animated and sibilant. Why don't you come to see us anymore? He spoke as he'd learned his English first at Harrow and had afterward attended Harvard for a year or two. The slight foreignness accentuated the precision and plummy of his vowels—the younger Gurdjieff, perhaps, would have looked and sounded like this if he'd been taken over early enough by upper-class English tutors.

I've been away for about eight months, Julia said. And back only for two. You know what that's like, Muriel... This is my friend Bob Foster.

Muriel offered Foster a hand. She held it palm downward and slightly tilted, presenting the recipient with a choice of shaking it or kissing it. Foster was just drunk enough to touch her palm delicately with his fingertips and kiss her knuckles, at the same time clicking his heels. He knew, as soon as he'd performed his rather clownish action, that he had probably made a mistake.

How charmingly you do that, Muriel said. So nice to meet you, Mr. Foster. Would you excuse me? I need five minutes catch-up time with Julia before the food is served.

Gem had patted the old man on the shoulder and now took Foster familiarly by the arm, leading him slightly away from the two women.

That man, he said, that *old* guy. Do you know who he is? No? He's Joel Wainwright, Professor of English...Professor *Emeritus*, I should say. He's been retired for some years. Muriel took courses from him many years ago...well, he was asking me about *girls*...whether I could recommend any young *girls*. At his age, can you imagine? He must be 80. Muriel says he once came round her apartment when she was a student to read some of her poems...he tried, quite vigorously, to undress her...a tough struggle for which you wouldn't have thought he had the strength.

Is that why he's crying now? Because she wouldn't let him?

No, no, his eyes are full of rheum, and his joints with arthritis, but he hasn't changed. The fellow is a creature of sheer lust...an old goat... I'm extremely fond of him. A witty and intelligent human being. But a *goat*, Mr. Foster, a very randy goat.

You're pointing him out to me as a dreadful warning?

To us both, Mr. Foster. That's what becomes of those who grope for trout in peculiar rivers.

Foster stopped and stared at the man in front of him. The eyes twinkled innocently. Had he been overheard? But no, Gem and Muriel were by the staircase then, well out of ear-shot.

Just what I would have said myself. *The Winter's Tale?*

Gem thought for a moment. I think *Measure for Measure*. I've always preferred "the Dark Comedies"... "be absolute for death"...

Me too:

"Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot:
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod..."

"And the delighted spirit," Gem continued, a huge and joyous smile made his dark Levantine face almost radiant:

"To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world."

Mr. Foster, I'm so glad to meet a fellow amateur of Shakespeare. I must now speak to the catering fellow. Would you care to accompany me?

"Ay, if I be alive, and your mind hold, and your dinner

worth the eating."

Come, then, let us *beard* this worthy.

Before you do that, Gemel, Muriel's imperious voice proclaimed. There's something I have to talk to you about. Will you excuse me yet again, Mr. Foster?

Foster nodded. Julia Reynolds had disappeared. He ambled slowly back to the room with the wall-hangings. Coincidence, that's what it was. And of the kind probably common among amateurs of Shakespeare...Shakespeare freaks...a buskin of bard-lovers... Nevertheless, it was odd. A microphone, do you suppose, hidden in Utamaro's crab?

The two girls sat facing one another holding hands and staring into one another's eyes.

I've no alternative, then, one of them was saying. But to really, really trust you.

Foster moved a little farther away. A youngish man dressed informally in designer jeans and an open-necked white shirt open almost to the waist, a deep tan and a gold pendant on the end of a gold chain nestling in black-and-silver curly hair. He looked like a prosperous young dentist or stockbroker dressed in the mode of half a decade ago. His eyes were clear and blue and his skin glowed with the ministrations of vitamin supplements and high-fibre diets. He was a few years older than Foster, not one of those people he and Sally had known from their U.B.C. days, but a man he had seen many times at parties, for they seemed to habituate the same circle. He nodded at Foster and offered a grinful of excellent teeth. A picture, one might have said, of health, happiness and success in the American mode.

Hi, I've forgotten your name.

Bob Foster. And I yours.

Ed Sondek. It's been quite a while, Bob. At Phil Abbot's party...a year ago?

No, though I know Phil Abbot. It's been longer than that.

One New Year's. Terry Mason was there, came with that inventor chap, Causely...you remember him? And his wife.

Terry, Foster said. Yes, of course. Have you seen him lately?

No, I remember your wife Sally, very well. I'd like to say hello.

Then you'll have to go back east. Sally and I have separated ...it's been a couple of years.

God, I'm sorry...me and my big mouth. You looked so right for each other.

Everybody said that. But evidently they were wrong. What of Terry?

My big mouth.

I remember you now, you sell computers.

Used to.

The prosperous man's eyes had grown inward-looking. Sally, he said. Sally Foster. Well, I'm sorry to hear it. The four of us stood in a little group that time...for over an hour.

Foster remembered something vaguely concerning this man, Sally and a young blond woman, all enlivened by drink, standing with their arms round one another, their bodies pressing in toward the centre of their circle, and a feeling of great love, of well being and sexuality so intense Foster had wondered idly whether they would split off into swapped couples or fall in a mutually interpenetrating heap then and there on their host's living-room carpet. Something happened, though Foster couldn't remember what it was, and they'd been interrupted. The mood vanished with their separating, but had brought Foster and Sally closer than they had been for a long time, and they had celebrated this roundly and fully later, but alone in the privacy of their bedroom. The blond woman had been attractive, but a little pallid for his taste and somewhat frail looking. She was Sondek's wife, though, and he and she had also experienced a heightened sexual drive, but in their case it developed into a big argument, then a fight.

She thought I was drawn too much toward Sally, Sondek said. She said she felt outclassed, and in most ways, she was.

Outclassed? Was that a competition of some sort?

Sondek said that he didn't know, but whatever it was due to, the rift deepened over the week and, at another party, they were involved with another couple the male part of which took exception to the attentions Ed started to pay his wife.

He pushed me away from her, and I was just pissed enough to take a swing at him and by total luck I connected and sent him sprawling against a wall. I took off out of there as fast as I could so's he wouldn't have the chance to get up after me.

Foster cleared his throat and glanced over his shoulder. Where was Julia Reynolds? What had he done to deserve this bore? The blond man said:

My father used to say that if ever I were to get in a fight and was lucky enough to land a solid punch, I must follow it up until the guy was down and then put the boot in so's he couldn't get up. Because if he ever did, the blond man said, his voice low, melodramatic and intense, he'd come and get you. Whatever it took. So if he's down, the old man used to say, then make sure he stays down.

Then Julia Reynolds was by his side—a soft fragrance of perfume, a gentle hand on his arm. Foster turned to her with relief.

I'm sorry, she said. I got involved with Muriel. Will you take this glass of wine as a peace offering?

No peace offering needed, Foster said, taking the glass from her hand and placing the empty one on a shallow table by the wall. I was just talking to my old friend Ed Sondek. This is Julia Reynolds.

Foster steered her away with a muttered excuse to the blond man.

Save me from this bore.

Save me from Muriel.

It's a deal.

They allowed themselves to mingle with the growing crowd of guests clustered between the Japanese room and the hall but almost immediately Julia Reynolds was drawn away by another acquaintance and Foster found his arm clutched

once more, by the fell hand of Ed Sondek.

I was telling you, he said. This guy's woman came after me as I was slipping out of the door. I'm coming with you, she said. Don't you understand? I'm with you now. What about Debbie? I said. You expect me to dump my wife? Why not, she said, you love her? Well, no, I said. Not anymore. She's too much of a bitch. Well I was just drunk and elated enough to let her come with me. So this woman, Janet, came with me and we drove in my car till we hit Spanish Banks, then parked in one of the lots there and screwed. Then I drove her to a motel and we screwed again.

I don't know that I want to hear this, Foster said. Why are you telling me all this?

We bolted the door, Ed Sondek said, and pulled the blinds and that's how it was for two and a half days... I went out a couple of times to pay the bill, buy booze and pizza, and let the cleaning woman in. I guess the whole thing was a sort of game. It wasn't until the morning of the third day that I remembered that I hadn't been to work and that I ought to phone the boss. But the boss had been trying to phone me—Debbie had been phoning him, trying to find out where I was. They'd got the police in on it. What's it all about, he said. Then he told me how pissed off he was about it and how little he wanted to get involved in my personal affairs, and how this woman's husband was after my blood. I shouted at him, and one thing led to another. So we told one another to fuck off.

So. No job.

No job. And none in the offing. And no wife. Debbie took off to the Okanagan...dry climate...she always had a problem with asthma. We communicated for about a year through lawyers. But it's been two years since this happened.

The blond man took a mouthful of wine and swallowed it with a gulp. He looked at his empty glass with regret, then took a full one from a lei-garlanded waitress's tray. Foster saw the tightness with which he held this glass, the knuckles

white, the curious lack of expression of his eyes. He wondered if he, Foster, looked like this to others.

I know something of what it's like, he said. I've been through the job-market number. And the wife-moving-out. What happened to the woman?

Debbie left, the man said. Up to the Okanagan... I want her back.

No, the one you shackled up with... Janet.

I blew it, Ed Sondek said.

He spoke with lowered voice but with raised intensity. Foster noticed that his eyes had begun to water and tears form. The earlier boastful, clipped manner had dissolved, and Foster felt a sudden and urgent compassion.

Look, he said. I've been there. I know you want her back. I want mine back too. (In saying this he knew, for the first time, how true it was.)

Janet, the blond man said. Janet stayed with me a couple of weeks then went back to her old man. He can have her. She turned out to be a real bitch...drinker and layabout. The guy himself came round my place to collect her... Debbie had long gone. He said it was okay, we were both drunk at the party, and he didn't want to fight. Just hand over his old lady. I was goddam glad to get rid of her. She left my place as if she'd never been. Except I've not been with a woman since, nor has anything worked out.

I'm sorry, Foster said inadequately.

Julia was back. You've got to move into the hall, she said. Gem's about to make a speech.

Yes, Ed Sondek said. She went back to him. Nothing's been the same since, if you know what I mean. Work, sex, leisure... the things people are most occupied with. It's not been the same. I feel dead inside.

A quietness was beginning to descend, like a slow curtain in a theatre. Foster found he was walking very slowly through the hall into the room opposite where huge tables had been erected, laden with trays, dishes, bouquets of flowers and

bottles of champagne. Men in white jackets stood beaming in attendance.

I know what you mean.

You do? Then what's wrong with us? What's happened to us?

I don't know. Foster smiled at the blond man with whatever fellow feeling he could muster. He no longer shared the blond man's *Weltanschauung*. He'd been there, yes, but he was there no longer. He was, instead, alert with a sense of purpose, adventure and renewed sexual energy. Julia had taken care of that. Julia...the blond man took another glass, for the tray had returned, this time bearing flutes of champagne, and regardless of the sound of a bell that Gem had started to ring, began to drain it.

What's Gem do? Foster asked Julia.

He buys and sells.

People? Things?

Both. And tax shelters. He makes figures multiply themselves on scrap paper and backs of envelopes.

The Turkish consort stood, ringing his bell, by his wife's side. His smile seemed made of rubber, the redoubtable Turk. The attractive Gem...rich and good looking. Stockbroker, moneymaker...

Sexual gymnast?

I beg your pardon?

Your Turk looks like a cuckold-maker.

Your eyesight's perfect. That's exactly what he is, among other things. He could buy you and me a thousand times.

I'm not for sale.

He'd buy us both before we knew it.

The Turk cleared his throat and smiled. He lifted his non-glass-holding hand and held it palm open to the assembly as if in benediction. Oddly this was enough to bring the residual low muttering to a halt. Foster could hear, for the space of five seconds, a grandfather clock ticking somewhere and the discreet gurgle of an empty stomach. *My friends*, Gemel said at

last, glazing each syllable with a rich and deep sincerity, almost, Foster felt, to the point of edibility. A honeyed presence, this Gemel—a sort of human baklava. The stomach, somewhere to Foster's right, bassooned a note to acknowledge the felicity of this culinary metaphor. But this, at any rate, you could say about Gem...he was one of the very few men Foster had met whose success with women was quite understandable. Odd about the quotation, though. If it had been something in everyday use: *To be or not to be, that is the question: et tu, Brut, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet...*

...My friends...Gemel said.

Foster looked around quickly. The hallway was dense now with these friends: they peered eagerly in from the rooms on either side and some craned their necks above the figures of their host and hostess on the grand stairway. Then it was as if something uneasy and desperate hovered on the edge of Foster's mind...some vision that jumped and danced just out of focus...something eluded him as soon as he tried to focus on it—a person, an event, a memory, he could not tell which, accompanied by an over-powering sadness. A beach...a child...a dark and fearful occasion that had the power to alter his surroundings. The guests, quiet and obsequious, seemed to Foster like wraiths...pallid and without substance or affect, dependent on the Reisz for their existence even as motes. An appalling greyness seemed to descend on him and on this house, rendering effort and purpose delusions, and joyousness a folly. He could feel his forehead grow damp with sweat and his hands tighten as he fought against it. He made himself aware of Julia's warmth and solidity at his side, and even of Ed Sondek, a little behind him, a man whose melancholy gave his spirit at least some habitation. Then, as suddenly as it came, the oppression lifted and he was back in the world of light, pleasure and alacrity.

...To celebrate, Gemel was saying, the birthday, and I will not tell you which one, of my beloved wife.

Come Gemel, Muriel articulated clearly and with preci-

sion. Let's not dissemble, it's my fiftieth. For this admission, Muriel received a loud burst of applause. But with a slight wave of her hand, a queen assenting graciously to the adulation of her courtiers, she brought about an almost instant silence.

Gemel shrugged and spread his hands wide apart as if to demonstrate the excellence of a length of invisible brocade, but with the intention of signifying that he stood momentarily speechless in the face of this dazzling honesty.

Fifty, Gemel said, is not a great age, as I know who have been 50 for many years (some laughter), and age itself I predict, will be one of Muriel's victories. I would have said that "age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety" but this is to leave the entire question of age and agelessness begged. I would sooner tell you that "they say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me."

Gemel's timing in this short speech was perfect. He allowed a good pause between the words *wise* and *but*, then let his voice sink to a perfect tonal melding of deprecation and congratulation of the self. He, like Muriel, was greeted with laughter. Foster whispered to Julia: That man makes me very uneasy.

Gem? Why?

He quotes the same passages from Shakespeare as I do.

You mean he rivals you in erudition?

No, I grant his superiority there. But it's *what* he quotes...

Tell me later. Muriel is about to speak.

And in fact Gemel retired, stepping consortwise to Muriel's side and perhaps three short paces behind. Foster was conscious of Ed Sondek next to him, growing in impatience and irritability as Muriel acknowledged her husband's introduction and followed it with the conventional formula of welcome.

...Fifty, she continued, is certainly no great age nowadays, though that is what it seemed to be when I was fifteen.

(Laughter...somebody began a fit of coughing, but was tactful enough to make an exit through a rear door onto what was presumably a patio. Yet in a sense it is a *surprising* age. I did not think I would ever reach it, not only because it seemed so immeasurably far off but because so many factors seemed hostile to life, in those days, not just my life but everybody's. When I was growing into puberty and experimenting with delight with my own body and the bodies of my schoolfriends I was also aware that we would all of us probably be destroyed in a nuclear war within five years at the most. I had my first lover at the time of the Berlin airlift, and my body learned the art of orgasmic sex during the Korean war. It did not occur to any of us that we would live very long...yet here I am, at 50, a survivor, still able to experience orgasm, still delighting in my body. I feel very, very blessed indeed.

A blessing, Foster whispered to Julia, implies a blesser.

...It is not a boast, Muriel was saying, to state that I have slept with most of you in this room. It is an indication of the distance we have come. The taboos of my childhood have gone...vanished like nightmares in the clear light of dawn, and that in our lifetimes we have encountered, for the first time in the history of our culture, the resurrection of the body...

...I've heard that phrase before, Ed Sondek murmured at Foster's side. Now where?

...And our generation, my generation, has done something astonishing, since this resurrection, this notion that joy must be the centre of our lives, our consciousnesses, our activity, was thought impossible to achieve without sacrificing the Apollonian in our culture—the rational, the logical, the linear, the scientific. But only think! In my lifetime the sexual revolution has been accompanied by the most tremendous scientific and technological advances history has ever known. At the time of the Berlin airlift in 1949, I lost four school friends through polio...two others were maimed...their lives ruined. My mother spent, during the war, two years in a sanatorium for tuberculosis: diphtheria, pneumonia, meningitis...these

were the killers of my youth. But then came antibiotics, the Salk vaccine, penicillin. Gone are the diseases that ravaged our childhoods...vanished are the terrors of polio...syphilis...

Instead we've got AIDS, Ed Sondek whispered in Foster's ear. Give me the terrors of the pox any day of the week...

...Probe. Venus, Mars and the wonderful achievement of the early sixties, the footfall of a man on the moon! And now we've bejewelled space with our satellite stations...what miracles of communication we've created! We can even pick up the phone and dial from here in the free world to speak to someone living under Communist domination! The technology already exists for this!

Does she think that'll prevent the goddam Yanks from killing every last one of them? Sondek muttered. She's crazy

...

...Not to mention the discoveries we have made about human consciousness...the new techniques, the new therapies...this must be the most exciting of all the half centuries to have lived in. We have conquered space, we are conquering disease, illiteracy, world hunger...we are discovering the secrets of mental well-being...reconnecting with the well-springs of human joy...

Chile, Ed Sondek said, the Sahel. Johannesburg. Send the bitch to the third world.

Muriel's not a friend then? Foster said.

We haven't slept together, if that's what you mean—I'm in the minority. I once sold one of Gem's firms an information retrieval system. That's how I met her.

...Human labour. I can see a future, my friends, when work itself will be a thing of richness and delight, when it will be something that people elect to do...a matter for the volunteer ... Machines...those wonderful machines, and let not anybody despise them, will do our work for us and leave us to the real business of living.

That's good news, anyway, Ed Sondek said. Solves my unemployment problem. I won't have to feel bad anymore,

bad or poor.

...These are some of the thoughts I've had about being 50
...thoughts I wanted to share with you, my closest friends...

...And lovers...Sondek added, *sotto voce*.

...And now I invite you to join me in the other room for
supper. Bless you all! May your lives be fruitful, prosperous
and happy. My friends, bless you all!

A toast! Gemel shouted, on cue, to Muriel on her fiftieth
birthday!

A toast! several shouted, and Foster drained his glass.
There was no reason he shouldn't drink to this lady toward
whose glibness he felt none of Sondek's animosity. In fact he
found himself admiring her presence, style and stagecraft. She
was genuine—at the top of a new and highly competitive pro-
fession filled with charlatans and opportunists. Julia said:

Muriel comes out with a lot of rubbish, sometimes, but I
love her anyway.

I've got a ravenous appetite, Foster said. What do you
think will be in the other room?

A cornucopia. Everything.

Canard a l'espece de Caen?

Nachos con salsa dysenteria.

Let's go and see.

Part of Muriel's power over her people, Foster thought,
must be due to her status of Goddess in presiding over cargo.
From the skies there lands on a hungry, thirsty earth a feast of
all that stomach and gullet could crave. In Muriel was her
minions' beginning and their end, their appetites and fulfil-
ment. But certainly there was nothing wrong with her choice
of caterers nor of husbands to put in charge of them.

A word comes to mind, he said, as he and Julia found them-
selves alone at the edge of the dining-room, plates stacked
neatly on trays almost immediately bussed out by young men
in white coats, desserts eaten, birthday cake, an enormous
sponge cake with a mango and cream filling topped with
thick icing, 50 candles well dispersed, cut and distributed by

the Goddess herself, eaten and wondered at. The word *flamot*. And what is that? Julia said.

It's a colour. The colour of dead leaves—at least, that's the dictionary definition. I was thinking to myself that it's the colour of his skin.

Your brain works very differently to mine. You make leaps and bounds and *non sequiturs*. I've noticed that already; most of what you say comes out of the blue. It makes me uncomfortable.

I'm sorry, Foster said, genuinely surprised.

I didn't say I didn't like feeling uncomfortable. Nor that I haven't noticed something else.

Foster looked down at her. She turned slightly to face him and put a hand gently on his shoulder. She said, And that's the energy developing between us... Do you feel it too?

Yes indeed. Foster fished awkwardly with his right hand and found a place to put his liqueur glass, half filled with an excellent cognac. He found a side-table, rid himself of the glass and brought his arm round to encircle Julia Reynolds' waist. She seemed firm and rounded and quite small, so that, close to him, he had a sudden comic image of looking down his nose at her.

Not here, she whispered, let's get away from the throng. Tell me about the skin.

Gem's. The trouble is I don't know what stage of leaf-deadness defines the colour. A truly dead leaf would probably be grey... Foster was aware as he uttered these absurd phrases, that his voice seemed to have become throaty, fighting its way through constricted muscles. His breath was difficult and he felt his knees weakening. It's French so I imagine it has to do with poplars or lime trees. Not a Canadian maple. The Turk's face isn't like autumn along the Lievre. It's less gaudy than than. Not even Group of Seven.

That's a tropical tan he's wearing... the colour of money.

They had by this time found themselves outside the door in the back of the house. Just as in the front garden this back-

yard was deep and luxuriant with heavy shrubs; and rhododendron bushes with huge, glossy leaves, their flowers wilted now in high summer and ready to move into their filamot decay. A great photinia lay spreadeagled against the wall and the fence to Foster's left supported the weight of a mass upon mass of cottoneaster whose red berries shone glossily under the light from the house windows. The air was soft and dry and voluptuous after the abrasive conversations in the great hall. Without thinking very much at all Foster drew Julia Reynolds to him and kissed her softly on the mouth. Her hands slid over his shoulders and round the back of his head, and she held him so as to both reciprocate and prolong the kiss. He felt her body relax against his own. He drew his head back and smiled down at her. Her eyes closed and her hands pressed his head gently forward again. He felt desire for her flow into him as if from the earth itself and his consciousness began to lose contact with the place and the time, so that his past—constant with him as a source of guilt and despair—seemed temporarily blotted out. It was Julia who broke the embrace and stood away from him.

Are you ready to go home? she asked. Her voice was calm and self-possessed.

Yes.

You want that too?

Foster nodded and pulled her toward him. She kissed him, this time a little briskly.

Wait here, she said. I'll go and fetch my things.

She reached up, stroked his face and left almost abruptly. Foster stood alone on the dark patio feeling breathless. It had been a long time since he had kissed anyone and not since Sally had he met a woman he'd wanted more. He thought for a moment of Julia's odd mixture of sensuality and brusqueness, the one alternating with the other, two mutually contrasting states...either/or. The dichotomy fascinated him and magnified his curiosity. Quite suddenly and disconcertingly he knew that he wanted to find out all about her, to know her

past, to contact her innermost thoughts and dreams, to know whom she had slept with, married, rejected. The fact that such a desirable woman was alone and available and was there for him amazed him. My luck is changing, he thought—the idea aroused him again, and he moved restlessly to the edge of the patio.

Images from the day coursed through his mind—Rains, Sally, the envelope, Judd, Prince, now Julia...more had happened to him in eighteen hours than in the same number of months. Green and russet Muriel with her inane optimism about the human condition: Ed Sondek's equally inane cynicism. Foster was glad that Sondek had disappeared. He wasn't in any mood to listen to such negativity, though he knew it... *he'd been there*. It was as if Sondek were he, Foster, as a shadow side, dispelled now by the sunlight. He thought with wry amusement of his desire to get Sally back: and of his equally strong desire to fall in love with this stranger.

Then he became aware in the darkness of a figure of a man. Judging by his relaxed attitude he'd been there for some time. It was astonishing to Foster that he hadn't noticed him before, and for a mad second he imagined that his embrace with Julia Reynolds had taken him beyond this immediate landscape into another continuum. Then somebody closed the door leading from the patio to the dining-hall and the man sank back into shadow. Foster relaxed and turned toward the house. The stranger would have seen him and Julia...a voyeur enjoying vicariously a sexual encounter. As such he would be totally compatible with the other guests. Foster started to amble to the doorway when the man stepped out of the shadow.

You're a fast runner, Mr. Foster, the man said in his Cockney voice. I'll give credit where credit's due. Fast with the birds and all, entya?

Prince started up the stairs to the deck. He was relaxed, perhaps over casual, his hands in his pockets and a slight sneer on his face.

Well, I don't care how fast you run, you won't give any of us

the slip. Take that bint home and fuck all night, don't matter to us, we'll be standing outside pulling our wires, waiting for the banks to open, Monday morning.

The sly, sad, pasty face loomed a little closer.

I'll tell you this, though, me old mate, Prince said, dropping his voice slightly in mock confidentiality. Lemme tell you this. You're in the wrong place, my friend, the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong people.

Something broke inside Foster then: the wine he'd drunk, the excitement of the last few hours and the promise of the next, had fractured his reserve, his instinctual caution. The insults and mortifications building up slowly since he'd lost his job, lost Sally, only to find her again with Rains, the invasion of his flat and the contemptuous mauling he'd taken from Judd expressed themselves now on this derisive, threadbare manipulator. Prince suddenly stood as a synecdoche for the past: the failure and betrayal, his own, Sally's, Terry's. Without a word Foster smashed his clenched fist into Prince's face, his knuckles crunching satisfactorily on bone and teeth. Caught completely by surprise, Prince fell backward, lurched through the air. His foot missed the step behind him, his hand flailed around, plucked at the guard rail, missed it, staggered, then he plunged head-downwards onto the concrete at the bottom. Half delighted, half afraid, Foster moved after him, but someone was shouting and someone else had grabbed him from behind, pinning his arms to his sides. Foster struggled briefly then said, It's okay...let go.

Whoever held him did not immediately relax his grip. The man who'd shouted ran up to Prince lying immobile at the foot of the stairs, and knelt by his side.

He's hurt, a man's voice shouted.

Foster's captor clutched his arm again. Together they clambered down the steps. A young couple, out on the patio, came after them and a voice shouted into the doorway, someone's fallen out here.

Prince had fallen flat on his back with his arms stretched

out and his head on one side—almost comically a parody of the crucifixion. He breathed heavily with a series of gasping snorts through his shattered nose and teeth. One eye was closed, a huge bruise over it, the other eye was open, gleaming sightlessly in the band of light from the open door. Foster stared at his own creation with a mixture of fascination and recoil—he leaned forward to peer gingerly over the heads of the young, kneeling couple now joined by a second man, then a third.

What happened?

Guy fell. Drunk, maybe.

Guy hit him. I saw it.

What guy?

Him.

Hit who?

Who hit first?

Does it matter? Get some help.

I'll phone.

Ambulance, police.

One of the kneeling figures stood up, thrust his way through the little knot of aghast and titillated spectators, and pushed through the stream of people issuing onto the patio. Take your hand off me, please, Foster said. I'm not going to hit him anymore.

The man at his side released Foster's arm. What happened? he said.

I hit him.

I know you hit him, I saw it. If he's hurt bad you'll have some explaining to do.

Yes, but not to you.

Better stick around.

Someone at Prince's side said Christ, I think he's going. Prince's breathing grew rasping, deep and irregular. Foster watched him with growing panic. He was aware that Julia Reynolds had come out onto the patio—he could hear her voice, calling his name. She tried to push her way through the

thickening and increasingly excited group of party-goers, some still drunk enough to giggle and hoot with laughter, others sobered by the presence among them of something black, strange and inevitable. Bob, she called. Bob...what's happened.

Somehow she managed to interpose herself between Foster and his erstwhile captor. The latter seemed focused on Prince's struggling breath.

Prince, Foster whispered. He must have followed us here. Don't ask me how. I hit him. He fell—now it looks as if I might have killed him.

She reached for his hand and held it tightly. Then go, she whispered. Go.

Go...go where?

To my place. Julia Reynolds reached into the bag slung over her shoulder and fumbled in it. She fetched something out and pressed it into Foster's hand, closing her own over his. Take the car, she said. Drive there.

Foster nodded. Where do you live?

She stood and pulled him gently to his feet. A man thrust his way through the knot of people saying, what's happened? What's happened?

501 Cretan Drive. It's in Arbutus Village. Drive there...let yourself in and wait for me. I'll get a cab, okay? Are you listening?

Foster nodded.

Go, then, get out of here. Don't make a fuss about it, but just go.

He squeezed her hand and turned. A group of excited drinkers stood between him and the patio door. He put his hands in his pockets and worked his way slowly through them with what he hoped was a casual grin.

What the hell's going on? someone asked him.

Foster shrugged. Some drunk, he said vaguely. He found his way into the dining-room and stepped round the table now bare but for large silver pots of coffee, cups, saucers, milk

jugs and sugar bowls.

He had reached the main hall and made swiftly for the door with whatever boldness he could muster.

Leaving us so soon, Robert Foster?

The booming voice, the rather absurd dignity, could only come from one source. Muriel stood by the stairs, where he had first seen her, head slightly cocked, less of the period of Sargent, perhaps, and more of Rossetti's.

I'm afraid so. It was delightful—thank you very much for a wonderful evening. It was almost impossible to deliver these conventional phrases to this woman without becoming orotund and pompous.

Is Julia leaving with you?

That's my business, Foster thought. He said, she wants to stay for a while.

To find out what happens to poor Mr. Prince?

Foster stared at her, aware that his mouth had dropped slightly. I've got to go, he mumbled, rather stupidly.

I think you should stay, Mr. Foster, though I haven't the power to make you.

I'm leaving, Foster said. Prince provoked me into striking him, you don't know our recent history. As to stopping me, you're right, you don't have the power. You can always get Gem.

Your impertinence isn't endearing, Mr. Foster, but go if you must. You won't get very far.

Foster turned and ran down the steps into the street, conscious of an increased activity behind him. He sprinted to Julia Reynolds' car and got the door open to the sound of ambulance sirens drawing near. He started the car and swung it into the driving lane, switching on the lights. Someone ran from the house and seemed to shout at him as he passed the front gate. Foster screeched the car around the corner, raced toward Cypress Street and turned off, more slowly, onto Fourth Avenue. He wondered whether Muriel knew where Julia lived, or whether the man who'd run out after him had

been alert enough to get the number off his licence plate. Foster did not think so...the trail of burned rubber around that corner may have prevented it...but one couldn't be too sure. But suppose Muriel knew Julia's address? If something has happened to Prince, she'd tell the police. And the police would be round there very quickly. Something bad...the childish phrase, for some reason, stayed in his mind. Well, Prince had asked for it: a man who assaults you like a sudden eruption in a peaceable and stable landscape, commands a thug to beat you up, then follows you and picks a fight...what would *you* do? Exactly what I did. Then there's nothing to feel uneasy about. But something bad...perhaps dead. Certainly badly injured. Well, his problem, surely, one of the risks of the profession, whatever that was. Yet to kill someone...not only is he a three-dimensional shape standing in front of you on the patio steps, but an extension away from you and away from your own extension back into the past: a fourth-dimensional being, only a minute fraction of it coinciding with your own...that was Prince, that was anyone. Prince was a pattern, a configuration of time and density, a man with lovers, children, who enjoys chicken, but doesn't like pork; he's a boy in some horrid comprehensive school in Britain studying for exams, reading history books, bored with maths, pouring with delight over illustrations in a book on modern painting; a small boy playing noisy ball games in the street who punches some other child, having taken an irrational dislike to him, and boy runs off crying. But later that afternoon his big sister and two of her friends come round and pummel you, your first humiliation at the hands of a woman, but not your last; and then you are a baby lying on a couch, diapers being changed by a laughing, loving mother, your mother, mine, not Prince's any more. Not his life at all but my own, Foster thought, a sacred thing, too precious to have it punched out of you in a fit of idle rage. Prince, himself, Sally...no more...no more...*be absolute for death...*

Along Fourth, right on Burrard, right again on Broadway.

The night had slowed and the hours of darkness, given over to the predatory vehicles of drunken drivers lurching home from parties. Left again on Arbutus...he was going the longer way round. He remembered again his dream and of the event that was its central image. He stopped near Twelfth Avenue and leaned his head on his hands. A long wide car filled with youths screamed past him, windows open, stereo blaring, rounding a corner. It was a night like this he'd lost Sally forever, killed her love and drove her away...never to return. He shuddered with self pity...and Prince...what of Prince? It was terrifying what he had done...no more...this sensible warm motion to become/a kneaded clod...a horror. But again he saw the sneering, vulnerable face in front of him, again he felt the surge of rage, the justified homicidal urge...had this man not tormented him? What was he supposed to do, knuckle under? Go limp? The words "just war theory" spun into his head, but such concepts buckled under the weight of the real—the feel of his knuckles smashing into the grinning face, the limp body on the steps, the one unseeing eye staring into nothingness. Foster found that he was trembling and that his body had broken out into a sweat. He turned right on King Edward Drive then left into the modern housing development, the townhouses, behind the Arbutus Shopping Centre ... Yuppie country, though the Yuppies had begun to move into the False Creek area...this was somehow older, less given to cocaine and recreational sex and more to wine and cheese parties among people whose "children had grown up and were in Toronto" or at Law School up at U.B.C. Carefully Foster picked his way among the streets, each of which looked the same as the next, low wooden buildings perched amidst shrubs and gardens. Foster prayed that the police would be slow to connect Julia's car with this homicidal stranger.

Julia's apartment or condominium was in no way different from the others.

There seemed to be no-one in sight. Foster parked the car a short distance away and waited. He remembered that his run-

ning gear was still on the back seat... Man running. Perhaps he should change his clothes again, contorting himself into knots in the car's tiny space, leave a note for Julia and run for it. But to where and to what after he had stopped? There was nowhere to turn. Better to wait for the police, and if he'd killed Prince, plead some sort of justification. But this document he was supposed to have stolen? And Prince's role as a police agent. What of all that?

Wearily Foster decided that it didn't concern him, that the money, Terry's offer, the contents of the manila envelope—none of this was his affair. He had taken the course he had in order to play a little trick on Prince and Judd. A sort of revenge. Well, now he'd got it and it was time to turn himself into the law. He huddled into his seat feeling defeated and afraid.

The lights of a car glided around the corner and gleamed in the rear-view mirror above his head. Foster cautiously turned his head lower so that he could not be seen and looked into the side-view mirror. It was a taxi, and it had drawn up outside Julia Reynolds' condominium. As good as her word. She stepped out, a familiar, elegant figure, and said something to the driver. The door slammed, the cab backed into a driveway and turned, and Julia Reynolds' heels clicked briskly up the steps to the door. Foster saw her ring the bell and remembered he had her keys.

He suddenly became aware of his own inertia and stupidity and slipped out of the car.

Bob! she said. I thought you were inside. A soft hand reached for his arm and held it gently. Why aren't you in the house? And why park the car so far down the street?

I thought someone had got the licence number, Foster said. I didn't think it would be safe here.

Silly, why would anybody take your licence number? How would he know who you were? People aren't that quick on the uptake. Muriel doesn't know where I live...nobody does. Even this isn't my own place...I'm housesitting it for a friend

JOHN MILLS

...I haven't been in touch with Muriel for over a year.

Terry?

Terry's vanished. In any case, he doesn't know either. Come on, let's get in the door... Bob...the key! the key! It's perfectly safe, I swear it.

Perhaps I killed him.

Oh Bob, Bob, she whispered, holding him trembling in her arms. I'm with you now...don't you understand? *You're not alone any more.*

I killed him.

No, no you didn't kill him. I stayed until they got the ambulance. He's got a concussion, but he's alive. You punched him, yes, but that was justified. Whatever happened after wasn't your fault. If we have to we'll discuss it inside. Oh Bob, where are the keys?...

She found them clutched in his hand. Gently she took them from him, unlocked the door and drew him with her into the darkness of the house.

Part 2

Tres Ovejas

Now at daybreak new shapes and patterns began slowly to swim into visibility from the room's deep shadows. Since this was still close to midsummer the sun rose well to the north east, but a hill between the Village and that horizon diffused the light so that the windows were dark grey and there was no hint yet of the morning's brilliance.

Yet Foster could see, with growing clarity, the long bank of shallow windows extending the width of the room. The outside of the house, with its cedar cladding, suggested that the walls would be dark inside, like those of a log cabin. Instead they were of plaster, drywall, painted an eggshell latex, an off-white with a yellowish tinge. Earlier, while it was still night and the lights remained on for a brief moment, he had noticed in the house carefully framed reproductions of old favourites—Van Gogh's chair, the billiard hall, a Gauguin with broad wedges of colour, Polynesian noses, hair, breasts, all as sensuous and ripe as autumn pears. These, the ones in the bedroom at any rate, were dark rectangles on the greying walls. He could see the dark bulk of a dressing-table and a chair. There was a bench alongside the bed—lamp, book: a novel by Robertson Davies...*Fifth Business*, not much of it read; a diary and a phone. Thus much Foster had been able to observe before the lights were out and before he and Julia had begun to make love. He wondered if the rest of the condominium were as bland and impersonal. He stirred uneasily. There had been no dreams: they had made love for something like an hour, then slept, only to wake again.

Lie still...lie still...relax your body. You're still so tense.

I think I'm falling in love with you.

You're very sweet.

And you seem to me to be two people...brisk and efficient...then soft and loving...like this.

And which of us do you love?

RUNNER IN THE DARK

Both...and equally...

Their voices trailed off into the darkness. Foster slept, dreamlessly, for a short while and until the woman's body beside him grew slowly real again from the confused gyres of longing, fantasy and desire to which his sleeping had consigned her. Now, as she felt him wake, her arm reached across his chest and slowly she stroked the side of his face. He turned to her, his hand moved down her rounded, smooth hips to the front of her thighs, then upwards and around to cradle the small of her back.

I know nothing about you, he whispered.

Nor I you.

I'm married...I told you that.

Silence. Foster said:

We've separated now...she lives back east.

But moves about with Sid Rains.

Foster said nothing. You want her back, she said.

Yes, I want her back. And I want you too.

You already have me.

Much later, the sun now in the window-pane and casting through the Venetian blinds bars of bright gold across the wall, she said:

Like you, I'm married. And like you, separated. He went off with someone but by the time that happened, it was all right by me. That was four and a half years ago. We'd been married ten. I've two children, twelve and eleven...they live with him...in Boston.

Is that where you've been for eight months?

Good heavens, no. I was in Toronto most of that time, in Montreal the rest.

Toronto! Foster muttered with the instinctive horror of the born Westerner.

Like his compatriots he saw Toronto as a dark, ugly and joyless place and now it was the city that had swallowed up and transformed his wife. Julia said:

That's where I was born, grew up and went to school. It's where I still have family, where I was married, and where I lived with my husband and children.

I seem to have said something inappropriate. I'm sorry.

No, all you did was say Toronto in that Vancouver tone of voice. I've no wish to defend it...it's big and sprawling and the climate's comfortable for only five months in the year at most, but you can make a life there, and be happy.

Have you been happy, Julia?

Since my marriage breakup, you mean? Off and on. I was happy in Toronto last year...living with my parents. Can you imagine? A grown woman of 37 living in the same room I had when I was a little girl. I'd be there now if I hadn't made the bulk of my living in this city. I moved west when I separated.

Lovers?

I've had them. And you?

Not many. And not now. The interest hasn't been there.

That's what I found. After a while the interest goes. It's exciting for a couple of years...until you get it out of your system. And then...you come along...

And you came along for me.

The sun grew rounder, higher. It lay in the panes of the window on the wall opposite Julia's bed. Fully awake, Foster found his memory filled with images of Saturday afternoon: the gentle crowds, the laughing children playing in the water park on Granville Island, the hoses and jets of water, miniature cannon, and kayaks, gaudy as dragonflies on the waters of False Creek, the bakers' smells of the market, the fish stalls. Foster felt a surge of nostalgia for the days with Sally, the week's shopping at the Island, a cappuccino and croissant, walking back to the car and an evening strolling on the beach or partying with friends. That was innocence: he could never go back to it, not even with Julia. It would be too much to expect that this would last. She would move on, into another life, the same world as Sally—of finance and numbers, com-

puters, stocks, bonds, expertise—whereas he was stuck in a world of values that had no relevance anymore—words, metaphor, language. Soon there would be computers that could translate for you in any given language. Go to Japan, for instance, and switch on your software: a man or woman would no more need to learn a language, relish it, study its nuances, than a high-school student needs to know the operations of mathematics. The diode does it for him.

Deep silence, broken only by the even breathing of the woman beside him, the sound of bird song, the persistent rasping of a crow in the far distance. But no traffic noise. No human voices to trivialize the morning with demands and brawls. An idyll. Yet whatever this moment was to him, whatever lay in the future, Foster knew that the day would be problematic to say the least of it. Apart from the question of Prince and his own culpability in that affair, there was Terry's evident disappearance. There was that envelope, lying in the bank, so much an object of desire and attention by so many disparate people. There was Sally and her attachment, whatever that amounted to, to Rains. A feeling of oppression began to grow in him. Something sketchy danced just out of his vision's range—something black and evanescent—a kind of dark aurora. A swelling up of some grief he couldn't name racked him and he gasped. Once again he saw out of the corner of his eye a beach, a stretch of bright sand, some tragedy that had taken place there...this black thing dancing on it... something that haunted...devastated...be absolute for death. He must have disturbed Julia beside him, for she moved but did not wake. The movement, though, brought him back to the present and slowly the sadness receded like a bleak tide back into the shadows.

He stared at the windows, now filled with straps of blue sky. Whatever that business was, it seemed physical in origin. As if one were a child again, making oneself swoon by holding the breath. It seemed, now, discomforting but hardly major. This house, for instance, was a place of joy and safety. Be abso-

lute for that. Nobody, and he believed Julia, knew he was with her. Nobody knew where she lived. Things could not have worked out better. He would, he knew, have to stay inside this sanctuary until he could piece the Terry business together and resolve it. Then he felt regret that he was going to be forced to imprison himself on this bright, delectable, West Coast morning. He could, now that he was in love, even enjoy the crowds...the Saturday afternoons...

Julia murmured: Where are you now?

Dozing.

No...you were there in the past...you were there with her somewhere in the past.

...Does it matter so much?

...I want you here, with me...inside me...your skin...so sweet...soft...oh, my love...

I love you...

I love you too.

A light breeze through the open window rattled the Venetian blinds slightly and made them swing against the window. The Saturday morning noises began; cars starting up, a cheerful female voice urging a spouse to hurry; the noise of children playing in the street outside—their cheerful sound broke the long and deep silence of the early morning. Foster, dressed in his shirt and trousers for want of a bathrobe, tinkered in the kitchen with coffee pot and beans and grinder. In the bathroom he'd found a razor which, though slightly blunt, helped him to repair the appearance of his face. The marks of Judd's attack were not very visible now, though a dark bruise along his cheekbone still felt very tender. Judd...Prince...though the shadows of the night felt dispelled, there was still some anxiety in him about Prince. In this day of perfect idyll, however, he knew there would be no disaster. Confidence and elation flowed through him, products, he knew, of being a lover and being loved.

She came into the kitchen and embraced him, saying, I

need to go out for a while.

He looked down at her. Her hair, rumped from the night, had regained its floating quality and lost its carefully coiffured look. Her eyes were blue and wide and her face, broad in the forehead, high cheek-boned, narrowing to a pointed, deeply cleft chin, was saved from a classical, conventional beauty by the short laugh lines at the corner of her eyes, and a very slight upward tilt to her nose. The sultriness he'd observed the previous day seemed now to be on the wane. He said:

I'm sorry to hear that... I was hoping we could drive off somewhere, look at shops, eat lunch, stroll on beaches.

As he said it he was aware, again, of the threshold of oppression, that dark flickering shape on the borders of awareness. This time, though, he could link it directly to Sally. Reading his mind, Julia said:

Is that what you used to do?

He nodded.

Oh, my darling, I'd love to do that too. But I really need to clear up a few things.

She let her arms fall and folded them. She became cooler, business-like.

I phoned a couple of hospitals while you were making coffee, she said. Prince is at the General. Critical but stable condition is how they described him. Severe concussion.

Then he's alive. Thank God.

Stable is the word to hang on to there, I think. At least it means he's not sinking fast. I have to go home and pick up whatever messages there are.

Where do you live, Julia?

I have a condo in False Creek... I'd love to take you there, but I really think you need to stay put for a while. Nobody knows you're here, but look how easily they found you last night.

I'm dying for some fresh air.

I know...so am I. But I have to work, I'm afraid.

Can you work here?

Yes, of course. I'm also going to Terry's office and I'll bring what files I think might throw some light on all this.

You know something already.

Only what Terry told me. That he was picking up an envelope from Sid Rains for delivery somewhere else. I don't know what its destination is... I do know it contained some material set up in an industrial code of some sort. That isn't uncommon in the kind of work I've been doing lately, and there's nothing intrinsically sinister about it. If you've got a good idea or a project you don't want it stolen by the competition.

She poured coffee from the percolator into a cup and sipped it.

Nice and strong...the way I like it. Sid Rains himself is somebody I wouldn't trust any further than I could throw him.

What is he?

Rich...crooked...dangerous. I'm sorry your wife's mixed up with him. That envelope...

I'm inclined to get it back to him.

Oh? Why? And how?

I suppose since he handed it to me in lieu of Terry that it is his to dispose of. There may be somebody behind Rains entitled to it more than Rains. But that's Rains' problem. Meanwhile I'd like to get these police off my back, if that's what they are.

Julia Reynolds reached across the counter and found a packet of cigarettes in a bowl alongside a throwaway plastic lighter. Do you smoke, Bob? she asked. That's one of the many things I don't know about you.

Foster shook his head.

How will giving Rains the envelope solve your problem with the police? You still have to clear yourself of being an accomplice. And for that you need Terry.

Who isn't here.

God knows where he is, since he wasn't at Muriel's. I'd be inclined to keep the envelope safe in your deposit box until he

shows up. Or, if you're serious about getting it back to Rains, be sure to sell it to him. You need the money.

That sounds as crooked as they are.

Crooked? Bob, why are you so happy to be a victim? Terry used you to get that envelope and subjected you to being beaten up, humiliated and pursued, the object of the attentions of the police and God knows who else. You deserve to make some money from it.

Speaking as a businesswoman?

Speaking as your lover. You've got something a number of people seem to want badly enough to kick you around. If I were you I'd make the most of it.

Well, Foster looked into her eyes. They were serious and unsmiling. He felt suddenly too young, too naive, too unworldly. It was time then to grow up—to accept the consequences of living in the real world.

Well, it's an academic argument, he said. I have as yet to get the envelope safely, then find out where Rains is.

She smiled and nodded. The slight crinkling around her eyes gave her face back its warmth and tenderness. She reached out and touched his hand.

I don't mean to bully you, she said. What you do with that envelope is of course up to you...it has nothing to do with me at all. As your lover and consultant, I just pass on to you my opinion.

What would you do, then, about Sally?

As your lover, I say...let her go and love me. As your consultant I'd say: you want her back, so go to her and see if she'll come back.

I've been thinking about it...it's the past I want back. Those early days of our marriage; the peace and gentleness... the innocence of them. That's what I want back.

I know. I know exactly what you mean. I've had those days too and I've had to let them go.

Things can never be the same? With someone else?

No, never. It's called growing up.

Loss of paradise.

Loss. Bob, those times never return. They're a function of youth and, as you say, innocence, when men and women are filled with strength, energy and hope, and when they've all the time in the world.

You make it sound as if there's nothing left.

I didn't quite mean that. What we have now is not what I had with my first husband when I was 23. But it's good in its own way, and in many ways better.

Like an oasis...

Exactly...an oasis in a desert life.

Foster felt a strong compassion moving through him. He stood and went to her then held her in his arms. She softened, became lighter.

I didn't mean to sound self-pitying, she said. I enjoy my life. It's filled with action and friends. Lovers if I need them. I do things I like to do...it's just that sometimes it hasn't much meaning. And when you spoke of those days of youth and innocence it reminded me that we never ever bothered about meaning: we just were...like flowers...blooming in praise of whatever there was.

They held one another for a long time; until the sadness turned again to pleasure and the pleasure to delight.

Where was she?

The day had become quite hot. The sun had moved into the windows of the living-room and Foster had to open them to try cooling the place down. Through an upstairs window he could see a stretch of wide asphalt—the street separating the individual townhouses, each private behind its solid fence, a top band of glass poking above each. The asphalt shimmered and the air had begun to feel heavy and stultifying. Privacy... the privacy so much in demand in a place like this...each of us tucked behind our fences in our individual tiny voids. Terrified of contact, of encounter. Foster remembered hearing that Canadians did the most banking of any people in the world. It

was true that the banks here were hushed and church-like, each client lining up patiently, taking his or her turn in coming forward, confessing to the teller in a lower murmur, receiving absolution in the form of banknotes or a madeup book or a set of receipts. The communicant would retire discreetly with a little smile, as if savouring the taste of bread and wine. Too easy to say they worshipped money as the people of the middle ages worshipped God. Everybody says that. But what happens? Those who'd said such things to him had not quit their jobs, gone on the dole, lined up at food banks instead of money banks, nor become workers for social change. If it were not for Terry's money, Foster would have been lining up at the food bank himself within a month. Food banks—the sign and symbol of social failure. Meanwhile—an image of hell: the wide stretch of shimmering asphalt between this isolated pad and the next; or the vast asphalt wastelands of Metrotown shopping-mall, or at Broadway and Arbutus, just down the road: an expanse of desert in a waste of shame; the waste remains, the waste remains, and kills.

Where was she? Gone a couple of hours. He felt a restlessness, a yearning, a certain self-disgust. To want her is one thing, to be at a loss without her quite another. He should know better than to try and define himself in terms of a woman. Yet the need remained, a delicate, invisible tendril of himself, reaching out, reaching out, a desire without fulfilment, a vacuity.

Foster looked at the bookshelves in the living-room. Books of popular psychology—*The Games People Play*, *How to Win by Negotiation*...these were surely not Julia's. A couple of middlebrow novels...*The Rebel Angels*, *The Executioner's Song*. Others with more pretensions—*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *Skevington's Daughter*. Foster picked up the former and thumbed its pages: a playful, lambent prose style...delectable...the laughter of devils, the laughter of angels. What lovely concepts. It belonged to another world, a world of peace, tranquillity, and love...where art mattered and where politics

mattered. *Skevington's Daughter* he could not read at all, though he'd met the author—a grey-haired English professor—at a party.

Something black and glazed seemed to grow from the surrounding air like a dark yeast and envelope him, then recede, just as a wave recedes, leaving him weak and crushed. He sat down with a feeling of terrible fatigue. What he had embarked on was futile and stupid. These people—Judd, Prince, Terry, Rains, Sally, even Julia, probably especially Julia—were stronger than he, and he was crawling at their feet, at the same time he knew that they probably lacked his energy, his insight into how things are: that life is permeated by an absence, an absence neither work nor play, gospel nor ethic, art or formless hectic experience, could replace. What was the point of waiting for the hospital's word on Prince? He should go to them, if that's what they wanted, and do their will...be absolute for death... He looked back over his life of the last few years and found it unintelligible...as if he had been waiting around for a job to give his existence some meaning. A job!

The bell rang. Then again. The buzz penetrated Foster's consciousness with great slowness. He was vaguely aware that the door had opened and closed again and that a blond head was bowed over him and soft hands cradled his cheeks.

Sorry, Julia Reynolds said. I thought I'd get a few provisions. She brought, like a housewife shopping, two crammed brown paper bags. Foster kissed her gently, took the bags and parked them on the kitchen counter. A bottle of Blanc de Blanc stuck out near the top. He turned as she came into the kitchen and caught her in his arms again. She embraced him lightly and smiled with some indulgence.

I've got something better for you, she said.

That's not possible.

I've been to Terry's office and raided his files...so there's some more stuff in the car.

Terrific. Want me to get it?

No, you stay here.

God, I've envied people, out there in the sun.

Make some tea, darling. I'll get Terry's stuff.

She was gone again, the word "darling" hanging in the air like the dust mote in the sun's rays.

What do you make of it?

Well, some of it's junk, as I told you. Terry's not systematic, that's partly why he pays the likes of me. The material I've organized is just some business letters and accounts.

Anything on Rains?

Not that I've found. Here's one file...bits of paper and old bills.

This was an expandable file, lettered, pocketed. Foster pulled out the A section. There were some personal letters. A woman named Ann, a man named Al. Foster felt a mixture of uneasiness and guilt.

We ought not to read these, he said.

If we can help it, no. I agree.

Foster riffled through the next couple of sections, then moved to F.

Nothing on me, here. Try S for Sally.

Or Sidney.

Foster nodded. But there was only a letter from Stan; about a year's statements from Scotialine.

Rains?

Nothing.

Try one of these.

"These" constituted a group of manila envelopes of the kind that Rains' papers had been delivered in—an 8" x 11" envelope. There were words written on the outside. *Puma* was one. It contained correspondence and statements from what was obviously a small company, one of Terry's clients. There was also a recommendation written out on Jannock Enterprises paper, nicely printed, both margins justified—not some cheap and easy job. Terry took trouble, Foster said.

JOHN MILLS

I remember *Puma*, Julia Reynolds commented. It's pretty recent. Perhaps six months ago. We had great difficulty getting them to pay the last instalment of the fee.

They go bankrupt?

No, though it's too early to tell. Terry knew his job, though, so I doubt it if they followed his advice.

What do they make?

I forget. Machine tools or something.

Foster shuffled through some of the others: *Cartwright, Hartmann and Briggs, GELF, Somo Company*... statements, proposals, recommendations, statements of account.

God, these are boring. Is that all there is?

I warned you. Yes, it's all here. Except the current stuff I've been looking at over the last two days.

The Bay, Eaton's... B.C. Tel. Paid his bills regularly. Was he in the money?

Not so far as I know. Clears about thirty to forty thousand, I suppose, in a year.

That's a fortune.

Not nowadays... consultants? They make more than that. It's what Sid Rains' private secretary pays in tax with all the loopholes wide open... if she pays any tax.

I've got no head for this.

You're doing beautifully.

The encounter with this block and tackle commercial and private material had a depressing effect on Foster. This is what a human life is about in our century... bills paid and unpaid; ghostly transactions with other ghosts; wisps and wraiths of human contact through paper and computer printouts... nullified by death... be absolute for death... Terry's disappearance began to take on a sinister and tragic overtone. The poor, theatrical, not very successful, struggling gink. Terry Mason. Small boy at one of those private schools... Athlone, perhaps, run by that tough Australian woman. Grey knee-pants and blue sweaters. Canings and silence at meals. Oppressive... picked up in the afternoon by his mother. Fed chocolate or ice

cream on the way home. Acts of love and caring. Poor Terry. Poor all of us...cast out from bliss to barren landscape of work and fear and graves!

Julia, Foster yelled.

Yes? She shouted back from the kitchen.

I'm getting maudlin.

Are you, my poor love? What about?

I don't know, Foster said more quietly. I'm worried about Terry.

I know, she said. So am I.

Later that afternoon, Foster made the discovery that was to take him along a path leading to disaster and tragedy. There it was, in a notebook, spirex-bound steno-pad, with the word "Daybook" printed on it in pencil. There were four of these, and Terry had obviously started keeping some sort of journal. In the first there were fairly routine accounts of meetings with prospects: a paragraph or so of descriptions, then a statement as to what had been discussed. These again seemed run of the mill—here, for instance, was a man named Armitage who wanted Terry to investigate the dealings of a business rival in the hope of uncovering a tax fraud. Terry had regretfully, but respectfully, declined. Perhaps Armitage's offer of a thousand dollars down and an additional ten thousand if Terry could show any cause for dropping the rival into trouble was too little and the job too risky. There was a description of a young woman Terry had taken out, rather unflattering, for the woman had refused to sleep with him. Foster could not imagine Terry doing very well in that arena, out in the sexual jungle. But he could hardly himself be a convincing judge of such things. There was a man named Causely, described as sandy haired, middle-aged, rather timid, who had discovered a new technology: a sort of pump that operated on a principle related to the propagation of soundwaves. There was a note at the end of this description: "See No. 2."

Foster noticed that the books were labelled in this way...

one through four. He opened the number 2 book and called Julia Reynolds over.

Look.

What?

This seem familiar to you?

He heard a little intake of breath. He looked up at her sharply. Her eyes were bright, and an odd hardness had come into them.

What's the matter? he said, with some concern in his voice.

Sid Rains.

Well, maybe. But it's strange.

In front of him was a page of pencilled figures, arranged in columns and ranks just as in the document in the safety-deposit box. You seem shocked, he said. Is it so surprising?

But she had switched to her softer self. No, she said with a laugh. It's just that I think we could have short-circuited our labours.

How?

If I'd found these the other day.

How would that have helped?

I don't know, she said. It might have saved so much trouble ...that man Judd, and you getting beaten up, Terry vanished ...Mr. Prince...

I know, Foster said. And I'm sorry.

Anyway, these figures...

In code. Just like the ones I got from Rains. And there's nothing I can do about it.

It looks like Terry's writing.

Foster nodded abstractedly. He thumbed a few pages of the notebook. There were blank pages, then notes in the same vein as before: comments on prospects, assessments of trustworthiness, reports of meetings. On one page there was a drawing, rather a crude one, of what looked like a piston fitted into a cylinder, though there was a thickening at one end that gave it a slightly odd look. It was unlike anything he'd seen before. He glanced over his shoulder at Julia Reynolds. Again

she had become very still, and once more there was an odd glitter to her eye.

Recognize it? Foster said.

No...it reminds me of something, though. Something about technology. Something Terry said. It's gone...it reminds me of something, though, very strongly...

Piston...cylinder...perhaps we need a rest.

And go to bed, you mean? Julia seemed to relax. She chuckled and ran her hand over Foster's head. Your symbolism needs a subtler touch...anyway, it's not such a bad idea.

Foster flicked over another page. Here it was as if Terry had placed the book on his knees while answering the phone. There was a little sketch of a cat, another of a series of boxes arranged so that the perspective flowed in and out unstably, an optical illusion. There was a square divided up by four lines down, four across: 25 subsquares. More reports of a consistently dull nature followed, then, remarkably, an array of letters occupying two pages:

DBPED UVCBH POABH POBEF KHKOS SUONR
GZFDQ ADFTB ESAFQ OSSCF DFTSZ FHBOB
IPUMP LPNPE BBBBB.

This formed a kind of paragraph. At the end of it was a large pencilled stroke and another, much longer, paragraph followed it.

Foster opened his hands each side of the book. He gave a small crow of triumph. That's more like it.

You mean those letters?

Code, he said. This one I can possibly do.

Bob, Julia said. What are you talking about? What makes you think you can do this and not the other?

Because here I have a clue to it, and in any case letters, not numbers, are my speciality. Look at this square divided up into five smaller ones. It may be a clue to the way this has been encoded. I think it's a Playfair code.

Foster reached across the desk for a pencil lying in a tray. Look, he said. He drew on a blank page of the notebook a square divided into 25 subsquares. You choose a key word... one that has no recurrent letter, and shove it into this five-by-five square, then you arrange the rest of the alphabet after it...you can leave out a letter...leave out J. So. Suppose your code word is the word ANSWER, this is how your square would look.

Foster pencilled in the square:

A	N	S	W	E
R	B	C	D	F
G	H	I	K	L
M	O	P	Q	T
U	V	X	Y	Z

Now suppose you want to encode a word. You simply split it into pairs of letters. Let's say your word is QUESTION. Split it up like this—QU ES TI ON. Then you substitute in pairs, using your letter square.

Show me.

Well, if the letters of a pair occur in the same rank, the coded replacements are the letters to the right of each. If you've got the last letter of a rank you use the first letter as a substitute. Suppose they're in the same column: then you use the letters below each, or the top letter of the column if the letter you want to encode appears at the bottom. Otherwise the letters of each pair are used as the diagonals of a rectangle, and you encode them by using the opposite diagonal.

Bob, Bob, please go slow...I've no head for this.

All right. Look at the first pair...QU. They form the opposite corners of the rectangle MQYU. So you encode it as MY. Take the next...ES. These letters are in the same rank...so you choose the letters next to each. But E is the end of the line, so you take the first letter of the rank...A. So ES encoded as AW. TI is encoded PL, and ON as VB. So QUESTION appears in

the code as MYAWPLVB.

Why go to that trouble?

Because it's an unpretentious, simple code—much harder to crack than the straight substitution ciphers. I bet you that's how we break these letters written here.

That little drawing of Terry's...

Right.

Wouldn't that give the game away?

It might. To the likes of me.

Foster pushed the notebook over toward her.

The first thing to do is to break the letters up in pairs.

Why are they in fives now?

You know, I've never asked myself that question. I suppose it must be a convention in the code world—like sonnets, or villanelles.

A small frown appeared on Julia Reynolds' face. She pointed a finger at the rows of figures and ran it up and down.

How do you know it isn't a substitution code, like you said?

I don't. This is just a hunch. If I'm right, all we need is the key word.

It's hopeless, she said. How many words are there in the English language?

It needs to be a word with no letter repeated. A word that means something to Terry. But I'll try the substitution idea first...just to be sure.

You've lost me, Bob. Julia Reynolds sat down at the table with him and looked at him seriously. I can see this is important to you, she said. But what will reading this message, whatever it is, achieve?

I don't know, Foster said. I don't know where it'll lead.

But you're going to go ahead with it anyway.

Yes.

Julia Reynolds nodded and smiled. His answer seemed to please her, for she reached across and placed her hand on his.

The sky grew darker blue, then a kind of indigo. Foster switched on a small table lamp. A soft pool of light spread instantly onto the table. Beside it lay scraps of yellow typing seconds. He was a man totally absorbed, unconscious of his surroundings, his pen darting constantly. Julia released the Venetian blinds, which expanded downwards with a sharp clatter. Foster jumped slightly. For three hours he had worked on the code, while Julia drafted some letters, then tried to finish *Fifth Business*. Before that they had cooked a meal together. Foster had disjointed a chicken. He browned it in olive oil with some garlic, added a little of the Blanc de Blanc, chicken broth made from a cube and a touch of tomato purée. Julia Reynolds made a salad dressing of oil and vinegar, stirred into it two chopped shallots, salt, pepper and half a can of anchovy fillets chopped with a knife, then mashed. She boiled a few potatoes, mashed them with butter and milk, formed them into balls and rolled them in a mixture of paprika, parmesan cheese, salt and pepper and fried them gently. Foster sautéed a handful of chopped mushrooms and added them with black olives to the chicken. Julia tossed two small butter lettuces in the dressing, poured the rest of the white wine into a decanter, and set the table carefully, a small bouquet of carnations in a vase as a centrepiece.

The flowers are for you.

Foster said nothing for a moment, then: I'm very touched, he muttered. He felt his breath deepening into a sort of gasp. His eyes began to water. Julia Reynolds embraced him softly. Nobody's ever bought you flowers, she said.

Not for a long time. Sally used to.

She hurt you badly, didn't she, my sweet?

No more than I hurt her. That's Sally...the past. Thank you for the flowers, Julia. It was a lovely thought.

You're very vulnerable Bob, she said. You've been lonely, haven't you? And depressed. You have to be quite careful.

Of you?

Of anybody. Me especially.

Why you? he said softly. I told you...I think I'm falling in love with you.

Why me? Because I'm the first woman that's come along in a while...the first to take you seriously? The first woman since Sally left that finds you lovable? As to you falling in love with me...let's be lovers, as we are now, without one or both of us becoming obsessed. Can we do that?

I'm not so sure about me. You can, I know.

Because I'm two women?

Your policewoman won't let you.

Julia Reynolds laughed gently. Let's eat, she said. Let's eat this lovely chicken of yours before it gets cold. Then I'll make some coffee and you can sit and do your puzzle while I catch up with my reading. Then when you've solved the code, I shall come upon you and take you quickly, before you can protest.

I'd like that.

But now, at sundown, Foster had not achieved very much. He tried working with substitutions—observing the number of times the letters were repeated in the code and trying the most frequent substitutions as E, T or A. The code made no sense. He chose the word Jannock, using one N, as his code word, then, on impulse, Causely, the name associated with "the new technology." Then he tried Dunsmuir. Kitsilano with one i, Vancouver with one V. Mason. He went back to the notes he'd made using "Causely" and attempted the substitution cipher technique again. But without result.

He stood, stretched and sighed. From deep within her armchair, Julia Reynolds looked up.

No luck?

He shook his head.

Terry never struck me as somebody interested in codes, in words...that kind of play.

No. Although he hired me ostensibly to find a word for him...for some new device or other.

That was a blind.

So it appears...I was just the patsy he needed to pick up

that envelope.

Did you ever talk about codes to him?

Maybe...once when I told him about *The Listener* crossword.

Then it's possible you told him about this Playfair code of yours.

I don't remember.

Bob...listen. *Try your own name.*

Foster shrugged and wrote out the square:

F O S T E
R A B C D
G H I K L
M N P Q U
V W X Y Z

and started desultorily breaking the message up into letter pairs.

DB PE DU VC BH PO BE FK...

DB, Foster said aloud, becomes CA; PE becomes US; DU, EL; VC YR. Julia! That's it...you've got it! The first word is Causely! We've done it...what an inspiration!

Foster jumped up and seized her, threw his arms round her waist and crushed her to him, rocked with her, she laughing with delight, her feet on his, stepping up and down with him in a little dance. Ask me, he shouted, ask me what walks on four legs in the morning, two at midday and three at noon. Ask me anything.

You can ask me that, Julia said. Even I could answer that one.

Champagne! Champagne for the codebreakers!

We've no champagne, but we've got some Similkameen Superior White. I'll get it.

She unclasped herself swiftly and darted toward the kitchen. Foster sighed happily and pencilled in the rest of it.
CAUSELYRAINSRAINSATEIGHTOONEMALVERN-
CRESECTORONTO ORTRE-

SOVIEIASABIQUIUINMUSAAAA

Julia Reynolds came in with a tray on which were two glasses and a bottle of the British Columbia wine. She sat the tray down, poured carefully and looked at him with seriousness.

To you, Robert Foster, she said, solemnly. As Muriel Reisz might have put it. To you and your powers of elucidation.

To me. To you, Julia Reynolds. My inspirator, protector and co-worker.

It sounds like an incantation.

He nodded. And so it is.

There was a short silence between them that Foster broke.

I've got the first part of it all right, he said. *Causey. Rains. Rains at Eight O One Malvern Crescent, Toronto.* But the rest of it's a little confusing.

I see what you mean. Are you sure you've got it right?

Yes. Starting from the back, though, and allowing for the repetitions that make up the group of five, that looks like USA.

NM, USA. New Mexico. Another address for Rains?

Good, good, that explains the OR at the beginning.

New Mexico...so this might be a couple of Spanish words.

Suddenly Foster stopped. His hands clenched, he sat back in his chair. He felt his mind begin to spin with words, images, songs...

Bob...Bob...what on earth's the matter?

It's okay. Something I'm remembering. A rhyme...*Tengo*...that's how it begins. *Tengo, Tengo, Tengo.*

I don't know what you're talking about.

It's a little rhyme, perhaps a nursery rhyme. I don't know where it's from.

Tengo, Tengo, Tengo

"Tu no tienes nada."

Tango tres ovejas,

En una cabaña

JOHN MILLS

Una me do leche
Una me da lana.
Otra mantequilla.
Para la semana.

A Boaster tells Scoffer, "I own, I own, I own." Says Scoffer to Boaster, "You own nothing." "I've got three goats," the Boaster replies. "Three goats in a cabin. One gives me milk, one gives me wool, the other gives me butter for the week."

That's all very charming...

But look. We have no letter J in the code, so I have to substitute. So look at
the address now...

Trez Oveh-jazz...

Tres ovéh-hass...the J in Spanish is pronounced like our H.
Look, *Tres Ovejas, Abiquui, New Mexico, U.S.A.*

Is there such a place?

I don't know. Have we got a road atlas?

I'll take a look.

A short, meaningless poem...perhaps a song, but no tune suggested itself. Words, spoken softly. Many years ago. How long? A gentle voice. Yes, singing, but what tune? And when? It was Sally...of course. Dark head bent over a washbasin, very young...perhaps twelve, fourteen years ago. Scarcely more than a child. A high, tuneful voice. Sally, what's that song? I don't know darling, I heard it in class...Andrea sang it to us... something she'd been taught when she was a girl. The dark, lustrous hair; the sink was a bathroom sink...she turned and faced him, he was in the doorway, the mirror to his left. Behind her was a window, quite a small one, half opened, daylight and a lilac tree outside...*Tengo tres ovejas, en una cabaña.* Foster's lips rounded on the words, silently, trying in his mind to recapture the song. *Tengo Tengo Tengo...* But then why... why now? synchronicity. Coincidence, a rare, an astonishing coincidence...the Turk...*Aye, but to go we know not where...* Peterley Corner and the Black Dog... Whistle and I'll come to

you, my lad. He felt a crawling sensation over his skin. Gemel and the quotation, now this. And there'd been something else at that party last night. Muriel? There was something again... again on the fringes of his consciousness. He shuddered and called out.

Find one?

No. Not yet.. I'm sure there's one here in this cupboard. There's so much junk.

It's Sally's song.

What? Can't hear you.

It doesn't matter.

Foster sat down. There was a place in New Mexico called Tres Ovejas. Possibly a cabin, more likely an inn, At the Sign of the Three Goats, or perhaps a farm: Rancho de los Tres Ovejas. Near a town called Abiquui...New Mexico. New Mexico...Albuquerque was in New Mexico, and that was the destination marked on the departures video screen yesterday morning, so long ago. New Mexico...Rains was there. Sally was with Rains. Sally had given Rains the name for his ranch, cabin, whatever it was. Unlikely. How long had she been with him? A year? Certainly no longer. Rains, a uxorious and indulgent lover, changes the name of his hideout. Foster found that hard to believe. And yet... On the other hand this was Terry's ascription... Sally also knew Terry. She'd given him the Tres Ovejas and Terry was passing it on. Why? That didn't make sense either. Back to the synchronicity theory... fancy name for coincidence.

Julia Reynolds came back with a large, thin book, saying, seek and ye will find. My friend's personal effects...I wonder if mine are as dreary?

Julia, Sally taught me that song, the Tengo song.

So? You think Sally taught it to Sid Rains?

That's what I'm wondering.

No. Tres Ovejas is probably a common enough phrase in Spanish. A pub name. Think how many pubs there are in England called the Three something or other. The three tuns.

Three crowns.

Three men in a boat.

No, but I see what you mean. I don't buy it, but it'll have to do for now. One gives me milk, the other gives me wool, the third a week's supply of butter.

...God what a lot of widdershin, jumbled stuff. But New Mexico. That's where they are.

Foster told her briefly about the departures video. They were in the airport, he said, and then they'd vanished: like werewolves at daybreak. And there were only a few planes they could have taken in that short space of time: to Los Angeles, Toronto, Tokyo, Sidney...even the Interior. But Albuquerque, New Mexico, was another possibility.

Rains had two bases, obviously. I knew about the Toronto address. In fact it's in the book. I also remember hearing that he owned a ranch "somewhere in the Sun Belt." I assumed that meant Arizona, or California. At any rate, I heard he spends a good deal of time in the States.

Well, Sally's with him down there, and I bet Terry's with them too.

Ah, of that I'm not so sure.

Together they poured over the map of New Mexico in the Road Atlas of North America. It took them several minutes to find Abiquui—a small town north of Santa Fe: Terry had misspelled it.

Near Los Alamos...that's the atomic research place, isn't it?

I doubt if there's any connection. You want to get down there, don't you, Bob?

Foster turned somewhat embarrassedly to his wine glass on another table.

Well, yes, he said. I would. I'd like to find Sally...

And bring her back?

He looked at her directly: Not now. I think that impulse is over. But I'd like a feeling of closure—a sense of completion. We never went through that.

She nodded. And you could sell Sid Rains back his ghastly envelope.

And have it out with Terry Mason...it's a lovely idea. But what would I use for money. Poor men don't travel.

Did you spend that five hundred dollars so quickly?

Five hundred dollars? My God, that's right...I'd forgotten about it...Terry's money! But it's in the bank...a bank thick with police.

You could write me a cheque...I'll put it in my own account and give you cash.

Julia...that's...it's too much. It's out of the question.

I think so too. For one thing, Rains may indeed have gone to Toronto...though I could probably find out if he's there from friends who move in the same circles. For another, I think if you went within a mile of Sid Rains with that envelope he'd have it taken from you.

I'd be well on my guard this time.

You think your friends Prince and Judd are tough, wait until you find out more about Sid Rains.

Well, I'd leave the envelope here and show him a copy. Pay up, I'll say or I'll destroy the original.

After which you'll kick his head in.

Something like that. Ah well, it's a lovely fantasy.

Foster stood and stretched himself. He poured himself another glass of the Similkameen Superior. His head felt muzzy, less from the wine than from the stuffiness of the room and his sedentary day much of it spent pouring over the code. What sense of achievement he'd experienced was slowly being modified by one of anti-climax. There was nothing he could do with this information. Unless...

Wait, he said. Suppose I were to give you the key?

Key?

To my safety-deposit box. You could get the envelope just by walking in the place. Prince is hors de combat, Judd hasn't seen you. You could just ask to go to your safety-deposit box and walk straight in with a note from me, just in case. Then we

could take it to Rains and bargain to some purpose... the main thing is to get that envelope out of the bank, somewhere safe.

I'd be happy to do that, Bob, if you think it's what you really want. But I think you're still just playing. In any case, I couldn't leave town right now.

No. Well, you wouldn't have to. But you're right, I'm not so interested if you aren't with me. I thought it could be something we could do together...

To make up for your long day indoors? Perhaps there's an easier way of getting you in the clear, my love. Something will turn up over the next day or two... meanwhile I want you here... a love slave.

All right, but let's decode the rest of this before we fine-tune that statement...

The second page of letters revealed its message within twenty minutes. Foster wrote it out on a sheet of paper and handed it to Julia Reynolds with a shrug.

There you are, he said. See if it means more to you than to me.

Seismic pump, Causely version. Patent number VN five oh six one four eight three dash eight six Ministry of Defence Acquisitions stock number MDA stroke AFG ten ninety eight specifications sold by Causely stroke Runciman Purchase Number RH nine seven oh stroke eight six dollars Canadian seven hundred and thirty-three thousand.

Julia lay back comfortably in an armchair with a glass of wine on a small occasional table at her side. She read the words on the page with a slight smile on her face. The roseate, glowing sultriness seemed to be moving within her, replacing the City Planner, the Labour Organizer, the brilliant career woman who could do several things at once—and all of them well.

Tell me about Causely, Foster said.

Lorne Causely. He's an inventor. Quite well known in his sphere. Did some pioneer work on lasers.

I heard his name at the party last night. Then in Terry's file... now in this code, associated with Rains.

I don't know why, she said. I've just heard Terry mention him. I've no idea how he and Rains are connected.

Her voice had dropped now almost to a whisper and the words she spoke seemed to bear no relation to her. By an effect of the light, the low bookshelf behind her, together with the standard household array of stereo, radio, television-set next to it, seemed to recede into darkness against which Julia took on a vividness, a soft lustre, as if her body during the daylight had absorbed the rays of the sun and had carried them with her into the night. Her stillness, her smile, her unwavering gaze gave her an intensity of being Foster found totally hypnotic: he could not, even if he had wished to, even if there were reason to, resist her.

That night Foster's sleep was disturbed by violent and distressing dreams. A small grey circle in the middle of total darkness suddenly exploded out to occupy his entire vision, to be a screen on which he saw himself, the wrecked car, the Lao-coon; tangle of twisted metal, the hissing, drenching rain of the dark night of his accident. Then he was inside it again, no longer a spectator, but a terrified victim, fighting to free himself from the metal's monstrous grip on him, the rain slanting through the shattered windshield, then Sally holding him in her arms as if it were he that needed to be soothed. The screen shrank, became a circle, then a dot, then vanished. Prince's face, white and sombre, stared at him with dejected eyes, the mouth opened slightly, a faint black stain growing from its corner. One eye closed and a hand reached up and pulled at him. The face disappeared and he saw Julia, wearing the dark blue dress she had worn for the party, petite and vulnerable, standing in the street outside Muriel Reisz's house; he heard her scream and recoil from something unseen and, as he ran toward her, a weight of something cold and bitter as iron fell across his face and pushed him to the ground. With growing panic he felt his wrists bound behind him, then a voice say: *take him down there*, and then he was walking, his hands

fastened behind his back into a strange form of carriage made of iron and drawn by two black horses. The wheels were of iron also and made a piercing, shrieking noise as the carriage lurched down a narrow cobbled street crossing the old part of some European city, a street filled, it seemed, with barking dogs and gas lamps projecting from walls. Then he was falling, his hands released and stretched into the air above him as he fell through air made luminous by moonlight, into a deep ravine then into black water, fathoms of it, through which he sank like a rock. Prince's face sprang at him out of the blackness, and Foster could see behind him, Terry Mason, plumpish, full of bonhomie and insincerity and, on a bed with dazzlingly white sheets, his mother as he had last seen her, wearing a translucent oxygen mask into which she gasped in unspeakable pain, her hand reaching for his, the hand of a nine-year-old boy. And Foster, a small boy again, weeping without control, desperately, the grief he felt utterly inconsolable and without end. Prince was in the bed now, the tubes and instruments coiling round him; Porces and Charibosa, Prince said, smiling. They can't trouble us *now*. And he was walking, peacefully, along a sunlit beach of golden sand, the tide well out, the world all light, peace and air, with Prince on one side of him, Julia on the other, and the image, ostensibly so peaceful, collapsed and he was falling again, off a dark cliff, into a sunless ravine.

He awoke with Julia holding him.

I'm here darling...I'm here...it's all right...

God...oh God I had some awful dreams...

But just dreams, darling...go back to sleep...I'm here, lying beside you.

He slept, this time peacefully, until the bars of gold once more lay across the wall.

He woke to the sound of the doorbell. He was awake instantly, and alert. He reached across the bed. Julia was gone. He heard muttering in the other room. He leaped out of bed and scram-

bled into his trousers. The door closed and Julia, in her bathrobe, walked back into the room carrying what looked like a letter. She smiled at him.

No need to be alarmed, my lover, she said. It was only Special Delivery.

This time on Sunday morning?

That's what I asked him. He said, yes, same as any other day of the week.

And it is gone nine o'clock.

How do people know you're here?

Well, Cynthia does for one. She's the woman who owns this house. And a couple of people in Toronto. But no-one of any consequence.

She held the envelope up to the light, then slit it open with her thumb.

Suddenly her face turned pale. She looked at Foster, then back at an envelope within the one she'd opened. She threw the covering down and stared at him.

Julia, Foster said. Julia, what on earth's the matter? Listen, Bob, she said, her voice trembling. Listen, my poor love. *It's for you.*

2

The country that stretched before Robert Foster now was open, tawny in colour and seemingly without limit. He was in a rift valley about ten miles across spread between two ranges of hills two to three hundred feet high that faced one another as abrupt cliffs layered in strata of orange, red and beige sandstone. The ground itself lay brownish, light and dusty, and sparsely covered with tufts of yellow weed. To the south the cliffs slowly dropped in height to merge with the vast plain

that extended almost to infinity, except that perhaps 80 miles away a dark blue mountain reared itself into the clear sky. The air was pure and thin and seemed to bear no sound except for the distant creaking of a buzzard's wing. Across the other side of the valley Foster could see the tips of another mountain range, jagged and snow-covered, lying in a cleft in the hills, but before him there was a small river and, across a bridge, the house. It was wild, exhilarating country, and Foster was filled with a sense of joy. His rented car was parked a hundred yards off, windows open to prevent the interior becoming an oven, and Foster himself escaped the heat by sitting in the shadow of a boulder the height of a man and the length of a railroad car. It was by the side of this mini-bluff that a cattle grid over ditch gave access through a three-stranded barbed-wire fence to a dirt road lying at right angles to the highway and disappearing into a clump of cottonwood trees that shaded the farm buildings. A sign stood near the entrance to the dirt road—it was made of wood and the words *TRES OVEJAS* were carved into it. Around the words a carver had carefully sculpted a design of intertwined ropes. The sign was new and highly varnished, but behind it, stuck on a post, was another, much older sign that said *NO TRESPASSING* in red letters on a black ground, and beneath it, on the same post, and in the same style, a third saying *NO HUNTING*. The house was inhabited but at present deserted. Foster had driven up quite boldly, found the garage empty, the barns vacant but clearly not derelict, and the grounds basking in that airy, baited silence that played an unheard music over the whole valley. He walked round the house and found that his courage was not quite up to the task of breaking and entering. He drove back to the highway and waited, hot, hungry, but by no means impatient, in the lee of his rock, for the owner, servant or visitors to appear. Foster was as happy as he'd been in years and as serene and peaceful as he could ever remember being. Deep within him there lay the consciousness that the problems that had obsessed him would, in this barren, lovely place, find reso-

lution.

That Sunday morning when the letter had come for Foster, the plans concerning selling the letter back to Rains, plans he and Julia had made between jest and earnest, were now not only practical but offered what seemed the most sensible way out. Foster had thought the letter innocent, Julia that it might explode. To satisfy her spoken anxieties and his own deeper ones, he had constructed a bomb-disposer's shield consisting of the heavy dining-room table turned on its side. He crouched behind it, flexed the envelope several times but no more than a letter-carrier would normally manipulate it, then, by pinning the envelope with a poker and inserting a long carving-knife into a tiny slit at one end, succeeded, aided by a mirror tilted on the opposite wall, in opening the envelope, his hands protected by thick books, his body by the table. These elaborate precautions took him half an hour and many trials. Eventually he had the letter open, and the contents, a sheet of paper, revealed. He turned the paper cautiously. It was both blank and harmless. A rather grim little comedy...who was it said that the root of laughter is effort confronting a void? But the intention of the letter was clear enough. To point out to Foster that his whereabouts were known. But to whom? Obviously to whatever forces Judd and Prince represented. It was a sinister enough reminder, but in some ways liberating: it was now no longer necessary to keep under cover, and more important than ever that he deal with the envelope in the safety-deposit box. Hastily Julia packed an overnight bag. It was still early morning. The street outside lay empty, the shadows long across it, the air crisp. Julia started the car and drove to two bank machines where, using her bank card, she was able to draw out \$400 in cash. There was little traffic on the road and none, so far as they could tell, on their trail. They drove, then, across the Oak Street Bridge onto the highway to Seattle. As they drove south Julia's nerve seemed to come back to her. The episode with the envelope,

the obvious game whoever was after Foster was playing, had caused her an hour's near panic. But as they drove for the bridge and observed that no-one seemed to be following them, she recovered her spirits somewhat and the brisk, heel-clicking efficiency began to sink back into relaxed condition. Foster could admire now the curve of the tanned legs as her foot pressed the accelerator of the small car, the shape of her hip moving under the thin beige cloth of her skirt. Without thinking of anything very much he placed his hand on the hip and stroked her gently. She gave a contented sigh and turned her head briefly toward him saying:

What shall we do?

Drive to Seattle—find a place to stay.

I notice with what care you avoided using the word "motel."

A word I hate.

I hate the thing itself.

A contented silence fell between them. Then Foster said:

I think that episode proves one thing—Judd and Prince are not police. Police wouldn't have acted like that.

I'm inclined to agree. Coupled with the fact that they need you to go to the bank with them. The police could have forced the issue. But if they aren't police who are they?

Foster shook his head. Perhaps the people to whom the envelope was supposed to be delivered...yet Prince had mentioned his own courier...intercepted...

The sooner we get rid of this envelope, he said, the better.

Now, the open ranchland before him, waiting for some sign of Rains, a scenario played itself through his mind: the door to the big adobe building opens: it is a heavy wooden door made of two huge seven-foot-high slabs of oak embossed with oaken designs: systems of triangles interlaced; in one door is a Judas window. It opens a moment after he pulls the brass handle that activates the deep-toned gongs inside. Rains is at the door, invites him in. The blond man stands beside Rains' desk as

adjunct and presider over the transaction. The walls are adobe, heavily white-washed, decorated with large, Navajo tapestries—elongated line figures of men and women carrying sheaves, birds, flowers, symbolic of fertility and growth. Another Navajo weaving—a rug—lies between Foster and the two men, one standing, the other seated at the desk.

Half down, Foster says, half when the envelope's delivered.

Seven thousand five hundred dollars, Rains says. (The sum is insignificant to a man like this.) I haven't the cash, Mr. Foster, but I can get it from the bank in Abiquui within a couple of hours. So make yourself comfortable. I'm glad you've decided to bring the envelope back to me. Much the best course of action. Sally will be down in a minute—she's a perfectly free agent, as you know, and we aren't much more than business partners.

The scene cuts to Sally, her dark head cradled in Foster's arms. She is crying softly. He whispers words of love and comfort. She gazes at him—he sees again her brown, gentle eyes, the soft skin, the wide mouth shaped like a bow. She and Julia—how fortunate he had been in women!

Then she is standing with her suitcase packed in the white, heavily beamed living-room, shaking Rains by the hand. Their parting is civilized and jovial. The money makes a fat wad in Foster's jacket pocket. This and the other wad to come will set him up, now, for the rest of his life. Fifteen thousand dollars! Less what he owed Julia! What a windfall! Well, now there are no excuses. Then Julia comes down to New Mexico with the coded message in the envelope...to Santa Fe...he could see her now in the Inn at Loretto...cool, brisk and lovely. She and Sally embrace. He takes Julia by the hand. He

...

Foster sighed. There was a problem here. Either/or. Because he couldn't have both. He most certainly couldn't have both. Perhaps he was right when he told Julia that all he wanted from Sally now was a sense of closure. Why would she want him? He had pushed her away, shoved her into the arms

of other men by his own stupid behaviour...refused to acknowledge her uniqueness, her preciousness. Why should she love him, or even want any more to do with him?

Either/or...what was it people said to one another at EST training seminars? *Get real with me, man.* So...get real.

The bell rings, somewhere deep within the house. On the right-hand door is a barred Judas window closed by an iron gate. Foster hears a footfall in the long, tiled hall of the adobe building. The Judas window opens and a face appears. It is still, expressionless, and it belongs to the magnate's blond helper, secretary, hit-man, whatever he was. Without a word said, the heavy door leans inward on silent hinges. The blond man, shortish, slender, rather graceful in appearance, manner and movement, beckons him to follow. The hall is wide, tiled, and a thin but priceless Navajo rug extending the length of the hall muffles their footsteps. At the hall's end is a T-junction of narrow hallways, and the blond man turns to the left—a route that brings them to a closed oak door, manifestly of the same materials as the front doors, but less massive. All the doors here are embossed with the same design, a system of triangles fitted and slotted together to form a pentangle, an emblem, Foster recollected, of health and wholeness—also of the five senses, the five letters of the name Jesus, the five wounds of Christ—an alchemical symbol of dubious origins ...

Wait here, please, the blond man says, hesitating just slightly on the word "please."

There is a bench like a short church pew padded with a long, finely embroidered cushion. Foster sits and waits, patiently. The house echoes and creaks.

But there is no threat here, only a feeling of peace, of a day well spent. The door opens. Sally emerges, the afternoon sun behind her shining through a great window in the room overlooking the river. The glow bestows on her the air of something almost divine, not a goddess, Sally doesn't possess that sort of grandeur—she is a woman associated with the elfin, the

numinous. He stands, the sight of her, her splendour makes him gasp. Slowly she walks forward and takes him in her arms

...

Rains sits behind his desk. The blond man stands slightly behind him. Rains is a big man with not much hair on a high-domed, large, intelligent head. Behind horn-rimmed glasses his eyes are blue and piercing. His face is square and massive and his neck fleshy and prominent as to Adam's apple. His shoulders are broad and athletic looking—a fine specimen, though clearly close to 60 years of age. Foster can understand his power over Sally and he resolves to diminish it.

Well, Mr. Foster? Rains says. What have you got to say to me?

Let her go, Foster said. Let her go and you'll get the envelope.

May I remind you, Mr. Foster, that you are scarcely in a position to bargain.

You have the envelope, it's true, but I have both you and her.

Let her go, Foster repeats. Or I shall have that envelope destroyed.

Rains stares at him—baffled.

The blond man smiles. Leave it to me, Mr. Rains, he says. I'll deal with it. A revolver suddenly appears in his hand. Stand up, he orders. Put your hands above your head.

With great reluctance Foster pushes himself from the chair. He reaches upward...reach for the sky. A small, self-satisfied smirk plays on the blond man's lips. Rains stands up.

I'll leave it to you, Olaf. You'll know what to do.

An explosion, sharp and bitter as a whiplash, by Foster's right hand. The blond man reels and shouts in pain. He holds his arm, blood runs between his fingers and drips onto the rug. His revolver lies on the floor. He winces and gropes with his hand to find a pressure point in his arm.

Sally stands by Foster's side, a blue-black shining automatic pistol in her hand. With a gesture she moves Foster

behind her and, together, they back out through the door...

Foster stirred restlessly. The afternoon was growing late. A squadron of large blue-black flies buzzed around his head and floated with a lazy ease away from his flapping hand only to return again. The day was peaceful, the landscape gorgeous beyond belief, but he knew he was wasting his time. He stood, stretched himself. There were good places to eat in Santa Fe, though Foster, so used to penury, did not yet feel he was affluent enough to enjoy them. A hamburger picked up at that greasy spoon in Espanola, or a bowl of chili, the staple diet of the region, would have to quell his hunger.

Not only had Julia given him money, in exchange for a cheque on his account written out on half a sheet of paper, she had booked them into a room in a hotel in downtown Seattle. Here they could relax: Foster was absolutely certain, this time, that he was unobserved. Yet the early afternoon was too hot and Foster's experience of being cooped up too recent for them to make straight for one of the large double beds in the spacious rose-and-cream-coloured room.

They had walked in the deserted downtown core, then to the grounds around the space needle. The city seemed empty. They ate supper at a quiet French restaurant near the University, and walked, hand in hand, up and down University Avenue until, the evening cool and peaceful, they thought it time to drive to the hotel where their idyll recommenced.

On Monday Julia bought on her charge card a ticket to Albuquerque, then drove him to the airport. Here they parted with some sadness mingled with excitement. Julia would wait another day or two, get the envelope—and, if successful, join Foster in Santa Fe. Foster reached Albuquerque in the late afternoon and picked up the rented car that Julia had also, by grace of plastic money, arranged for him—an advance against profit, the whole account eventually to be paid for by Sidney Rains.

Monday evening; Foster drove into Santa Fe.

For some miles the land, a great plateau covered with beige ground grasses and dark green clumps of juniper shrub and piñon pines, had tilted upward toward the two ranges of mountains, east and west of the highway. The road into Santa Fe leaves the highway as the latter turns east on its ascent to the pass through the Sangre de Cristo mountains. The air was cool here, and thin, and a sign by the road gave an altitude figure of over seven thousand feet. The city itself seemed hardly to exist, for there were no tall buildings and the adobe structures seemed to crouch close to the brown earth. The status symbol here, he discovered, is to live in a low unpretentious building accessible only by dirt road. It would be behind those brown mud walls, and within the patios that the Indian, Spanish, local crafts would be conspicuously consumed.

Foster found a small, cheap motel on the edge of the downtown core.

In the town centre, a dusty, almost deserted (but for a quartet of huge American cars built low to the ground driven by four groups of dark-skinned men and women by means of tiny steering-wheels formed from welded chains) Foster found a place to eat a late supper. Chili here meant a bowl of thick, pungent red sauce the purist takes neat, though you could add beans and meat on request. He had already begun to feel an alien in a non-American culture, though reason told him this was nonsense: this *was* America—as it probably was before the Eastern, anglo ascendancy had spread over it. In fact he *was* the alien. A sense of his isolation and rootlessness came upon him. He thought with longing of his nights with Julia Reynolds and keenly his own isolation. Sally was probably near, perhaps as close as right here in the town. But there lay even greater problems than the business of negotiating with Rains. He walked disconsolately round the Plaza after this fiery meal through poorly lit, archaic and narrow streets suggestive of Old Mexico rather than some thriving modern American state filled with rapacious developers and downtown renovators.

Greed, here, was clearly controlled and disguised to take other forms than he had been used to. Miles to the west an array of peaks he had noticed earlier now seemed to harbour distant, flickering lightning. Feeling somewhat at a loss, Foster decided to go to bed and rise early. There was much to be done: finding a land registry, locating Tres Ovejas, approaching the place with caution, confronting Rains and, if all went well, Sally.

The early morning lay fine and vibrant. Foster ran in the cold air around the low, unpretentious government buildings, into the central plaza. There was no traffic, a small group of Indians chatted in one corner of a long, covered arcade. Later they would arrange turquoise necklaces, gold and silver bangles, bracelets, rings, together with placards advertising Visa and Mastercard on mats and sit beside them, blanketed, waiting for the first tourists—the fat, loud Texans, the retired Easterners in Bermuda shorts and baseball hats, the thin, with-it college instructors from California swathed in halos of neurosis almost visible—to emerge from the coffee shops and breakfast nooks of the hotels. Foster ran along the north side of the plaza, then across a small river, dry now in high summer, along a little shaded street called Acequia Madre, which led eventually to a road irresistibly named Old Santa Fe Trail. He ran along this, past secret, expensively built adobe residences, as the road tilted uphill toward the museums on the outskirts of town. The road turned at the foot of the hill and he followed another path down again to town. The thin atmosphere was hard on his lungs and he felt breathless and exhausted by the time he got back to the motel. But from the highest point on his route an immense vista opened up; the peaks of the mountains to the east, their foothills covered with dark pines, were tipped with the gold of the rising sun. By Albuquerque, 60 miles to the south, another great peak stood out of the plain across which Foster could see the two straps of freeway. Northward and eastward the Sangre de Cristos formed a sawtooth

frieze in the cloudless blue sky. Tired, but confident, Foster showered and dressed. He walked back into the Plaza and ordered in the same café a plate of huevo rancheros. Traffic had started up and already the sun had grown quite hot. Hot sun, cool air. He had remembered to open his car windows against the heat. He drove slowly, for there seemed all the time in the world, on the highway north. Just out of Santa Fe the road rises then drops slowly into the desert country, the lower-lying valley of the Rio Grande. At Espanola an iron bridge takes the highway over the turbulent, wide and muddy river and winds its way to the north. Nearer Abiquui the landscape changed again into the wide, lovely rift valley of the day before.

The huge doors of the adobe house stood tightly locked with new, sparkling brass locks and bolts as on the other day. Foster again walked round the house. It was large, built according to local idiom in the shape of a hollow square. Through windows he could glimpse the densely foliated garden, cactus, great spear-leaved fleshy agave plants and fruit trees, a lilac, its blossom time long over, even at this altitude. A dirt path ran round the house from the drive and, immediately behind, a wider track led toward the hills. About 50 yards from the front entrance a small adobe structure housed a garage inside which was a newish, red pickup truck. There was no-one in sight, nor had anybody responded to Foster's rings on the bell. Again he was conscious of a silence so obtrusive as to be like a form of music. There was a feeling that this place was eternal, that time was irrelevant, that his activity was paltry and absurd. What mattered was the existence of this planet with its huge empty spaces, seas, its sun, its blue sky and silent air wheeling through space...deserts of vast eternity...the thought was not distressing...a feeling of great peace descended on him. He could wait here forever, whether Rains appeared or not, and yet not feel as if he were waiting. Pure, naked, blissful existence...at one with the brown earth, the slowly turning stars, the hot sun and the bright rarefied

air.

As Foster began another tour of the house he heard a clatter of a car's wheels crossing the cattle grid perhaps a quarter of a mile off. He ducked into a group of boulders, the starting point of a low, single-strand wire fence, electrified, that corralled off maybe two acres of barren field, now deserted. A long, expensive-looking car drove up. Foster was conscious that his own rented car was parked along the road where it would, depending on the direction this new car had taken, be visible and, on this deserted road, an object of legitimate enquiry. At any rate, he was safe behind these boulders.

The car drew up at the front porch and Foster could see that it was driven by a woman. She opened the door and climbed out delicately with a flash of leg beneath a short white skirt. She was dark, raven haired, with a profile like a Hindu goddess. Foster had seen her before—with Rains at the Hotel Vancouver. She opened a rear door of the car and Rains climbed out. He smiled and looked around. He spoke a few words and the dark woman nodded. Rains was dressed informally in grey trousers and a soft cotton shirt over which was a light golfing jacket, unnecessary in the heat of this mid-morning. He was a big, athletic man with a formidable expression. He looked like a high-echelon corporation lawyer, an oil magnate, or the power-broker of a political party. He muttered something and laughed: the woman chattered something back then together they walked inside the house.

This was as good a time as any, Foster considered. Before Rains had a chance to settle, before the house filled with underlings. Yet there was no sign of Sally. Now would be the time to approach Rains. Julia would have the envelope by now. He would call her, as arranged, this afternoon. After his interview with Rains. Set it up and tell him to wait. The time passed. Some insect ticked lazily in a clump of chamisa near Foster's shoulder. The sound was slightly hypnotic. Nobody else in sight. Just Rains and the woman. Now was the time. Foster rose, his legs feeling rather stiff, and boldly walked

across the parched earth to the shaded portico.

Before him stood the two high doors with their designs carved in an intaglio of interlaced triangles. A Judas window was let into the right-hand door, covered by an ironwork grill, as indeed were all the windows in this house. A brass handle on the left-hand side of the door emerged from the adobe wall. A small enamelled sign read "Please Ring." Foster, conscious that what he was about to do would profoundly affect his future, pulled the handle. Chimes echoed distantly within the house. There was a long silence.

Then a small metallic click. The Judas window opened and Foster could see, deeply shadowed, the eye and cheekbone of a face, though whether male or female he could not tell. There was a long pause. Then the door opened. The blond man, Rains' assistant from the hotel, stood before him. He was short and slight, and gave the impression of hardness and athleticism. His face was high-boned and delicate, almost the face of a girl, until you noticed the coldness of the blue eyes and a grim, rather humourless tight-lipped mouth. Yet the man suddenly smiled and the face changed: it was instantly softened, it became amused and delighted. The smile turned him from a slightly reptilian figure into something elfin and playful.

Good-day, the blond man said. Can I help you?

Foster was puzzled. The house had seemed deserted before; and only Rains and the woman had driven up. Then he remembered the pickup truck and the path leading toward the mountains.

I've come, he said, to talk to Mr. Rains.

Ah yes, Mr. Rains is here today. Why don't you come in?

The blond man took a half step backward and gestured amply with his right hand—a sweeping hospitable gesture. Foster nodded and stepped inside the hallway.

We've met before, of course, the blond man said. In Vancouver, no?

His English was excellent but there was a trace of difficulty

in the w sound, which he achieved by making a Dickensian compromise between w and v, so that "who" and "we" became *wuy* and *wue*—the faintest trace of a lisp.

Yes, at the hotel.

The blond man led the way down the long, wide hallway. The walls were of thickly applied plaster, bone-white, and decorated, here and there, with long Navajo tapestries. An Indian rug, thick and brilliant in colour and designed with a system of triangles interwoven with one another like the patterns on the door, lay underfoot. The floor itself was of red tile and led straight into a T-junction—two smaller corridors that stretched round the patio. The corridor ended in a huge window through which the luxuriant garden of oleanders and succulents spread vividly beneath the warm sun. The corridors were glazed on one side, all the way round. The blond man turned to the left and knocked on the first door to the left. A voice shouted "come in." The blond man threw open the door and gave a slight ironic bow.

The room was a little smaller than Foster had imagined. It was lined along one wall with bookshelves, on the other with etchings which, at quick glance, seemed to have as their subject historical views of Santa Fe, Taos and the immediate vicinity. The floor was made of wood, not of tile, and the boards were broad, roughly cut, wormholed and polished to a lustrous dark brown. The large Indian rug extended almost from the door to Rains' desk.

Rains sat, big, energetic and rather menacing, staring at Foster as if the latter were exhibiting some rare and disgusting skin disease. The dark, beautiful woman—secretary, perhaps—stood by his side. Her face wore an expression of some anxiety. Foster experienced a feeling of envy—for this man's power and wealth and possession of beautiful women—the bleak Freudian trinity.

You're Foster, Rains said. It was more of a statement than a question. Sally would have told him.

And your name is Rains. Foster refused to be intimidated.

Rains gestured at the chair in front of his desk. The blond man stepped forward and nodded at the dark woman. She nodded back and slipped away, past Foster, through the door. The door closed behind her.

Now Mr. Foster, Rains said, let's get down to business. You have something that doesn't belong to you.

Nor does it belong to you, Foster said.

Through a variety of circumstances, Rains said as if Foster had made no remark at all, which I deplore, an envelope intended for another party is in your possession. Do you have it with you?

No. Foster almost sneered the monosyllable. He had grown to dislike intensely this powerful, confident man. It was going to be a pleasure to hold the whip hand over him.

Then where is it?

I have it, Mr. Rains, that's all that needs saying, and I propose to get it to you as soon as possible.

An inscrutable flicker of Rains' head toward the blond man was slightly disconcerting.

Under what conditions? Rains said.

First, I want to see my wife. Where is she?

Your request is impossible to grant, Mr. Foster. Sally isn't here.

Then where is she?

At present, in Albuquerque. I cannot get her back here merely for your benefit. You'll have to make arrangements with her directly. She is staying at a hotel there... Wolf, will give you the details. Next?

So the blond man's name was Wolf... Next I want fifteen thousand dollars—in cash.

Again he noticed a gesture, a minute element of communication between Wolf and Rains...there was a feeling that these men were amused...amused at his expense.

And I want half of it now, Foster continued, and half when I deliver the envelope.

I see. Fifteen thousand dollars...well, it doesn't seem so

very much. Have you any conception of what's inside that envelope, Mr. Foster?

Yes.

I don't think you do. You'd ask for very much more than fifteen thousand dollars. However, I don't really see why I should pay you anything. I'll give you twelve hours, Foster, twelve hours to make your arrangements to deliver me that envelope peaceably. If at the end of that period you've not produced it, I shall have you dealt with.

Foster stood up. This man's arrogance, his impertinence, were intolerable.

For a second he became for Foster the archetype of those in power, those who could deny him, those who could, by shifting figures and names on a slip of paper, demolish his career. A joyous rage surged through him.

Listen, Rains, he said, if you want that envelope you'll pay me what I ask in the way I've suggested. Now go and get the first half of it—I'll give you four hours to produce the money. During that time I shall go back to Santa Fe. Since a hotel is where we first met, you can hand me the money in the lobby of another. The Inn at Loretto, Santa Fe, at three o'clock this afternoon.

Rains smiled tightly.

You're a fool, he said. I could turn you over very easily to the people that envelope was intended for. You'd get short shrift from them, I can tell you. You have twelve hours...and you'll spend them in this house.

The interview was not at all going the way Foster had visualized.

Nevertheless he said as forcefully as he could:

Produce the money, Rains, just produce the money.

As he spoke, though, he was aware that someone had entered the room, was standing behind him. He started to turn. He had a confused, rapid impression of a thin, gaunt face, of brown ferocious eyes, then the blond man was on him like a cat, leaping from Rains' side. Foster turned back and

swung a fist toward him but the man behind had caught his other arm and brought it up toward his shoulderblades with an agonizing jerk. Wolf pulled something from his pocket—a short, fat, heavy-looking rod covered in leather, raised it high, and brought it down with a terrible, cracking impact on Foster's unprotected skull.

There was a jagged flash of light, an instant of searing pain, then blackness.

Slowly, over eons of time, through black, imploded inner spaces, a flickering consciousness returned to Foster. At first when he opened his eyes and the light was still in the sky outside, he could see the dim walls of a heavily shuttered room, bare of furniture. He was lying on the ground with his wrists bound expertly behind his back, and his ankles tied tightly together with electrical wire. The light splintered into shards and pain, more excruciating than he had ever known, permeated his whole body so that the slight movement he made caused him once again to pass out.

The second time the room was in total darkness and he was confused and afraid—afraid that his sight had gone, that the agony in his head and down one side of his body was permanent, that some dreadful and irreversible damage had been done to him and that, even if he were to survive this, he would be in the world in a totally different way: crippled, tortured, utterly dependent on the goodwill of others. Then a knife blade of yellow appeared suddenly at the level of his face and an incalculable distance away. It lay there, a vertical yellow rod, unwaveringly, like a sodium band on a star spectrum—remote and meaningless. As his eyes got used to it, though, its radiance seemed less intense and he could distinguish that its glow illuminated a sort of vertical, narrow aperture. He could see, by piecing this together, that the configuration was that of the space beneath a door, that he was lying on the floor with his cheek pressed against cold tiles. The recognition caused him to stir slightly, but the pain surged violently back. The

door opened suddenly, blindingly, and the blond man was gazing at him.

Jack, he shouted in his slightly foreign English that caused him to make an effort over the J so that the syllable bordered on the sound yack. Tell Mr. Rains he's come to.

There was a distant acknowledgement. Wolf walked across to him and gently lifted Foster's chin. The pain in his head and down one side of it almost to his shoulder almost made him shout aloud.

Tender, hey? the blond man said. Vell... Vwell (he made a strong effort) I should not *worry* about it if I were you. We will either kill you or cure you, depending on what Mr. Rains decides. Meanwhile I think ve have some brandy.

Another man entered the room, tall and stoop shouldered, with a long, gaunt, weatherbeaten face, and a Stetson hat—a figure not unexpected in this part of the country. The blond man said:

Bring us some brandy, will you Jack?

Where the fuck from?

Across the hall, you dummy, in the dining-room. There's a bottle in the side-board. There're some glasses there, bring those too. Where's Mr. Rains?

On the phone. He'll be here in a minute.

Wolf nodded and came back to Foster's side.

If you promise to behave yourself, Mr. Foster, I'll cut these vires.

Foster could barely nod. Each movement felt as if he were being sapped again and again. The blond man brought out of his pocket a pair of snips and neatly severed the wires. Wolf said:

Ler's get you in a chair. Shall ve? Can you sit up?

Almost tenderly, he stood behind Foster and, crouching, lifted him to his feet and eased him into a chair.

Yes, you're all in, I can see that. And if vun of us has to hit you again, my friend, it'll probably *do* for you. Then we *cannot* make a cure.

Jack returned with a tray on which a bottle of brandy jostled a set of four wine glasses. The blond man winced and said something about the wrong kind.

Well, I suppose it doesn't matter.

He took the bottle: Some for you, Jack?

Don't drink.

You surprise me. Mr. Rains still on the phone?

No, he's coming.

The blond man poured a stiff shot of brown liquor in the glass and handed it to Foster. Foster reached for it, but spilled half of it before getting the rest to his lips.

The brandy was wonderful: it raced through his veins and seemed to dilate him, like rain on parched soil.

More?

Foster attempted a nod. This time his hand was steady enough not to spill any of it, and his need diminished so that he did not drink it all at once. He felt his muscles dilate and his nerves calm down.

Rains entered, tall, rather flabby, but obviously capable of swift and certain motion...by no means a chair-borne financier, or mafia hood. This was a man in good physical condition who could move incisively on the balls of his feet. He faced Foster and nodded a greeting.

So Mr. Foster, you came to visit us.

Foster said nothing.

Why, may I ask?... You're not speaking? Or perhaps you can't? Is it Sally you're after?

Foster managed to croak out Where is she?

In Albuquerque. I told you that already. At the Statler Hotel. I see no point in your being here, Mr. Foster. She doesn't want you any more. Can't you understand that? She's dumped you.

Foster said nothing. Rains stared at him with some curiosity. He allowed a silence to fall. Then he said:

I told you already you were very stupid to come here if your intention was to sell me back that envelope. For a while I

thought we might, indeed, have needed you to reclaim it. But we didn't. My agents got it back.

So much for the safety-deposit box, his plans of windfall money, and so much for Julia.

What have you done with her?

Miss Reynolds? Safe enough, now, don't worry, though we were all concerned about her for a while.

Now there really was nothing...Sally, no longer his, and no claim to her...Rain's ugly word...dumped...Julia, obviously unable to keep Rains' forces, whatever these were, off her track. And Terry... Rains said: The question is, Mr. Foster, what are we to do with you?

The question was entirely rhetorical. For a moment there was again a complete silence. The blond man stared at Foster with some interest—a professional executioner not totally unsympathetic to the condemned man's state of mind. The cowboy in the Stetson chewed some cud of his own, his eyes thoughtfully fixed on Foster's feet. Rains took a chair stacked against the wall, swivelled it slightly and sat facing Foster. He said:

I'd offer you money to leave me alone, but I don't think that would do any good. I'd give you five, ten thousand dollars, and I'd have no guarantee you'd not be back. In any case, you know too much about us.

If I might make a suggestion, Mr. Rains, the blond man said, we could give him a job.

Doing what?

I don't know...anything...we could use a courier.

One like this? Sally's ex-husband? He's got no cause to love us.

Then frame him for Terry Mason's death.

Foster started. So Terry was dead...killed, probably, by this sly, blond psychotic.

Rains glanced at him, then back at Wolf, his face twisted into an expression of wry dismissal. Wolf, he said. I'm afraid you're not using your head. He can't fail to involve us. It's by

no means certain they've killed Mason, number one. Number two, if they *have* then no-one will ever know, least of all, the police. And though the police aren't going to believe him, he could still make things very difficult, given the Canadian political situation. Mr. Foster, what about you? Do *you* have any suggestions?

This was absurd. It was like being interviewed by the Volunteer Service Supervisor at a hospital, being gently asked where he could fit into their organization. He knew that Rains was merely going through some formula and that nothing he could say would save him.

No? Well, it's a difficult situation, I'm afraid. I've no alternative but to get rid of you.

Rains stood briskly, a man whose executival grasp of fundamentals and unafraid decision-making had put him at the top of his profession. See to it, Wolf, will you?

He started out of the room, making a shrug and raising his eyebrows at Foster as if to say, *There's no job available in this firm.*

Wolf, said: Anything special?

Rains thought for a moment. No bullet wounds, no marks of strangulation. We need the body to be found—I don't like the idea of open files. Take him to Steamboat Rock and throw him off the cliff. You can sap him again if he resists. There's a backpack in the basement. Put that on him...make it look as if he missed his footing on the hiking trail above the gorge. He nodded at Foster. See to it right away, will you Wolf? I'll need you back in an hour or so to drive me to Santa Fe.

Rains was gone. A blind fury seized Foster: that he should be beaten by these thugs and coolly dismissed, his execution planned so casually and his life dismissed as if he were some vermin to be dispatched by a farmer...at least he would take somebody with him. He staggered up from his chair and caught it by the back and tried to lift it. A great gush of pain sprang to life, he winced and toppled and would have fallen had not the man in the Stetson leaped forward and caught him by the arm, turning so that Foster's forearm was twisted ago-

nizingly behind him. He gasped and cried out.

Hit him, Wolf, Jack muttered. Clobber the son of a bitch with your sap.

Wolf walked over without any show of panic and caught Foster's other arm.

No need, he said. Easier to get him in the car if he's still walking.

Are you kidding? Tie him up, sap him, shove him in the pickup.

Pickup's got a flat. We'll have to take the Chrysler. Walk him...come on, Mr. Foster...walk.

They dragged him across the floor. Foster's feet moved automatically, for he was barely conscious. Nausea spread through his body like a poison. He gagged as they took him through the door and began to retch. They leaned him over, still holding his arms in a painful grip, and let him vomit.

Christ, the man in the Stetson said. He's throwing up blood.

Let's get him out of here, Wolf said. Before he dies on us.

Foster could feel his feet, barely functioning, kicking feebly at the floor as they dragged him through into the huge living-room, past a fireplace in which the logs had burned low to faintly flickering embers, into the hallway then out through the front doors. The wave of nausea passed and had left him with somewhat more strength, though his head pounded steadily and painfully. Wolf locked both Foster's arms while the man in the Stetson unhurriedly opened the car doors on the driveway outside. They might have been two farmers leaving a party with a drunken friend. Without ceremony the blond man bundled Foster into the back seat while the other clambered into the driver's seat. Foster sank into the cushions with a groan of relief and let his head loll against the back of the seat.

That's it, Mr. Foster, make yourself comfortable. We won't be very much longer.

They began to cruise slowly down the drive; the night

seemed very dark, yet clear and dotted with flying insects as big as locusts, or so it seemed, darting in the shaft of light with which the car penetrated the darkness. At the end of the driveway Stetson got out briefly to unlock the gate. The ride was easy and very soothing. Foster felt his strength begin to flow back into his body. It would not do, and he knew this without really thinking about it, to appear anything more than half-conscious. The blond man beside him was alert and ready to deal with any resistance. The car was now travelling at a good speed along the highway. Foster could not see what direction they'd taken though soon the road began to wind its way around outcrops of rock and small buttes. At one point he could hear the soft murmur of a lower gear engaged automatically as they rounded a long upward and curving stretch of road. They must have topped a small pass, for the road began to descend in a series of shallow hairpin bends, Foster could feel his body swaying against the movement of the car, and at one point the blond man was thrown against him, jolting his upper torso and causing a savage burst of pain to explode in his head. A groan escaped from him.

Slow up on these bends, the blond man said.

Almost done, Stetson replied. Steamboat Rock ahead.

Then pull off the road just in front of it.

The headlights revealed a massive wall ahead of them, crevassed deeply and flat at the top. The lights dipped and swung and there was a crunching of gravel as the car pulled off the road and bumped to a halt.

Still with us, Mr. Foster? the blond man said. Then let's all get out.

End of the road, buddy, Stetson said.

Shut up. Come on Mr. Foster.

Foster uttered a confused groan and stayed still. The blond man reached back into the car and grabbed Foster's arm. He pulled it strongly and steadily and dragged Foster across the seat.

Help me, Jack. He's unconscious and weighs a *ton*.

Here's the packsack. Aren't we going to put it on him?

I damned near forgot. Okay, but let's get him out first.

Foster groaned again and let the two of them pull him horizontally out of the car. Jack swung a small dark object made of nylon with webbing straps across Foster's back and pulled at one of Foster's arms in an effort to put it on him. Just at that moment there was a flash of light in the sky behind them and in the direction from which they'd come. A car rounded a corner and its lights swept across the chord of road casting a triad of vast man-shadows on the rockface.

Down! the blond man hissed, unnecessarily dropping his voice.

With one last effort Foster rolled over onto his side and got to his feet. His hands clawed into the air and he ran, limping and staggering back onto the road. Frantically he waved his arms at the fast approaching car. As if paralyzed, his two captors lay flat. The car's beam swept over them and bathed Foster's wild, frantic figure in a full light. The car swerved to avoid him and accelerated past and almost instantly the two men were on their feet. But Foster had started off across the patch of gravel away from the road and away from the two men, now on their feet, temporarily confused by the sudden darkness, but racing after him. A desperate, final rush of adrenalin enabled Foster to dart down a trail leading along a cliff-top he was just able to see. The trail snaked, became broken; he heard the men's footsteps loud and scrabbling behind him, Jack muttering oaths. A flashlight sputtered and its faint light danced on a line of boulders to his right. The path broke into two, one toward the road, the other clearly hairpinning off downward, steeply, to the cliff. Foster turned, started down this new track, slipped, recovered, scattered a tiny avalanche of stones, slipped again, this time to the right. His feet left the ground, but his shoulder smashed into it. The ground seemed to toss him like a trampoline, for his body, accelerating, seemed to thrust vertically into space. He shouted, reached out with his hands, found nothing, struck the ground again

with an enormous, life-consuming crash, slid down a steep slope where his grasping hands fought against sharp rock face, sand and a patch of scrub, his fingers snatched at it, caught its exposed roots, but his momentum was too great and the plant tore from the soil. Sliding, bumping, Foster desperately let go of the roots, swung his arms out mechanically but successfully for, beyond belief, his hands caught something, a spike of rock, and his sliding fall came to an end. He saw the flashlight above him and heard someone shout. He held on, tighter and tighter, aware that the sudden accession of strength that had brought him this far was fast going. Then the light was on him, and a voice shouted, not far above him: There he is, the son of a bitch, stuck just down there.

Somebody farther up the cliff top shouted an incomprehensible word or two.

I think he's alive, the near one yelled. I saw him.

There was a scrabble of loose rock above him and a pebble buzzed past his ear.

Goddam him anyway, the man just above him muttered. Wolf, he shouted, Wolf throw a rock or two at the son of a bitch...I can't do that and hold the flashlight on him at the same time.

Foster's feet scuffled desperately at the cliff face below him. His feet slipped on a greasy patch of shale, then found a toe-hold in a small crack. He felt the wind of a large rock pass him and crash on the cliff six feet below him. The spike he was grasping jutted out a couple of feet or so. Another stone brushed air against his face as he released his right hand and wedged his knuckles into a small vertical fissure. A third big stone bounced noisily above him and smashed into his left arm, glancing off it down the cliff. The force of the blow made Foster gasp and release his hold on the spike...for a fraction of a second he swung out as his arm dropped, but both footholds were secure and the right fist wedged tightly. He found a tiny ledge for his left hand to grab onto and ducked his head under the spike out of danger for the time being. The flashlight's

beam danced around him.

We get him? The topmost man asked. He'd obviously found his way down the cliff a little way: Foster could hear them both, now, quite plainly.

No. He's trying to climb down.

Christ, man, what are we going to do? No way I'm going down there.

Hold the light, then, I'm going after him.

In those shoes? You're crazy...

Foster looked down...the cliff stretched almost vertically into blackness, though further to his right he could see, a long way down, a patch of steely water glinting in the starlight. This cliff overhung a lake, then, or a big river. Foster unclenched his right fist and felt the vertical fissure. It was long, leading past his knee. He dropped his right hand and clenched it again. His left arm throbbed painfully, but the fingers of his left hand seemed to be functioning well. He let go of his handhold and let his hand wander and creep downward until it found a vertical flake of rock about an inch high. It felt astonishingly secure. Foster let his right foot off its ledge and kicked it across gently to the continuation of the fissure.

He felt it with his toe, wedged the toe in the crack, and brought his left foot loose in search of a hold. So far he had made no sound. Again the flashlight began to jig and flutter nervously across the cliff face, but he was still in the spike's shadow. The crack seemed to extend downward quite a long way. Foster reached his left hand into it and made a fist, then his left toe. He had brought himself into the same kind of position in which one climbs or descends a flagpole, except that his hands and feet were pressed into the cliff face. Hand over hand, foot over foot, Foster began to descend. The fissure twisted unnervingly to the right, became shallow, but turned vertical again. The face itself seemed to be getting less steep, for Foster could feel its pressure on his chest, pushing his body out of the vertical into a leaning-across position. He was 30 feet below the two men, now, one of whom seemed to have

reached the spike that had broken his fall. But this crack: it was as if in its formation the great rock face had bulged out just here, then some great hand, of earthquake or of frost, had split it in two. The crack itself was deep enough, but the bulge had begun to turn vertical again. Foster could feel through his pain and nausea the beginnings of a deeper exhaustion; his knuckles were skinned by the rough rock and beginning to go numb from the cold and tension.

The position was insanely exposed: he was lying pressed against this slab of rock only a few degrees out of the vertical, a slab that fell away beneath him into darkness: the crack in the rockface was the only way that he could stay attached to it.

Foster felt cautiously with his hands to the left and to the right, but the surface seemed smooth and greasy, like slate. Above him the two men cursed at one another and scrambled about clumsily trying to find a resting place where they could see him.

A rope, one of them called. Get back to the house and find a rope.

Then: No, no I'm okay here for now. Get back as quick as you can.

Foster crawled another foot, and then another. The strain on his hands and legs increased as the rockface seemed to turn back toward the vertical: as if he had come across the top of the bulge and was beginning to descend the other side of it. Another few inches; and then, as he turned his right foot in the crack and pressed it against the crack's lip, the movement met no resistance. A small flake of rock broke off, slid over the bulge, rattled, cracked against something, then vanished: there was a second or two pause, a thump, and a moment's silence, and a splash. Meanwhile Foster's right foot threshed about in empty space: the crack immediately below it had become an open wall.

There was now nothing more that Foster could do. His left leg trembled violently and involuntarily while his right foot explored the cliff face. There was an edge, slanting up to the

right and about an inch deep, that provided a hold for his right toe. This stopped the muscle tremor, but did not decrease the desperateness of his situation. He wondered how far the house was, and how long it would take the men above to get a rope. Perhaps half an hour. But what could they achieve with a rope? Well, for one thing one of them could belay and send the other down after him: a few kicks at his hands and he'd fly off the cliff and be dashed to pieces: he was at least, judging by the time it had taken the section of foothold to reach the bottom, a hundred feet up. He could continue climbing down. But the way the rock had fallen suggested that this bulge he was on ended in an overhang. Even if he could get farther down, he would eventually be defeated, there would be no hold on the underside of this rock, probably, and his feet would swing free, or he'd be leaning backward, over the precipice, for God only knew how far. His strength was going and he knew he had neither the climbing skills nor the courage to attack it. Another possibility was to climb back up and deal with the man who had stayed while his colleague had taken off back to the house. But what could he do against this man who would be on the lookout for him and would more than likely hear him long before he could get close? Foster could visualize a sort of mad scuffle on a tiny ledge ending, since his opponent was big and comparatively rested, with being thrown off. There was only one other possibility: to find an alternative way down.

During the last ten minutes, though, something had changed, something in the quality of the air, of the night itself. For one thing the rocks to his right had become silvery, he could even see a glittering line of quartz. A moon, an enormous moon low on the horizon, had come sailing up into the sky bathing its light across the huge plateau, illuminating now much of the wall that Foster lay clinging to, and idling about on the surface of the water. Foster looked beneath his feet and could now see the river, or lake, whatever it was, quite plainly. It was, in fact, a hundred feet below, and directly

below him was a small jutting piece of cliff. His foothold must have struck that, bounced, hit a bank below and slid into the water. The left side of the slab he was on was smooth as the surface of fine cloth, but to his right, it was rougher and, after about ten feet, it passed into deep shadow, as if some gully, or other line of weakness in the cliff, led more gently down to the water's brink. The problem, of course, was getting to it. Slowly he unclenched his right hand and reached out: the rockface under his touch was rough, and the moonlight enabled him to pick out dark streaks in the surface that may have been deeper indentations. His fingers curled over one of these indentations—perhaps an inch and a half deep. His right foot found another. In a moment, quite boldly, he had succeeded in extricating himself from the crack and had spreadeagled himself on the bare, nearly vertical, roughly pockmarked slab. There was nothing for it now but to crawl sideways across his slab as best he could. At the same time the moonlight had changed things for the man above him: he heard a scrabbling sound and looked up. Foster could see the man quite clearly, a dark shape moving about, perhaps 50 feet above him and to the left. Evidently he had a solid footing on a good ledge. Foster saw the flashlight dart again, but the man didn't need it. It was a question of a few seconds before the man would spot him. The broken line on Foster's right was indeed a sort of gully: a vertical stretch of broken and precipitous rocks and insecure-looking boulders: but it was black and full of ledges and shelves like an old water course. If he could reach it, Foster thought, he would be in comparative safety. The way down to the water would be easy.

At that moment, the man above caught sight of him. Whether it was Foster's last, crabwise movement that flickered at the corner of his vision, or perhaps it was the slight rustling sound that the climber made scraping across the surface of the rock. But he no longer needed the flashlight. He picked up a large stone and hurled it: it bounced two yards from Foster's head and lurched off into the gorge. Then another, below

him. He was an easy target and the holds on his right, toward the gully, seemed to be giving out: the slab was bounded on the right by a smooth arrete. A rock crashed by Foster's arm with what seemed like terrible force: his hand swung away, then, as his body began to topple, he grabbed at the cliff again and found a hold. His arm ached abominably...another rock hissed past him and grazed the bottom of the slab...another passed him, then another. He could no longer move to the right, in any case, his arm, badly bruised by the first stone, had gone numb. Below him crawled the glittering water—how far down? Foster knew the man above would eventually hit him: he himself could move neither up nor sideways. The slab below him ended in an abrupt overhang, he could see that. Exhausted now, his head hazy with pain, he made a sudden resolution that no enemy would cause his death; that he would be responsible for his own. For a brief moment a series of images crossed his mind; the sunlight playing on the water of English Bay...Sally and he in the Mozart Café...*kaffeedrincken*...Sally's face over his, her eyes wide open and her head shifting sideways and closing in to kiss his lips...the fall colours of the cottonwoods up toward Ashcroft in the Interior...poor Julia, poor Julia, and her final caress at the Seattle airport... All gone. In this moment he tasted the full sweetness of life and his anger at departing from it. He prepared himself to release his hold and let his body fall to wherever the cliff took it. Yet at that instant something strange happened to him. Words he had never consciously learned moved through him and uttered themselves through his clenched mouth. He heard them, felt them leave him and was astonished by them:

Into thy hands, O Lord, he heard himself say. Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

He pushed his toes away from the cliff, let his fingers uncurl and let go.

Foster came to under starlight, his body shivering as if someone had soaked a blanket in icy water and swathed him in it. There was a weight on him, and a sense of constriction. He was conscious of a great, abiding ache at the back of his head and a stiffness in his arms and legs; his ribcage and abdomen were racked in pain. He tried to move: a groan escaped him, and the night swirled and faded as he lost consciousness. When he recovered it again, the sky had paled and Foster could see his hands. They were dark and patchy with blood and they were clawed out in front of him as if grasping for something—though all that lay before him was a light patch of sand. He heard a strange hissing sound, but his mind could not decipher it. He moved again to try to bring his body out of the cold blanket, but the sky darkened again and the moon faded with it.

The third time, under the faint grey light of dawn, Foster discovered more about his condition. For one thing he could identify the hiss—he was on the bank of a wide, strongly flowing river. The water surface was silky—unbroken by rocks or sudden declivities it seemed to move *en masse* causing the rustling, hissing noise as it swept past its steep banks on the way to the sea. The other thing he learned was that his body, most of it, lay in this river; his arms and chest were spreadeagled on a sandbank that projected across the water for perhaps half a dozen feet. Foster's body sang with pain; he tried to haul himself up onto the sandbank by levering with his elbows and his knees, but the effort was too much and again he sank into a stupor. As the sun grew higher, some strength began to return to him and he succeeded in lifting his body onto the bank. He had grown numb with the coldness of the water but, very soon, the sun grew warm enough to dry him, then to make him feel positively uncomfortable. His coldness increased and so did the shivering, but he could feel himself sweat. There

was no shade on this sandbank; no tree, no shrub grew on the broken cliffs around him. This river was contained in a deep gorge with walls about two hundred feet high built of vast slabs and piles of rock between which the great river hissed gently. Shivering wildly, Foster sank his body into the water to cool his fever, then crawled out like a lungfish making its first painful steps upon the earth's surface. The sun grew closer and the sky whitened and became incandescent. The water evaporated from the torn clothes on Foster's back—he turned, shielding his eyes with his arms, and let the sun's furnace dry the rest of him. All that day and until the sun passed slowly behind the great wall of rock on the other side of the gorge Foster lay alternately damping himself and drying out in the sun. His fever lifted, descended, in a slow rhythm regular as breath, and in moments of clarity he could think somewhat beyond his immediate desire for shade and the shaking of his fevered body. He drank at the river a few times, the water tasting like iron. Gradually he was able to piece together what had happened to him. He remembered the two men dragging him out of the car, the headlights, Rains sitting facing him, a feeling of terror, of hatred—a gut wrenching hatred—against the lot of them—Rains, the blond man, the ferret-faced man in the Stetson hat. He wondered vaguely what had happened after he had run down the path, but of his clinging to the cliff face, his long fall into the river, he remembered very little.

There was no sign of his enemies, whoever they were. There was nothing but this river and its steep cliffs. Foster knew he was in no condition to try to climb them and there seemed no break in them as far as his eyes could see. The water itself was swift-flowing and dangerous-looking but there seemed no alternative but to trust himself to it. It had served him well before; it had broken his fall and carried him away some distance from the man who'd stoned him. He could recognize, in the light of day, nothing of the cliff upstream...how long the river had carried him, whether he had inadvertently crossed it

or not was impossible to tell. He was aware of some improvement, though, his fever...his arm ached horribly and seemed to throb on that side of his body. But was not, as far as he could tell, broken, for the fingers on his left hand functioned, though he did not know whether this was a sign of anything in particular. His head was painful, fuzzy and filled, it seemed, with cotton wool.

In the late part of the afternoon, a decision seemed to make itself for him. This time as he entered the water he pushed himself off the sandbank and let the strong, hissing current carry him. He kept close to the side which, after the sandbar, grew precipitous again: he was travelling at a slow walking pace here and could fend himself away from danger with his arms. In the centre of the stream he could see great loops and lazy circlings of water moving against the downstream flow, but there were no rapids nor foam: the river was very deep and the banks cut sharply here. Though he was carried by the river, Foster was aware of great tiredness and knew that soon he would have to find a resting place. At last the cliff gave way and receded away from the water's edge into a kind of bay. Here it was shallow again and there was a patch of dry sand perhaps ten feet long and a couple wide. Foster crawled out of the water and shivered; the air beneath the cliffs had grown quite cold—it was more than likely the little bay had been in shadow all day. Foster lay on the sand, exhausted, his fever coming back to him, for the better part of an hour. The sky grew darker blue, then turned to indigo as the sunset enflamed the sky. He must have slept in short periods, barely conscious of the changes in the sky or of the growing dusk. In a moment of brief consciousness, however, he saw that the little beach lay at the foot of a gigantic gully that, slanting backward, split the cliff above him—a deep trench between steep rock walls. It was a watercourse, though now completely dry, but the remarkable thing about it in this silent, empty desert was that a path, narrow and primitive, led through scree at the gully's base and took a direction upward into it, then

seemed to disappear among crags and boulders. It was clearly the way out, though Foster's strength had deserted him and he could not take it. He slept, on and off, through the deepening night, the blackness, the moon-rising, the bathing of the gorge in serene silver light, and back to darkness again.

He slept fitfully on this bed of sand and saw Prince's face many times; sneering and broken; he felt Judd forcing his arms behind his back; Julia, and the softness of her bed, her arms, the birdsong and that delectable two-day oasis in a terrible year. The word *locust* forced its way into his mind...*the locust years*...his time on the dole, waiting, looking toward his non-future, to Sally's absence, the years of his own stupidity and failure. Sally came to him in his dreams, slowly, a face full of love and desire for him, her black hair and her light blue eyes, but this image of peace was broken by nightmares and feverish half-visions.

In the early morning light, the sky grey as a dove's wing, Foster moved. He staggered to his feet, his head reeling. He walked slowly up the path through the screes and entered the gully, its cold dark depths probably no more than the height of a man wide. The path stopped being a path and became a series of steps, irregular and unpredictable; here they were perhaps three or four inches high, there perhaps as many feet. A healthy man could have climbed joyously up these, for the rock was firm and rough to the touch, and the line of weakness lead by leaps and bounds up the 200-foot walls of the canyon. It took Foster, with many rests, a good two hours. The sun was high when he reached the top, still distinguishable as a round disc...not yet a blinding glare in that quarter of the sky. But he had got to the top. He rolled over onto his stomach and let the sun warm his back. His breath was short and gasping and he knew that he would need to find help within a few hours, or he would fall and not recover.

But an hour later Foster felt no better. The sun was quite hot now, and his fever increasing. He knew that he must find

some shade. Perhaps, too, there was a road. If there was a path to the river there must be a road to the path. He stood, swaying, and looked before him.

As far as the eye could see, a great plain, faintly undulating, lay sprawled in the heat tawny as the pelt of a lion, dotted with dark green shrubs—junipers and dwarf trees—piñon pines—the soil was beige and sandy, and the ground cover very thin, consisting of small succulents of a number of kinds, chamisa and tumbleweed. On the horizon stood a range of mountains, dark green with patches of grey rock. Behind him, across the other rim of the canyon, the landscape was repeated without much variation save that the mountain range was a little closer and thus seemed higher. Up and down stream there was merely plateau except to the north; another range of mountains, very distant, broke the line of the horizon. Foster had never seen a place of such majestic emptiness: a vast country in which there was no road nor sign of human habitation nor any sound that did not originate inside the head of the observer, part of the utter desolation. There was life here though: against the blue of the sky something small floated high up and distant from Foster, about a mile: a hawk or buzzard—it made long, easy, calligrapher's loops in the sky, crossing and recrossing the same small area. The heat made Foster gasp: his arm burned with pain and he could hear the blood rushing through his arteries. Behind him was the river; thus if he were to face to his left, the north, he would be going back along the rim of the canyon in the direction of Steamboat Rock. Thus there *was* a road, though God knows how far and from whence it came and to where it lead. Perhaps back to Tres Ovejas and Sid Rains. Foster knew that he had to take the risk: or die here on this starved plateau.

He started off, with a walk that within ten minutes had become a stagger, in the direction of the hypothetical road. There was nothing else; the path down the cliff led only there, there were no wheeled tracks to it, it may have been a hiking trail, though how hikers got there was anybody's guess. Once

he lay down under one of the almost comically dwarf pine trees, but it cast hardly any shadow. Foster had long ceased to feel hungry, but now the heat, his own dehydration and fever, made him conscious of a terrifying thirst made more desperate by the knowledge that there was no water here. He dragged himself to his feet again, his head singing, and walked another hundred yards. Then, near another, slightly bigger tree, he fell on his face and lost consciousness.

The bird had crisscrossed the horizon now, and was getting closer. Turning in his delirium and opening his eyes he saw it, a great bird, much larger than he had imagined, and more brightly coloured. It was green in the body and its head was a reddish colour, its wing span was huge, and the wings seemed hardly to move at all. He could not see the front part of its head—it soared past him too quickly for that—its prey was obviously close at hand. But there was no doubt it would find him. He found that he was now muttering to himself, his tongue thick and dirty in his mouth; the bird had scared him, and forced him to keep moving. This time the effort to get on his feet was too much: he crawled forward on his hands and knees, his skin torn by cactus spines, his eyes close to the earth surface, glinting grains of sand, little quartz prisms, dazzling with light and fire, and thin brown clumps of grass, the bare patches of ground through them that looked like trails but were not. Lifting his head Foster saw the bird and knew, with a flash of terrified insight, that it wasn't a bird at all: it dove before him, straight into the ground and vanished without a trace: a second later it rose, lazily, and just a few degrees out of the horizontal: it was not a bird, no bird could have vanished into the earth like that and risen out of it: it was something beyond experience, some horrible phantom, a green-and-red demonic figure out of a nightmare with huge, nearly translucent wings of skin through which the skeletal digits could be seen; its head was leathery and red and a small black proboscis in its front bobbed and weaved showing a white underside. The body of the demon was viridian and as long as a man's, and

the tail, red as the wings, was short and bifurcated; the demon swerved, rose, hissing through the air like rushing water, turned again and dived toward him. Foster got to his feet and ran forward, the demon after him, then flying directly ahead of him as if to turn and face him, but again it rose as if borne aloft by air currents it couldn't quite control. It floated away and began to turn. Foster ran forward and almost lurched into a void: he found himself at the brink of a cliff perhaps 70 feet high. The lie of the land had obscured this cliff, for the country beyond was no different in colour-tone and vegetation from the semi-desert between it and the canyon. The cliff's lip had functioned as a sort of ha-ha—that delight of Augustan landscapers—and the demon had obviously dived into it, then risen in a gush of air flowing vertically. Foster had a confused impression of the cliff face below him—it was striated with horizontal paths on different levels crisscrossing one another along its face between dark patches on the sand-coloured surface. In his delirium Foster swung himself over the cliff and scrambled by large, easy holds, and he was in his mind on the canyon wall again, spreadeagled on a slab in the moonlight, the river glinting beneath him and two men struggling to reach him from the top. Now, oddly, he was in strong sunlight, a red wing flashed in the sky just above the canyon's edge and vanished again, and again Foster let himself fall, though this time there was no sudden, gasping drop and abrasive slide but a gentle letting down into a soft curving and delectable space from which he moved easily, like a swimmer, into the security of a cave.

He recovered consciousness with a start, or seemed to, for the light had gone and there was a face before him, bearded, belonging to a man kneeling by his side, but the language he spoke was demon language and unintelligible. Foster dreamed he brought his arm up to ward the demon off, but it held Foster's wrists and smiled deceptively.

Foster said weakly: *I don't want to die.*

No, the Demon replied. I don't suppose you do. But that's

because you're still young, and more than a little stupid.

What do you want from me?

I want nothing from you. I'm here to give you advice.

Give it, then, and leave me alone.

Be absolute. Be absolute for death, so that when it comes it will be all the sweeter. Only a fool would want to live forever.

I don't want to live forever.

Yet you hold on to your paltry life as if it were a pearl beyond price. And you know as well as I that life's a mere afflicted breath, vulnerable to a million misadventures, and what it has in store for you is deepening woe and increasing pain. You're laughable: Death has turned you to a clown: each minute of your time you spend shunning the thing you inevitably run toward. And what do you ask of life? What are its rewards? Fame: a wind. Sex: a momentary, undignified spasm. Wealth: a burden you carry through your life like a beast that Death unloads. Happiness: the greatest of all delusions, for what you don't have you strive to get, and what you have you forget about. And whatever road you take you regret you have not taken the other.

...But to die...And go to eternal rest. Think of your friend Terry. He basks in silence and ease—a state you want and crave yet wander from it further, day by day. And be honest: you do not fear death so much as the small pain in passing into the quietness of the grave. After so much toil, is it not good to sleep? After so much storm and harrowing anxiety, is it not good to be still and at peace? And think of this also, Robert Foster; think of the agony and sorrow you have caused others. Your wife—insulted and devalued by you, she becomes the mistress of someone who embodies everything you and she hated. Think of poor Julia, drawn into your stupidities, perhaps beaten, mutilated, even, by Rains' thugs. And you are still so young! Think, if you live, how much pain and suffering you will cause! The longer a man lives, the greater the evil shadow he casts upon the world. Life hasn't so much to offer, except to the very young and the very ignorant. What's in store for you but increasing sorrows, fear, sickness, age, loss, labour, pain, hunger, and cold, and, as you move into old age, weakness, the loss of friends, the contempt of your children who will curse the cancer, stroke or cardiac arrest for ending you no sooner.

The demon in front of him became clearer. Its disguise was recognizably human and familiar. Something of Prince was there, something of Sondek, something of Terry. Foster felt an ebbing of energy, a yielding. Into thy hands, O Lord...the words seemed once again to speak through him. Let go, he said aloud. Let go. The demon's hands had grabbed his wrists. Suddenly, from Prince's mouth, a strange language issued...a clattering of sharp consonants: glossalalia. The face shifted, grew suddenly bearded again and gentle. The grip on his wrists slackened.

A voice said: it's okay. Relax. Relax, Chico. It's all right. Something in the tone was soothing, deceptively soothing perhaps but the man's head and body were a normal colour and the demonic side, if it existed, had vanished, like the winged body over the cliff. Relax, it said again, and Foster, like the fool he very often was, trusted him.

There was white around him and a patch of blue barred as if with iron rods and there was a deep peaceful silence, not the silence of the plateau where one hears one's blood roaring in the head, but a peace out of time, out of mortality. When he turned his head, though, a pain seemed to shoot from his neck into his forehead and throbbed and pulsed until he could lie still. His body seemed to be encased in white sheets and a thin blanket lay over him. Though it was manifestly day, the room was pleasantly cool. A small table stood beside him with a lamp and a glass of water. He reached, suddenly conscious of great thirst, for the glass, but the effort was too much for him. He groaned and fell back onto the pillow, his head pounding. The walls, so far as he could see, were white and completely bare. It was clear that he was in prison, and that this was a prison hospital. At least he was free of Rains' men, and free of something dark and unspeakable. Foster would have smiled had the thought occurred to him. He was safe. In some sanctuary or other. He did not care that it was so obviously the end of his search for Sally and the "technology." He was out of it,

failed, but still alive. The rest would sort itself out...

Foster slept.

He slept that afternoon and, fitfully, through the night as well. Once he got up needing a toilet, and found one behind a door in his room. There was a sink, a primitive-looking shower and a tiled floor. There was a small, clean white towel and a handcloth in the same material. A sliver of cheap white soap. If this were prison, they did their criminals well here... wherever here was.

Then it occurred to him that he didn't in fact know where he was, that when he tried to think, he moved into day-dreams—his mind filled with disconnected and strange images: of a sad man with a pale and shiny skin, whose face was lined and nervous, and the face collapsing in pain and horror, and blood flowing; of himself falling through the air, scraping over rock, losing his footing on a stair, the face and body of the pale man floating down through deepening and darkening water where mites and horrible-looking weird fish floated eyeless in the deep, and the light he brought with him compressed into him as if it were a vapour in a cylinder, sinking down with the pale man through caves in black, underwater rock through which the pale man floated enfolded in the mist of faint light. Fat, white, maggot-like shapes darted out of range, half seen, hardly there, and on the black, larvaic sand of the cave floor the pale man rested, his head bowed, and Foster took him carefully by the waist and back of the knees and lifted him easily so that his bloodied head, mouth agape, fell backward, one arm along his body next to Foster's own, and the other trailing limply in the sand. The body, light at first, grew heavier as Foster carried it through caves and halls of bare rock, the light growing fainter, swathing the two men like an aureole. Then, somehow, the body, when its weight became intolerable, lifted itself away from Foster, floated free of him, sank to its feet and began to walk, a kind of somnambulist blind step. Then Foster was in a light, clean hospital room with air and joyousness and his mother, lying in her bed

almost as she was the last time he saw her so many years ago except that she was smiling with delight, her face still firm, her flesh unwithered, as if she had not yet been afflicted with the cancer that killed her, greeted him.

I've brought him to you, Foster said. His mother smiled and beckoned. The pale man lay at her feet, for now, miraculously, she was standing at the foot of a huge stairway, imperious and powerful. I've brought him to you, Foster said. I've brought him to be healed.

There was a woman beside him who ought to have been Sally and was not, the small, efficient, good-looking blond woman with quick movements who, Foster thought, ought to have been someone else, someone dark and more introverted, but who wasn't but who was there anyway to help him. The pale man, one eye open and unseeing, the other closed by a great bruise, the mouth agape with a small gush of blood, had for some reason been dressed in a robe and a crown. The crown was not a full crown, more of a coronet; but it was of gold and shone in the great light that now entered the hall and the woman, his mother, raised her hand and commanded the great assembly to be silent.

Who are you? she asked, and her voice echoed throughout the hall.

I've brought you my brother to be healed, Foster said. And there was a clap of thunder and the scene before him vanished into darkness.

Foster came out of this nightmare with a raging thirst. It was dark except for a patch of moonlit sky hanging on the wall before him. He reached a hand for the table, somehow knowing that a carafe of water stood on it. He drank, but his thirst remained, and soon the carafe was empty. Foster's bed was clammy with his sweat, though he could feel cold air flowing gently through the open window. He lay back and the darkness turned to a huge, open plain with juniper shrubs and piñon pine and small animals darting back and forth hunted

by huge green-and-red birds and Foster was back, running, terrified, like a hunted animal, the great demon with its leathery head and livid white face diving through the air, reaching its talons for his throat and he woke again, screaming.

This time the sky was light again, though barely so, and he was conscious, as his fear subsided, of a very tall man by his bedside. A man with long, abundant hair and a beard like a flower-child of the sixties. The man wore jeans and a sweatshirt over which was a gaily patterned coterina. The man bent over and carefully lifted Foster's head to a glass of water. When Foster drank there was a pill to swallow, and a feeling of relief came over him.

Thanks, he said. His voice was little more than a whisper. He tried to clear his throat, but it seemed very dry and tickly, as if dust had settled in it over a long period of time. He coughed and lurched weakly with a hand toward the carafe.

Just take it real easy, the man said. His voice was deep and booming and sounded as if he was from the southeastern coast of the U.S. South Carolina, or somewhere.

Foster nodded. Who are you, he said.

I'm Brose, the man answered. And you?

It seemed a simple question. Two words flung out almost casually. But there was something there that prevented Foster from answering. His mind seemed to collapse on the issue of his own name, and a memory—something terrible and pitiful—seemed to dance on the edge of his consciousness. His own name, a word, seemed to dissolve in a series of images—a blond woman, face close to his, a man with a sweating, pallid face, screaming in pain; another pale man in a brown suit lying with one eye shut at the foot of a staircase, and something huge, a bird with green body and red wings swooping with incredible speed and power through the sky toward him and flicking its vast body past the opening to some dark malodorous place where a man lay in hiding.

The demon, Foster whispered.

What demon?

I was in a cave...there was a devil, like a huge bird... coming at me... I couldn't get away from it...it would come into the cave, and there wasn't...wasn't a way I could stop it.

You were in a cave, right enough, when Miguel found you. You remember that much? Miguel? Little Spanish guy?

An image came into Foster's mind of a small-boned man with a dark bearded face. He nodded weakly.

Miguel's one of our people. Just come. I was showing him the cave dwellings. There wasn't any devil, mister. Miguel would've sicked him, for sure.

There was a bird...bigger than I've ever seen...red and green.

No. There was a guy round there on a hang-glider... seemed like he was flying back and forth along the cliff face where the dwellings are. But no demons.

Foster's mind, at least on this point, suddenly cleared. A hang-glider. Of course, the red body and green wings, the operator's face, light beneath a dark crash helmet: not a dragonfly, or buzzard, but a man on a hang-glider...hunting him, yes, but at least from the world of light and rock, wind and stars...nothing demonic, nothing from another world. He sighed with what was very nearly happiness.

Thank you, Mr. Brose, he said.

Ambrose. No need to thank *me*...you just rest, We'll talk soon. And listen, boy, don't worry about the Devil. Ain't no Devil's gonna shake his tail in here. You're in a desert monastery, that's where you are, and though we may not get rid of the Devil for keeps, we can sure spoil his day.

Foster nodded, and was almost instantly asleep.

On the second day Foster found he could take notice of the time. It was like learning everything again from scratch; he seemed to possess certain skills he must have learned in his previous life. He could use a spoon, for example, for the soup he was given: it was a curious soup, red and fiery hot and thick, almost a sauce, eaten with fluffy bread that looked like tiny

pillows. The soup warmed him and burned his throat. That evening the small dark man he'd seen in the cave brought him more soup and a salad. This time Foster ate it all—conscious that it was an evening meal, and that it wasn't quite sufficient. The dark man said nothing but smiled and nodded. On the tray he brought in was a little flask of wine and a pottery goblet decorated with a depiction of Durer's praying hands. The craftsmanship was rough, that of a learner, and Foster felt a strong and sudden warmth toward it. He could feel his strength returning to his body. The bed was comfortable, the room warm and safe. A delighted feeling of tranquillity moved slowly through him, deeper than any he had ever known. He finished the wine, and swung his legs out of the bed and stood up. His body was no longer in pain, but though his fever had dropped, he was still very weak. He moved slowly to a cupboard let into a wall. Inside were his clothes, laundered and pressed, but when he took them out he saw they were almost useless—ripped nearly to shreds. But someone had thoughtfully provided a bathrobe. For a moment Foster was tempted to put it on, walk out of his room and explore the rest of the buildings. Then he knew that this didn't matter, that he had all the time in the world, and that for the first time in his life the pressure was off; nothing threatened him, no-one expected him to get a job, nobody demanded anything from him, he expected nothing of himself. Time enough to explore this monastery if, indeed, that was what it was. Something for another day.

Part 3

El Pajarito

The two men, one very tall and burly, the other—though not short, just under six feet—slight and insubstantial by comparison, walked slowly along the dry bed of the stream. This arroyo was broad and sandy and its banks about three feet high were in places sharply vertical, as if chopped by a spade. Around them the country was flat as a circular board of earth perhaps ten miles in diameter, barren except for sparse patches of cactus and chamisa. Around its circumference was a sandstone wall that rose to the north of them in giant steps toward a serrated line of a high mountain. In the other direction, Foster knew, lay the cliff dwellings where Miguel had discovered him, and beyond that the river that had floated him to safety—the upper reaches, he had already been told, of the Rio Grande. Out of this plain and close to the mountain wall, the monastery, not by any means a high building, stuck out huge, isolated and bulky like, Foster thought, Fort Zindeneuf or some other legionnaire's castle from *Beau Geste*. The military quality was enhanced by the thick, burnt-sienna walls and small windows. Yet coming closer, from across the arroyo and over the dusty parking-space in front of the monastery, the place looked more vulnerable, for along the southern wall, and quite low down, was a large expanse of glass. Below the glass were the vats and pipes of the solar heating with which the building had been designed. It was a relatively new establishment, a creation of the sixties and Age of Aquarius theology—Benedictine as to order, nominally Roman Catholic, but ecumenical and charismatic in practice. All this Ambrose had explained carefully while Foster was still in bed, but after he had begun to feel much better. This monastery, Ambrose explained, was called, appropriately enough, the Monastery of Christ in the Wilderness and it housed fully fledged monks and prospective nuns in the first stages of their novitiates.

Don't get me wrong, Ambrose said as if in answer to some

unspoken question, nobody fucks. Or if they do, I haven't heard of it.

But isn't that a strain?

Sure it's a strain...but nothing we can't deal with. In any case, we've got a couple of brothers here who're gay. It's a strain for them too.

So everybody lives in a constant state of erotic tension?

It ebbs and flows, I guess, same as it does in the secular world.

It sounded incomprehensible to Foster, but there was nothing odd about their treatment of him. They had rescued him, healed his injuries, caused his fever to subside. Nobody had asked him questions beyond the simple desire to know his name and this, with some reluctance, he had given them. The fever had subsided, but he still felt extremely weak. The first thing he had done when he felt strong enough to venture beyond the door of his room was, with Ambrose's permission, to telephone Julia. There was, as he had expected, no reply. A knotted, desperate feeling rose in him: yes she was resourceful and independent—she could certainly take care of herself even against people like Rains—indeed, she had proved to be better at that than Foster. But then, where was she? Where was she? He tried again that night, then this morning, very early. But she seemed to have disappeared. There was a chance, a good chance, that after releasing those documents to Rains' agents she had been freed. Thus she might easily be in New Mexico, looking for him. She knew of Tres Ovejas, even the name of the motel he had stayed at—and the car rental company. He had phoned the latter. Somebody had returned his car.

The bill had been made out on Julia's credit card number, but the person returning the car was male. He longed for her. He wondered whether he should tell Ambrose about her, about Rains, Tres Ovejas, the blond man and Terry. The thought of unloading himself in this way was both comforting and disturbing. Yet were it not for Julia, and for a deeper

longing he could not at the moment identify, he could in this warm-weather Shangri La be almost happy. Now, as they walked slowly back to the main entrance, Foster said: Ambrose—thank you for not asking questions.

Ambrose shrugged. I don't need to know anything about you, he said. What you choose to tell me is your affair. Just let me know if there's anybody from outside you'd rather not see.

Foster laughed. You put that very tactfully. No, I'm not wanted by the police...as far as I know.

When you feel a little better, Ambrose said, I'll take you along the trail at the back. It leads up those cliffs yonder (he pointed), onto easier ground. You can see that's where the evergreens start. But it gets steep very quickly. The mountain was all one vast volcano once...when it blew it formed the plateau we're on now. It's called Pajarito...little bird.

Lava rock...

Tufa...like pumice. It's covered hereabouts with mud, sand and gravel but where it comes out in cliffs, that's where the Indians made their caves.

I've already stumbled on them.

Right. Once you get up high onto that trail you can see across beyond the far ridge way across the Rio Grande...over to the Sangre de Cristos. Ain't nothing much between but cottontails, rattlesnakes and prickly pear.

I know about the Sangre de Cristos—from being in Santa Fe.

Santa Fe's that way, Ambrose said, pointing to the south-east. You been living there?

No Ambrose, I haven't. I'm from Canada, Vancouver. I came down here as a kind of salesman.

So what do you sell? You see? Sooner or later the questions come.

It's a long story...

There you go. Well, it doesn't matter. We asked you a couple of questions that first time you came around. You didn't know who you were or how you got there.

Foster remembered the gentle, bearded man in the cave, being carried out and given a fireman's lift across Ambrose's huge back. Ambrose said: We were walking along the lower terrace. Then we heard you groaning...Miguel went up to take a look. He's used to drug abusers...been one himself...figures you were crazy on dope. Then I came up and you were out of it. We carried you down the trail and drove into Espanola to a doctor we know there...the community uses him a lot. He said you'd either been beaten up or had a bad fall, or maybe both. And that you were delirious with fever. We knew that for ourselves...you were rambling on about every goddam thing under the sun.

Foster laughed softly as if the thought of delirium were a subject for comedy; yet the laughter was not about that at all. He felt astonishingly happy, feeling that the past few days, weeks, had already receded into the distant past. He said: You're the one with the memory loss...you told me all that already. But I remember something else...a hang-glider...

The one you thought was the Devil? You think the guy in it was looking for you?

I bloody well know he was.

Well he took off when he saw us. Couldn't have wanted you very badly. He was flying low, along the cliff face...dangerous, I would've have thought...then he saw us and sort of flew away.

You had a car there?

Sure. That big grey mother yonder. Ambrose pointed to a panel truck parked just in front of the door. I must have told her a dozen times, he muttered, not to leave it by the entrance. Makes us look like a gas station.

That glider didn't follow the truck?

Not that I'm aware of. You think the guy might've got the licence plate number? He wasn't around Espanola. We'd've seen him for sure if he were that close. Relax, my friend. Nothing's going to happen to you here.

And there was something about the huge man's reassuring

and protective presence that caused Foster to nod in agreement. Rains' people could not possibly trouble him in the sanctuary—it was well-populated, well hidden and connected to the rest of civilization by telephone and ham radio.

Foster rested, after that, for a couple of hours in the big lounge—quiet and sunlit, lined with books—for the most part of a theological and devotional nature. These had little interest for him. He found, though, in one section of the shelves a number of novels—modern classics...*Sons and Lovers*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Beautiful Losers*, *Ulysses*, *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Sun Also Rises*. He took out the Hemingway. He had read it before and admired its lightness and complexity. The others had been assigned books on university courses and he had read them, particularly the Joyce, under a vague sense of protest. He wondered idly whether he should just stay here for a few weeks, offering his physical labour, to thoroughly mellow out. He was tired with a deep tiredness that went beyond the aftermath of fever and physical injury. At the same time there had grown in him what amounted to a moral passion: to avenge the injuries done to himself, to Terry, to Julia. About the latter he experienced an abiding guilt—about Terry he could not even bear to think. Someone, somehow, connected with Rains, either as an ally or antagonist, had done for Terry. That was almost certain. What was necessary now was to get his strength back totally and make a plan. Never mind mellowing out. All he knew about his future was that it must involve Rains. After Rains he could deal with these other matters—Sally—Julia... The happiness, the feeling of delight and well-being, even the detachment he'd experienced this first day of his convalescence, faded. He was like a man who recalls, in the quiet enjoyment of a summer's day, the nightmares of his sleep.

A bell rang in the distance. It was deep-toned and single-noted. It seemed to cause the whole building to resonate with it. Foster had heard it before but had ignored it. A young

woman, blonde, high-waisted, with a lean, tanned and eager face walked quickly through the lounge door, saw Foster and nodded amiably. He tried to smile back, saying: What's the bell mean?

Vespers. You're welcome to join us.

Foster thanked her and turned again to Hemingway. She said, as she went past him through the far door: You're the person who's been sick, aren't you? Are you okay?

Perhaps the attempt at a smile was too close to a grimace of pain. He said, Yes, thanks.

Anything I can get you?

No. No, I'm fine. Really...

Well...supper's in an hour and a half. We'll talk then.

Foster nodded at her and she was gone. *Vespers. Compline. Matins. Diurnals.* He'd already seen a little sheet outlining for the benefit of visitors the monastery's order of services. Archaic. Repressive. Looked at from one point of view. But a liberating structure if looked at from another. In either case it had nothing to do with him. Except that he felt an enormous gratitude toward these people—whatever it was they thought they were doing stuck right out here away from civilization. They had certainly, as far as he was concerned, been at the right place at the right time. Some impulse made him get up, put the novel back in the shelves and go to the huge picture-window overlooking the vast stretch of flat desert rimmed by sandstone cliffs before him. Oddly, the scene exhilarated him: he had been lucky to survive, singled out or, as Ambrose would probably put it, been the recipient of grace as an answer to prayer: Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. He must remember to tell Ambrose that...he'd be most amused. Saved by grace for some sort of triumphant reentry into the world beyond the line of cliffs; the world of towns and cities, bars, jobs, vacations, kids, tennis clubs, department stores, restaurants, sexual jungle. It all seemed so remote; unreal and worthless—here was this desert—this ineffable solitude and peace. He wondered very idly about the nun who'd just

greeted him. An attractive girl—mid-twenties, perhaps—about to embrace poverty, obedience, chastity. What a waste! He wondered if he felt strong enough to go into supper, decided that he did. There was a little more than half an hour. Unhurriedly he consulted the bookshelves again. He found, much to his surprise, a copy of Roy Campbell's translations of Lorca. Eagerly he thumbed through it and found the poem—the one he and Sally had spent two hours discussing, one idyllic and far-distant evening, a poem that haunted him still:

*Sing lullaby, baby,
About the great horse
Who would not drink water,
So dark was its course.
Who will say, baby,
What the water is reaping
Through the green halls
With his long tail sweeping?
His mane is frozen,
His hurt hooves stagger,
Between his eyes
Is a silver dagger...*

They were in a restaurant in Stanley Park, the Ferguson Point Tea Room, which stands on a bluff overlooking English Bay, Georgia Strait and the mountains of the North Shore and Vancouver Island in the distance. But, Foster remembered, it was the autumn and late in the evening, and the view from the large windows had to be imagined. A fire burned in the big hearth and there was a feeling of comfort and protection. The firelight sparkled in the carafe of wine on the table, and it danced in Sally's eyes. She said playfully: Bobbie, why do you think the water is like the horse?

Well, I'm not so sure it is.

I am; Bobbie look at it...the water sweeps through the green meadows like a river...but like the long tail of an

animal...the tail of the horse.

So if it won't drink the water, does that mean it won't drink itself?

It means the horse is terrified of its own power.

There's only one kind of power a horse has, Foster answered. It's sexual power. Otherwise it's just a strong animal. It's a standard metaphor for sexual lust. I bet you think that dagger's a phallic symbol.

Yes.

Is mine like a dagger?

No, much gentler than that. You've got a particularly nice one.

But this horse carried his between the eyes...

Like a unicorn.

The horse is an image of *terribilità*, she said. Yet the knife suggests maiming, castration, mutilation. You don't need to worry about that from me.

For Christ's sake, Sally, who have you been reading?

Her hand tightened on his; her face, filled now with playful menace, grew closer.

The dark, sexual thirst, she murmured, is only slaked by mutilation.

I'm damned if I'm getting into the same bed as you tonight.

Just try and resist.

What's the opposite of *terribilità*? If there is such a thing.

There is—*gentilezza*. The soft, calm, serene aspects of love. You prefer that?

You know I do.

Bobbie, in California they'd advise you to get in touch with your Wild Man.

We don't live in California, thank God. We love where the nights are long.

For you, I think you're right. Perhaps you'd be better off sipping sexual water only where it's fallen gently into unruffled, shallow pools...

And they had sat at that table in front of the fire for another hour—inconsequential, undergraduate talk—innocent and playful—a kind of “mind-fucking,” as they used to call it. Finished, done with—a pleasant memory now, with no long-ing behind it.

This is a gay poem, Brother Ramon pronounced. Written by a Christian fag.

You mean to tell me, Foster said, that without knowing anything about the poet's life you can identify its sexual orientation?

Brother Ramon smiled: No. I think that's one of the limitations of the so-called New Criticism...that one must deal only with the words on the page. I know something of Lorca, and that knowledge illuminates the poem which, in turn, further illuminates the life—and so on.

Your own preferences, surely, the lean, youngish woman said kindly, illuminate it even more.

My dear Beatrice, I am far too old, far too advanced in my spiritual journey, as we say in this place, to deserve a preference. It is because *I was* gay, or rather, because I am presently a non-practising gay, that I can recognize this quality in the poem.

Ramon had not done himself much justice in this speech. He was thin and grey-bearded, and his face had been weathered by who knew what experiences into deep lines that gave him an extraordinarily tragic appearance belied by the alert and humorous eyes. He was probably 65 and looked a battered 50. He was in charge of the garden and fought a desperate, never-ending war against drought and tumbleweed. He believed that planting gardens, maintaining them and talking softly to the resulting vegetation was the way to psychic wholeness. Like Foster, he had given up pursuing those few careers for which a degree in literature might have entitled him. Foster said:

I'm not so sure, though, that there's such a thing as “gay”

discourse that isn't overt. Give me another example.

Four Quartets.

Are you kidding?

Certainly not.

Eliot was gay?

Perhaps not to the best of anybody's knowledge, including his own.

Forgive me, and excuse the pun, but that sounds perverse to me.

I think I could demonstrate it, Brother Ramon said. But now isn't the time. I'm on kitchen duty, then I have to ring the bell for Compline.

They were left alone. The community, except for those away on business, had gathered for supper around the huge oak refractory table donated to the monastery by some well-wisher. They had eaten quickly and, but for Ramon and Beatrice, vanished. There were about twelve of them altogether, eight men and four women.

Ambrose wasn't there.

He's gone to Espanola, Beatrice said. The nearest town, unless you count Los Alamos. But that's hard to get to. Even Espanola's half-a-day's drive, depending on the state of the road. When it gets muddy it's a real adventure.

So he won't be back for a while.

Tomorrow night. Ambrose does supplies. Say more about the poem.

I like it now because it reminds me of my wife—the early days of our marriage...we used to spend hours discussing poetry. Just the two of us. It was a kind of verbal lovemaking.

Why "was"? Did you stop?

Foster told her something about Sally and his separation. He found, somewhat to his surprise, the words *gentilezza* and *terribilitá* had come back to the forefront of his mind from those conversations.

We were a bit literary, he explained. Self-consciously so. I think our love for one another was too gentle: not enough of

the dark passions.

Like lust, possessiveness, jealousy? Is that what *terribilit * means?

Yes. And violence, I suppose.

I don't think that could've been the case, Beatrice said. And if it was, you're well rid of her.

Again, a sadness darkened his mind. He stood up, aware of his great tiredness.

Better take it easy, Beatrice said. Leave me to do this.

She began to stack plates from the cupboard onto one end of the table. This was for the next day's breakfast. Foster nodded and walked slowly back to the lounge with his volume of Lorca. *Well rid of her*. Perhaps that was true. The idea did nothing for his comfort.

Now as the sun was beginning to set shadows quickened in the ravines on the mountainside close to the monastery. They sculpted the serrated ridges containing them into hard, sharp, yet slowly moving curves shifting and shape-changing as the light sank and faded. In the chapel there were two rows of pews facing one another, windows behind each group. Between them, on the high gothic arched wall, was a huge cross. Below it an altar, standing well forward. The floor was covered by large red tiles. A couple of rows of chairs faced the altar forming with it, the pews, a rough square. These chairs were for guests of the monastery. There was only one other than Foster, a thin, pallid young man with a very long black beard and equally long hair tied in a lank-looking ponytail. Foster had already been told that this person was "on silent retreat" and ought not to be greeted other than by a smile. The community, dressed in grey habits, had already collected in the pews. The angelus rang slowly and loudly... Ramon pealed it by pulling on a rope that was let out of a hole in the wall to the outside. He took his place and there was a deep silence, as if everyone had turned inward. The dozen or so figures before him, male and female but mostly male, seemed

perfectly still. There was a spellbound hush, then at some unheard signal, they stood, Foster and the silent visitor with them. A brother said:

The Lord Almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end, Amen.

There was a short litany, and the company sat down again, some knelt. Foster saw from the corner of his eye the retreatant kneel with the rest. Well, he'd be damned if he would kneel. All this was very beautiful and mellow, but not much of an impingement on his consciousness or moral being. Inner life would be a better phrase. What did it mean to say one "had an inner life?" How does a man know he owns such a thing? Presumably only through dreams and his own irrational behaviour. They'd all stood again, singing a rather tuneless hymn... Foster remembered once going to a church in Vancouver at the suggestion of a friend. Sally and he had been heartily bored. The minister chumbled his words, whatever they may have amounted to, and his own attention had been caught by a battery of what looked like tattered regimental flags, union jacks and white ensigns hanging dust-stained from the walls at the back. He felt certain the minister might suddenly enjoin his congregation to be courageous in the morning as they went forth to fight the Hun. The flags seemed outrageous to him—he was no Christian nor any other sort of thing—but, to use these people's own language, was this a House of God or a military museum? Sally and he escaped before some welcomer, already eyeing them hungrily, could rush them with an introductory offer... a comb, let's say, or a couple of ballpoint pens engraved with the compliments and the name of the church.

The brother said: *Keep us as an apple of an eye.*

They answered: *Hide us under the shadow of thy wings.*

The community then pronounced a number of psalms, it seemed interminably, alternating from one side of the chapel to the other. His inner life, if he had one, would have to be nourished in some other way. There had been a priest around

in hospital, the last time he visited his mother. He'd been standing by the bed as Foster entered, a small boy, stunned and horrified at what had happened to her. A large, active and loving woman, she had diminished, almost overnight, to a white and pain-racked "terminal case." He had heard them say that: "stay here," he heard them tell her, "in the terminal ward. You'll be better off here; you'll be well looked after."

His uncle and aunt, the people at Qualicum, had brought him to her that day, that last time. She was barely conscious... probably by then in no pain, her mind awash with morphine. The priest left, patting Foster's shoulders. His mother held his hand, limply. He could feel the bones, the shallow pulse. She lay back on the pillows, a transparent mask over her nose and mouth. Her eyes were closed, dark lines embedded in pockets of yellow flesh. He stared at her in horror, not fully understanding what this was but intuitively knowing he was involved in a terrible, irreversible disaster. They'd stayed an hour... he'd been taken away then. He had not seen the priest again. In any case the latter was of no use to him. How could he have been? In later life Foster knew that no religion could explain the fact of pain, of death, and thus it was pointless. But then they'd taken him to Qualicum—a place on the east coast of Vancouver Island, a wide beach, thick, lustrous vegetation, a kind of delightful solitude in which slowly he became healed.

A man had risen now and had walked to a lectern. He was short and dark, a youngish man, middle thirties, with a neat black beard and dark Spanish eyes the colour of brown ale. This was, Foster knew from supper, the Abbot. They had been very briefly introduced. The man had seemed shy and a little evasive. Amiable enough. Foster wondered idly about him: who was he, how did he get here; where was he on, to use Ramon's phrase, his "spiritual journey?" What was he saying? Something about locusts:

...A sinister little verse. It describes the laying waste of a whole countryside, the destruction of crops and vines and fields for grazing so

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that there will be nothing left, no nothing, not even enough to make a sacrifice in the temple—the cereal and wine offerings required by the cult. Nothing even for the house of God. As for the people of Israel, there will be nothing but lamentation and despair, for:

*What the cutting locust has left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten.
And what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.*

Foster's mind drifted around the phrase "locust years." Did that come out of this same text? Certainly that is how he could describe his own life, since the time of Sally's departure...or before that, to when he lost his job, to before that, even. The night of the accident...the night the locusts came. The guilt, the uneasiness with Sally, sprang from that. But yet nothing seemed explained. He asked himself for the thousandth time why he felt so alienated from Sally after that episode. For she had forgiven him; she had most certainly forgiven him.

...Barkless stumps of trees, and barren earth. It would have been to them like the aftermath of a tremendous air-raid, or a nuclear explosion, for the land over which men and women had struggled and coaxed into fertility for a generation is cataclysmically reduced to desert. But not even our kind of desert...of coarse grasses, cactus, juniper shrubs and piñon trees and yucca plants. It was a place where it seemed nothing could ever grow again. It was as if God had indeed laid his hand upon their lives, as if they must have committed some terrible sin that such a horrifying punishment be levelled collectively against them. What had they done, what was their great crime that such evil should be visited upon them? For the sacred writings are interspersed with stories and songs, questioning theodicy...God's justice...

It was before that, Foster thought, that the locusts came. His mind sank slowly back into images of the past, the beach

at Qualicum, his mother fading into nothingness, his father, a very faint recollection this, of a tall, commanding man in a dark suit, though Foster could not be sure this was not a memory of a photograph rather than of a living being. His mind seemed to focus on Qualicum, the beach, a long, wide expanse of whitish sand, a stretch of blue water with a faint, oily sheen to it, the distant blue mountains on the other side of the Strait. On his right, just on the corners of his field of vision, two figures. A feeling of unease crept over him. He remembered something of this now, and of how some event from that distant time had oppressed him while he was with Julia. Something about her, her house in Arbutus Village, had triggered a knowledge hidden deep within. Two figures, closing in on him. On the beach. At Qualicum...a resort place on Vancouver Island, a little north of Nanaimo.

...Well, Joel, about whom we know nothing...believes also that God, Yahweh, is behind the locust plague, that he likens the plague to an actual army, the army of the apocalypse composed of the nations, led by their kings, of Gentiles and strangers who are to be used as God's instruments of wrath. For the Day of the Lord, Joel says, the Day of the Lord is upon us...

Then let it come down. Let the memory come down, for there is nothing to fear. *Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.* The brightness of that summer's day. The feel of the sand itself, the way it was soft and granular on the top and how it would harden up as his hand went deeper into it, resisting him, and abrade the skin under his nails. The smell of earth and wet vegetation a hundred yards inland and around the secluded cottage of his retired uncle and aunt. Now dead, like his mother; a warm early morning after rain. Well, he had his own room, a fine and private place where he could live the life of a lonely child—reading avidly and without discrimination, inventing solitary games, talking to himself, creating fantasies...and perhaps those two figures came from one of these.

Joel, like all the prophets before him, calls upon the people to repent.

Now what, my Brothers and Sisters, does it mean to repent? Well, the Jews have two words for repentance—shuv and nacham. If I had a blackboard I would write them down for you and show off my Hebrew. It is just as well, perhaps, that there is no blackboard here, for I am not sure I could anymore. It's the kind of thing you learn in seminary and forget almost instantly. But I can tell you what these words mean, even if I cannot write them. Shuv means a turning to God; to turn away from idolatry and self-righteousness to the Lord who has delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, given them land, the covenant, his blessing in return for their rejection of inhumanity and oppression—in return for their exercise of compassion, the laws of hospitality, the care of the poor, disadvantaged, the orphan, the stranger, the widow. In our own day and in the rule of our own Order this is summarized in the injunction to "greet the stranger as if he were Jesus." That's shuv...what you might call the bare bones of shuv. Nacham is a little different. It has to do with regret, of acknowledgment that one has done wrong, and sorrow or contrition over it. God himself repents, repeatedly: look up Genesis 6:6-7, or Exodus 32:14. There are many places in the Bible where God is said to repent of the things he'd done to Israel. But in the Book of Joel the people first repent—they turn back to God. Then God repents. He repents of the locust plague and showers renewed blessings on the people of Israel. He restores to them Their land. He pours forth his blessing equally on woman and man, freeman and slave...

Then what was it, those two figures, who were they and what did they want? Figures out of nightmare, farcical nightmare? Judd and Prince? That name gave him pause—Prince: perhaps after all a policeman, or a man on the other side, the people for whom Rains was an intermediary. Russians? CIA? But on this beach, two figures, and he a child.

Foster's mind shifted from this past time to the present. Beatrice, the young novitiate. He knew he was vulnerable to women who took an interest in him and in whom he saw the possibility of nurturer. He also knew it was disastrous to project this need on otherwise innocent bystanders. But she had asked about him, asked with kindness and compassion about

his wife, and he knew nothing of her, nothing about her past, her work life, her decision to enter the monastery. He could see her head bent either in great concentration to the Abbot's discourse, or in a convincing imitation of one who follows every word.

For the locust plague we in Western culture can substitute our own disasters: the denuding of the world's forests, the explosion of populations, the massive inequalities that lie between the rich countries of the northern hemisphere and the rest of the world, the continuous state of warfare and preparation for war, the AIDS epidemic and so on. Joel doesn't specify the sin of the people, and he does not have to. We do not need to point to the specific evils in our time. Though this would not be hard to do...

Ramon he knew something about, but Miguel—what about Miguel? A quiet, shy man, there in one of the right-hand pews, his head bent. He'd given him a wide smile and a nod. The man he'd taken for the figure of Despair. What was his story? And the other women—two of them in middle-age, probably with grownup children, now in later life contemplating the Veil. There were several such, Ambrose had told him, in the other orders. The silent retreatant, what of him? His eyes were on the windows to the left and on the darkening sky. Well, he would discover all this in time. That was one thing he looked forward to—time without pressure. He could stay here, Ambrose had said, as long as he needed...

Joel summons the people to return to the God of the covenant. He observes that salvation comes by means of liturgy: in our own time we have recognized that this is not enough, that our turning back to the covenant implies a radical turning back on the errors of omission and commission over the centuries, the way we have arranged our economic and material lives. It implies an injunction to follow the new law as we find it expressed in Matthew 25. Even then it is not clear that release from the order of sin, the body of death, will be secured; Joel anticipates for us the Pauline theology of grace through faith beyond good works. But the fact that Jerusalem is saved from the plague, the harvests restored, the land and the trees and crops reinvigorated, the

enemy cast down, that God reestablished in his temple, in the city, among the people and thus, by extension, the world, not once, as in Joel's prophecy, but again and again creates in the believer a faith that in T. S. Eliot's words:

*All shall be well
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are infolded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.*

That night in Foster's dream the tendrils of metal that had him caught like a bird in a fowler's net seemed to fall from him and the mood itself to change from urgency and terror to complete serenity. He was a small boy again, on a beach, not quite the beach at Qualicum, for this was much wider and longer and the sea curled onto it in long, smooth breakers over which hung a fine mist of spray, glittering in the sun. It was more like the rim of the open Pacific than the sheltered waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland. It was long, its sand hard-packed, but there were dunes far back from the sea and Foster, a small child, dug into one of them with a spade in search of treasure hidden by pirates and buccaneers. He'd read a book about them, a book in his uncle's house, and knew of Drake, Grenville, Raleigh—the more respectable ones. Other books had taught him different stories—particularly Stevenson's *Treasure Island: ah, the flower of the flock was Flint*. But it was Drake who captured his imagination then, Drake who had explored this very coast. The sun was high and his shadow short on the ground, so that when the two other shadows crossed his own he knew they were directly behind him. His mind filled with piratical violence, suspicion and betrayal, he nevertheless felt no horror, only great caution. With assumed casualness he turned: the figures were not blackavised men with tricorn hats and cutlasses but children of his own age, a boy and a girl. *What did they want?* The girl said: what are you

doing? but there was no threat in her voice, only curiosity. Foster shrugged; he knew he didn't want to share his fantasy with a stranger. We have some food, the girl said, cookies and stuff. Would you like to play with us? The little boy dug his toe in the sand and grinned with embarrassment. Foster felt a sudden panic. These were local children who knew he was not long in the district, knew, probably, that he had just recently been orphaned. He did not want their pity, their patronage. No, he said, without hesitation, no thanks. The little boy put his tongue out at him and Foster, caught up with a great surge of violence, clenched his fist and lashed out. The boy ducked, the girl caught her brother's arm and pulled him away. They ran off, vanished, and Foster was on his own, the game of treasure-hunting gone from him, and a strong, irreparable sadness began to overwhelm him.

The dream faded and Foster woke. It was just past sunrise. His face was wet with tears, as if some dreadful violation he had unconsciously committed against someone had been brought to his awareness. This dream, like the one about the car, was based, he knew, on an actual incident. He knew with a clarity he had not experienced for many years that he had rejected those children—and so violently—out of fear of *gentilezza*, of intimacy, but above all out of pride. It was no big affair, surely; surely he could forgive himself. The fact that he had not directly thought of them for so long, that they had hovered, demanding attention, on the fringes of his mind so that they became interwoven with later fears, guilts and self-incriminations indicated that he could not. There was something there, though, something important to him that linked up with recent disasters: his breakup with Sally. What was it?

Foster dressed quickly and walked out from his room into the cool early morning air. An edge of sun appeared over the distant range of cliffs bringing the monastery out of shadow. Another long, hot, delightful day. There was time enough to figure out these conundrums. Time stretched out before him with a bounteousness he had not experienced since childhood.

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And with it came a sense of great release for the first time in his life, of complete freedom.

Let's go for a walk, buddy, Ambrose said that afternoon, you look as you could do with a little sun and exercise.

You want to take me up the trail you mentioned?

The top trail. Too hot. You need to be a little fitter and to start earlier in the day. We'd bake our asses up there right now. No, let's go up the arroyo.

Outside the monastery, through the dusty parking-space, they found a narrow path leading through the sparse ground cover of cactus and desert grasses. About a hundred yards along was the lip of the arroyo, a wide, barren stream bed, totally dry. Yet the sand in it formed ridges and shoals almost as if it had taken on the qualities of a flowing river.

In real heavy rain, Ambrose said, water floods down along here like you wouldn't believe. You'd almost expect to see dead cattle floating on it, and houses with people clinging to the roof. And it all disappears about a mile down, sinks straight into the ground and ten feet along from there it's as if it never was.

So it never reaches the Rio Grande.

I guess in Noah's day it did. That's about what it would take.

They walked along the dry riverbed in a tranquil silence. Foster felt suddenly that whoever he was, whatever he'd done, the big man beside him would accept him, unconditionally. Without hesitation, his speech flowing quite naturally from what had last been said, Foster told him about his dream. Ambrose plodded in silence for a few moments then said:

You figure she left you because you couldn't take whatever it was she had to give?

Put crudely, yes.

And that this inability to receive is one of your patterns?

Right.

But from what you tell me about her, she found someone

else. You got longcocked, my friend, I think it's as simple as that.

We both screwed around; we started soon after we were married.

But you set it up so she would longcock you. And what's more I don't really blame her. Who wants to lie in bed with a victim?

You ever fuck anyone, Ambrose?

You bet I did. From the age of seventeen on until I got conscripted, and from the time I got conscripted till the time I went to Korea, and from the time I got out of Korea till the time I was married. I was married fifteen years, during which time I fucked with my wife and with most of her friends, while she fucked most of mine.

That was the sixties; and you look too young for Korea.

Ambrose told stories, as they walked further along the hard-packed sand, of ambushes and machine-gun fire, of infelicitous cold, and waves of enemy infantrymen swarming toward them like locusts. Foster said:

I heard that sermon too.

The Abbot's never seen a locust. But I have. Swarms of them, like Chinese GIs.

What happened?

We got our asses out of there.

The arroyo grew a little narrow and suddenly lifted a degree out of the flat. Looking back they could see the monastery, downhill slightly, a big block of a building with a narrow adobe campanile, and the great frowning cliffs behind it. Foster pointed out its resemblance to Fort Zindeneuf.

That was one of the books I was brought up on. My Dad, he was a Colonel in the army, so was my granddad. His father was only a captain, but would've made Colonel for sure if he hadn't got killed on Cemetery Ridge outside of Gettysburg. He was one of General Pickett's boys; you ever hear of General Pickett?

Yes. When Pickett was a captain he played a part in the Pig

War in the San Juan Islands.

Ambrose shook his head. I never heard of that.

Pig War. It's more our history than yours.

Ambrose explained that in the sixties he allowed his hair to grow long, wore beads and became a pacifist. With Father Berrigan and many others he tried to exorcise the Pentagon, while others tried to lift it by prayer and incantation.

I'll swear we made that big son-of-a-bitch float off the ground an inch or more that day. Though maybe it was us.

His wife grew tired of his militant pacifism, his political activism, his growing involvement in his faith. When it was time for her to go, Ambrose said, it was also time for me. Just as it's time for you.

Time for me?

To be healed.

I am healed; I'm feeling better by the hour.

I don't mean that—I mean that dream of yours, those things that happened when you were a child. They can be healed—by prayer, by intercession.

Prayer! Ambrose, I'm not even a believer, let alone a Christian.

You think God loves only Christians? Only believers? Where have you been?

Foster hesitated. He knew that he could at this point choose: to confide in Ambrose, to seek his help even, or to remain silent. He was not proud of the role he had played in his own encounter with Rains and Rains' men, nor of the way he had involved Julia, agreeing, even, to use her money. But some unspoken thought in him, something only half-formulated, caused him to let discretion go. He found himself telling the monk about Terry, his fears for the latter, Rains, Julia and Tres Ovejas. Ambrose listened in silence. At the story's end he said:

Tell me again about the cliff.

I hung on as long as I could. Then I decided to let go rather than have them stone me to death.

Right. And you prayed, you said.

I said, Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. Is that a prayer?

Better believe it. You sure you said that? That you're not remembering the compline service from last night and getting confused?

No, Ambrose, I'm not getting confused; I must've heard those words before from somewhere. A sort of coincidence. Like at the party.

What party, for Christ's sake? It's me that's getting confused now.

Foster explained about Gemel, the Shakespeare quotation, the "Tengo Tres Ovejas" poem. He said: Haven't you noticed that things sometimes go like that? You encounter a series of connected events—connected, but not in any causal way? What Jung called *synchronicity*...

Synchronicity be buggered. Listen, Foster, you say you've got a couple of university degrees?

Such as they are.

So much for higher education.

Ambrose, clearly agitated, took a packet of cigarettes from his top pocket and shook one loose. You don't understand anything, he said, more gently. But then I guess I can't expect you to.

Listen, Ambrose, stop being so bloody superior. Say what's on your mind.

Let me ask you a question: what do you propose to do when you leave here?

I haven't thought that far ahead.

Foster thought about it then. The prospect was far from pleasing. Rains and Terry, Prince and Judd...the world presented itself in oppositions. Sally and Julia...

To be honest with you, he said, I'd like to stay here.

I bet you would. Well, I'm afraid you can't. Not that we wouldn't let you, there'd be no problem. We could easily find you work to do. But you can't yet; you have to get well first.

Really well. Then you have to go and sort that mess out.

How can you be so sure of what I ought to do?

How can I be so sure? Ambrose grinned at him. The same way you heard a quote from Shakespeare. And recognized it. Call it "synchronicity."

It's fixed up, Ambrose announced a few days later to the community at large. We're off to Pecos.

Pecos was the name of a tiny village on the banks of the Pecos River just the other side of the Glorieta Pass from Santa Fe. Nearby was a monastery, similar in architecture to Christ in the Wilderness, but different in organization. Ambrose and the Pecos Abbot had been trying to organize a two-day visit. Now it looked as if it were coming together.

You and the other visitor can join in if you want, Ambrose told Foster later. It'll be quite an experience for you. Pecos is a charismatic place.

What does that mean?

It means that there's a box of Kleenex under every pew.

I don't think I'm ready for that, Ambrose. You going?

No, I'll stay and mind the store.

Then I'll keep you company. We can walk up that mountain trail of yours.

No, it's time for you to get a good workout. We'll do the trail tomorrow.

During the next few days Foster walked the trail twice: once with Ambrose and once on his own. He was conscious of his body's growing strength. He followed the arroyo well up into the Jemez mountains, a distance of twelve miles or so, the last part of it precipitous and boulder-strewn, and returned the same day feeling pleasantly tired, but no more. Somebody's used pair of running-shoes fitted him quite well, and for three mornings in a row he jogged easily along the dirt road that lead out to the highway—about four miles out, to where the road cut into the cliffs of the basin, and back again. Other clothes were found for him, an improvement on the

rags he'd been wearing when Ambrose and Miguel had rescued him. He felt sleek, fit and well-cared for, but above all he basked in this new-found tranquillity.

2

Sunday. Foster spent his last few hours at the Monastery of Christ in the Wilderness very peaceably. He ate a lunch of bread and cheese, apples, bran muffins, Gallo Burgundy and coffee. With him were Ambrose and the silent retreatant who had now broken his silence and revealed himself as one Stan Hepner from Milwaukee, on holiday from a stressful job in the nursing profession in some northern hospital. He had enjoyed his silence, he claimed, and had got in touch with aspects of his personality in need of healing. Ambrose boomed advice to the effect that his cultivation of personal piety ought not to interfere with the Christian duty to pursue social justice. Hepner replied that justice is a matter established between men and women who have achieved inner peace, a proposition Ambrose vigorously denied. Foster was amused by the debate, but felt the need to retreat from its one-to-one intensity. The rest of the community had *en masse* left for the celebration at Pecos.

He decided to seek shade and fresh air in the patio. There was a copy of Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing*—he vaguely remembered Beatrice mentioning it during some early conversation. As usual, he seemed to have the place to himself. He read the book for half an hour, intrigued by its headlong style, the staccato, sewing-machine flow of ideas triggered in an exciting way his critical faculties. Then he put the book down and found himself gazing upward at the sky through the sparse leaves of the overhanging fruit trees. He was aware that

within him there had grown a quiet, almost ecstatic acceptance of the delights of this place—its solitude, and its silent, invisible, but nevertheless real purpose. He had lived this last few days in a way that surely human beings were intended to live—in harmony with one another, without pressures, rivalries or anxiety, basking in the radiance of just being.. Foster was aware that he was also romanticizing the place. Of course there were hostilities and conflicts—these men and women were just that—human beings. Nevertheless, his previous life had grown unreal to him; reality lay here, he was sure of that. He would let it go a few days, then, if his feeling grew more intense, he would broach the subject with Ambrose again. He was certain he could talk the latter round. And if it were necessary to be a convert—so be it. A small price to pay. At that moment, perhaps, the mental images of the two women in his life, Julia and Sally, had dimmed, the unresolved situation between the three of them had become trivialized by this desert around him—the vast country, the hot sun, cool air. He could think of nothing better. Poverty—part of the vow. Well, that was going to be his future anyway, but at least here he would not be poor alone. Obedience—but then individualism, in the outside world, was no big deal. And he would owe allegiance not to some secular boss, but to men and women like the Abbot—benevolent authorities who controlled, if you can call it that, by council. Chastity—aye, there's the rub. If only it weren't for chastity. But then his own sex life had not since his married days, except for a few bouts and waves of it and the idyll with Julia, been any great thing either. No, he would think about it some more, then talk to Ambrose. No hurry. Peace here came dropping slow. He stood up and started toward the lounge again with no particular goal in mind. The time was a little after three in the afternoon.

He had just opened the door into the main corridor when he caught sight of Ambrose walking briskly before him. The monk saw Foster at the same time and, without slackening his

rapid pace, made a pushing gesture at him, then put his finger to his lips. Foster's heart leaped unpleasantly. He turned and stepped back into the patio. Ambrose was beside him.

They've come for you, he said.

Come for me?

Two visitors...a man and a woman. The man is short, blond, speaks with a foreign accent, the woman is his height and dark. East Indian, I'd say. You know them?

Yes, Ambrose. Thank you. Where are they now?

Keep walking, then. Go through that door there...no, no ...this one.

The door brought them back into the building. Another took them outside again into the large tool shed. Ambrose closed the door.

Listen, Ambrose whispered. When they rang the bell I answered it. Remember? Greet the stranger as if he were Jesus. Sometimes it ain't Jesus rings your bell. As soon as they told me they were your friends I kind of guessed they were on the other side.

Why're you whispering, Ambrose? They can't hear us. Of course you had to let them in, what else could you do?

I told them I'd go find you. Well, I've found you. What do you want me to do?

Foster hesitated. He could play along with this charade—go into the visitor's lounge and take Ambrose with him. What could Wolf do? Shoot him on the spot, turn on his heel, drive off? There was nothing to be lost by confronting these two. On their own they didn't sound particularly formidable. Those four ugly words of Ambrose's—*they've come for you*—resounded in his mind. He knew they would not be on their own. And Ambrose—big and powerful though he was—was as vulnerable as anybody else to bullets. Foster had no right to involve him.

Ambrose, these people are very dangerous, he said. For Christ's sake watch yourself. I'm going out the back and up that trail to the cliffs. When the coast's clear I'll come on

down. Meanwhile stall them off and phone the police.

They may follow you.

I hope they do.

Ambrose squeezed his arm and turned back to the main building. The door closed softly behind him. Foster felt a wave of longing—for the lost peace, for the big man's presence. Then a cold anger took him; that these people should have tracked him down again—violated him. There must be a way, he would make sure there was a way, of turning on them. Quickly he slipped out of the door to the back of the monastery and ran, as fast as he could, to the base of the cliffs. Some instinct made him almost dive the last few feet and, as he scrabbled for the cover of a huge boulder just at the foot of the glaciis a sharp snapping sound, a whine and a scattering of pebbles to his right and a little above him caused him to huddle behind its shelter. So there *was* another of them—watching the rear exits. Foster breathed deeply. He must have taken the watcher by surprise—a moment's distraction and the target, moving very fast, diving for cover before the man could take aim. Where was he? Probably on the roof. It would not be hard to get up there—probably the sniper had found a ladder even before Wolf had rung the bell.

Behind him the trail to the top of the cliffs wound between high rocks, almost perfect cover. Foster clambered rapidly up the first few feet of the trail and paused. There was no untoward sound. He could see that a hundred feet above him the path snaked out across the barren cliff face, on a sort of traverse. He scrambled to the beginning of the traverse and peeked over the top of the rock. The monastery roof was obscured by an outcrop to his left. Very cautiously he climbed back again seeking a place where he could get a complete view of the roof. Then an extraordinary thing happened: a voice called his name, a woman's voice—high-pitched, clear and lilting. Foster stayed perfectly still. His back felt very exposed, he could hear his heart pounding in his ears.

Mr. Foster, the woman shouted again. Please listen to me

...you have nothing to fear...please listen to me.

With great caution Foster peered over the wall of rock. He could see the entire expanse of roof, a long rectangle. There was no-one on it. There was a trace of foliage within the rectangle, but he was much too low to get a clear view of the patio. The monastery was perhaps 200 yards away and 30 feet down. He slithered down the steep path on his backside, easing forward on the soles of his feet and hands until he was much closer, but still hidden.

Mr. Foster, the woman shouted again.

I'm here, he shouted back, safely behind cover. Say what you've come to say.

Mr. Foster, I can't talk to you like that. I promise no harm will come to you.

Someone took a shot at me, Foster shouted. What does that promise?

He had no business shooting at you...you took him by surprise. We have come with a proposal.

Foster peered over the rock. The woman was clearly visible, the Indian woman he had last seen at Tres Ovejas. There was, of course, no reason to trust her. He ducked down again carrying with him a vivid impression of a slim waist, wide hips, large breasts firmly held in a white blouse. She wore white cotton pants narrowing at the ankles and flat heeled sandals.

Come close, you stupid man, she shouted. Do you think I carry a gun? Do you want me to take off all my clothes to show you I'm unarmed?

I'll stay right here, Foster shouted back. Keep those other people away. I can hear you perfectly. One sign of them and I'm off.

Mr. Foster, she said more gently. They were quite close and in any case the air carried the sound of voices to inordinate distances. My employer was very impressed by you...by your spirited escape. He took that as a sign he was mistaken about you, and he wishes to make amends.

Tell Mr. Rains to lock his doors at night and not to go out

alone.

You realize what this offer means, Mr. Foster? That he wants you to work for us.

Tell him to go to hell.

There was an odd sound then, almost like a chuckle. She said: I wouldn't dream of conveying such a foolish answer. You must realize what the offer means. That you will never have to seek a job again—that you will never be poor. Are you so rich that you can turn down such an offer?

And my wife?

I know nothing about that, but she would not be Mr. Rains' problem but yours and hers. I cannot make guarantees about such a matter. On the other matter I can.

What's your name, Foster said.

I am Miss Confectioner.

Listen, Miss Confectioner, I'm not interested in your proposals. I intend to find Rains and make him pay for what he's done to me, to Julia, to Terry Mason. I feel this so strongly I am not even going to discuss it with you. Now if I were you I should take that blond psychopath with you and get out of here before the police come.

Mr. Foster, Mr. Foster, she said in her strange and attractive singing accent, I implore you to be sensible. Miss Reynolds is now in our care. If you choose not to co-operate with us we shall do her harm.

This confirmation of what he had suspected shocked him. A sudden image flashed through his mind of Julia's agonized face, torn flesh, burns on her skin—he shuddered and groaned to himself.

We have Miss Reynolds, the Indian woman said, and we now have this idiotic monk of yours. Please be guided by me. You cannot get away from us. You are alone, the phone-line is cut and our agent here has put your CB transmitter out of action. There are enough of us to hunt you down and kill you. You will be quite visible to us. We shall kill you and be back on the highway before sundown and before your friends get

back from Pecos. You want a bloodbath, Mr. Foster? Is that really what you want? A bloodbath?

There was an odd desperation in her voice. His death, let alone Ambrose's, would certainly make things difficult for Rains. Foster did not feel great concern on Ambrose's behalf; the big man could certainly handle himself—absolute for death. Be resolute...

Carefully, so as not to move loose stones, Foster crept slowly back up the path.

He could hear the woman's voice, pleading with him, deeply and convincingly as if he were a departing lover. Clearly, whatever she had told him, his unco-operating presence was a great embarrassment to her employer. The voice stopped. Foster was quite high now, along the trail, back toward where it became exposed in its traverse along the cliff. He peered once more over the rim to the monastery roof. This time it was occupied. A man in jeans and long-sleeved plaid shirt stood looking out across toward him, he was bearded, long haired and gaunt-looking. His silent retreat had not given him a more peaceable position, for in his arms he cradled a rifle.

The agent...of course. Hepner would have found out about the radio set and would have known where it was kept. Miss Confectioner was at least no liar. Furthermore, Hepner would know the trail he was climbing, know that it came out along the exposed face of the cliff. All he had to do was to watch for Foster's emergence and pick him off at a range of perhaps 300 yards. Not a problem. Meanwhile someone else, perhaps Wolf, would, more dangerously, stalk him from below. They would be careful about it—they would not assume he was unarmed. Foster began to experience the beginnings of helplessness. There seemed little hope. He stayed perfectly still for nearly half an hour, his eyes on the 50-yard stretch of ground between the cliff-base and the monastery. There was a great stillness in the air. Some insect clattered and a lizard came out on a nearby rock and sunned itself, obviously unthreatened by its motionless human neighbour.

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Almost stationary in the clear air hovered an enormous bird. Or what might have been a bird. The glider hung in the sky poised over the arroyo perhaps a mile away, then dipped suddenly and turned toward the monastery. When it was no more than a quarter of a mile off it lifted again and, with great speed, flew parallel with the cliffs and directly over his head. Foster crouched down and looked upward. The operator wore the green tracksuit and black crash helmet and he was staring straight at Foster so that, before swooping upward and outward again, he must have had a good view of the fugitive. The figure was out of the nightmares of his fever, but held no terror for Foster now. The man might observe him, but in no way could he land effectively along these cliffs. There was a chance, a small chance, that if Foster could hold his position until nightfall he could make his way across the traverse and continue to the top of the trail where it joined the thick belt of trees above. He thought for a moment that the man on the glider might fire at him, but judging from the strenuous efforts the pilot seemed to be making to keep his contraption horizontal it looked as if the updraughts and air currents close to the cliffs required all his attention. And indeed, the glider made three more passes close to Foster's position before heading straight and smoothly in the opposite direction from the one it first appeared. It seemed, once more, to be following the line of the arroyo. Foster stared after it and saw that where the dirt road from the monastery itself joined the arroyo there was a tiny red object he could not at first identify. Just there, with a sort of caudal flick, the glider sank downward then seemed to stop in the air. From this distance it looked as if the wings had suddenly folded—the bird come home to roost. There was an agitation at ground level and Foster became aware that the object was a red pickup truck. He could see two tiny figures, one emerging from the discarded wings, in some sort of confabulation. Two there, Wolf and the woman, Hepner on the roof—how many others? They would need at least two to

make sure he didn't get back into the monastery, one on the roof, Hepner, to watch the trail, and another, or perhaps two more, to climb up after him. About this they would be extremely cautious. Where he was now, in a deep cup of sandstone, he was safe enough for the present. Darkness would fall at perhaps 7:30. Three hours to go.

Beyond the ridge of the low cliffs on the other side of the huge basin Foster could see the peaks of the Sangre de Cristos sharp against a dull frieze of nimbus clouds, the afternoon summer storms. The parched, almost barren earth of the basin, clay and marl, shimmered in a heat haze. To the left of the monastery the red pickup truck had not moved—it was about three-quarters of a mile off—too far for him to pick out detail. The man in the hang-glider had packed the wings of his toy into the truck. There seemed to be two men there; they seemed casual and unhurried, as if they knew where he was and that they would eventually get him. Foster visualized the narrow trail beyond the traverse. It would take him to the north and west of the truck. It stood too far out from the base of the cliff to be worth trying to get close, but he could work his way along the top until it merged with the basin rim. The dirt road zig-zagged up through massive chunks of tufa and crossed the rim at a low point. Then it sank down steeply the other side to where the arroyo came out of a deep, precipitous gorge slashed through the tufa by some vast earth tremor aeons ago. He could wait there and roll rocks on the truck as it tried to get back to the highway. The prospect of this pleased him. The late afternoon droned on. Foster grew conscious of a raging thirst and the beginnings of hunger. The food at Christ in the Wilderness was very basic—a kind of Monastic House low cuisine—but he had grown used to it and to its regular appearance. He pictured the cool, elegant refectory, the companionship of Ambrose, Miguel, Ramon, Beatrice, with longing.

Then he heard it—the scraping of a pebble down below

him, slightly to the right. Instantly he crouched, quietening his breathing. He heard it again, unmistakably this time, the soft, abrasive sound of someone climbing the path and being remarkably quiet about it. Foster's hand felt behind him for a rock. There was a smallish one to hand, about the size of a tennis ball. None other. It would have to do. He slid silently back down the path a few feet to where it dipped suddenly between two high boulders. The path here, shiny with use, lay almost vertical. Foster cautiously lifted his head over the downhill side and watched the slope below. It was broken and chaotic with short cliffs, vast boulders, piled one on top of the other. Whoever came up that trail would have to squeeze his way between the giant boulders and come into view again on the brow of a tiny cliff. Wolf, Hepner, whatever underling of Rains', he would have to stick his head around the corner at a level with Foster's. They would confront one another—in the pursuer's case with total surprise. Foster eased his body upward upon a shelf of rock so that he lay horizontal at a point where the enemy had to appear. Slowly he drew his legs up under himself in a crouching position. Again the sound of a footfall, very close. Foster knew truly that the chance of achieving such a total surprise was very small. The man could, in a split second, react, bring his gun, whatever it was he carried, around and fire a snap shot. He imagined the enemy eyeing each rock, every line the cliffs made, one against the other for a tell-tale sign—the top of a head, a hand. Foster pressed his body close to the rough beige rock beneath him and focused his eyes on a point about four feet ahead of him where the downhill trail disappeared behind the boulder. He heard the creak of leather from a carefully placed boot; he heard the intake of breath and was aware of the effort the man needed to breathe quietly in the thin air and under the strain of the steep upward trail. Then Foster knew that the man was on the other side of the rock, poised, waiting, sensing that something lay behind it.

Foster strained slightly forward, his fingers on the sand-

stone, his feet pressing against a tiny ridge behind him. And just at that moment his pursuer moved; he moved quickly, coming around the corner, his rifle raised, his Stetson hat firmly squashed forward on his head to keep out the glare of the sun, at that instant right in his eyes, and Foster lunged forward from his toes, his hands stretched out, one of them holding the rock. His left shoulder caught the man just below the ear and smashed him against the wall on the other side of the trail, the rifle he'd been carrying loosely in his arms clattered onto the ground, the breath went out of him and Foster twined his forearm round the man's neck and brought the rock in his right hand with all the force he could muster on the man's head just behind the ear. It wasn't enough. The man recovered almost instantly and with a desperate grunt tried to knee Foster in the groin. Foster clouted him again with the rock and threw himself forward so that the man fell on his back with his head downhill, clearly stunned by his fall. Again Foster lifted the rock and brought it down with a kind of mad zest on the man's skull. There was a dull, leaden sound. The man twitched and lay still. Foster leaped up and reached for the rifle, picked it up and focused it on the man with the Stetson hat—called, he remembered, Jack. Well, Jack had found a new master. Jack would have thrown him off a cliff, had tried to kill him. Now he lay stretched on his back, his mouth agape without, so far as Foster could tell, any sign of life. The Stetson hat lay upturned by the man's side: Jack's head was narrow and covered with short, thick, brown hair. Foster could see a red line around the forehead where the hat had fitted tightly. An elation seized him. He could feel no compunction whatsoever—he was filled with instant fantasies of revenge against the lot of them—his would-be murderers and the torturers of Julia. Quickly he bent down and frisked the man's pockets. He found in the jacket two clips of cartridges. And the rifle...well, the odds had evened a little. Through a notch in the rock he could see the roof of the monastery and Hepner standing guard. Foster remembered that

he had fired a rifle perhaps four times in his life: twice in miniature at a fun fair, and during an afternoon with a friend at the latter's gun club. This was a private range and he'd hobnobbed with gun freaks and sipped scotch on the rocks and thumbed through magazines with titles like *Guns and Ammo*. This thing he now carried: it was long barrelled and sleek. There was a bolt action on it and a magazine. He remembered the gun he had handled on that occasion was loaded by means of a spring on the stock near the magazine. He felt round the rifle's stock by the magazine. There was a tab almost flush with the wood. He pressed it; the magazine slipped out. He pressed the top bullet. It seemed solid, as if the spring beneath it were fully compressed. The magazine snapped back, and Foster examined the part of the rifle near the bolt. There was a knurled button—probably the safety catch, but he could not tell if it was on or off. He lifted the rifle to his shoulder and poked the sight through the bottom of the V-shaped notch. He could see perfectly clearly the figure of Hepner, standing quite openly close to the roof's edge. He seemed unnaturally still, his head was half turned forward, expecting some sign, some sound, of his colleague's success. Foster lowered the rifle sight an inch. Now it was directly over Hepner's head. He settled the butt firmly against his shoulder, paused, breathed deeply and pulled at the trigger.

Nothing happened. The trigger seemed stuck fast. With an oath Foster moved the knurled piece of metal and tried the trigger again to see if it would pull. The rifle fired and kicked viciously: he had neglected to take aim again and firm the butt against him. Hepner stared almost straight at him. The shot would have been wildly off. Rapidly Foster operated the bolt, took aim, breathed, squeezed the trigger gently. The rifle kicked again, but this time it felt he had controlled it.

Hepner scrambled along the roof, looking for cover. Foster's bullet must have got much closer to him this time. Foster fired twice more in quick succession—he saw Hepner darting from side to side, a comic figure, as if he were an adulterer in a

farce evading the grimly determined husband. Foster took careful aim and fired a last shot. It was enough for Hepner—he dived for the hatch that connected the roof with the building's interior and disappeared.

Foster felt content. He had accounted for one of Rains' people and scared off another. They would all of them know he was armed and perfectly willing to kill them. The sweetness of revenge, the adrenalin flow of combat, moved through him. Instinctively, he moved swiftly and silently up the trail until he came to the traverse. It was a ledge, two to three feet wide and nearly horizontal, across a cliff face. Each side of the path the cliff stood vertically—the downhill edge about fifteen feet, the uphill perhaps three times as much. Foster cast a quick glance at the roof and at the narrow line of flat earth between the monastery wall and the cliffs that was not in dead ground. Nothing. He looked toward the red pickup truck. It was still there, but there was no sign of anybody around it. His heartbeat loud in his ears, Foster stood and boldly walked as rapidly as he could along the broken ledge. At the far end the path disappeared again in a tangle of boulders. Foster reached the end of the traverse without incident and sank with relief behind good cover. He waited perhaps a minute and peeked over the top of the sandstone. He could see no sign of activity in the monastery, nor around it. It was as if he had the whole vast countryside to himself. Distant, soundless lightning flickered in the dark grey expanse of sky above the Sangre de Cristos; the higher peaks had vanished inside the storm clouds. The sun still blazed across the southern reaches of the plateau but the day had ticked the vast shadow of the Jemez range behind him across the north aspect like the hand of a clock. The cliff around him was in shadow, and Foster realized that with his brown shirt he would not be very visible against the beige and brown rocks. He wondered with increasing urgency about the location of the enemy. The men in the pickup—where were they? It occurred to him they would have found the tree-line path and would be up there, waiting

for him to join them. The ground between the traverse and the top was more broken up than lower down. It offered more choices. A man did not have to stay on the trail. Yet parts of it were still vertical and dangerous—it would not do to get into a position that involved tricky climbing. At least he would now assume that the main danger would come from above him, not from below.

Foster left the trail about 50 yards above the traverse and headed off to the left—the south. The trail itself, he remembered, took two zig-zagging loops and joined the footpath through the trees some 200 yards to his right and 300 feet or so vertically. The terrain was much as he had expected. He scrambled easily but with care well to the south then took off uphill. This was more strenuous, for the rifle hampered him. He paused frequently, wherever there was a boulder to crouch behind and that afforded him an uphill field of fire.

The shadows deepened. By the time Foster had clambered past the first few trees the entire plateau was in shadow. The sun had set behind the tops of the mountains but there was still a strange pearly twilight save over the Sangre de Cristos where the sky had turned almost black. The ground now was much gentler but heavily eroded. Foster's feet slipped on bare earth and he had to grab at roots to drag himself up the last 50 feet to join the trail. With a sigh of relief he sat beside the path—a wide track covered with the needles of conifers. The rest would be simple: he could walk to the south to where the trail connected with the one from the monastery. This would probably be guarded. Well, he could shoot the guard and move on: he almost smiled at the brutality of this idea. What in hell was happening to him? He was fighting for his life, that was what was happening, for himself, for Julia and now for Ambrose. God only knew what was happening down in the monastery: it would probably be the best thing he could do, to fight his way back into the monastery and take out whoever stood in his path. His comparatively easy victory over the man in the Stetson must have made him light-headed. It was the

best thing to do, but the most stupid. Better to continue up the mountain above the path and work his way northward until he could reach the highway. Perhaps twenty miles. And in the dark, though it would be safe to use the dirt road at night, for the pickup truck and whatever Wolf and the Indian woman used would need their headlights to get back themselves. Meanwhile, what was he to do for food and drink? The monastery got its water supply from an artesian well. But there was also a spring, Foster had heard, way up in the hills. He doubted very much whether he could get to the highway, itself in the middle of a desert, without water and something to eat.

Rather indecisively he stood up and walked a few yards down the trail. It was a pleasure to walk on after the roughness, the problematic quality, of the rock climbing he'd done. It was now dusk: perhaps seven o'clock in the evening. Hungry, tired and puzzled as to his next move, Foster walked slowly forward.

The guard at the top of the trail and Foster saw one another at the same time. He was a smallish, plump man in a beige shirt and blue jeans. He wore a black baseball cap. He lifted his rifle instantly and fired. The bullet chipped a tree close to Foster's elbow. He had instantaneously slipped back the safety catch and fired a shot almost at the same time and darted behind the tree. The man ran with an odd clumsy gait, as if he had been hit in the leg, to the shelter of a rock. He was no more than 30 yards away. Foster lay on his stomach and poked his head round the tree's trunk. He wondered how many of them there were. This must be the hang-glider man or the driver of the red pickup. Then he saw the man moving very slowly from the far side of the boulder. Foster crushed his face in a clump of chamisa and aimed carefully. Whoever this man was, he must have thought Foster was farther uphill than he in fact was. The sight was firmly on the man's chest. It would be cold blood, though not quite, for this was the enemy, one who had already

tried to kill him. But some of the euphoria of the afternoon had given way to hunger, thirst and physical exhaustion. Perhaps he should try to scare this fellow away. Yet he knew he could not, that there were others in the vicinity, that this man's death would almost certainly ensure his escape. Well, one thing he had learned in the monastery: refer the matter to prayer. Foster said to himself: *Lord, if it be your will, let this bullet find its target.* Then he squeezed the trigger.

The bullet caught the plump man squarely in the chest. His arms flew up as he crashed backward onto the ground. Foster leaped up like a cat and darted across the intervening ground, his rifle held before him, finger on the trigger—the picture of an infantryman. He was both gratified and horror-struck at the effect of his bullet. One less, anyway. *Thank you, Lord.* The rock, the trees, were in deep shadow now. The man lay still in the deepest shadow of them all. There was no movement from him as Foster approached. He levelled his rifle at the head. He could see now that the man's hair was blond beneath the black baseball cap, that he was quite short, the chest and hips large; and then, as he stood by the body, he saw that it was not a man at all.

The dead eyes of Julia Reynolds stared up at him. Julia Reynolds. Julia... He found himself sobbing; he sat down by her, his mind reeling. The ambivalences of things, the betrayals, the sheer hopelessness of everything... He heard it, the whining clatter of a helicopter, quite close. He looked up; what now? What now? There was a floodlight, the helicopter turned toward the monastery, lowered itself out of the sky and came to earth.

3

The rain had fallen for two days—a warmish, steady rain from a dark and lowering sky. Great nimbo-stratus clouds swal-

lowed the tips of the high buildings downtown and blackened the dreary concrete wastelands around Bloor and Yonge Streets. The tall CN tower, a whitish line against the greyness, seemed to connect the city umbilically with the wet sky—rather a sinister umbilicus, for red lights sparked along its length so that what with its unexpected vastness, its colour—the hue of dead skin—and the little lights—it reminded Foster of a sombre image he'd seen in some downbeat adventure movie set in an Orwellian future. People still in light summer clothes but carrying umbrellas splashed and cursed their ways rapidly along the shiny sidewalks, ducking into doorways and under awnings. Foster remembered from a summer visit to Toronto the violent afternoon thunderstorms, but this was more Vancouver weather—a steady, pouring, drenching and disheartening rain that got down your neck, pulped your shoes and travelled even up your sleeves; it caused people to scream wildly at the carefree traffic sending up great fans and gouts of dirty water from the puddles in the gutters.

They had put Foster up at a hotel just between Yonge Street and the seedy/yuppy purlieus of Cabbagetown, a clean well-lighted place that seemed to be run by vast families of Portuguese. They had brought him up from Albuquerque, after he'd been subjected to long, abrasive interrogations as a murder suspect. There had, even then, been meliorative aspects: one was the intervention of Ambrose, another was the presence of a clever, curly-haired, pipe-smoking civil-rights attorney, a third was the decisive influence of a man from some unspecifiable branch of the Canadian Government. This was a short, powerful-looking fellow with red hair cut *en brosse* and a red moustache. His skin was heavily freckled and his eyes narrow behind fleshy lids. He looked like a wrestler or night-club bouncer, but he was soft-spoken and amiable.

We're taking you back, he said, with some satisfaction. Once I can get the paperwork straightened out, that is.

Foster noted how Canadian this sounded—the firm declarative statement, the undermining qualification. He felt he

was indeed on his way home.

Foster had been in jail three days—fed, watered and even brought beer. A police official named Martinez, a heavy, frowning, ill-favoured fellow, had sat him in a chair under a bare bulb for hours at a stretch going over his story not once, not twice, but many times. There was a lot on Martinez' plate: two deaths—Jack's and Reynolds', a missing person named Wolf Streicher, or Hans Fogel, or Hans Brumbacher suspected of illegal entry into the United States, of causing this Robert Foster grievous bodily harm, of attempting to murder the said Robert Foster, and of activities associated with espionage. His routine police work was complicated not only by this meddling civil-rights attorney, but by yet another pipe-smoker, some Dartmouth graduate with CIA credentials. Furthermore there was this red-haired man from Canada—a blank place, as Martinez knew, on the map north of Chicago, full of bears and Inuit that was used as an American missile base and ruled directly from Buckingham Palace by the Queen of England.

The CIA man was slow of speech and ingratiating in manner and he chose to approach Robert Foster as one well-educated gentleman to another. He pretended to have studied literature, but Foster, disliking him, suspected him of being a business major.

Foster himself was in a condition of emotional blankness. The horrifying image of Julia's dead, accusing eyes came between him and sleep and any waking comfort at all. Ambrose had been allowed to see him, and the monastery's prior, but they had been unable to break through his stony silence. Had it not been for Ambrose, Foster might have had a very bad time in this jailhouse. But the monk had cut an impressive figure—tall, burly, bearded and long-haired, but spruce and clean, who looked as if he could heave a door from its hinges by one thrust of his massive shoulders, but whose air of gentleness exceeded that of a dove. He was dressed for these occasions in a long white robe, sandals, a triple-knotted cot-

ton cord cinching the robe and a huge black pectoral cross. The Hispanics among the officers addressed him piously but incorrectly as "Father." It may have put them in mind of icons of Jesus as imagined by some Christian of the cheerful, muscular persuasion. At any rate it was to Ambrose that Foster owed the beer, the pizza, the sandwiches from the delicatessen and also, of course, his very life. For Ambrose had slipped away from the monastery lounge while Ms. Confectioner, whom Wolf had asked to keep an eye on things, had been distracted by a burst of gunfire. This must have been, Foster told him, when he had succeeded in taking the rifle from Jack's recumbent body and had opened fire on Hepner, atop his roof. Ms. Confectioner had run to the door between the lounge and the patio to see what was going on while Ambrose had slipped out of the other door, the one that led to the parking-space, had run, ducking and weaving but without being challenged, to the monastery's grey truck. Here was a CB rig that the saboteur on the roof had forgotten about. Mercifully the thing worked. Ambrose was able to raise the police without difficulty but was surprised himself when, a short time afterward (though to Foster an eon) the helicopter had arrived, landed and distributed armed police from itself like peas spilt from a pod.

The ivy-leaguer with the pipe had escorted Foster on a plane from Albuquerque to Chicago. Here he was met by a group of men in light summer suits, briefcases and thin raincoats over their arms. Half of these indistinguishable men turned out to be Americans, the other Canadians. Ivy-league almost marched Foster to the little cluster in the departure lounge and left him with visible relief. The men had formed a circle around Foster, checked his identity, then cut their numbers by one half. He was left with the Canadian contingent, walking slowly down to the departure lounge where the connecting flight to Toronto waited to take off.

Foster had tried his hardest to come to terms with Julia's death and with his own culpability. Reason told him that he

had acted in self-defence, that she had, in fact, fired at him first. His reason also told him that her duplicity explained a lot: he could see how she had manipulated the document out of him—the “special delivery” letter, for instance; an obvious, in hindsight, ruse to get him out of the house, out of the country, even, and to deliver him up to Rains. She’d encouraged him so subtly! It had all been his own idea—breaking the code, deciding to blackmail Rains. He wondered if the elaborate game with the code had been her set-up as well. She could have faked the notebook and let him stumble on the Tres Ovejas address. How slow he’d been! She had even given him the clue: “Try your own name”... the key word. What a fool she must have thought him! Yet he would have sworn that her sexual response to him was genuine. Foster knew that many women believed they could fake orgasms convincingly and that few indeed were successful at it. No, Julia’s lovemaking was real. She was his enemy and she was turned on by him. Not really a contradiction. Perhaps there were some women, perhaps most, who were turned on by betrayal. He put this unworthy thought aside. He thought instead of Sally with sadness and longing, knowing he had not only betrayed her but also, it had become clear, himself. Here, in the hotel room, the rain pouring past his window and the dismal urban prospect of trolley wires, parking-meters, parking-lots, scurrying pedestrians, police cars and wailing ambulances before him, he stirred restlessly with self-loathing. He had left Canada to fight and defeat Rains—a knight wearing the whole armour of righteousness—and now—

Right faithful true he was in deede and word,
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad...

A knight rendered powerless by guilt and squeamishness. Yet the feeling in him grew of desire for the high, dry country he had just left—the wild desert he had scrambled over, beaten and feverish, with its blue open skies, cream and gamboge

cliffs, blazing sun and yucca flowers. This beyond the pane of glass was a barbaric wasteland, a place of Mammon, a behavioral sink. His mind turned back to Julia and reeled before the enormity of what he'd done.

The phone on the bedside table muttered quietly for attention.

Mr. Foster? The voice belonged to one of the mackintoshes men from the airport, the men who had brought him here and bade him stay put until called for. Mr. Foster it's time to eat lunch. We're coming up to join you.

We?

Me and my boss.

The boss turned out to be a woman of about 50, blond hair tightly curled, a blue floral blouse and blue skirt. Her feet were encased in low-heeled brogues spattered slightly with mud. Her face was pocked and her nose slightly bulbous, tending to that strawberry porosity suggestive of heavy drinking, but her eyes were blue and alive with a kind of gaiety and her handshake firm without being macho. Altogether a very pleasant woman who suggested less the middle reaches of the civil service than she did suburban laundromats, hair curlers, cigarettes dangling from a mouth and lively, acrimonious gossip.

I'm Laura Barstow, she said. The officer assigned to this case.

To my case?

A case, she said carefully, that now includes you. You've met Gary already, I think.

Foster bowed slightly to mackintosh who shifted weight uneasily from foot to foot.

And you're Mounted Police?

No, Miss Barstow said carefully. We're not the police, but we do work for the federal government. The CSIS, in fact.

She said this rather shamefacedly as if confessing she made her living as a charwoman, or a harlot.

What's that?

Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

An imitation of a superior institution south of the border? Foster asked nastily. As *Maclean's* is to *Time* so is your outfit to the CIA?

We work with the CIA, Laura Barstow said, totally unruffled, whenever their interests coincide with ours. And not when they don't—as in the present situation.

I'm sorry, Foster said. I'm being rude. Please sit down.

There was a knock at the door and a dark, small, Iberian waiter appeared with a tray of food and drink.

I thought we could have lunch here, Laura Barstow said, because I'm expecting a call. Do you have any objection to club-house sandwiches?

None. And even less to the beer.

Please help yourself, Mr. Foster. Gary, there's plenty for all of us.

No thanks, Gary said. I'm not hungry.

Not hungry? she said, a matron concerned at her son's lack of appetite. You'd better eat something now, Gary, we may not have a chance later on.

Well, perhaps a beer.

Mr. Foster, you may have some questions for us. I can probably answer a few of them.

I was hoping all of them.

Well, but some of the information in this file is classified. I'll tell you whatever I can.

Foster thought: that's it, that's about what it amounts to. I'm a particle in a file. He said: you can tell me about Julia. As he said her name he was aware that his voice trembled slightly and that his face had reddened. He knew that if she expressed sympathy, Miss Barstow, he would inevitably cry. She might have sensed this, however, for she became a little brisker.

To be frank, Mr. Foster, we're not very sorry about Julia Reynolds, nor is the US government agency we've been working with. And as far as we're concerned, her death took place on American soil, and . . .

What do you mean "took place"? Foster said bitterly. I shot her. After, from the reports, she shot at you. Is that right?

Foster nodded. This whole episode opened up terrible vistas for him...implosions of darkness, cliffs of fall...

We've known about her for some time, of course, as have the Americans. That's why we were able to get you out.

Activities, Foster said. What were they? She told me she was a single parent with two children living most of the year with their father in Boston.

That's true enough. What else did she tell you?

That she was a kind of business consultant...did people's accounts.

True enough. We don't know why she got into industrial espionage, nor how. Nor why she stayed in it and got involved with more serious matters connected with security. But she did, and I suppose the short answer is money.

It was on the tip of Foster's tongue to start speculating about it; the need some people have to assert themselves in the world as independents after coming out of a marriage; how Julia had succeeded and he had failed.

Terry, he said. What about Terry Mason?

Mason's very probably dead, Mr. Foster. But you must have known that.

Foster nodded glumly; the pallid face, the lisp, the con-man's ingratiating, the sheer neediness of the man—gone, all of it, at the bottom of Vancouver harbour, or rotting into the dank ground under the North Shore rainforests. He said: who killed him?

Laura Barstow hesitated. She picked up one of the beers and rotated it in her hand. She looked at Gary. He leaned over, grasped the bottle, twisted the cap off. The bottle uttered a little hiss and a puff of vapour. He poured the sparkling amber fluid into a glass from which he'd carefully stripped the "hygienic" wrapper. For a brief moment Foster was put in mind of a hotel in Mexico City with a carboy of purified water in the lobby which, when it was empty, the staff would surrep-

titiously fill from the bathroom tap.

Laura Barstow said: We don't know precisely who killed him, and I don't want to breach security. Let's put it like this: suppose by a fluke the Canadian government owns the plans to some new technology, some invention. Rains, a well-known figure in Ottawa and Washington, actually sells this invention to the Ministry of Defence. He's an arms lobbyist, Mr. Foster, among other things. He's an intimate of prime ministers, presidents and their cronies and hangers-on. He made the arrangements to sell this invention, acting as the inventor's agent.

Right. That much I know. And the inventor's name is Causely and his gadget is what he called a seismic pump.

It's not exactly a pump, Gary interrupted. It's a device for placing enormous energy on a very small area with a minimum amount of power...in fact solar power will work it.

Hard to visualize...

It's like one of those pneumatic devices for hammering nails...

In any case, Laura Barstow said. Causely designed it as a pump for countries where the ground water, if there is any, lies very deep...the Sahel, for instance—places where they've got a lot of sunlight and little else. You could sink a narrow shaft, stand his invention on top of it, and let the sun pump out water from very deep under the surface. Rains got wind of this thing, saw the military potential of it, then moved in on Causely.

The telephone on the bedside table uttered a soft purr.

Yes...Gary said into it. Yes. Okay. Thanks. Stay there till you get the word from Mike.

He put the phone down and shook his head at Laura Barstow.

Rains moved in on Causely, she continued, and managed to get him a lucrative contract.

Seven hundred and thirty-three thousand dollars, Foster said.

Laura Barstow, for the first time, showed some unconventional emotion. It was clear that she was genuinely shocked and startled—horrified at the implied breach in security. These feelings manifested themselves by a slight gaping of the mouth and a raising, by perhaps three millimetres, of her right eyebrow.

Now how on earth do you know that? she asked.

I decoded Terry Mason's notebook.

Decoded his notebook?

Listen, Gary said, leaning forward, a no-nonsense man anxious to get things straight and unambiguous. Did you have access to a notebook written by Terry Mason?

I did, Foster said with irritation. And what's more it was in code.

So how could you read it?

I broke the goddam code.

Yes, but how?

I'm good at them, Foster almost shouted, *Jesus Christ...*

Mr. Foster, you haven't drunk your beer. She spoke as if, wife and mother, she felt that men's anger is always appeased by strong drink.

I don't want any beer.

Tell me about the code, she said.

Foster fell silent for a moment, remembering that day of quiet joy, the game of the code, the meal he and Julia had cooked together, the portrait of young lovers he'd painted for himself in his mind. The excitement, he remembered, as he found himself unravelling the message. He found his throat thickening and a dull pain start behind his eyes.

He started telling them, as unemotionally as he could, about the notebook; how Julia had found it, or pretended to find it. How she had led him to the code, which she may even have helped to invent, and gave him the key word—his own name. He told them about Prince and Judd, the words now beginning to tumble out of him as if long repressed. Gary nodded wryly.

RUNNER IN THE DARK

You almost did for Prince, he said. You're right, though, he's one of ours.

Almost did for him?

He's okay now. Convalescing and a little sorry for himself.

You see, Mr. Foster, Laura Barstow said mildly, we're often confronted in our profession with a choice as to how we treat a suspect: we can be polite, or we can try to intimidate. Prince tried the latter course and it didn't work.

At least he tried to warn you, Gary said.

Several people did.

Foster remembered not only Prince's words, "you're in the wrong place, my friend, the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people," but Sondek and Sondek's story. So many warnings unheeded, so many stupidities. He said:

Prince's warning didn't sound all that sincere. How was I to know who he was? I'm sorry I nearly put paid to him.

Tell him that. You can go visit him if you like...when we get you back to the West Coast.

I think I'll deny myself that pleasure. Why was he at that party?

At the Reisz's? He and Judd followed you there . . . they really are quite good at what they do. In fact he was rather hoping you'd do something like that, leaving your apartment. It linked Rains to Muriel and Gemel Reisz of whom, of course, we know a fair amount already. And they, of course, knew of Prince. It was Reisz's and Reynolds' job to get you out of there and out of the range of our surveillance—which of course they succeeded in doing. We lost you then, until you turned up in Albuquerque.

Again the phone purred. Right, Gary said into it. Good. We'll be right there. He put the phone down and nodded.

Come along with us now, Mr. Foster, Laura Barstow said. We'd like to take you visiting. Have you ever been to Banstead Place?

Foster shook his head.

It's a big apartment hotel, Gary said with a sneer. For the

rich and beautiful.

I'm afraid it's still raining out, Mr. Foster. And you just up from a dry climate. It's lucky I've brought an umbrella with me.

The big, unmarked Pontiac splashed gracelessly along the sodden streets. Their destination was a large concrete block of apartments in the downtown area, certainly within walking distance. Foster knew how unthinkable walking would be: better to sit in this big damp car listening to windshield wipers battling the water sheeting down in front of him. His mind drifted as Gary drove slowly through the thickening traffic; his dream, the night of the accident, the slanting rain drumming on the car's roof, the entanglements of wire and nylon webbing, the shattered windshield, the groaning, limp body of his wife. A great sadness, so vast it was it seemed he had moved through space to another planet, a world of grief and pain from which there was no escape. The greyness, the horror of it, caused him to gasp her name aloud.

Yes, Laura Barstow said, an eavesdropper suddenly challenged. Yes, she's certainly been a problem to us.

I'm sorry?

Your wife. A problem. We've decided, though, that she's innocent.

Rains' mistress innocent?

Come, now, Mr. Foster. There isn't any need to talk like that. She may have found out some of Rains' activities—it doesn't mean she approved of them. She must have been utterly horrified to see you at that hotel in Vancouver. And Mason—how could he have predicted she'd be there? It spoilt the whole plan.

I have no idea what you're talking about.

It must have gone something like this: Rains sold the invention to the government for nearly three-quarters of a million. (Causely probably got about half.) Then he found out another government was interested. We aren't sure which one

yet...it could be the French, the West German, even the U.S ...we don't think it was a Warsaw pact country, but we could be wrong...

We've been wrong before, Gary remarked ironically.

Our Ministry wouldn't let Rains sell it again, and Causely was in the south of France. So Rains had one alternative...to steal it. So he did.

That easily?

Nothing is difficult if you've got the money and contacts. Now you've just bribed a man to deliver up to you a classified document. You need to pass this on to these other people, whoever they are. Better to use a middle man, give him the document, let him deliver it to these rather dangerous people. Mason was that middle man. Then he discovered we were on to him.

Who discovered?

Mason found out that Prince was after him. So, informing Rains of this, he must have hired you to take his place—I don't know what pretext he used.

He offered me \$500, Foster said bitterly, to invent a word describing a new computer.

Gary giggled. He must have seen you as a classic sucker. What a load of crap!

A poet named Marianne Moore, Foster said, was paid by the Ford Motor Company to hit on a word for their new car. She worked quite hard on the project.

What name did she choose?

They didn't use any of her suggestions. They called the car Edsel.

Five hundred bucks! Gary said with scorn. Ten percent of his fee and a hundred per cent of the risks.

Mason must have known, Laura Barstow continued, that picking up that envelope would lead Prince to the third party. So he took a lesser risk and used you. He must have thought that you'd go home after the pickup and wait for him to call. He did not know about Mrs. Foster nor that you would react

to her being there by following her to the airport. Be thankful that the dangerous party didn't get wind of you.

Sally...

It must have amazed and horrified her to discover you and she were working for the same man—Sid Rains. But by the time you got to the airport, the Third Man must have found Mason and demanded his envelope...for which he'd paid God knows how much. We don't know what happened then—my guess is that Mason must have done his best to protect you.

How do you figure that?

Because nobody molested you.

Foster thought: nobody molested me. I went unmolested. Except by Judd, Wolf, the man in the Stetson hat. Hepner. Julia. He said: poor Terry. So you think he's dead.

Yes, Mr. Foster, I'm afraid I do. Gary, can't you park any closer than this? Look at the rain... go into their parking-lot and flash your ID at them...we shouldn't have to walk in the pouring rain.

Gary began driving slowly for another four blocks down a long dismal street opening into what looked like infinite vistas of stone and water stretching southward to be swallowed, evidently, by the lake itself. A huge, cubiform block with the words Banstead Place arrayed in vast letters at its top came into view.

Eventually Rains must have found out that something had gone very wrong. He set another of his agents, Julia Reynolds, to trace Terry and to search his office. They knew one another, of course.

Julia, Terry, Sally... Wolf. Hepner. Jack what's-his-name. The Reisz'. Who didn't work for Rains?

Plenty do, that's true. But remember his forces in New Mexico must have been very thin on the ground. He would not otherwise have used Sabia Confectioner for his assault on the monastery. Nor, for that matter, Julia Reynolds.

Maybe he thought I was an easy mark.

Rains had left Tres Ovejas by then. He'd left Wolf to deal

with you: it was badly organized and planned, but he must have thought that with everybody away that weekend he wouldn't need much in the way of a private army. I think the offer of a job was quite genuine. A combination of big bribe and threat—people like that don't believe there are members of the human race immune to such tactics.

Gary turned the car suddenly down a side-street and became involved in parking. Foster, hardly able to resist his own lethargy, said:

Who are we going to see, Miss Barstow?

That I can't tell you right now. You'll have to identify the person—that's why we brought you here.

They were now down in the building's fundament—a concrete wasteland running with rivulets of black water. An elevator took them to the lobby and a second elevator, carpeted, plushly lined and muzaked—altogether of a better class—took them to the fourth floor.

Soon they walked along a spacious, wide corridor onto which discrete doors, each with its regency cornice and spy hole, debouched. Each was separated from the next by a fake Chippendale settle, or a chair, or a bronze pot holder bearing a fern. The carpet was thick and light grey and the walls were papered in silver and grey stripes. There was an underlying vulgarity, however, exemplified by an oil painting of an eighteenth-century gentleman on one wall—it was illuminated by its own special light bulb. As if emerging from a wall itself a young man in a blue suit stood suddenly in front of them.

Hallo, Mike, Laura Barstow said. All well?

Mike nodded.

Mr. Foster, I'd like you to meet Sergeant Mike Clements. He actually is an RCMP officer. Mr. Foster thought, she admitted slyly, that we ourselves might be Mounted Police.

Mike chuckled.

I thought you'd like that, she said. What I want you to do, Mr. Foster, is to stand back a little. I shall be ringing the bell of

that apartment (she pointed to one of the doors). We know someone's inside. When the bell is answered I shall step aside and Mike and Gary will push their way in. When I call you, you come in as well. There's no danger...at least, not by the time I shall call you.

Is it Rains?

I shan't tell you who it is.

Mike and Gary took up their positions each side of the door. Foster noted that each had drawn a gun; also that two other men had appeared, both wearing neat suits, one at each end of the corridor. There was a long silence. Foster was aware of the beating of his heart and of a sour taste in his mouth. It seemed to him that the light in the corridor had somehow slanted, bringing out deep shadows, even patches of blackness. Behind it there was some taunting, sardonic presence that recognized his fear and mocked it.

Laura Barstow rang the bell. Again, a long silence. She rang it again. And again. Then the door opened and Foster could see her talking to someone, her manner amiable and polite. Whoever she spoke to remained hidden. Then Gary moved in front of the door, said something, then, suddenly and with a rush, the three of them were past the door. The two men in the corridor closed in. The door slammed shut.

Whether it was the caution, the tension built up concerning this person's identity, the possible though unlikely danger, Foster did not know. He could feel his own fear, the sense of something evil, the negative, despondent texture of the rain outside, the night of the accident, his car sliding across the wet exit ramp, the crash of metal: but beyond that the figures on the beach and a sort of emptiness, a loveless, blank desert where only evil thrived. There was a moment when he feared for the quarry these people were so actively seeking, a moment of identification as he recalled that he too had relentlessly been hounded, and without mercy. The door opened. Gary beckoned. Foster walked forward.

They were standing there, in a large, luxurious living-

room, regency stripes and thick wall-to-wall carpet, fake Chippendale, dubious Hepplewhite—the same decorator had manifestly been responsible for the hall outside. And there was Laura Barstow and three men, two in suits and another with his back to Foster dressed in a tracksuit as if he had just come in from his fitness club. There was no mistaking the lithe, fair-haired figure.

Wolf, Foster said.

Wolf turned, a slight, bland, overconfident smile on his lips. At the sight of Foster the smile vanished and, wayward as a torrent, he sprang from an attitude of stillness and relaxation to a fighting, lashing, leaping enemy. He smashed out at Foster with a fist that caught him high on the forehead with enough force to knock him on one side. A foot caught Gary in the groin and doubled him over. The door was open and Wolf was out of it in half a second and running down the corridor. Foster picked himself up and went after him, Mike behind.

The two men in the corridor had leaped on Wolf and borne him, struggling and flailing, to the ground. There was a desperate, silent battle until Wolf, at the end of his strength, raised his head and shrieked with all his might:

Bastards! Bastards! Let me go!

Mike dragged himself to his feet, his wrist now bound to Wolf's with a handcuff. With a jerk of his arm he pulled Wolf to his knees. One of the suited men had his hand firmly clamped on Wolf's mouth, while the other hauled at Wolf's arm to get him to stand. The little group started down the hall, Wolf's body arched back with the man's hand still clenched over his mouth, while his arms were stretched almost at full length. The image suggested to Foster a wild animal being prepared for vivisection and, inappropriately, a wave of compassion almost overwhelmed him. Slowly he walked back to the apartment.

Laura Barstow was standing over Gary, seated, pale and still in obvious pain, in a chair. She was muttering soothing words and trying to get him to drink a glass of water. As Foster

came in she said mildly:

The man you saw with Rains?

Twice: once in Vancouver, once at Tres Ovejas. He was the man who supervised my accidental death.

Let's hope that he's better at turning Queen's evidence than he is at arranging people's murders. Mike have any trouble with him?

Not really, Foster said with disgust, the numbers of people against him were just enough to turn the tide.

She nodded, put the glass of water at Gary's side and sat composedly in another chair.

What about Rains? Foster asked. I thought it was Rains you wanted me to identify.

Heavens no. Sid Rains is in Ottawa right now arranging the sale at inflated values of a cabinet minister's land to an armaments firm. He is much too respectable to come into our bailiwick. No, no, Sid Rains will be around forever.

Like Prince.

Laura Barstow seemed to hesitate, as if conscious she needed to choose her words with great care. You've been absolutely invaluable to us, Mr. Foster, she said. And I might as well tell you that I have arranged to hire you as a temporary employee of ours—your salary will be backdated to the day Terry Mason contacted you, and there will be a bonus for this particular operation, plus your expenses. I am also empowered to suggest that you remain on our payroll as a supernumerary available to us when needed.

You're offering me a job.

Yes.

Thank you very much. Rains had the same idea. But I think not.

Don't answer too quickly, Mr. Foster. Remain with us at any rate until this job is finished. We have as yet to locate your friend Hepner; we will need you to build a case against Gemel Reisz.

There is something else I should tell you, she continued.

Mrs. Foster . . .

Where is she?

This is her apartment, Laura Barstow said. Or more accurately it is an apartment belonging to Sid Rains that she occupies. She will be here in about half an hour.

Sally? Here? Well what am I supposed to do? Let's get out—she doesn't want to see me.

On the contrary, Mr. Foster, she does. She knows who we are, what's happened and that you're sitting here. I suggest you wait for her. Gary, if he's feeling any better, will leave you to it. We've a lot of work still to do, as you can imagine. Gary?

Gary stood painfully and held out his hand to be shaken. Dutifully, Foster pumped it mildly up and down.

Goodbye for now, Mr. Foster, Laura Barstow said, shaking his hand in turn. We'll be in touch; meanwhile please give that offer we've made you the most careful consideration.

And they were gone.

Sally. Sally's apartment. The love-nest. Well, perhaps no more. She'd have to move, no doubt of that, nothing more of Rains. What then? A recrudescence...perhaps a recrudescence. A turning again...shuv...nacham. Well, we'll see. Foster's heart leaped a little. This job! What an insult! Being part of the Canadian government's foreign policy with its slavishly American cold war rhetoric. NATO, NORAD...all the dreary initials of belligerence. Who would want to be part of that? Yet Laura Barstow had been pursuing Rains; in this instance she and Foster might have agreed on the Enemy's identity.

Something deep within him began to sing.

Because say what you like...when all the smoke was cleared away...when push comes to shove...he had been instrumental in placing a spoke—a fragile, plastic, wand of a spoke, but a spoke after all, in the Enemy's works. Rains wasn't defeated, oh no; Rains would be back again and again, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, at work in the cellerage, but he had met a slight, a tiny discouragement. Rains would be

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back, or something like Rains in another guise. And Prince... Prince would be back to haunt him with livid face, closed eye and worried features—the embodiment of Foster's own melancholy. But he would be on the watch this time.

Sally...really a question of forgiveness and acceptance. Well, he could offer her that and, what's more, receive it from her.

Let this be a beginning, and: Please, Lord, let me not fuck this up. He smiled to himself. Ambrose would have enjoyed such a prayer. That bonus...it could go to the monastery. He must write to them...Beatrice...Miguel...Ramon...

A key turned in the lock.