

A BAD RELATIONSHIP

Roland Menge

A BAD RELATIONSHIP 2

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for Jeanne

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Hearts are not had as a gift, but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful.

W. B. Yeats

In San Francisco, near the west end of the cable car line that comes over Nob Hill from the waterfront, is a bar called Wyley's Pub. Along with a flower shop and sporting goods store, it occupies the bottom floor of a three-story transient hotel called the Stanton. Like these other two establishments, it has store-front windows, but a fake roof, a wide eave with wooden shingles, has been tacked on the building above these windows to set the bar off from the flower shop next-door and give it a pub-like appearance.

The interior of this bar is as dingy as its wood-shingled facade. It is long, narrow, and just big enough for the counter, a few side tables, and the single pool table in the back. There are red lamps around the side of the room. The wall above the counter is covered with a hodge-podge of post cards, sports pennants, and newspaper clippings, which are tacked, taped, and pasted on it in every conceivable fashion. Outside the front door are a gas lamp and a square wooden sign on which the bar's name is printed in Gothic letters.

Across the street from Wyley's Pub and on both sides of it are other shops and restaurants. There is a pizza joint on the corner, and down the block from the bar is a movie house that shows European films. Cable cars pass by with clanging bells. On weekends the streets are full of people. All this makes for a romantic setting, but Wyley's Pub doesn't share much in this commotion. It is just a typical downtown bar of the sort that can be found in almost any American city, and like most places of this kind it has its regular customers who come in every night. Some of these customers live upstairs in the Stanton and some come from the many apartment buildings that are crammed together on the side of Nob Hill. Most of them are men though now and then a woman or two will come in. Some of the older people from the Stanton use the bar as a living room.

In May, 1973, a young woman named Katherine Hewitt began working at Wyley's Pub as a bartender. She was 27 years old, of medium height, with shoulder-length brown hair and small, pretty features; she had a full body and

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tended to be a little on the heavy side—not enough to detract from her figure but just enough to be noticeable. She was a divorcee and had a seven-year-old daughter named Stephanie who sometimes accompanied her mother to the bar and sat at the counter with crayons and paper. Some of Stephanie's drawings were tacked on the wall amidst the post cards and clippings that hung above the counter.

Katherine Hewitt proved to be a good choice for this job. There was something solid and substantial about her, a complete lack of pretense or coquettishness. She was a part-time student, and to support her daughter and her studies had worked in a number of bars over the year. Like many women of this sort who work in truck-stops or bars, she had a sixth sense for men which expressed itself in mixed cynicism and affection. She knew how to interact with the men in the bar and maintain her own dignity. She kidded with them, listened to their problems, even exchanged crudities with them, but kept her own ground. With the older people, too, she was attentive and kind. She soon became a popular figure at Wyley's Pub, particularly with some of the regulars from the Stanton. Her being a little bit overweight just made her more appealing; it made her seem more human and approachable.

As might be expected, all the men got around to making perfunctory passes, but it soon became known that Katherine Hewitt wasn't available for one-night stands. You could get just so close to her and that was it.

Just around the corner from the bar lived a cabdriver named Tom Steward. Every day at some time or another, usually toward evening, he passed by Wyley's Pub. He was 29 years old, a handsome young man with clean Nordic features and a ruddy complexion like an outdoorsman but with a soft look around his eyes which suggested that he was gentle-mannered and unsure of himself. He was always dressed the same way, in a blue denim coat, corduroy pants, and tennis shoes, and always seemed in a hurry. He walked with long, energetic strides, now and then breaking into a run. He was intelligent-looking and often seemed lost in thought. Sometimes he came by with the clipboards. and

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maps that he used in his cab and at other times with a sketchpad. He drove cab only four nights a week and on the other three nights attended drawing sessions at a community college. Occasionally he stopped in the bar. He usually ordered a beer and sat by himself at one of the side tables.

Since he came by the bar so often, Steward was bound to notice Katherine Hewitt eventually, but she had worked at the bar for more than a month before he did. He was on his way to supper when he first saw her. He just caught a glimpse of her as he passed by, but something about her was immediately appealing to him. Later that same evening he stopped in. She was standing by the pool table with some men. She came across the room, took his order, and brought him his beer, glancing at him for a moment with her direct, intelligent eyes.

While drinking his beer, he watched her as she moved around the room. She was dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and a flannel shirt that she left unbuttoned and outside her pants in an obvious effort to deemphasize the largeness of her hips. Now and then she smiled. She had a delightful smile. When she laughed, she brushed back her hair from her brow and tucked it behind her left ear. The silver loop in her ear was the only thing pronouncedly feminine in her apparel. She always had a cigarette in her hand and was good at playing pool. She divided her time between the customers and the pool table. Whenever she had a free moment she went over and took a shot.

Steward was the sort of man who, when he first met a woman, made an immediate judgement of her based on physical appearance alone, and he noticed at once that Katherine Hewitt had a lovely face and was a little bit too fat. But what intrigued him about her was her tomboyishness and straight-forward manner. When he met a woman of this kind, he always imagined that there was some softer part of her that she wasn't showing. He had always been attracted to strong women—not only to strong women, but they were one of several types that particularly appealed to him. He craved the approval of such women because deep inside himself he doubted his own worth. He watched her as she

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interacted with the men in the bar. He noticed that she spoke to everyone in the same direct way and didn't flirt around.

By the time he left the bar, she was very much on his mind. He walked up the street as though in a hurry. At the corner he broke into a trot and ran the rest of the way to his building. Up in his apartment, he rolled himself a joint, then while smoking it he paced back and forth from the big room that he used as a living room and bedroom to the tiny kitchen that he used as a study. The next night he came by Wyley's Pub in a blue and white cab. He drove just the same way he walked, impatiently, weaving in and out of the traffic and laying on the horn. But when he came near the gas lamp in front of Wyley's Pub, he slowed to a crawl and leaned way over in the seat to get a good look at Katherine Hewitt.

The next night he went back to Wyley's Pub determined that he would interact with her in some way. But it was a busy night at the bar and anyway a bar-room was the worst kind of situation for him. He wasn't much of a drinker and he always felt uncomfortable in bars. He wasn't good at making small talk; he never knew what to say. He ordered a beer just as he had done the time before. She came across from the pool table just as she had done before and gave him the same direct look. But no words were exchanged between them and he didn't want to go over by the pool table because he didn't-know how to play pool. He came back a few nights later but the same situation repeated itself.

He was about ready to give up when she began to get interested in him. It wasn't an amorous interest so much as plain curiosity—at least, that's the way she explained it to herself. She was used to men coming in and out of the bar. Most of them she hardly gave a second look. The bar was like a second home to them. They sat around, watched TV, played pool, now and then they made a feeble pass. She knew what to expect from them. Steward was different because he was so out of place. She could tell that he felt ill at ease in a bar. Far from regarding this as a minus, she looked upon it as a plus. She herself was a very determined, goal-oriented person and she didn't think much of people who had nothing to do but sit around in bars.

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Even before he had first stopped in the bar, she had seen him going by with his sketchpads. Her ex-husband had been an artist of sorts and her memories of the world of art were not particularly rosy. But none the less his having such interests, combined with how he acted in the bar, made her think that he was probably a sensitive person.

The most curious thing of all was that his eyes followed her wherever she went. She was used to being the house amusement for the men but most of them were more subtle about their interest. Steward, the whole time he was in the bar, did nothing else but look back and forth from his beer glass to her.

She knew very well that he had a crush on her but she didn't regard him as a potential lover; she just thought that he was a harmless, lonely man. It wasn't that she considered him unattractive. She thought he was very attractive, but she had no room for men in her life.

One night he came in when there were only a few people in the bar. She could see by the way he hesitated at the door that he wasn't sure he wanted to come in when the bar was so quiet. He was afraid that there would be too much attention on him. She was in a down mood and suddenly it occurred to her that she was glad to see him. She came around the counter, saying, "Don't be bashful. Come right in," and went over to plug in the juke box so that the bar wouldn't seem so much like a tomb. She came around the pool table to take his order and looked at him for a moment but he looked out towards the street. She brought him his beer and went over to the pool table. Now and then she looked over toward him. He looked as uncomfortable as always.

He finished his beer quickly and reached for his jacket.

"Want another?" she hollered across the room. The juke box was playing so loud that she had to holler to be heard.

"Yea, I guess so," he said. "And some pretzels."

She brought him his beer and looked at him. Once again, he looked toward the street. She set her pack of cigarettes on the counter next to him, went over to take another shot at the pool table, poured herself a cup of coffee, then walked around the counter toward where he was sitting. Meanwhile,

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the juke box had stopped. She set her cup of coffee next to her cigarettes, went over to the juke box and plunked a quarter in it. All this while he sat on the stool looking directly at the wall behind the counter. With a little smile on her face she came over and took the seat next to him. It was obvious that he was now even more uncomfortable, and while she wanted to reassure him, she couldn't help feeling superior because this was her own turf and she knew it well.

"You must live around here, don't you?" she said. She sat facing outwards as though to keep her eye on the other people in the room. She lit a cigarette. It was a stupid thing to say, but it was the only thing she could think of.

"Yea. How did you know," he said, twisting around to see her face.

"I always see you come by. You always wear that same blue coat."

He laughed. Already he felt more at ease. "Yes. That's the extent of my wardrobe." He looked at her a moment and then looked beyond her towards the street.

No one said anything for a moment. He was still looking toward the street,

"Quiet night," he said.

She nodded. "Uh-huh."

He took a sip from his beer.

"You must draw or something," she said. "You always have a sketchpad."

"Yea. I've been taking classes."

"You make money by doing art?"

"No, I drive a cab."

"Too bad."

He laughed. "Why is it bad?"

"You must see a lot of crazy things. You must meet a lot of crazy people."

He smiled. "Oh, it's not as bad as all that. I kind of like it."

"Why's that?"

"I just like to drive around. I guess I have a low I.Q."

"You don't seem like, you have a low I.Q. You seem intelligent."

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“Thank you.” He turned around a little on the stool so as to face her more directly. For the first time, he really looked into her eyes. He noticed that she was older than he had thought and that there was sadness in her eyes. She looked away.

“It must be crazy here, too. Isn’t it?” he said.

Suddenly, a different, softer side of his personality was coming out. It made her feel more drawn to him at the same time as she felt it as a danger.

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess it is sometimes.”

Again a silence intervened, and then he said, “So how about you?”

“So how about me what?”

“Do you just work here or what do you do?”

“No, I do other things.”

“Like what?”

“I’ve been taking classes also.”

“In what?”

“Linguistics.”

She didn’t at all like that the attention had shifted to her and she was glad to see that a few customers had walked in. She excused herself and went back around the counter.

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That evening in his apartment, standing in his small bathroom, Tom Steward looked at himself in the mirror. He turned sideways so that he could see how he had appeared to Katherine Hewitt when he had looked at her over his shoulder in the bar. Three steps took him down the short hallway to the kitchen where his sketchpads were neatly stacked on the dish counter. Turning on the small lamp on the kitchen table, he sat down to look at them, but after a few moments he turned distractedly away.

Later, lying in bed, he went over what had happened at the bar, acted it out in his mind. He recalled how he had said, “So how about you?”, and how she had answered, “So how about me what?” He thought that maybe she had resented the way that he had said that. He tried to recall what she looked like and how she had looked at him, but he couldn’t get a

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clear picture of her in his mind. The only thing he could remember was the one look that she had given him when he had seen the sadness in her eyes. And he remembered that, despite the largeness of her hips, she had lovely breasts that were tilted to the side.

He was determined to find some way to ask her out. That she had put her cigarettes by him and had come over to talk with him was the only indication of interest he needed. He was basically a shy person; many times in the past he would have required more encouragement. But he was in a new period in his life: he was forcing himself to initiate relationships. He wanted to break away from what he had been in the past.

He had lived in San Francisco for a little more than a year. Previous to that, he had lived in many different places and had tried many different situations. His boyhood had been spent in the Upper Midwest. He had graduated from college in 1967 when the Vietnam War was at its height. Pressured by the Draft, he had enrolled as a VISTA volunteer. During his two years of VISTA service, he had lived in a small town in North Carolina. Following that, he had done two years of alternative service as a conscientious objector: the first in West Virginia and the second in the Southwest.

He was odd in that his relations with women had been limited and intense. He had attended an all-boys' high school and for four of the five years that it took him to get through college had attended Catholic universities where the students were all men. Due to these circumstances plus his natural shyness, he managed to finish school with little experience of the opposite sex. During his time in VISTA, his social interactions had been limited to the small town that he lived in. Again no women entered his life. Then, at age 25, during an interval between his VISTA service and his first year as a conscientious objector, he had fallen in love and married after a courtship of four months. This marriage, complicated by his obligation to perform alternative service, had lasted only a year and a half, but the psychological repercussions of its break-up—his feeling that somehow he had failed or that

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she had seen something in him that was basically wrong—had lasted several years more. He had wandered around, lived on a commune, gone back to the Midwest and worked as a carpenter, but nothing had seemed right. Then, at age 28, he had come to San Francisco.

During his year in San Francisco, he had set up a new life which at times seemed exciting and romantic to him. He had started out with a vague ambition to find his way to some form of artistic expression. He felt good because he had not only started classes, but also had found a subsistence job which enlarged his life-experience. He liked driving cab. It was more than a job to him; it was a way to mix in with the city and take part in its commotion. He liked to drive; he liked to dodge in and out of the traffic. He was still in the initial romantic period that most rookie cabdrivers go through. He was just as excited about his art. He drew everything—not only the models in his classes, but people he saw on the street, the chairs and plants in his apartment, and his own face which he observed in the bathroom mirror and depicted as more thin and severe than it was in actuality. His drawings were done in a stiff, linear style with the pencil pressed too firmly on the paper.

Steward had also tried to make a fresh start with women. He had this idea his ex-wife had rejected him because he had been too serious-minded; he tried to be more spontaneous and impulsive. Whenever he did something rash, he patted himself on the back because he thought that it was more dynamic to be impetuous.

He couldn't get over his shyness but he had managed to initiate affairs with pure brash guts. During his year in San Francisco, he had had a number of such affairs. All of them had been short-lived. Some of them had been with women, friends of friends from back home, who had visited town for a short time. The others had been with local women, but for one reason or another they hadn't worked out. With the women who were just passing through, where the relationship had a pre-defined ending and remained parenthetical to his life, he was at his best. With each of these women he had gone through the same little routine

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which involved a few joints and a tour around town in his cab. San Francisco was the perfect place for this and it had turned his head a little to have a series of pretty women hanging on his arm. He had even started to think of himself as a kind of Don Juan and was developing a whole, new breezy style to go along with his new identity. With the other women, the ones that there was a chance to have a real relationship with, things never went well. If he was accepted, he became very critical and started to think that he wanted to keep his options open. If he was rejected, he fell in love.

Whenever a relationship ended, even if he had been the cause of its demise, he had experienced the same intense emotions that he had gone through at the end of his marriage. As soon as he was alone again, the same deep loneliness came back that had been with him since then. Beneath his whole life there was an undercurrent of desperation. He was very conscious of his age. He imagined that by his thirtieth birthday he had to have his life in order.

He exercised every day because he did not want to look old. There were times driving cab when, despite his romanticizations, he suddenly felt tired and bored. Even though he pursued his art studies with single-minded intensity and dreamed of producing great art, he doubted his talent. He was afraid that he would get old without doing anything solid. He kept thinking that some woman would come along who would give him the emotional support he needed and fill up the deep emptiness that he felt inside of him. It was this as much as sexual hunger which impelled him into new relationships.

He got up early the next morning, went running, took a shower, and then, dressed in his blue denim coat, with his sketchpad under his arm, took the bus to a morning drawing session. All day long he bent over the paper producing his stiffly-lined drawings. By the time he returned home it was already dark.

As he passed the gas lamp in front of Wyley's, he impulsively turned in. As soon as he came in, he looked around for Katherine Hewitt. It was a busy night at the bar. The juke box was playing. If she had noticed him come in,

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she didn't let on. Finally she came across to get his order.

“Well, if it isn't Blue Coat. How are you doing?”

He stared right into her face, looking for some indication of whether or not she was glad to see him, but as soon as his eyes met hers, she looked back toward some people on the other side of the bar. She took his order, brought him his beer, looked at him matter-of-factly, and went back to the pool table.

He hung around for about ten minutes, but she didn't come back. He picked up his jacket and started turning to go. Immediately, she came across the room, brushed past him, and went over to the juke box, which was right next to the door. When he came by, she was wrestling with the juke box, trying to move it away from the wall.

“Hey, Blue Coat, come here a minute and give me a hand. I have to turn this damn thing down.”

He grabbed it with both hands and yanked it away from the wall. She squatted down and reached behind it to readjust the volume. When she stood up again, her face was flushed from her exertion. He noticed that her eyes were green. For the first time it occurred to him that she was stunningly beautiful.

She brushed her hands together. “Well, that's that.” She pointed to her head. “All this loud music, it blows my mind sometimes.”

He nodded, not knowing what to say.

She saw his sketchpad. “You been drawing?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Well, keep it up.” She shook her fist, “All that effort pays off.” She turned around to go back into the bar, then turned back and said, “Oh, thanks for helping me with the juke box!”

He watched her cross the room and then went out. He looked up toward the top of Nob Hill. A thick fog was rolling in. The steeples of Grace Cathedral were hidden in fog. He started to go home but changed his mind. He felt too worked up. He kept going up the hill and wound up down in China-town at an all-night restaurant Where he sat drinking popcorn tea and thinking about. Katherine Hewitt.

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Steward had one close friend that he always talked with about woman, a Jew named David Brod. who drove cab for the same small company that he drove for. Brod was a huge man with black frizzy hair, a wide brow, an Aramaic nose, and a black bushy beard that made him look like a patriarch. He was liked by everyone and regarded as a natural leader. He was always ready to give an ear. He was involved in all kinds of artistic and political projects, and yet had plenty of energy for other people. Steward had only known Brod for several months but was on intimate terms with him. He saw him from time to time on the streets, and now and then he shared a meal with Brod and the two women and one child that Brod shared a flat with in the Mission District. He was in awe of Brod because somehow he combined serious-mindedness and intellectual responsibility with joyous living. More than anyone else, Brod represented for Tom Steward the new life that he was groping toward. And more than anyone else, Brod personified the romance and excitement of this new life.

The logical place to look for David Brod was a bar in North Beach called the Paradise Cafe. It was on Broadway Street at the end of the Strip where the neon lights ended and the street dipped down toward the on-ramp that led to the Bay Bridge. The logical time was Sunday night. By custom some of the younger cabdrivers congregated at this bar every Sunday night about midnight because after midnight on Sunday there wasn't much business on the street.

Steward parked his cab in the alley down the block from the bar and then came running up the hill with his jacket in his hand. At the door of the bar, he stopped to look in. The bar was a hub-bib of activity. It was the height of the tourist season and all the drivers were making money hand over fist. He saw Brod standing with some other drivers in the back of the bar by the pool table, his head towering above the others. Steward went over towards him, weaving in and out of the swarming bodies in the room. Brod and the others were looking at some kind of leaflet. They turned around to watch Steward approach.

“Hey, here comes the kid,” said Brod, speaking in the

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New York accent that the drivers affected. “He’s been sweeping up the streets. He’s been looking for a couple extra nickels.”

Steward shook his head in mock disgust, looked at Brod, and motioned with a sideways flick of his head towards a table by the front window. “Got something to tell you. Let’s go have a beer.”

“You made a hundred. You got a trip to Sacramento,” said Brod, still speaking in his street accent.

“I’m not talking about money. I’m talking about something important.”

Soon they sat at the table by the front window that Steward had motioned to. A steady stream of cars passed by on the street outside the window. Across the street from them were some apartment buildings and a two-story brick school with large windows that reflected the flashing lights of the nightclubs on the Strip. On the table in front of them burned a candle in a red-glass container. Next to it was a tiny bouquet of purple flowers, two bottles of beer, and a pile of potato chips and pretzels.

Brod bit loudly into a pretzel and studied Steward’s face in the unsteady light from the candle while pulling on his beard with his left hand. At first he had no expression on his face, and then the sides of his lips quivered and bent slightly upwards into a smile.

“I was going to say, ‘Now what can this be?’, but looking into your lustful eyes, I can see you’ve been womanizing again. I can tell you have your evil mind on laying some pipe.”

Steward smiled, leaning towards him. “Brod, you’re so crude. Haven’t you ever heard of being in love?”

“I’ve heard of it, Steward, but the question remains whether you have.”

“So let the matter drop then,” said Steward, “because this lady is something special.” He got up to go the counter. He came back with a couple more beers and some pretzels. He set one beer in front of Brod, bit off the top of the cellophane bag that the pretzels were in, and dumped the pretzels on the table. He picked one up, looked at David

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Brod, and smiled. To talk about women like this was one of their favorite occupations.

“So what are you saying? You mean this is HER?”

Brod used this word, “her”, to refer to the special woman that he hoped would someday come into his life. It was hard to know whether he really believed this would happen or just joked about it. He himself wasn’t sure. When it came to women, the two of them were as different as night and day. Brod, though naturally sociable and outgoing, was cautious about women and dilly-dallied around for months with one toe in the water before he finally jumped in. He admired Steward’s impetuosity.

“Suffice to say, I’ve got my eyes on a beautiful lady. And just last night she had her eyes on me.”

“And to where was her eyes directed then? I suppose to your gargantuan cock.”

“To my brain, David. To my wonderful, sensitive brain.”

Whenever they talked about women, they always went on like this in a banter before they got down to more serious discussion. That didn’t happen until later that same night. They were back at the garage, sitting in Brod’s beat-up Plymouth Valiant, which had plastic and cardboard where the back windows should have been. Across the street from them was a large gray building with a sign that said “Pacific Cab.” The curbs on both sides of the street were lined with blue-and-white cabs. The yellow light on the corner stop-light blinked off and on.

“When you were talking before about that lady, were you serious?” said Brod.

“Yea, I was serious.”

“Where did you meet her?”

“On California Street. You know that little bar by the show-house?”

“Wyley’s?”

“Uh-huh.”

“She must be really fine if she hangs around at a dump like that.”

“She doesn’t hang around there. She’s the bartender.

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Give me a break.”

“She must be a tough cookie, working there.”

Steward shrugged. “That’s what’s so intriguing about her. She’s very matter-of-fact, a real poker face. You can’t tell what’s she’s thinking. And she doesn’t flirt around. She doesn’t flirt around in the least.”

“Sounds like she’s got her guard up. I don’t blame her.”

They sat in silence for a moment, looking at the blinking stop-light. Then Steward said, “You ought to see her, David. These beautiful sad eyes. A real madonna-type. She’s got these beautiful breasts.”

Brod grinned and leaned back in the seat, scratching his beard. He said, “Hmmm. Sounds pretty good to me.”

Later, Brod drove Steward to his apartment. Whenever Brod drove, he kept his window open and stuck his nose out like a dog. They were riding down a deserted thoroughfare through a corridor of blinking yellow lights. They were still talking about Katherine Hewitt.

“She puts her cigarettes next to you. She comes over to talk to you.” Brod was saying. “That sounds pretty good to me. What happened then?”

“She asked me what I did. I told her I drive cab.”

“Was she impressed?”

“To say the least. She asked me for my autograph.”

Nothing had been resolved by the time they pulled up in front of Steward’s

apartment, but as he got out he said, “In any case, I already made a plan.”

“Now he springs it on me,” said Brod. Steward’s impetuosity was a running joke between them. “I suppose your plan is a secret.”

Steward walked toward the door of his building. He turned and looked

back. “I’ll let you know about it after its execution.”

“You mean after your execution,” said Brod.

Steward laughed and turned around again. Brod hollered, “Give me a break.

Steward turned around. “It’s a very simple plan. I go in

there and point-

blank ask her out. I'm tired of wasting my time in that rat-hole."

Brod shook his head.

"You believe it?" said Steward.

"Sure, I believe it," Brod said. His whole head was outside the window. He looked like a bear. "You know why?"

"Why?"

"Because you're an idiot. That's why."

The following night Katherine Hewitt stood by the front door of Wyley's Pub, watching the fog swirl above the roofs of the Victorian-style buildings across the street from the bar. A cable car came by with people hanging on the side. One of them, a young man in a three-piece suit looked at her and smiled. She frowned and looked away. It was just after sundown. A bluish glow still lingered in the sky but the streetlamps were lit. With a sigh of boredom, she glanced behind her into the red-lit interior of the bar

A few men, some of the regulars from the Stanton, were playing darts in the back of the room. An old man with white hair, another regular customer, stood by the counter drinking whiskey with a beer chaser. Every now and then, he would pour some of the beer into the whiskey and swish it around with his straw.

Watching the old man, her face softened. "So how are you doing, Bill?" she said to him, still standing at the door.

"Oh, not bad, not bad. I guess I'm okay."

"And how's Caroline? I heard she got out."

"Oh, she's still kind of under the weather. She needs a lot of rest."

She nodded pensively and then looked back to the street. Her thoughts drifted to Tom Steward. Lately she found herself thinking about him. He was the most interesting person who had come in the bar for a while. But as soon as she realized that she was thinking about him, she pushed him out of her thoughts. Experience had taught her that most men who showed an interest in her at the bar came to look and that was that. She was wary about men,

especially good-looking men. Over the years, through much hard work, she had managed to put some order in her life. If anything could throw a wrench in the works, it was a man.

She was just thinking this when she looked up the street and saw a blue-coated figure approaching. She watched the figure blankly for a moment and then realized it was Tom Steward. Immediately, she turned around and walked quickly into the bar, glancing at her reflection in the large mirror next to the cash register. She began washing some of the glasses that were sitting by the sink.

“Well, it’s Blue Coat again,” she said with affected surprise when he walked in the door. At the same time she said this, she was aware that she was glad that he hadn’t passed by without stopping in. He hesitated by the door a moment. As usual, he looked uncomfortable.

“So what have you been up to?” she said.

“Nothing much. Just things.”

“How interesting. Can I get you a beer?”

He felt like she was making fun of him. It made him feel mad.

She brought him a beer, smiled faintly, and went back to washing her glasses. She ran out of glasses and started doing them a second time. He was dressed in the same outfit and his hair was still wet as though he had just stepped out of the shower. He had his hair swept back from his brow like a little boy. He looked healthy and handsome. She noticed that he was in an inordinately serious mood, as though perplexed by some problem. She finished washing the glasses the second time and went over by the pool table.

All this while, Tom Steward had his mind on one thing and one thing only and that was how best to carry out the plan that he had resolved on. The old man with white hair was still standing at the counter near the door and still mixing beer in his whiskey. He looked at the old man with irritation, thinking that it would be too embarrassing to say anything with him in hearing distance. He got up with his glass in his hand, plunked a quarter in the juke box, and punched out three selections without reading what they were, then came back to the counter, taking a seat further down

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from the old man. He sipped his beer nervously and kept glancing at Katherine Hewitt who was very much aware of his curious behavior.

Noticing that his glass was empty, she came across the room. "Is every- thing all right? Can I get you' another?"

"Yea, please," he said frowning. "And one bag of pretzels."

She came back with the beer and smiled at him. "You look so gloomy sitting here by yourself. Why don't you come over and shoot some pool?"

He squirmed on the barstool. "Listen, you may think this is rather strange But I don't like to sit around in this bar, and the only reason I came here tonight is to ask you out. So why don't you tell me if you want to and then I can go."

This was not at all what she had expected. She was taken by surprise. She walked down the counter a little ways and began emptying some ash trays.

"No one ever asks me out," she said, as though to explain her hesitation. "They all just make cow eyes."

Since this wasn't an answer, he looked to the side. He watched someone make a shot at the pool table. It suddenly occurred to him that he had made a terrible mistake. He began thinking about how he could make a graceful exit. He looked towards the door. It was only thirty feet away. But when he looked back at her, he discovered that she was looking at him sympathetically, as though touched by his predicament. She brushed back her hair from her brow and tucked it behind her left ear.

But if you really want to," she said, "I'll give you my number."

She tore off a receipt slip from a pad by the cash register. On it she wrote her name and phone number in big rounded figures.

She shrugged. "I'll be home tomorrow at supper time. You can call me then if you want to."

He got up. He kept nodding his head. "Well, hey, that's great. Thank you very much. Your name is Katherine, right? My name is Tom Steward. Well, hey, that's really great. I won't hang around." He was already moving toward the

door. "I'll call you tomorrow. Sure thing."

He went immediately out. She watched his awkward exit in amused disbelief.

At the corner by the pizza joint, he broke into a run and ran the rest of the way to his apartment. He called the next evening at the appointed time and made a date for the following Tuesday.

The next night he drove cab. He was coming down Broadway Street when he saw Brod sitting on the hood of his cab by the cab stand on Broadway and Columbus. He slowed down to miss the green light. He leaned over and rolled down the right-side window.

Brod, as usual, was dressed in a green Army jacket. He saw Steward and smiled. He came limping over—due to an old basketball injury, he walked with a limp—and stuck his bearded face in the side window. "So what transpired with the beautiful lady?"

Steward held up the receipt slip with her phone number on it. "Went in there just like I said. Walked up to her and asked her out. Got her phone number just like that. Called her last night and made a date for next Tuesday. I'm going to meet her at her house." He winked.

The light had turned green. The cars behind Steward's cab were honking. He started moving forward, still waving the receipt slip.

"Hey, the kid is invincible!" Brod yelled after him, shaking his fist in approval. "Give him one night and he gets her number!"

3

"The problem is that he looks so decent. He looks like a Prince Charming."

"Now, how can that be a problem, Katherine? You should hear yourself talk."

"It brings out all these unrealistic expectations, Scott. That's how it can be a problem. I'm not sure I want another dose of unrealistic expectations."

Katherine Hewitt lived in a three-bedroom apartment which, since she received no assistance from her ex-husband,

she paid for with her earnings from Wyley's Pub. She and her daughter each used one of these bedrooms; the third she let out to a gay man named Scott Paulsen who received room and board in exchange for taking care of her daughter on the nights when she worked at the bar. Scott Paulsen was relaxed and affectionate, a good surrogate father for Stephanie. His light-hearted attitude provided a healthy balance to Katherine's determination. It was Saturday morning, and the two of them were in the kitchen where they often had long discussions. Hewitt, her hair pulled tightly back from her brow, sat at the kitchen table with a pen in her hand and an open notebook in front of her. The kitchen table was stacked with books. Scott Paulsen stood by the sink, leaning against the dish counter. He was a slightly-built man in his middle 30's; he had a thin face, plain features, and warm eyes.

“And yet you said ‘yes’, didn’t you, princess! There must be a spark of unrealism somewhere in those old bones.”

She laughed. “The only reason I said ‘yes’ was because he was so emphatic about it. He caught me off-guard.”

“How could he resist someone as beautiful as you?”

“Ha! I can understand how it might be a problem!”

“And now you’re angry because you’ve opened up this Pandora’s box of terrible things that are going to happen to you.”

She smiled. “A little. But we don’t need to talk about it now.”

“Ha! She doesn’t even want to discuss it. Hiding her feelings as usual! Well, you’re lucky that I can’t stick around. But I’ll be back to conduct another interrogation!”

He came over, buffed her on the cheek, and went out. Every Saturday morning, he had a class in Tai-Chi. She watched him go out. Due to the demands on her time made by school and work, she had few close friends. Scott Paulsen was her only confidante. Her relations with other people were restricted to Paulsen, the people at the bar, and her daughter. She worked at the bar four nights a week and attended classes four days. Her time and money were carefully divided between school, work, and home.

She studied for another hour, then noticing that it was at

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ten o'clock, she folded the notebook, put it on top of the stacked books, and got up. A long hall ran from the front door, which was right next to the kitchen, to her own bedroom which was in the back. She walked to her bedroom, took her peabody coat and purse from a closet, looked at herself briefly in the mirror, then returned up the hall to the bathroom where the sound of running water could be heard. She pounded on the door.

"Stephanie, what are you doing in there? I don't have all day."

"I'm doing my hair," said her daughter defiantly. "You do your hair. Why can't I do mine?"

She sighed and went back to the kitchen to study. Soon her daughter appeared in the doorway dressed in jeans and a sweat shirt with her hair tied in a bow. She was an attractive girl, big for her seven years. In facial features and body-type, she was a diminutive version of her mother: the same oval face, same small nose and mouth, and same sturdy legs and arms. But her hair and eyes were darker and her skin had an olive hue.

Stephanie's mood had lightened "I'm sorry, Mother. I didn't mean to holler."

Katherine's mood was not so easily altered "Oh, that's all right," she said. "I'm used to your bad attitude."

Later, they sat on a bus bound for the Mission District where Katherine's ex-husband lived. Every other weekend, Stephanie stayed with her father and his girlfriend. Katherine didn't like this arrangement, especially since it was up to her to take daughter there, but it had been worked out with much bickering on both sides, and it was easier to leave things as they were than to enter into new negotiations.

The bus was jampacked with Saturday shoppers laden with paper bags. The busdriver kept mumbling under his breath. He was trying to move the bus forward around the double-parked cars on Mission Street. Whenever new passengers tried to board the bus, he had to yell to those already standing in the aisle: "Okay, move it back. Please move to the rear. Let these people get on. Please move to the rear." Becoming more and more angry at the people in the

aisle, who held their places like cows, not moving unless prodded, he jerked on the stops and starts to make them lose their balance. Everyone was cussing—the passengers at the busdriver and the busdriver at the the slow-moving traffic in front of him. In the aisle next to Katherine and her daughter was a crazy lady with a bandage on her nose and a bunch of dirty newspapers under her arm. She kept elbowing the people near her and looking fiercely around.

Meanwhile, Stephanie was negotiating her finances for the weekend, insisting that she needed three dollars for the Sunday movie.

“Well, ask your father for it,” said Katherine angrily. “During these couple days, you are his responsibility, not mine.”

“He never has any money, you know that,” said Stephanie, with a frown on her pretty face that exactly resembled her mother’s. “And I don’t like sitting here with all those people, Mother. It makes me feel strange.”

Katherine relented. “Stephanie, I don’t know what I’m going to do with you “ She leaned over and kissed her. “I’m sorry if it’s difficult for you. But you love your father, don’t you?”

“Yes, Mother, you know I do.”

Well, here’s three dollars. And here’s fifty cents for some popcorn. And you’ll be good, won’t you?”

“Yes.”

The next stop was 24th Street. Holding hands, they got off the bus, waited for the stop-light to change, and crossed Mission Street toward the hamburger joint that was kiddy-corner from the bus stop. On the weekends, Mission Street was a meeting-place for Latino teen-agers. The girls sat on the hoods of the cars that were parked along the street; the boys came by in their hot-rods and hooted at them. The whole scene was depressing to her. It just reminded her of the foolishness of her youth*

John Hewitt—Katherine’s ex-husband—lived in an apartment building behind the hamburger joint. It was an odd-shaped building, basically rectangular, but cut off at an angle on one side where years before a railroad track had

been. All of the apartments were entered from the irregular side. John Hewitt lived on the third floor. The steps leading up to his apartment were on the outside of the building and on an alley rather than a normal street so that the front door looked like a back door even though it was the main entrance to his apartment. Though his main interest was painting, all his friends were musicians. His apartment was a gathering place for all his associates.

Katherine Hewitt and Stephanie, still hand in hand, passed around the hamburger joint to the alley behind it, and then, reaching the apartment building, which was on the other side of a parking lot, they went up the stairs.

Approaching the apartment, they could hear loud music and talking. Without knocking, they went in. There were a couple people in the front room, cleaning out some grass to make a joint. They nodded and smiled. In the back room, they encountered John Hewitt's girl-friend, a thin, blonde woman with long, thin hands and a pale, pretty face. Recognizing Katherine Hewitt, she immediately got up from the couch where she'd been sitting.

"Gloria," said Katherine. "We're here."

Gloria arched her eyebrows, said hello in a forcedly courteous way, and retreated into a third room, which was the bedroom. The two women were polite to one another but seldom on good terms since John Hewitt occasionally went to his ex-wife for advice and now and then slept with her; there was mutual resentment over shared territory. Soon John Hewitt came out. He was a pleasant-looking man with dark hair, a beer-belly stomach, and olive-hued skin.

"Here they are," he said. He was a high-spirited man, usually in a good mood. Katherine disliked his continual good moods and lack of practicality.

"And there's my little sweetheart," he said, smiling at Stephanie, whose face lit up as she went forward to greet her father. She closed her eyes and lifted up her face so that he could kiss her.

Under her arms, she had a blue folder. "I brought you some pictures to see," she said, holding up the folder.

He lifted her up and walked with her toward the other

side of the room, giving her another kiss. “Hey, all right! Hey, you know something, honey?”

“What?”

“You’re really dynamite.”

Stephanie laughed. He put her down again and looked for a moment at Katherine. Occasionally, their eyes met in a glance of understanding which said everything—what had been and couldn’t be any longer, the ways that they had helped or hurt one another that couldn’t be erased, the degree of commitment to one another that remained despite their estrangement. Meanwhile, Gloria had returned. She noticed this glance and walked into the other room.

“And how’s Wyley’s?” said John.

“It’s okay. The same old thing.”

Stephanie, observing the serious look exchanged by her parents, turned her attention to the cat outside the window. She ran across the room toward the door.

“I’m going to get Dibbick.”

Katherine Hewitt was in no mood for her husband’s superficial cheerfulness.

“John,” she said, looking at him severely, “I want you to promise me you’ll take Stephanie somewhere for a while this weekend. This noise is disturbing to her.”

“Okay, okay,” he said. “We were planning to take her to the circus. We got tickets and everything. Gees, I hope we aren’t going to get into some big discussion.”

“I didn’t say anything about a discussion. I just want you to know that this chaos—”

“There’s no chaos here,” he said, shaking his head.

She didn’t want to hang around. She hated to see her ex-husband, who just brought up painful emotions from her past. She hated to see Gloria, whom she despised because she hung on John and never made any demands for a life of her own. And she hated the whole noisy scene in the apartment—the disorder, the loud music, the grass, the shallow camaraderie. She kissed her daughter on the cheek and glanced at her husband, who by this time had regained his good spirits. Then, relieved to be away from him, she walked down the outside steps, up the alley behind the

hamburger joint, and across, the street to the bus stop.

It was a chilly afternoon. She fastened the top button of her peabody coat, and, with her hands in the side pockets, looked up Mission Street for the bus.

A half-hour passed. No bus was in sight. She opened her purse-and took out her wallet. In it were two five dollar bills and two one's, which was all the money she had to last her until Monday when she worked at the bar. Another half-hour went by. Impulsively, she hailed a passing cab. No sooner had she done so than she berated herself for being wasteful. But it was too late to change her mind.

She got in and said her destination. The cabdriver immediately tried to initiate a conversation. He was a good-looking young guy. He kept turning around and smiling at her. She gave the shortest possible responses to his questions. He finally got the point and left her to herself.

There was nothing like a visit with her ex-husband to convince her of the need to be more practical and vigilant in her own life and increase her resolve to work towards the future. As the cab weaved in and out of the traffic on Mission Street, she looked out at the passing stores and at the people who were walking in and out of the stores and waiting at corner bus stops. She watched the Latino girls as they stretched themselves for the boys. She felt secure in the cab and very much alone. On these weekends when she ceased to be a mother, she realized herself as a separate person more than at any other time. It was late afternoon. The eastern sides of the buildings along the street had already taken on the orange glow of sunset. As they headed up Van Ness Avenue, she could see that a fog bank was rolling in from the ocean. She kept going over in her mind what she needed to do, step by step: first get a degree, then get into a graduate program, then get through it somehow. Meanwhile, staying firm on this course, she should try to make friends. Her study should be the center of her life and from that she should expand outward as far as she could without losing her focus. The cab pulled up in front of her building. The meter said: 3.10. She handed the driver four dollars, refused the change, and went in.

She was hoping that Scott Paulsen would be home, but as soon as she opened the door and saw that the kitchen was just as she had left it, she knew that he was not. She walked down the hall, looked at the mess in her daughter's room and sighed with exasperation. She went into her own bedroom and noticed that her bed was un-made. She made the bed and began cleaning the apartment. She washed the dishes, swept the hall, then came back to her room. Crossing her legs, she discovered that her right shoe had broken at the back. She shook her head, walked to the kitchen again, and sat at the table. A book was sitting on the table "The Phonemic Structure of the Germanic Languages." It was a relief, after the day's commotion, to just sit and study. She worked for a couple hours and then got up, opened the cupboard, took out a fifth of brandy, and poured herself a drink. She went to the bathroom and put on the water in the bath.

While waiting for the bath tub to fill, she looked at her face in the mirror. It presented a familiar image—the small nose which made her look girlish, the thin-lipped mouth which curved upward in a delicate arc, the wide brow and green eyes. She knew that her green eyes were striking and knew that her mouth curved upward in a way that men found alluring, but she looked at herself with indifference because she had long ago ceased to think of herself as an object of desire.

Later, as she relaxed in the warm water, her mind drifted from the events of the day to her-ex-husband and past, and from that to Tom Steward. Like Steward she had grown up in the Midwest. She was an only child. Her parents had separated when she was ten years old. She had been raised by her mother. As a girl, she had been rebellious and romantic. Immediately after high school, she had left home and had come out West with no object in mind except adventure. This was in 1964 when the flower child era in California was just beginning. She had lived in Monterey for a while and then had moved to San Francisco where some people that she had met had a flat in North Beach. Then she had met John Hewitt. By age 19 she had married and by age 20 she had a child. The marriage had gone well for the first

year but then problems had developed. Initially, she had been attracted to John Hewitt's romantacism. In many respects, he was much like her father had been, a good-timing man who didn't have any strong direction in life. At first, it was nice to have a man like this around whose personality, because of this resemblance to her father, connected her with her past. But after she became pregnant, his free-wheeling attitude toward money and the future, along with his lack of any real emotional support, became more and more irritating to her. Instead of bringing them together, the birth of the child caused division between them. By the time that Stephanie was one year old, she and John had separated to the extent that they lived in different flats, but their apartments were down the alley from one another, and they still got together every day. After another year had passed, they only saw one another a couple times a month.

When she thought of the part of her life that she had shared with John Hewitt, she could only remember little pieces of it, and though some of them had been wonderful, they were so far in the past that she didn't bother to connect them together any more. Over the years, though, she and John had remained friends, and she still cared about him enough to mother him when he was down, but her affection was mixed with contempt for his lack of self-discipline.

After separating from John Hewitt, she had lived for another year in North Beach, and then had moved to the Haight District, where she had worked for a free press newspaper and had lived in a large Victorian house that was shared by the collective of people who published this newspaper. During this time, she had been a proponent of collective living as an alternative to the individual family, and had been one of the most devoted and selfless members of the group of people that she lived with, but after several years various problems had developed, most of them interpersonal, the newspaper had folded, and the people involved had gone off to different places. This experience had soured her against anything that smacked of utopianism or social experimentation.

For a while, not knowing what to do, she had hung out

around the Haight getting stoned, then she had decided to go back to school. She was in her third year of a baccalaureate program at the state university. She no longer made any attempt to see any of the people that she had known in the Haight. She had cut off that part of her life as though it had never existed. All her present hope were directed toward the one possibility that she might advance herself through school. Yet, despite her determination to be practical, she had no specific idea of what she would be able to do with a degree after she earned one. She thought that the thing to do in the present was just to act and hoped that the very act would create possibilities. Her immediate plans were to apply for graduate school in linguistics after she received her undergraduate degree.

Sarah Hewitt was a serious student, but, due to the various claims on her time made by her job, her daughter, and just the day-to-day survival chores of her life, could never get her average above B+. This was a marginal average so far as graduate schools were concerned. She was aware of this and for this reason was cautious about any new developments which might disturb the precarious balance in her life.

Since breaking up with John Hewitt, she had had only two other relationships. One of these had been with a medical student who, after going with her for over a year and taking her for a lot of emotional support, had suddenly developed an interest in a younger woman. The other had been with a roguish-type whom she had known from the first would tire of her. Both of these relationships had begun romantically and ended traumatically. Over the years, she had learned to regard her romantic side, the side which had been so much a part of her as a girl, as almost an enemy. She had worked out a way to deal with men. For the most part, she remained distant. She hid her feelings behind a mask of indifference. Though lonely, she avoided any involvement. Experience had taught her that loneliness was easier to manage outside a relationship than within one. When she wasn't involved within anyone, her loneliness, though always present, was more akin to a dull ache than pain. But

within a relationship it flared up and disturbed her equilibrium.

This was the reason why she was wary of Tom Steward's initiative. But she held it to his favor that, despite his awkwardness, he had had the decency to make a formal date. That was something that hadn't happened to her in several years. Despite her distrust of romance, she considered it gallant.

Tom Steward prepared for: any significant event in his life with strenuous exercise. On Tuesday afternoon, he went running. He normally ran five miles but since this was a special occasion he ran twelve. He went when the sun was high in the sky because he wanted to get a tan. His route took him across Russian Hill, down some wood steps to Ghiardelli Square, along the waterfront through Fort Mason, past the Marina green, and alongside Crissy Field toward Fort Point, and then up into the Presidio. It was a beautiful day. The sandy shore by Crissy Field was overgrown with wild flowers. The blue-green water of the bay was dotted with white sails; some children were flying a bright yellow kite with a dragon's face and a silver streamer that followed its swooping and rising motions like a long tail. He ran with an easy gait, his lean torso held too stiffly, his brown hair blown back from his face. He was in a good mood. He felt enthused about the prospect of an evening with Katherine Hewitt. An odd thing about him was that he went erratically from vanity to self-deprecation, and then back again, seldom finding any middle ground. At his half-way point on a hill above the Golden Gate channel, he paused for a moment and looked off toward the ocean where the ragged silhouette of Mile Rock floated in the gleaming water. The hills on the other side of the channel were softly rounded by the sunlight. He took a deep breath and drank in the fresh ocean wind. Then, after taking one final look, he broke into a run, and with the same easy gait, his torso still held stiffly, he started back toward his apartment. By the time he got back, it was late afternoon. It was still a couple hours before the time he had agreed to meet Katherine. He took a shower and sat in the kitchen trying to read, then tried to draw, but he couldn't

concentrate. He paced back and forth from his kitchen into the sitting room then up the short hall to the bathroom then back to the kitchen again. Each time he reached the bathroom, he paused for a moment to look at himself in the mirror. At seven o'clock, he shaved and took another shower, put on the corduroy pants and blue workshirt that he had especially laundered for the occasion, took a final look at himself, and, with his blue coat in his hand, went out, locked the door, and bounded down the stairs.

Standing at the bus stop, he looked toward the white buildings on top of Nob Hill, watching for the appearance of the bus on the crest of the hill. To the other side of him, beyond the top of Russian Hill, the sun was low in the sky, shining dully behind the incoming fog. Whatever his apprehensions, the start of a new relationship was always an exciting time for him, a new chapter in his life. He had no idea of what, beyond the initial liaison, he wanted from Katherine Hewitt. He imagined her as a kind of honky-tonk queen, a woman from a different world. But no matter what she was, so far as he was concerned, any new development was better than his present situation.

Her apartment, a four-story brick building on a busy street, was only a couple blocks from the garage where he picked up his cab, in an area of the city that was neither rich nor poor and formed a buffer zone between the low-income neighborhood to the south, which was called the Western Addition, and the well-to-do neighborhood to the east, which was called Pacific Heights.

She met him at the door. "Oh, it's Blue Coat. You told me your name but I forgot."

"Tom," he said. "Tom Steward." He smiled and held out his hand.

She pressed it lightly. "Tom Steward. That's a nice name. Come in."

She led him into the kitchen. There was a moment of awkward silence. He looked at her. She was dressed in blue jeans and a white blouse with flowers embroidered on the breast pocket. Her hair was newly washed. She looked fresh and clean and smelled faintly of perfume. Seeing him look at

her, she shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, can I get you some coffee? Or I have brandy— would you like a drink?”

“Coffee will be fine.”

The kitchen was scantily but tastefully furnished. Hewitt’s books were still stacked on the table, pushed to one corner.

She saw him looking at them. “As I told you, I’m a student.”

“I can see that. It looks like heavy stuff.”

She nodded. “It is.”

He sat down and looked through the books while she stood at the stove waiting for the water to boil. Looking up, he noticed that there were childrens drawings tacked up on the doors of the cupboard. He remembered that he had seen similar drawings above the counter at Wyley’s Pub. Then he noticed that a pair of eyes was watching him from the dark hallway. When he looked towards them, they retreated down the hall.

She was about to pour the coffee when she said, “First of all, I should give you a fifty cent tour.”

He laughed. “Yes, I’d like that.”

“After all, I don’t want you to think that we have only one room.”

He followed her into the hall. “That’s what I have. It’s like a cage.”

“It must seem so crowded. How can you stand it?”

“I can’t.”

All of the rooms opened to the hall. Stephanie’s was the first after the kitchen. The door was closed. Light came out from a large gap between the bottom of the door and the floor. The next bedroom down was Scott Paulsen’s. Everything in it was tastefully arranged and neatly ordered. Next to that was a sitting room wit a bookcase, a piano, batik wall hangings, and plants. Her own bedroom was on the other side of the hall in the corner. She turned on the light so he could look in. The only objects in the room were a bed, a dresser with no mirror, and an endtable with a record player on it. On her bed was a plain blue quilt. It was a single bed,

hardly large enough for two people. A few record albums were stacked against the legs of the endtable. On top the dresser were a jewelry box and a framed photograph. The photograph was of a woman that bore resemblance to her. The jewelry box looked old; the printed flowers on it were fading.

“My mother,” she said, nodding toward the picture.

“Oh... where does she live?”

“A place called Riverton. In Ohio. That’s where I’m from.”

He looked around the room, noticing that it lacked the feminine accoutrements that he was used to seeing in a woman’s room. There was nothing flowery or dainty about it. He looked at the bed and then at her, thinking that it was only a matter of time before he would be sleeping with her. She stood by the door with one hand on the light switch. He was behind her, looking over her shoulder.

As she turned around, he tried to look into her face, but she looked away.

“Now, I’d like to introduce you to my daughter,” she said. She knocked on the door of her daughter’s room. “Stephanie, are you in there? I’d like you to meet someone.”

The door opened, revealing a conglomeration of crumpled clothes, toys, coloring books, and children’s records strewn on and around the single mattress in the middle of the floor. Stephanie Hewitt bowed bashfully while at the same time eyeing Steward with frank curiosity. He was immediately struck by the girl’s resemblance to her mother and noticed that she appraised him with the same matter-of-fact expression.

Katherine laughed. “Stephanie, how can you live in the midst of such a mess?”

“It’s not a mess,” said Stephanie, all the while watching Steward. “I like it this way.”

“I try not to break her spirit,” said Katherine as they walked up the hall. “But sometimes the whole thing gets out of hand.”

Later, they stood in the kitchen and talked. She acted more relaxed, less defensive than she had seemed at the bar,

though at the same time she kept a formal distance. He asked her about her past. She described it sketchily.

She was more serious and articulate than he had expected her to be, and only at rare moments seemed light-hearted, but her facial features, particularly now because she had made an effort to look pretty, struck him as almost girlish. He couldn't get used to the contrast between how she looked and how she acted.

He kept expecting her to show a more carefree or vulnerable side of her personality, but she didn't. When she described her studies, she did it with such matter-of-fact self-confidence that it made him feel hesitant to talk about himself because he knew that his own life was much less in order. But at the same time it made him feel all the more drawn to her and curious about her.

"So how did you ever start studying linguistics?"

"I'm a smart person. I want to use my mind.

"You just decided out of the blue?"

"No. It's very complicated. The paper I told you about, it was a collective, you see. A typical 1960's visionary project. I was very much into it. But it fell apart.

"Just fell apart?"

"Everyone got older. They went off to lead their private lives. So where was I then? I was set adrift. I was nowhere. Getting stoned all the time. Trying to be a free spirit, you know, and I guess I did succeed at that for a while, but I never got anything done. I just let everything go until my life became totally oppressive. I didn't have any money."

"You don't get anything from Stephanie's dad?"

"If I depended on him, I would have been down the tubes a long time ago."

After a while, Stephanie came into the kitchen to get herself some milk from the refrigerator. She looked at Steward as she walked across the room. After pouring herself a glass of milk, she sat at the kitchen table.

"You two seem like a real pair," said Steward. "You look very much alike, only Stephanie has darker hair, don't you?" He smiled at the girl but she didn't smile in return. Katherine Hewitt was on one side of him, leaning against the

dish counter, with her small hands folded together in front of her wide hips.

Stephanie was on the other side, peering at him over the top of her milk glass, which she held to her lips with both hands; and both of them looked at him with the same direct gaze. It was obvious that a straight male was something out of the ordinary in this household. He felt as though he was on exhibit. He was very conscious that he was in the presence of a mother and child and that the mere fact that he was a man made him the third person in a triangle. Except for those occasions when he shared dinner with David Brod and the women and child that Brod lived with, Steward had been in the recent past seldom around children. It had been a long time since he had been in the midst of a family circle where so much attention was focused on him as the male figure. He wanted to be worthy of this attention but felt intimidated by it.

Later that evening, at Katherine's suggestion, they walked down the block to the corner where there was a neighborhood bar. It was a pleasant bar, much more cheerful than Wyley's Pub. There were large glass windows on the two sides facing the corner and all kinds of ferns and hanging plants. She led him to the last two seats on the inside end of the counter where there was a small alcove between the counter and the steps to the upstairs washrooms.

"I always take the same seat. Nobody hazzles me here. They all know me."

The bartender came over. "Hey, Katy. Scotch and water. Right?" She nodded. "Uh-huh." Steward pulled a wad of money from his hip pocket. She shook her head. "I pay my own way." A doe-eyed waitress came up to the counter. Katherine reached for an olive from the waitress' tray and handed one to Steward

"They keep telling me I might get on here. But I guess I'm not exciting enough. They're all like her," she said, gesturing toward the waitress. Only when she referred to her physical appearance did she betray any lack of self-confidence.

She looked at him as if expecting him to make a

negative comparison, but, despite his earlier qualified approval of her appearance, he was in no mood to be critical of her. In the soft light from the orange lamp above her head, she looked lovely. Her eyes looked brilliantly green. He felt so distracted by them that he could hardly pay attention to what she was saying. He wanted to lean towards her and brush her hair back from her brow. But though they were sitting side by side, only inches away from one another, she never leaned toward him or in any way encouraged him to touch her. He liked her straightforward manner but was confused by it. He was too impatient to let things take a natural course. He wanted to think that he was so charming that from the very first moment his interaction with her would be charged with romance.

“And what about you?” she said, giving him one of her noncommittal glances. “Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your classes.”

“There’s not much to say about them. I just started.”

“What kind of drawings do you do?”

“Just drawings of models.”

He continued in this vein, portraying himself in such a poor light that by the time they left he felt as though he had given the impression that he was an absolute idiot. As they walked down the street toward her apartment, he attempted to depict himself more favorably. He walked along with his hands in his pockets, his face twisted into a frown.

“I probably gave you the impression that I’m not serious about art—”

“Not at all, Tom,” she said almost sympathetically, looking at him curiously. “You just don’t seem sure of yourself.”

“So maybe I’m not sure of myself,” he interjected, still frowning. He was ruthlessly honest, and out of self-contempt always told his bad qualities along with his good ones. “What’s the sense of saying that I am if I’m not? But that doesn’t mean that I’m not serious. I work very hard.”

“Tom,” she said, laughing. “I just said that I didn’t think that you weren’t serious. I’m sure you work very hard. But why do you keep it up then, if you’re not sure you have

talent?" She said this as much to kid with him as out of curiosity. She watched his serious face contort in thought.

"Because it's the only thing that I've found that seems right to me." He felt a sudden compulsion to drop any pretenses. "It just seems right, you know... So I've built up this whole construct around it—you know, when I should go to classes, what I should read. Sometimes it seems like an artificial intensity. But the way I get around it is by telling myself that this is my dharma... you know what I mean, my calling. I invent all these duties that go along with it. That's the way I keep up at it. I suppose it sounds absurdly rigid and controlled considering that you're dealing with intuition..."

The truth was that his artistic life was based on a mish-mash of ideas that he gathered from sources like the Bhagavad-Gita and William Blake. He pondered about them a lot but never talked to anyone else about them, even David Brod, because he so intensely despised poseurs and people who talked philosophy. It felt strange to him to be talking about them and he only did it because he had suddenly decided that he wanted Katherine Hewitt to think well of him. But the more he talked, the more he felt like he was failing to communicate the essence of his ideas. He went on and on, talking about his duties.

She laughed. "But aren't you interested in what you're doing?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "But I have to be more methodical about it than that."

Despite his efforts to justify himself, he felt that he had made a poor impression. Thinking that all was lost anyway, he tried a come-on. They were sitting together on the couch in the room with the batik hangings. She laughed and warded off his hands, leaning away from his nose and mouth which he had pressed into her face like a puppy.

"For such a quiet guy, you sure come on like a tiger. I try to make a distinction between liberated and loose, if you know what I mean."

He didn't like being regarded as quiet because he didn't think of quiet people as being dynamic. He felt like he had made a disaster of the whole evening. But, at the door,

noticing his consternation, she took his hand and kissed it.

“I would like to see you again, Tom. Will you call?”

He hadn't expected her to say this. He nodded assent. “Of course I will. I'd like to. Why don't I just stop in at the bar?”

“That's fine.”

He started to leave. She touched his arm. “I'd like to know when.”

“A week from tonight. I'll come by in my cab.”

4

The last few months of his marriage had been, ironically, the very best for Tom Steward. During this time—this was when he was doing alternative service as conscientious objector—he and his wife had been living in a small railroad town in northern Arizona where he was working as a youth worker for a private foundation. This town was in the middle of the mesa. The sun shone every day and the sunsets were beautiful. His wife, who, unbeknown to him, was conflicted about whether or not to leave, was for this very reason more affectionate than ever. Misinterpreting her affection, he thought that the various problems that had come up earlier in their marriage had been resolved. Often, in late afternoon, they would take a walk and watch the sunset. A two-lane road that led out of town to the north provided a good view. From this road you could see for miles around in every direction. To the east and north was flat country broken only by occasional houses, windmills, or clumps of cottonwood trees. To the south was the town itself which shimmered in the sunlight like a mirage; at the far edge of the town was a lumber mill that spouted brown smoke, and in the distance the range of low hills where the wood came from that supplied the lumber mill. To the west, beyond an expanse of brown land, was a range of rugged mountains with three peaks. It was there, behind the northernmost of those three peaks, that the sun always set. As the sun lowered in the sky, it turned from its normal colorless intensity to orange and then red, this whole landscape glowed in response to the changing light and the

shadows beside the cottonwood trees lengthened. The billows of clouds that moved back and forth above this wide country grew orange and red and shadowed, too, so that the sky seemed as vast and rugged as the land. After the sun had gone down, when the red glow had turned to violet, they would walk home together hand in hand. Tom Steward felt like a whole and healthy man at this time in his life. For many years afterwards, he would look back to this time and remember how his whole being had shared in the spaciousness of this Arizona mesa.

After his wife left him, Steward was too embarrassed about what had happened to stay in a place where everyone knew him, so he went to another small town about a hundred miles to the east and finished his alternative service working in an Indian health service hospital. This town was also on the railroad, but instead of open country there were red cliffs, miles and miles of red cliffs all around the town, and brown hills that looked like rubble. He lived in a drab little house up the street one block from the main street highway that ran through the town. The people he had lived with were always zonked out on acid; he mostly kept to himself. He had a tiny room in the back of the house by the bathroom. His window looked out to a small backyard with a single block wall. Below the wall was a used car lot. Beyond that were the red and brown brick buildings that were crammed together in the center of the town. He had a desk in this room, and when he wasn't working at the hospital, he would sit at this desk, look out toward the car lot, and write down his thoughts in a journal. Most of his thoughts had to do with his marriage. He had asked himself again and again what had gone wrong.

In the evening he would go for walks by himself along the railroad tracks. About a quarter mile from his house was a switching house where he liked to sit and think. When a train came in, he could see its light approaching from the darkness when it was still a couple miles out. When it roared by, the boxcars bumped together and groaned. Tom Steward was an extremely intrapunitive young man, and during the ten months or so that he spent in this town with red cliffs, he managed to blame himself for a lot of things in his marriage

that hadn't been his fault (or for that matter, anyone's fault), and managed to punish himself for them to such an extent, that by the time he was ready to leave, his new self-blame and self-contempt, and new sense of self-worthlessness, were as much a part of his being as his brief feelings of spaciousness and wholeness had been.

When Steward's alternative service was over, he hitchhiked to California where his ex-wife had gone, and had a last painful reunion with her. Then he hitched back to the town with red cliffs, pawned his wedding band for three dollars, sold or gave away most of his few belongings, and with what was left of them stuffed in an orange backpack, he trudged out to the highway one morning and said goodbye to the red cliffs and his past.

That same night Steward slept in an abandoned shed that he found on the side of the road in Colorado. A month later he was hiking along a two-lane highway in Quebec. He didn't know what he wanted or where he wanted to go. He spent two months with some friends on a communal farm in New Hampshire, then hitched around again, then went back to the Midwest where he tried to sink roots but he couldn't settle down. This period in his life—which spanned several years—was suffused with his freedom and new hopes, but he alternated between moods of elation and depression. When he was feeling good, his spaciousness and wholeness came back. When he was feeling bad, he had to deal with his self-incrimination and with the morbid, self-destructive thoughts that followed from it. He kept trying to get away from his self-blame by moving on, but it came right along with him as though perched on his shoulder. And as the years went by without his having found anything solid to hold on to or identify with, this self-blame got worse, because when he turned around to look what was behind him, all he could see were pieces of his past scattered in his wake like pebbles alongside the road.

At first, after his marriage ended, Steward had had no female friends at all, but gradually various women came into his life. The first of these was in the town with red cliffs. She was a nurse in the hospital that he worked in. She was

engaged to a soldier in Vietnam but became Steward's closest friend. He slept with her one night but never made love to her. Then, at the farm in Vermont, there were two women, one of whom he slept with and one he didn't sleep with, but both of whom cared about him. During the time he was back in the Midwest, there were several others. These women were what mattered most to him. Their looks of affection and approval were what kept him going and hoping. Nothing more disturbed him than to think that he would prove unworthy of those looks. If it hadn't been for those looks, he wouldn't have cared. Even when everything else seemed like darkness, they were like islands in the midst of this darkness. Even when he didn't know what else to believe in, he knew that the moments of physical intimacy that he had had with these women were something he held sacred.

He had once considered himself a good lover. During his marriage, despite what other problems had developed, he had felt competent at sex. To be able to give a woman pleasure was a matter of great personal pride for him. He never felt more sure of himself than when he felt desired by some woman he wanted and respected. To be desired in this way made him feel strong in his loins, as the saying goes, and this strength radiated outward to the other parts of his being. In his sexual relations with the various women who had entered his life in the first three years after the break-up of his marriage, he had also felt competent for the most part. But gradually, as his life had become more fragmented and as his personal identity had thereby become more subject to diffusion (placing all the more pressure on him to assert his identity through sexual prowess alone), an element of doubt had come in. At first, this doubt had amounted to nothing more than a fear, way back in his mind, that in the moment previous to penetration he would go limp. Then a few isolated cases of impotence had occurred. He had managed to follow these embarrassing moments with successes, but nonetheless they made his self-doubt more real, and brought to the domain of physical intimacy that he had considered so sacred a new dimension of anxiety and strangeness.

His most embarrassing case of impotence had occurred only several months previous to his first meeting with Katherine Hewitt, in a relationship he had had with an 18-year-old woman, a friend of a friend, a beautiful girl with red hair and blue eyes that he had met when he took a group of people to get ice cream in his cab. He wound up talking to her and later called her up. He knew from the start that this relationship wouldn't last because she was just in town for a two-week holiday from her college in St. Louis. He did his usual routine with her, shared a few joints, and took her up and down the hills in his cab. It turned out that she had never had sex. He taught her how by whispering in her ear. After that, she wanted him all the time during the short time she was there. She said she felt like her insides were burning. But then, suddenly, it all seemed strange and scary to him. He had looked at her body and he almost didn't understand what it was or why he should feel drawn to it. He wanted to enjoy her but something was in his way. She herself made light of it, and when she left, she cried and said she loved him. He watched her go and told himself he didn't care, but inside of him he knew that he had loved her, and knew that what he had wanted from her was a second chance to be a young man with promise. He also told himself that his impotence had been nothing, and, in fact, within a few weeks, he had another fling that reassured him of his masculine powers, but the fear was still there and the sexual domain was that much stranger for him than it had been before.

This was a situation that advised caution, he knew. Any wise friend would have told him. he knew, to stick with sexual encounters where there was an atmosphere of trust. But his fears about himself made him all the more impetuous, all the more anxious to hurl himself into situations where he could prove himself. And since he had promised himself to stay in one place and try to make some kind of a life, his self-blame, which previously would have impelled him to move on, just made him restless though he stayed in one place. The more upset he was, the more restless he became while not moving on.

After leaving Katherine Hewitt on Tuesday, Steward decided to walk home rather than take the bus. He walked a couple blocks then broke into a run. It was a chilly night. A thick fog had come in. He could hear the fog horns droning in the bay. He ran about five blocks, then suddenly slowed to a walk. Not wanting to go home, he kept going past the street his apartment was on and continued over Nob Hill to Grant Street in Chinatown. He walked through Chinatown, stopped in City Lights for a few moments, looked distractedly at the books, and then walked up to the Strip. An orange cab was sitting on the corner. He looked in and recognized the driver. "Hey Mick!"

"Well, if it isn't Tommie: All right!" the cabbie said. He was a good-natured guy with a Solzhenitzyn beard. "What are you driving?"

"I'm not driving anything. I'm driving my shoes."

"Oh, I get it. You're catting around."

They watched another cab make a pick-up. Steward squatted down by the window. "You know what I was thinking, Mick? Sure would be nice to get a little buzz."

"Weil, now," said Mick, "it may just be that I have a little something here in my Sucrets box." He pulled out a joint. Steward smiled and got in the back seat.

They sat and smoked the joint for a while and talked about what kind of conventions were coming to town. Then Micky said, "So how come you're out just roaming around?"

"Was over to see a lady."

"Far out." Mick remarked. "Well, now, let's see, Tom... is this a new affair or an old one?"

Steward laughed. "A new one. Brand new."

"And I imagine the poor woman was crawling all over you, and you were saying, 'Hey, slow down, honey. Let's keep this thing at the proper pace.'"

"That's exactly what happened, Mick. I don't know how you do it. You got me all figured out."

A couple people came up and peered in the cab to see if it was vacant. Steward threw open the right-side back door and got out on the other side.

"Hey thanks for the doobie."

“My pleasure,” said Mick, “and enjoy the beginning of your affair, man. Take it from me. That’s the best part.”

Steward watched the orange cab go off, then, feeling pleasantly stoned, he walked up Broadway toward the tunnel. He went around the tunnel and climbed up to the top of Russian Hill where he stood for a moment and looked back at the neon lights on the strip. He felt in a good mood, restless but enthused.

All the next week, Katherine Hewitt was much on Steward’s mind. A couple times on the nights he had his cab, he drove past Wyley’s Pub but resisted the impulse to go in. He felt like he had given her the impression that he wasn’t together and he wanted to dispel that impression. He didn’t really know what to make out of what had happened, and he wasn’t sure to what extent she was interested in him, but he was intrigued by her matter-of-fact manner, and anxious to prove himself to her.

He was glad when the appointed night came around. He picked up his cab early and by eight o’clock he had made enough to cover his cab rental and gas. The rest of the evening he took it easy. He didn’t even count how much money he was taking in. At midnight, he went home and took a shower. An hour or so later, he drove to the bar, parking his cab in the alley between the Stanton and the movie house next-door.

He walked in with his blue coat under his arm. She was standing at the far end of the counter playing liar’s dice with a couple men. The juke box was going but the bar was almost empty. Besides the men playing dice, there were only three other people in the bar—a couple of the guys from the Stanton who were in the back by the pool table, and the old man with white hair, who had his usual place by the door and who, as usual, was standing rather than sitting, and drinking beer with a chaser.

When Steward came in, Katherine Hewitt immediately noticed him and waved. She came across the room. Instead of her customary jeans and flannel shirt, she was wearing an evening gown with a low-cut neck.

“So it’s you,” she said. “I wasn’t sure you would come.”

He laughed. "Why not? I told you I would."

"I know you did, but you know how people are."

"How are they?"

"More complex than they know." She pushed him gently to one of the side tables. "Here, sit down, Tom." He sat down. "You know what I mean. They underestimate the complexity..."

"The complexity of what?"

"The general complexity. Can I get you a beer?"

"That would be nice."

"And some pretzels, right?"

"Uh-huh."

She brought over the beer and pretzels and sat down on the edge of the chair next to him. "I can't keep you company right now. I have to work. But I'm going to close early."

She had green earrings on and wore a silver-chain necklace with a small jade heart. The dress and earrings seemed out of character for her. She noticed him looking at her.

"I always wear this dress when I need more money. When I let my boobs hang out, I make more tips."

He laughed.

"You don't believe me, do you, Tom? Well, it's true."

She went back over to the counter for a while and then began to sound last call. She served a few more beers. About ten minutes later, she said, "let's go." Everyone began filing toward the door. The old man walked gingerly as if afraid to step on his heels. The guys who had been playing pool went out with their arms around one another's shoulders like Army buddies. She locked the door and began gathering the dirty glasses, sliding them down the counter toward the sink. He was still slitting at the side table.

She looked over at him. "You can help me if you want to."

He got up and nodded.

"If you want to, you can take out the trash. There's a bin in the back."

He brought out the trash, then came back to help her with the glasses and ashtrays. Then they lugged in some

boxes of beer from the back store room, wiped off the tables and put them in order, and swept the floor. Finally, they sat down by a table by the juke box. She put a quarter in the juke box and sighed.

“Another day, another buck.”

The two men who had been playing pool were standing outside by a fire hydrant. Some of the other men from the Stanton had joined them. She motioned toward them.

“Sad guys. They’ve nowhere to go. The same: old thing again and again.”

He nodded thoughtfully. She lit up a cigarette. She started counting her tips. Arranging the change in little piles of nickels, dimes, and quarters. “See what did I tell you? Eleven dollars and thirty-five cents. Last night I only make, seven.”

She motioned outside again with her cigarette hanging from the side of mouth.

“It’s true. They’re sad. They’ve no place to go. And would you believe it? They all get around to making a pass. Every one of them, and just about every night in some way or another. And it’s always in some half-hearted way that they know won’t work. It’s just a perfunctory pass, like some orange peels for the Buddha. And look at me. Am I a great beauty?”

“You look pretty good to me.”

“Sure. I look Okay. As they say, I’ll do. But it’s not even a personal thing. It doesn’t matter that it’s me. It’s the same every night. When it’s time for last call, they ask me to bed down.”

“And do you?”

“Oh, come on, Tom. You’re too decent to say that. Do I look like a floozie? It’s bad enough going through the whole trip of learning the facade of toughness that you need to get by, without having decent people regard me as a whore and yet be okay with them—because they’re not bad guys, they’re not wolves in the classical sense... But you, Tom.. I can tell you’re different. You try to hide it but you’re nice. You’re the gentle type.” She looked at him in her matter-of-fact way. He couldn’t tell if she was joking or serious. “I got

you pegged.”

He shrugged.

She persisted. “Am I right?”

“A wolf in sheep’s clothing. You’ve heard the old story.”

“So that’s what you are. I bet you’ve had your share of innocent women.”

“No, to tell you the truth, I haven’t.”

“What have you had then?”

“I don’t know. I was married for a while.”

“When was that?”

“A long time ago. I haven’t seen her in a couple years.”

“What happened to her?”

“She lives in L.A.”

“I mean what happened to your marriage.”

“She just fell out of love.”

“That’s sad,” she said. She got up and put another quarter in the juke box. He got up, too, and put his arms around her as she looked at the selector. He tried to kiss her cheek, but she pulled away from him and sat down again at the table. She lit up another cigarette.

“So what happened then?”

“You sure are giving me the third degree.”

“I don’t mean to. I’m just curious. I always wanted to be a shrink.”

“Oh, I see. Well, there’s nothing exciting to report, I’m afraid., All’s I’ve had are sporadic little affairs.”

“Where did they all go?”

“Who?”

“All these women.”

“They didn’t go anywhere. They just didn’t work out.:. Really, Katherine, do you do this to everyone you go out with?”

“Oh, don’t mind me,” she-said, getting up. “I’m just in a crazy mood.” She began getting her things, together to leave. “I’m just not that resilient, you know. It’s just so depressing, isn’t it? How people come and go.”

He got up to go with her. She unplugged the jukebox and stood by the window looking out. He came up to her and

kissed her on the cheek. She looked in his face for a moment, then pulled back the bolt on the door.

“I was thinking we could go out for breakfast,” Steward said as they went out.

“Oh, not tonight. I’m really very tired. Maybe you could just take me home, and then we could make some plans.”

“Of course.”

She was quiet on the way to her house. She sat on the far side of the seat by the window looking out. They headed up California Street toward Van Ness. An old man with gray hair and a gray beard was scrounging through a trash can by the doughnut shop on Polk Street. A Chinese couple stood on the corner by a blinking stop-light. The man had a shopping bag in his hands; the woman held the man’s arm and stood twisted to one side. They moved slowly across the street, the man looking gravely ahead, the woman limping. Some male hookers, young men with pretty faces, stood on another corner posturing for passing cars.

“You look sad,” he said.

She looked at him and smiled wanely. “Not sad, Thomas, just tired.”

“Weil, at least you did good on tips.”

“Yes, I’m glad about that.”

She looked out the window again and then looked back at him. “Do you like it when I call you ‘Thomas’? I bet you don’t. You seem like the short-name type.”

“No one ever calls me that, but I guess it’s okay.”

“Just okay?”

“No, more than okay. I guess I like it.”

She smiled. “I’ll call you ‘Thomas’ then.” ”

5

At her apartment building, he pulled the cab to the curb, shut off the motor, put his hand on her shoulder, and began caressing her neck. She was still on the far side of the seat, and still turned away from him.

Finally, she looked at him and said: “Not here, Thomas. Do you want to come in?”

“Are you sure you want me to?”

“If I didn’t want you to, I wouldn’t say it.”

“My garage is right down there on Sutter. Street. I’ll bring my cab in and come back.”

“I’ll go with you. I can wait outside.”

“There’s- nobody there at night. We put our money in a slot.”

At the garage, she sat and watched as he read the numbers from the meter and completed the waybill. He counted through his take for the night, arranging the bills face-up and in order of denomination. Then he folded his one dollar bills in half in packets of five. He wound up with twelve such packets of five and folded his waybill around them to make a package on which he wrote his name and the number of his cab. Then he ran across the street with the waybill package, dropped it in the safe-box slot, and came running back with his blue coat in his hand.

They walked up the street without talking. She wore her usual peabody coat even though it matched poorly with her dress. She seemed lost in thought. Her apartment building was two blocks from the garage. The front lobby was dark—the only light was a small lamp that stood on a table by a large gilded mirror. She led him across the lobby to the front door of her apartment and put her finger to her mouth. “We have to be quiet. Stephanie is sleeping.” A light was on in the kitchen above the sink. Aside from that, the apartment was dark. She didn’t bother to turn on any other lights. He followed her down the dark hallway to her room, stepping over some clothes, and books that had overflowed from her daughter’s room. She turned the handle of her bedroom door and opened it quietly. They went in. She turned on the lamp by her bed and put a record on her record player, turning the volume way down. He sat on the bed and looked around, newly impressed, by the plainness of her room. The only thing feminine in it was the jewelry box on the dresser.

She saw him looking at the jewelry box and said: “A present from my mother.”

“It’s very nice.”

She sat down on the bed next to him. He kissed her cheek. “Should I get a candle? I have one in the kitchen.”

“Yes. That would be nice.”

“And I think I have some wine. Would you like some?”

“Yes.”

A few minutes later, she came back with a bottle of wine, two glasses, and a candle in a glass container. She handed him the wine, lit the candle, and put out the lamp. She sat on the bed, looked at him, and shrugged her shoulders. The window was open. Every time the wind blew in, the candle flickered. Outside the window was a small back yard bordered by a high wood plank fence that was covered with ivy. On the other side of that was the back stairway of another apartment building. It was a foggy night. Fog horns could be heard in the distance—first a high-pitched one, then one that sounded hoarser and more insistent. The unsteady light from the candle flickered on the wood plank fence, creating a dappled pattern of light and shadow that moved back and forth as the ivy leaves swayed in the wind.

Steward produced a joint from his shirt pocket.

“Someone gave me this. Do you want to smoke it?”

She wrinkled her nose. “I guess so.”

“If you don’t want to, we won’t.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to. It’s got nothing to do with you or the here and-now. It’s just that it brings up some unpleasant memories.”

He started to put it back in his pocket. She intercepted his motion with a soft touch of her hand.

“Don’t put it away, Tom. Let’s smoke it. You can smoke most of it and I’ll take a couple puffs.”

He lit it, moving closer to her. He took a deep puff, swallowing the smoke, and handed it to her. She took a couple tiny puffs and gave it back to him. While holding the joint in one hand, he rubbed the back of her neck with the other. He always berated himself for smoking grass before his first sexual encounter with a woman. The grass intensified his sensations, but also intensified his fear of failure. At the same time, it made his actions more automatic and made him feel less inhibited.

Within a few moments, the grass began taking effect.

The foghorns sounded farther away and more distant from one another. The candle flickered in time with their droning and with a pulse-like rhythm which a moment before he hadn't noticed.

She, too, was beginning to feel the effects of the grass and the alcohol. She smiled and reached up to brush his hair back from his brow. "You know, you're not a bad-looking guy."

He smiled and pulled her towards him. He began kissing her face—her forehead, her eyes, and her neck—but when he tried to kiss her on the mouth, she turned aside.

He began undoing her dress, fumbling with the buttons. She stopped him. "Let's not go through a whole big ritual. Let's just get undressed and get under the covers. I feel chilly."

He nodded, got up, and unbuckled his pants. When he was undressed, he got in bed beside her. She was on, the side of the bed closest to the window where the endtable was, laying with her back propped up against the pillows and the covers pulled up to her shoulders. He immediately leaned toward her to start in again, but she looked out the window as if distracted. She reached over for the bottle of wine and poured herself another glass. He drew back from her. He sat up in bed with his legs crossed.

"Hey, Katherine."

"Uh-huh."

"Will you hand me the rest of that joint?"

She handed it to him.

"And a match-book."

She handed him the match-book. He occupied himself in making a roach-clip from a piece of cardboard that he tore off the match-book. He smoked as much of it as he could then reached over and, put it by the candle.

"Does this seem strange to you?" she said suddenly.

"I don't know. I guess it does in a way. I mean, everything is strange."

"You do this a lot?"

"Not really. Do you?" He lay down beside her.

"Hardly ever. I'm totally out of it."

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He laughed. “You don’t look out of it, Katherine. I’m sure you wouldn’t have to be if you didn’t want to.”

“It’s not that I want to or don’t want to. It’s just the way it is.”

She reached for her cigarettes and lit one. They lay in silence, she looking out the window, and he observing her face and petting her with his hand.

She laughed. “I’m afraid you got yourself hooked up with one crazy lady.”

“You don’t seem crazy to me.”

“But you don’t know what I’m like.”

“I can tell you’re a, decent person.”

“How can you tell that? Do you have some kind of tremendous antennas?”

“Just my eyes.”

She reached over and took a sip of wine.

“Now, tell me this, Thomas. A guy like you—what gives you meaning in your life?”

“Here comes the third degree again. I don’t know. What gives you meaning?”

“I asked you: first.”

“Katherine?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you mind if I just go to sleep?” He lay back in the bed. She set down her glass and turned, toward him, leaning on his chest. Poor Thomas. Have I tired you out?”

He put his arms around her and pulled her down to kiss her, She turned her face aside but let herself be drawn in to him. He moved his hand around to her breasts and then to her hips.

He knew that this time things would go through to completion. Immediately his anxiety about impotence came forward again. He was kissing-her-passionately, was fully immersed in his passion, but at the same time he felt apprehensive. His attention kept going back and forth between her and himself. He was feeling her, kissing her, and at the same time wondering if he was hard. He relaxed his pelvis and lower stomach in an effort to determine if he was hard, but it was impossible to know for sure without

touching himself. He kept wishing that she would fondle him but she didn't. She was on top of him, leaning over his face. He was feeling her with his hand and knew that she was ready to come down on top of him. But when she reached down for him, he discovered that he was half-limp. He looked away in embarrassment.

She pretended not to notice. She slid to the side and kept kissing him while she fondled him. He felt himself swelling up. She kept saying, "Uh-huh, uh-huh."

When he was fully hard, she said, "You're very large." She mounted him again, settling down on top of him at once. He felt her tightness pressing on him, felt her opening up. He pushed his pelvis up towards her. He knew that now everything would go smoothly, but still, when he reversed positions with her and came on top of her, he was careful not to disengage himself. To change positions like this without uncoupling required an awkward movement, but he preferred a moment of awkwardness to further embarrassment. Once he settled on top of her, though, he felt himself growing hard again. Now his only thought was to satisfy her. He kept watching her face and listening to her breathing for some sign of what she wanted him to do. But she kept her eyes closed and made almost no sound. Finally, she whispered: "When you want to, just come."

"I'm not in a hurry," he whispered back. "Just relax."

"No, you go Ahead."

He began moving-more vigorously to bring himself to a climax. She encouraged him with kisses but now and then gritted her teeth in discomfort. He came with a groan of pleasure, then settled down in her arms, his face moist with perspiration.

He lay with his lips pressed to her cheek. He was still inside of her. She stirred. He disengaged himself. She went to the bathroom and came back.

He was sitting on the side of the bed, looking out the window. He opened the covers for her and then, after she was in bed, and arranged them around her shoulders. He moved closer to her, brushed her hair back from her forehead and tucked it neatly behind her ear, then started to massage

the back of her head and shoulders.

“You’re so sweet, Thomas,” she said. “That feels very nice.” He felt as though he had been less than adequate in sex, and was glad to be able to do something for her that he was sure she enjoyed. The candle was still lit. A light breeze came through the open window. The candle-flame flickered, nearly went out, and then flared up brightly again. He tucked the covers around her shoulders more tightly and kissed her on the cheek. She sniffed, wrinkled to her nose, and turned over on her side. He sat looking out the window for a long time, then got in bed and fell asleep beside her.

He woke up first the next mornings The sun was high in the sky. He was lying with his body pressed up against her from behind. He started feeling aroused. He began rocking his pelvis into her gently and nibbling on her neck. She woke up and put her hand on his arm, but, didn’t respond.

When his efforts became more emphatic she said: “I have to get up. You can lie here if you want to.”

She started to get up. He held her firmly. “And what if I won’t let you go? He tried to tickle her.

“Tom, I don’t find this amusing. I said that I want to get up.”

He released her. She threw the covers back and walked across the room. In the full light of the morning, she looked much plainer than she did at the bar. He noticed that she was more overweight than he had thought she was. Her backside and thighs were flabby. He looked away, not wanting to accept this contrasting image of her.

She put her robe on and came over by him. “If you want to, we can go for a little walk to the park. But I have -a class at one o’clock. I have to be back, by noon.”

“May, I’ll be right with you.”

He, watched her-go out. He looked around the-room., The dirty glasses, wine and cigarette butts were still, on the end table. Then he heard her in the hallway yelling at her daughter. Suddenly, everything seemed dull and mundane..- He got up slowly, put on his clothes and walked down the hall to the kitchen. Katherine was standing by the stove. Scott Paulsen was at the table, eating his breakfast. He

hesitate' at the door.

"There's some water on the stove," she said. "You can make yourself coffee if you want to."

"Boy, are you in a bad mood," he said.

"This place is a mess. Nobody ever lifts a finger around here except me."

Soon Stephanie came out to look in the refrigerator. She was completely nude but oblivious of everyone. Her eyes were still sleepy.

The park that Katherine had mentioned was a few blocks from her apartment on the top of a hill. A long, wide stairway led up the hill from the lower side. They walked up the stairs and sat on the grass near a children's playground. To the east were the tall buildings of a medical center; beyond them some of the downtown buildings could be seen. In the other direction were the Victorian houses and brick apartment buildings of the residential section where Katherine Hewitt lived, with here and there among them a church steeple or school. It was a beautiful morning. There were some pine and eucalyptus trees on the side of the hill and some plots with orange and red poppies. From the trees came the sweet smell of eucalyptus leaves. Some kids were playing in the playground, laughing and shouting at one another.

Looking off toward the view, Katherine fell into a pensive mood. Tom Steward lay beside her, munching on a piece of grass.

"When Stephanie was first born, I used to come up here with her. I was living in North Beach but I had some friends who lived a couple blocks from here. I used to sit here and look off. I like this place. I like the wide steps. They remind me of a pyramid."

"Was that a good time for you, after you had Stephanie?"

"Oh, it was in a way. But, you know, it wasn't idyllic. I didn't plan to have her. I mean, I got pregnant and almost had her by default. I thought about, an abortion, but I couldn't make up my mind, you know. And then it was too late. Even after she was born, the whole thing seemed unreal

to me. I just never grew up with those kind of expectations. I never played with dolls or anything like that. Me with a child.—It seemed very strange.— I do love her though. I've loved her all along. And at that time, when she was little, John and I—John is Stephanie's father—we weren't getting along. So I was very lonely. He was always cruising other women. It was nice to have some other person around. I was so fucked up then. I won't bore you, with all the terrible details." She laughed. "I'll save them for my therapist. Ha-ha. I'm just kidding."

"I wouldn't mind the details."

"I know you wouldn't, Thomas, but I'll spare you anyway. The point I was trying to make about Stephanie is that a lot of the time she doesn't seem like a daughter to me. She seems more like a friend. I don't try to give her any guidance. I just try to let her work out her own life."

Her attitude toward her daughter seemed odd to him, but he had already begun to notice that she tended to say things in the extreme.

After they had talked for a while, he leaned over to kiss her. She allowed him one kiss on her cheek and then leaned away. She got up to go.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"Nothing is the matter, Tom. Sometimes you're just a little bit too much."

"How's that?"

"You're always trying to lean on me and kiss me. I'm not that way. It seems weird to me."

"Why does it seem weird? A lot of people do it, you've maybe noticed."

"I know a lot of people do it, but to me it seems strange."

They walked down the steps and then across the street toward her house. She began talking about how beautiful the day was and how San Francisco was such a beautiful city. He felt uncomfortable and bored and when he looked at her, trying to regain his fascination of the previous night, nothing was there.

He kissed her good-bye at the door. "Wen, I guess I'll

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get going then.” He was going to say he would phone but on second thought he didn’t.

Halfway across the front lobby, he turned and looked back. She was still, at the door, watching him leave.

“Will I hear from you again?” she asked. “I’d like to know if. I don’t need to know when.”

He smiled wanely. “Sure. I’ll stop in at the bar. Next week sometime. Okay?”

She threw him a kiss. “Okay. Thanks for bringing me home last night.”

He went out. His first thought was to go home. But after walking a few blocks, he changed his mind and took a bus out to the ocean. He spent the rest of the day hiking above the cliffs by Land’s End. He felt relieved to be alone.

A couple night later, he drove cab. He was sitting at a deserted intersection when David Brod came roaring by. Brod screeched to a stop and backed up to talk to him.

“Tommie, is that you?”

“Yes, as far as I know, last time I looked, this is me.”

“What are you doing at 15th and Lake at one-forty-five? The bars are closing, kid. Mucho dinero.”

“Oh, I don’t know. I was just whizzing by. And then, all of a sudden I noticed how this stop-light was blinking off and on.”

“Are you stoned, Tom?”

“Naw, I’m just joking around.”

Brod forgot the mucho dinero and parked. his cab behind Steward’s. A half hour later, they were still at the same intersection, talking about Katherine Hewitt.

“You don’t sound very enthused,” Brod was saying. “I thought this was HER.”

“Give me a break, David. I’m not in the mood for jokes.”

“Well, it just sounds like she’s a serious person. Her life is probably very conflicted. A lot of pressure, you know.”

“I can understand that. I just can’t understand what she wants out of me. She resents everything I do. I try to be affectionate. She’s suspicious of any show of affection.”

“Well, it’s obvious she’s been hurt.”

A group of people came. out of the bar at the corner. A couple of them looked in the cab. "You looking for a fare?"

"Not right now," said Brod. They kept hanging around, looking down Lake Street as though they expected cabs to be cruising down Lake Street.

"Hey, Chip up, kid," said. Brod. "Give it a little while. She'll come around. She's just a lonely, woman. She must like you. She keeps asking you to see you doesn't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, let it be for a while."

Brod gestured to the people who were looking for a cab. "Come on. I'll take you. Take it easy, Stewie. I'll see you at the garage."

"Yea, okay, David. Thanks for the ear."

He thought over What Brod: had said, and decided that he was right, but procrastinated going over to the bar. In almost every relationship he had, a similar pattern developed, first a period of high romance with lots of kissing and hugging, then a second period of mundane reality. When the mundane reality arrived, he usually hit the trail. It wasn't that he made some big decision to take off, it just happened that way. With Katherine Hewitt, the period of romance had never gotten off the ground. He couldn't understand why she was so adverse to romance. He made-up his mind that it would be best to leave things alone. But the weird thing was that he missed her. He missed her a lot, and thought about her a lot. A couple times he felt like stopping in the bar, but he shot his head and told himself not to. He could see already that the whole thing would become more intricate than he wanted it to be.

6

When Katherine Hewitt was a girl, her hometown of Riverton, Ohio, had a population of about 440,000. She was raised in a working class neighborhood called Harrison Bluffs. To the north and west of this neighborhood were the outlying areas of the city which, during her childhood years, were just starting to be turned into suburbs. To the east was the downtown section which in those days had at most a

dozen buildings. To the south, beyond the limestone bluffs that gave this neighborhood its name, was the narrow valley of the Suskenon River, which was mostly used for commercial purposes. The house Katherine lived in while growing up, a two-story wood-frame house with a beveled roof, a wide front porch, and a nicely-landscaped yard, was on the street that wound along on the top of these bluffs. From the front porch or from any of the windows, facing that direction, you could look off toward the valley. Immediately below the house were the red brick buildings and tall smoke stacks of the: Suskenma Electric Company. Beyond that, coming, in at an angle, were the supporting girders of the Bradley Street bridge, which connected Harrison Bluffs with the bluffs on the other side of the river. To the southeast, an elevated extension of the bluffs prevented a view, but if you looked to the southwest of the bridge you could see the Suskenon River itself. It was a sluggish, unimpressive river, brown-watered and functional-looking, bordered on one side by a cement company and on the other by a railroad yard with tall spotlights that glowed all night. The whole consort, even on a sunny day, was mostly gray and brown in color, and certainly not benevolent in the way that a more pastoral landscape might have been, but it had a majesty of its own which came from its being so functionally precise and well-organized with respect to its economic possibilities. Katherine Hewitt's bedroom looked out to this scene, and throughout her childhood she looked towards it: in so many different moods, good and bad, that on this basis alone it came to be something beautiful and profound for her.

Katherine's father, Joseph Kerwin,—Kerwin was her maiden name—was what people generally refer to as a good-timing man. Even during the Depression, which had arrived when he was a teenager, he never got particularly down. He was such an engaging person that he easily found work. The first job he had was with the Johnson Paper Company, where he apprenticed for several years as a shop mechanic, and he was in one capacity or another associated with Johnson Paper all his life, though he was the sort that took numerous indefinite leaves of absence and alternated periods of work.

with schemes to get rich that never panned out. He stayed in the shop as long as he could stand it and then got a job driving truck, hauling the cardboard Johnson Paper made from compressed newspaper up to another town called Dover Springs. For most of Katherine's childhood, even previous to the formal separation that occurred when she, was 10, he didn't live at home. He had a heart attack at the age of 53 and died after a prolonged subsequent illness when she was 14. Why he had died so young despite being so easy-going was a real mystery, but people said his easy-going personality had just been a cover-up and that underneath it he had been a desperate man. Even though Katherine only saw him from time to time, her father was an important influence on her life. What she remembered most about him was his cheerful optimism and live-and-let-live not to mention his undisguised fondness for her.

Katherine's mother, Alma, nee Lerner, was a total opposite to her father in personality type. She was serious, industrious, self-reliant, and unemotional, at least on the surface. She was a straight-talking woman who had little tolerance for feminine games and little tolerance for her husband's hare-brained schemes. She always had her shirt-sleeves rolled up and was always out in the yard with a rake, shovel, or paint brush in her hand, and, as far back as Katherine could remember, her mother had always had a job away from home. For a number of years she worked as a waitress at the restaurant in, downtown Riverton. Though always supportive of Katherine in a firm-minded way, she only betrayed her deeper feelings in the rare moments when her facade would come down. With Katherine's father, she was usually at odds, not only about money and his impracticality, but also about his tendency to have a roving eye for other women. There was continual tension between them. As a child, Katherine Hewitt had felt this tension very much. Years afterwards, she, could still remember various arguments she had witnessed and could also recall those few times, precious in her memory, when she had seen her parents show affection for one another.

When she first left Riverton—this was when she was 18

years old —Katherine was in an angry frame of mind, angry especially at various constraints her mother had tried to impose on her. She told herself that there was nothing in Riverton worth looking back to. But as the years went by and she got older, she became nostalgic. At times particularly in the early morning, images from her childhood would, pass through her. Mind. What she recalled, most of all was the garden they had always had in the side yard and the lilac bush in the back yard by the garage, the swing on the front porch, and the view from there and from her bedroom window, especially from her bedroom window—in her mind she could see the stone wall across the street from the house, could see the smoke swirling out of the rebrick chimneys of the electric company, which were just beyond the stonewall and to the right of the bridge, and she could see the cars and trucks going back and forth across the bridge, the brown barges moving up and down the river, and the diesel engines with their yellow blinking toplights going back and forth in the railroad yard next to the river. She also remembered her morning walks to school. The route she followed led along the stonewall for a block to Bradley Street, then through an alley lined with elm saplings to the blacktop playground behind the school. Over the years, too, her memories of her parents had become more poignant. She often recalled those occasions on which her father had come by in his truck to take her to school. Her sorrow over her father's death and memories of his illness continued inside of her as though they were a part of the present as well as the past. Her sense of kinship with her mother had also grown.

For several years after leaving Riverton, she had seldom been in touch with her, but in the time since then, she had corresponded with her frequently and had visited her about once a year. Her mother still lived in Riverton though the house had been sold when Katherine was 20.

One thing that over the years she had realized about her Riverton past was the extent to which the personality differences between her parents and her painful childhood experience of their estrangement had influenced her life—had, in fact, set up a kind of polarity within her between the

opposing attitudes toward life which they represented in her mind. Even as a young child, she had felt this polarity strongly; she had felt that it was urgently necessary to resolve it in some way. The only way she could figure out how to do this was to judge them against one another. First, she had done this just in her mind, reasoning that if the polarity in her mind ceased to exist, then the situation that had caused the polarity would vanish along with it. From that, she advanced to a more active kind of interventions she would become convinced of her mother's rightness and try to convert her father to it, or vice versa. Even after her father's death, this polarity continued. In fact, due to various ramifications of her father's death, it grew stronger. To begin with, because of her grief at his loss, she felt it all the more important to be loyal to the ideas and attitudes that she associated with him. Then, her mother, also in response to his death, went the other direction and became more severe and embittered than she had been before. In particular, a religious side of her that had always been there in a milder form came out in the worst, most judgemental way; she became more rigid and close-minded, and more critical of her daughter's high-spirited tendencies. As a result of these changes in both her mother and herself, a new situation developed. Katherine assumed the role with respect to her mother that her father had played. It was this further intensification of the polarity between her parents, with herself as her father's surrogate, that caused Katherine to leave Riverton.

After Katherine left, Riverton remained in her mind as the backdrop to everything else; it was the original situation against which she judged everything new that occurred in her life. And her parents' influence continued, too, as well as the division in her mind she associated with them. One way that this happened was that she was always attracted to men like her father. She had always wondered why this was so. Her more exotic explanation was that it had something to do with how her father had died just as she reached puberty; it was as though her sexuality had sprung out of her grief at his death. A simpler explanation was that, since she had wanted so

much to have him around when she was a child, she was still trying to bring him into her life as an adult. That was why she had chosen a husband who was so much like him. But, in other ways, too, he and her mother had been a continuing influence. In fact, during her adult years, though this, of course, was just one aspect of a many-faceted situation, she had found that she swung back and forth between the attitudes toward men and sex that she associated with one parent to those that she associated with the other. In the first several years after leaving Riverton, her father's carefree attitudes had prevailed. She had even tried to be totally promiscuous for a while until guilt and lack of emotional resiliency forced her to proceed more selectively. In the years since then, her mother's way of looking at things had prevailed. As the years had gone by, in fact, she had come more and more to resemble her mother both within and without. Her face was often set in the same frown which was so characteristic of her mother.

That this had happened to the extent that it had wasn't due to influence, however, so much as it was due to how her and her mother's lives, coincidentally, had taken parallel routes, both starting out with a bad marriage and both leading through various difficulties to increasing bitterness. From what little she knew about her mother's life, she knew that her mother had each started her own marriage with high ideals. Katherine had started hers, for example, with high standards regarding fidelity and marital duties. She knew that her mother's marriage had soured because of her father's infidelity. The same development had taken place in her own. At first, everything had gone well, but then once her husband started cheating, a vicious cycle of attack and counter-attack had begun. In retaliation for his lessening interest, she had become unresponsive. Then he had become more demanding and verbally abusive, focusing on her weight problem which he knew was his wife's greatest weakness. She had fought back in her own way, by refusing him the mothering that he needed, but she had lacked the emotional stability to come out unscathed. Had her interaction with men at this point been more positive and

reassuring, she might have escaped without permanent injury. But her subsequent relations, due to the fact, mainly, that she always started them with men like her father, had also been troublesome. That both of the men involved, despite her earnest efforts to make these relationships work, had rejected her, confirmed her in the low self-esteem, especially regarding her physical appearance, which had begun with her husband's ridicule. She persisted in believing that she was an unattractive woman even though there was much evidence to the contrary. Out of spite for men and for herself, she even aided the process somewhat by deliberately abasing her health and allowing herself to be a little bit heavy. She was very well aware of this. Her bitterness about this whole situation was the main reason why in the years since leaving Riverton her face had taken on her mother's frown.

Once she had regarded her sexual life, her sexual expression, as an important part of her makeup, but more and more she had come to associate it, just as she knew that her mother did, with difficulty or trauma. Once she had regarded sex as a pleasure, but along with her disenchantment with men, her technical problems in sex had increased to the point where it was either tasteless or else just too much trouble to bother with. When other women talked about sensuality or desire, or about some man's sexual equipment, it almost seemed far-fetched to her. Only in occasional situations where everything was right did she feel aroused and she had almost given up believing that there wasn't any man who would be patient enough to understand her needs and the damage that she had incurred from the past. At times she was glad that she felt unattractive because being unattractive removed her like a person from another planet from the whole messy realm of social maneuvering and sexual battle. At times she told herself that desire was something people made up, that it was some kind of medieval remedy for boredom and nothing more. And yet she had experienced desire as a younger woman. She had experienced it in those first free years after leaving home. Her marriage had begun with a honeymoon just like anyone else's. Even in the

troublesome relationships since then, she had had her moments of ecstasy. But she had them less and less. She knew that her sexual life was fading, that it was disappearing within her like an old coat put in a back closet. Sometimes she told herself she didn't care, told herself that it felt good to be aloof from what other people considered so vital. But at other times she realized that she was kidding herself, that she did care very much, and wanted to feel like a normal person again. Sometimes it seemed as though her whole life was proceeding inexorably toward a kind of post-romantic-period spinsterhood; it seemed as though everything sweet inside of her had been squeezed out. This was frightening to her; she sensed that this process of dessication was not only physical but intellectual and spiritual as well. She wanted to resist but didn't know how.

After her first night with Tom Steward, she went over what had happened. It was a puzzle— to her how everything had happened so quickly. She counted it up to her self-destructiveness as much as to anything else. She didn't feel right about having slept with him, didn't feel right about it morally, aesthetically, or from a sense of personal dignity. She didn't know why she had let it happen so fast. The first thing that occurred to her was that he seemed honest. He seemed like a person she could trust. His self-deprecation just contributed to this image. She didn't see his insecurity and indecisiveness so much as his quixotic nobility. It occurred to her, too, that in certain respects—mainly in his good-natured gentleness and lack of practicality—he resembled her father. But the resemblance wasn't as strong as it had been in most of her other relationships. She regarded this as a good sign. He lacked the devil-may-care roguishness that she often found appealing in men. He was too serious-minded to have that quality. But in the past, roguish men had always led to painful disappointments of one sort or another. His impracticality bothered her, but she thought it was something that might be tempered with time. The very fact that she had had sex with him, that it had happened so quickly, as though meant to happen, made her feel a special kinship with him.

This was one respect in which her mother's religiosity had manifested itself in her; despite her attempts to be down-to-earth, she tended to mystify her relations with other people and especially to mystify sex. She also made a definite distinction between being "in" or "not in" a relationship, and between a relationship that was "sexual" and one that was not. She specifically told herself that she was in a sexual relationship with Tom Steward. And yet, even though she defined it this way in her mind, she didn't feel any particular desire for him outside of a desire for intimacy. It wasn't as though any driving force had entered her life, though within herself she was hoping that he would help her back toward a more healthy attitude toward sex. But her sex life was as latent as before. It was just that this kinship or bond now existed. She was very much aware of this.

In terms of her everyday life, however, one significant change had taken place. She suddenly found herself in the midst of a whole new emotional climate. She found herself dealing with all kinds of emotions she hadn't experienced in such a long time that they were almost surprising to her. She realized that she was thinking about him more than she wanted to. It wasn't as though she was pining for him; it was just that he was there in her mind wherever she was. She kept looking for him to stop in at the bar. When a week went by without his having either called or stopped in, she began to feel almost physically sick. Her stomach felt knotted and empty. It was then she realized that the situation was more serious than she had been willing to admit to herself.

Had he really gone through all that trouble for just a one-night stand? For a few more days, she tried to forget him, tried to concentrate on her studies. Then one night, when she walked in the apartment with her schoolbooks under her arm, she went straight to the phone. She called information, found out that his phone number was listed, and wrote the number down on the back of her notebook. Then she doodled around the number for a while, tapped her pen on the table, went to the refrigerator and came back, and sat down and called.

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He -answered on the second ring.

“Thomas, is that you?” She was relieved that he had answered.

“Katherine?”

“Uh-huh. I suppose you think it’s forward of me to call.”

“Not at all. I’m glad to hear your voice.”

“Are you really?”

“Yes, I am.”

“The reason I’m calling, to tell you the truth, is because I’ve been a little upset.”

“Because I haven’t come by.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Hmmm.”

“Did you change your mind about wanting to?”

“No, not really. I just wasn’t sure, you know.”

“Wasn’t sure?”

“That it would be a good thing for us both. I was just feeling conflicted”

“Well, I won’t bother you if you feel burdened—”

“Naw, it’s not you, really, Katherine. I’m glad to hear from you, sincerely. I just go through this whole thing whenever I begin a relationship, you know. It’s like I get in a frenzy. I get all wound up, and I’m not sure what I want to do. It’s just the dynamics of my own personality, you know.”

“Well, maybe you’re making it into more than it is.” An edge had come into her voice.

“Hey, Katherine, don’t take offense—”

“I’m not taking offense. I just think that you should let me know where you stand because the ambiguity makes me feel uneasy,” she said firmly, her voice even-toned but still edged with anger.

“Well, how about this. I would like to see you again.”

“Thought you were so conflicted.”

“You asked me to be definite. I’m trying to be definite.”

“Go on.”

“So how about tomorrow night? I’ll come by at the bar.”

She sighed. “Yes, Thomas, that sounds very nice.”

“And you won’t be angry at me?”

“No,” she said wearily. “I’d: like to see you.”

As she sat at the kitchen table that evening, she kept thinking about what had happened. She realized that she had merely exchanged one kind of ambiguity for another. Before she hadn't known whether he would call. Now she knew that she would see him again but she felt like she was on probation. It made her feel furious.

She found his indecisiveness contemptible. She went to the phone again, thinking to call him and cancel the whole thing, but she couldn't bring herself to call.

Later that night, she made a couple resolutions. The first was that, though she would go ahead with her plans to meet him, she wouldn't give him any royal welcome at the bar. The other was that, no matter what happened, she wouldn't wind up in bed with him. Feeling satisfied with herself, she folded her notebook, went to the cupboard and poured herself a glass of brandy. Then with a determined frown on her face, she went down the hall to her bedroom.

The next night about one o'clock, she stood at the door of Wyley's Pub, looking up- California Street toward the top of Nob Hill. It was a clear night. A half moon hovered in the sky above the apartment buildings on the other side of the street. A group of young people came by laughing and holding hands. She noticed the toplight of a cab approaching from an intersection a couple blocks up the hill. She watched it until it came near, then, seeing that the driver wasn't Tom Steward, she went back in the bar.

Earlier in the evening, the bar had been busy but now the only customers were a middle-aged couple who both had had a little too much. They were sitting at a side table talking. The television was going—some old movie she had seen a couple times before. She only left it on because noise was good for business. Without turning off the TV, she put a couple quarters in the juke box. Then she poured herself a cup of coffee, lit a cigarette, and sat down.

Throughout the evening, her feelings about Tom Steward had gone from one extreme to another. On her way to work on the bus, she had felt angry and irritated with him, and had gone over in her mind what she would say to him when he arrived.

Later, during the busy hours at the bar, she had suddenly decided that she didn't care one way or the other what he did or thought. Now, she was starting to worry that he wouldn't show up at all. That made her feel angry again. But she also realized she would be disappointed if he didn't stop by.

Looking around the bar, she thought how boring and depressing it was. She had come to hate the red lights, the half-lit artificial atmosphere. She yearned for some kind of job where she could be out in the sunlight.

Just as she went around the counter to get herself another cup of coffee, Tom Steward walked in carrying a bouquet of daisies. She was delighted to see him but she didn't smile and go around to meet him. But she did look him over. He looked fresh and clean as usual, and as usual he was dressed in a blue work shirt and corduroy pants. His hair was wet as though he had just taken a shower. He strode across the room energetically. By this time, he felt more comfortable in the bar. He came around the counter, kissed her cheek, and held out the flowers.

She gave him one of her matter-of-fact glances. "So who are the flowers for?"

"Who do you think they're for, goofy? They're for you."

Though he had stayed away from the bar all the previous week, it had required a great effort of will. Now he was glad to be able to see her without bearing sole responsibility for continuing the relationship.

"Where can you buy flowers at one o'clock in the night?"

"I bought them this afternoon. I had them in my refrigerator."

He noticed that she was back to her usual flannel shirt and jeans. But she looked very lovely. In the bar she always looked lovely to him.

"For someone who's so conflicted, you certainly are romantic."

"Don't give me such a hard time, Katherine. Take the damn flowers."

She took them and sniffed, holding them with both hands and peering at over the top of them with her serious

green eyes. He reached over and kissed her on the forehead. He went over to the counter and began looking around.

“Hasn’t anyone ever told you that romance is dead?” she said, following him with her eyes, the flowers still in front of her nose.

”Hey, Katherine, why can’t you. just accept them as a nice gesture,?How about a beer?’

She set the. flowers down on the counter. went around to pour him a glass of beer. When he reached for his money, she stopped his hand. “For you, it’s free.”

“How come?”

“I’m just in a generous mood, I guess.”

Seeing that the middle-aged couple’s glasses were empty, she went across the room. She came back, mixed two drinks, and went across the room again with the drinks in her hand. On the way back she stopped at the juke box and dropped another quarter in. After selecting some songs, she came back and took the seat next to Tom Steward. She observed him coldly a minute and lit a cigarette.

“So you have, a good night?” she said,blowing the smoke at him.

“Oh,, not so good. A lot of crazies. Things were cooking for a while and then everybody went home.”

“You make any money?”

“Just nickles and. dimes.”

“So you kept driving all night?”

“Naw. I was trying to do some drawings for a while.”

“Drawings of what?”

“People in that- doughnut shop on Mission Street—you know, that dingy place that stays open all night.”

“The people don’t get nervous?”

“No, they don’t know I’m drawing them. I do it from my cab.”

“That’s a good idea, Tom. You should do a painting sometime.”

“Yea, I’d like to do a whole series of scenes of the city night. You know, like Edward Hopper.”

“Can I see what you did?”

“They’re out in my cab.”

“Well, why don’t you get them?”

He got up hesitantly. “Yea, okay.”

“You don’t want to?”

“I’m just a little-self-conscious, you know.”

“Well, you don’t need to if you don’t want to,” she said, looking at him with motherly sympathy.

“Hey, Katherine, you know what I was thinking?”

“No.”

“You ever close this place down early?”

She shrugged. “Sometimes I do.”

“Well, look the only people here are those two and they’re about under the table anyway. So why don’t you close? We’ll go for a ride.”

“Where would we go?”

“I don’t know. Just around.”

She pressed her lips together and looked at the middle-aged couple. Then she looked at the door. “Have to say the idea is tempting. Sometimes this place really gets me down.” She sighed. ““Gets me down’ isn’t quite the expression for it. Sometimes it’s an absolute drag.”

He tapped her on the shoulder. “Well, come on, then, let’s go. The: world won’t end if Wyley’s Pub is closed for one night.”

“It is a temptation,” she said. She got up and looked around the bar. Much as she hated the bar sometimes, she was scrupulous about her responsibilities. “Maybe it won’t hurt for a change. There’s no business anyway. But we’d still have to clean up, you know.”

“So what’s that? We could do it in ten minutes.”

“We can’t do it sloppily, Tom.”

“Katherine, come on.

She went, over to the middle-aged couple. “Wduld you mind greatly if I closed?”

Fifteen: minutes later, they were just finishing, the clean-up. On his way to the store-room, Steward shouted: “And let’s bring’ some beers and some beernuts:or-something.”

“Won’t you get in trouble?”

“No.”

Soon they were sitting in the cab, Katherine on the far-side of the seat with the bag of beers in her lap. On the seat beside them was the bouquet of daisies.

“I tell you how we do this, Kath. See, we very sneakily open just one beer so it looks like you’re the passenger. And if the cops stop us, I say that you’re some poor lost lady I’m helping out.”

“Oh, that’s very clever” she said. “But what if I don’t want to be lost?”

“Then we just tell them that you’re a femme fatale, and you’re out for a night on the town.”

She laughed. “I like that one better.”

Steward opened a beer, took a huge gulp from it, handed it to her, threw the car in gear, and headed up toward the top of Nob Hill. Every now and then, he reached over for the beer, looked all around to see if there were any police in sight, and then raised it to his lips and took another huge gulp. By the time they reached the top of the hill, he had already dispatched one bottle. He reached over and started fumbling around for another. She took out another bottle, opened it, handed it to him, took it back from him and held it with both hands.

“This one you’re going to do a little slower, alright?”

“Yea, I guess you’re right. Hey, hand me some beer nuts.”

She had the window rolled down. She watched the people passing on the sidewalk, sniffing the breeze. Taking a tiny sip of the beer, she settled back in the seat. She looked over toward him. He drove just the way he did everything else, very intently, and leaning toward the view ahead. It felt good to be away from the bar and doing something, besides her usual routine.

He tapped her on the shoulder. “Hey, Katherine, how you doing over there?”

“Pretty good. It’s been a long time since I just went for a ride.”

She was watching the young couples in evening clothes who were crossing in front of them from one big hotel to another. They were all laughing. One of the women was

leaning on the man. next to her and pointing down the hill toward the downtown skyline. There were limousines lined up in front of the hotels. The whole corner was lit up like a stage setting.

Leaving the hotels behind them, they headed down the steep incline toward Chinatown. At the corner of Grant Street stood a small crowd of people who were all looking down the hill for the cable car. Three Japanese men began waving their arms: at the cab.

“Hey, let’s pick these • guys. up. It will give you a little view of the cab driver’s life. Do you want to?”

“Sure, do I get a cut?”

“Fifty percent for being the co-pilot.”

“It’s a deal.” She shook his hand.

The Japanese men piled in the back of the cab. “Union Skare.” He was about to ask them permission for Katherine’s presence, but he could see right away that they couldn’t speak English. He threw the meter, turned into a narrow alley between the back of some apartment buildings and a park lined with poplar tree, then headed up Pine Street, which had synchronized stop lights. There was heavy traffic in front of them. With passengers in the cab, he drove all the more intently, weaving in and out of the other cars and hitting all the stop lights exactly as they turned green. It was three blocks to Mason Street. There he hit the stop light on red and turned to the left down the hill, again hitting the stop lights as they turned green. The cab had terrible suspension. Every time they hit a bump, they almost bottomed out.

Katherine Hewitt, the bag of beers still in her lap, a cigarette in her hand, bounced up and down with the motion of the cab, a tiny smile on her lips. In the back seat, the Japanese men were talking, laughing, and pointing.

“You have very good city,” one of them said, tapping her on the shoulder.

“Yes, isn’t it?” she said, smiling at him.

It all seemed very amusing to her—the cab rushing forward through the traffic, the animated but unintelligible conversation in the back seat, and, most of all, Steward’s boyish enthusiasm. Every now and then, he would look over

toward her. She could tell that he was proud of his driving skills and was eager for her approval.

They dropped the Japanese men at a hotel by Union Square, then continued down Powell Street a couple blocks past some bars where hookers were motioning toward passing cars.

He looked over toward her. “There’s a real science to cabdriving, you know.”

She smiled., “No, I didn’t know, Tom. But I can see that it takes a lot of driving.

They turned unto Ellis Street. He was munching on the pretzels.

“So tell me about this science.”

“You really want. to know?”

“If I didn’t want to know, why would I ask you?”

“Well, you probably don’t think it’s all that interesting. But the big thing is to keep moving. It’s like the city is one big obstacle course, you know. Part of it is the traffic. The basic premise is that you got to keep moving. No matter how messed up the traffic is, there’s always some way to get through.”

“Uh-huh.”

“It’s like the Tao, you know. You never meet a force head on. You always bend to the side, ‘He who does not contend cannot be overthrown.’ Or something like that.”

He looked over for the beer She handed it to him.

“So what’s this big force?” she said. “I don’t get it.”

“The traffic. The flow of the traffic.”

“Uh-huh.”

“It’s like driving a motorcycle—someone once told me that. With a motorcycle your advantage comes from your greater maneuverability. With a cab, it comes from your knowledge of the light patterns and traffic conditions. I really get into it, you know. If I didn’t, I’d go bananas, I guess.”

“So what are these light patterns?”

“You know, just synchronized lights. It’s like the whole city is one big circuit, and there’s always some way to never hit a red.”

He turned unto O'Farrell Street. "See, this here is a light pattern. It's not that big a deal I suppose."

There were some cars sitting at the red light on Mason and O'Farrell. He zoomed around them through the right hand lane and hit the green light right on the button. He got green lights on the next two intersections, hitting both of them as they turned from red to green. He hit a red light on Grant Street, but got a free left there since it was a one-way. At the next intersection, he got a green. The following one was red but he took a free right. Then he roared toward the next corner where the light was red.

"You got to hit this one on red, or else you mess up the whole pattern."

He took a free left unto Kearny. Then for several blocks, they hit nothing but green signs.

"I always call this a "green blanket"—you know, easy greens."

She smiled, more amused with his boyish enthusiasm and the absurdity of the whole situation than with the actual subject.

They passed the Holiday Inn and Portsmouth Square. Ahead of them was the seven-cornered intersection at the convergence of Kearny Street with Columbus and Pacific.

"This one is difficult. Sometimes you get it and sometimes you don't. It's erratic. It's not synchronized with the others. It's unpredictable. I suppose there's some way to predict it, but if there is, I haven't learned it yet. But anyhow, Kath, you can see, if you look, the traffic sign facing us is on 'walk'. That's the key. Then I watch for the yellow on the corner of Kearny and Columbus—over there."

He pointed to the triangular corner of Kearny and Columbus, which, though normally crowded with people, was deserted. The yellow light went on. There were some cars occupying the three left lanes of the four available lanes at the intersection. He took the right-most lane, hitting the intersection at the exact moment when the light turned green. He swerved to the left in front of the other traffic and headed down Columbus toward the wharf.

She shook her head, smiling at him. "You really are

crazy, aren't you?"

"So how come you say that? You mean, because of the traffic lights?"

"No, I'm just kidding you, Tom. But you really do go around in a frenzy, don't you?"

"I don't know. I'm just a speedy person."

Later they drove down Market Street toward Twin Peaks. A fog bank had come in. He drove up as far as Burnett Street, then did a U-turn into the parking lot observation point that overlooked the city. He turned off the motor and they got out. The city could be seen all the way from the Golden Gate Bridge to the south bay by the airport. In the middle of this, the East Bay bridge was demarcated with yellow lights. Beyond the bridge were the glimmering lights of the cities on the other side of the bay.

They stood together looking off. He tried to put his arm around her shoulder but she pulled away.

"You're such a strange woman, Katherine," he said. "Always so distant."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

She inhaled the cold wind and looked off toward the view, which seemed so far-reaching and majestic that it was almost unreal.

"I'm chilly," she said. "Can we go?"

At her house, he attempted to kiss her again. She turned away. I really don't know what to make of you," she said.

"Why?"

"For one thing, you seem so immature, Tom. I just feel such a great difference from you."

"I guess I am immature in a lot of ways."

"And then your indecisiveness. One minute you come on to me and the next you're all conflicted."

He shrugged. "I know. I do like you though."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

She started to get out.

"I guess you don't want me to come in."

"I don't want you to assume that every time you see me,

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it's an automatic lay, if that's what you mean."

"All right."

She started to get out.

"Hey, how about the flowers? No sense of adding insult to injury, you know,"

She took them from him and bent over toward him. "I didn't mean to be rude. It was wonderful to ride around. I enjoyed your cabbie philosophy."

"At least you could kiss me good night."

She knelt on the seat and kissed him softly on the cheek.

"Are you still so terribly conflicted?"

"I'd like to see you again."

She wanted to make some definite plans but was too proud to ask for them.

"Well, you know where to find me."

A couple nights later, he stopped in the bar. She was very glad to see him. She brought him a beer.

"You know what I was thinking?" he said.

"No, what?"

"I was thinking we should have a real date, go out for dinner or something. So what if we don't have some big, tremendous relationship We could enjoy one another's company. And I won't assume that we're going to wind up in bed."

She didn't answer. She stood behind the counter with a dish towel in her hands, her pretty face set in a thoughtful frown.

"So what do you say, Katherine?"

"Okay, Thomas, that would be nice."

All night long, it was busy at the bar. A couple of the customers got into a fight. By the time she went home, she felt weary. Lying in bed, she thought about Tom Steward. Somehow it seemed inevitable that he would continue in her life. Even though his indecisiveness annoyed her, she regarded it as the other side of a good quality, his honesty. He always said just what he was thinking. In that respect, he was a person that could be trusted. He was an odd combination of things. She knew that, despite his hesitancy, he was sincerely affectionate. In the cab with him, she had

seen a different, more boyish side of him that brought back memories of her father. She liked that but regarded it as a danger. She didn't really know what to do because she felt attracted to him to a certain extent but was afraid of getting hurt. She also knew that her main strength with him was in her distance, that he was intrigued with her because he couldn't figure her out. So she made up her mind to keep up that dynamic. She was afraid that as soon as he found out what she was really like he would reject her.

7

Except for David Brod, Tom Steward had no close friends. He saw Brod once a week at the most. The rest of the time he kept to himself. On the nights that he didn't drive cab, he-usually ate in a Jewish deli about four blocks from his apartment. He went there with more a feeling of resignation than of pleasure. He didn't like to eat alone. Meal-time just brought back memories of other meals where there had been more people in his life. The reason he chose this particular deli over other similar places was because coffee refills were free and the lighting was bright-enough to read. After finishing his supper, he would sit for a long time drinking coffee and reading. Now and then, he would write down some thoughts in the pocket journal that he always kept with him.

Despite his dislike of talking about philosophy or abstract subjects, his readings were always along this line. He would read for about an hour, then pick up his blue coat and head home along a street where there were mostly restaurants and gay bars. All kinds of people would be passing up and down the street but he would hardly look at them. Arriving at the door of his apartment building, he would unlock it and head across the small, dimly-lit front lobby with the same feeling of resignation with which he had entered the deli. After climbing the three flights of stairs to his apartment, he would unlock the double lock on the door and go in, flicking on the hallway light as he entered. Again a dull feeling of resignation would come over him. Closing the door behind him, he would walk the several steps to his

bathroom, turn on the light, and stand for a moment looking at his face in the mirror. At times, when he did this, he looked at himself with almost a feeling of surprise or bewilderment, because in many ways he didn't understand just how he had arrived at the point where he was, just how he had wound up in San Francisco living in a studio apartment and eating in a Jewish deli. After looking at himself for a while, he would go into his small kitchen and sit down at the table, not feeling like sitting there but at a loss for something else to do. He would try to think of someone that he could call or go visit but no one would come to mind. Once again he would start reading and taking notes. About midnight he would go to bed and lie awake listening to the fog horns and sirens that could be heard now and then in the distance. Thoughts would go-through the mind. Reviewing the events of the day, he would berate himself for things he had done that in retrospect seemed irresponsible or stupid. Sometimes he would say out loud: "What an idiot I am." Tom Steward was a lonely man, isolated first of all by his situation, but even more than that by his lack of self-love.

True, there were other people who, though not involved in his day-to-day routine, were nonetheless part of his life. He had a family back in the Midwest,—parents, two brothers, and a sister that he kept in touch with and cared for very much. He also had a number of old friends from his college days that he wrote to now and then. And there were various people in San Francisco, such as the two women that Brod lived with and other cabdrivers that he saw on the streets, who were tangentially involved in his life. But he never sought these people out and when he saw them never had much to say to them except superficial pleasantries. He was the sort of person who when it came right down to it only was interested in intimate interaction, and the number of people with whom he was intimately connected had decreased steadily since his college years.

This was all the more reason why, when he- became involved with a woman, it was difficult for him to disengage even when he wanted to. No matter how much was wrong in

a relationship, it was still better than his original state of loneliness.

Even so, he could never stay in a relationship without all kinds of conflict. While he didn't want to be lonely, he also didn't want to be tied down. He had a knack for getting involved with women who were all right to a certain extent but weren't quite what he wanted. Though his life was frugal and he barely earned enough to pay his rent and supply himself with essentials, he hoped that he would someday arrive and be able to set up some kind of ideal situation and he wanted to hold off for that possibility. When he imagined this ideal situation, there was always an ideal woman at its center. Though he always started out a relationship believing that the involved woman might be this ideal woman, it was generally the case that before a month had passed (if the relationship lasted that long), he found much to give him grounds for serious reevaluation. Sometimes he looked back at his marriage and told himself that that was the ideal situation that he was judging everything subsequent to it against, but the truth was that even during his marriage (a fact he had managed to forget), he had felt constrained and critical a good part of the time. He was seldom really, thoroughly satisfied with a woman he was involved with. This chronic dissatisfaction even extended to his sexual interactions. When he fantasized, he almost never fantasized about the woman he was currently involved with. It was always someone else, some body he had met in his cab or seen passing on the sidewalk or eyed in the deli. And he was never quite satisfied with what happened in the bedroom because he wanted to arouse more passion than he did.

For a while, during the couple years that he had lived in the Midwest after leaving the farm in New Hampshire, he had belonged to a men's group that had discussed sexual roles and so on. During this time he had tried to reexamine his conduct toward women. He had come to the conclusion that a man ought to behave toward a woman ignoring physical attributes and he had even deliberately dated a couple ugly women to prove to himself that he was sincere in his belief. But a part of the reason why he had left the Midwest was

because he felt that he had become so mired down in such serious-minded, cerebrally-governed action that he had lost the ability to act like a normal, helthy man. In the time since then, he had- gone to the other extreme to such an extent that he now had little patience with unattractive women. He felt that somehow women were meant to be attractive and that women who didn't try to be attractive were negative and anti-life or psychologically disturbed in some way.

Because of his indecisiveness, he often found himself in a relationship in which increasing feelings of affection and kinship were paralleled by increasing feelings of conflict and entrapment. This was something that went on in his mind and which in many cases didn't enter much into his actual interaction with the woman involved. He was basically a person of good sympathies and when he was with anyone he liked he was attentive and considerate. Steward also didn't like contention, especially with women—in fact, there were few things in life as disturbing to him as a woman's disapproval or anger—so generally, out of desire for harmonious surroundings, he prefered to let a flash point ride rather than to confront itride. Meanwhile, though, his mind was churning away taking note of the various ways that his current involvement fell short of his ideals. Eventually, unless some more convenient means of breaking off relations presented itself, he would feel compelled to push his way back to some situation where he felt that his original dreams where once more withuin grasp.

While riding on the bus back and forth from his drawing classes or when driving his cab or sitting in the deli, Steward was always thinking about Katherine. Previously, all his attention had been on how to begin a relationship with her; now all his attention was on whether or not to stay in it. He often thought about her fondly. When he did, he would shake his head and smile to himself. He was aware that the bonds between him and Katherine were getting stronger. He felt complimented by her continuing interest. At the same time, however, he wasn't sure he wanted things to get more serious. One factor that he often thought about was her being a mother. It gave her a mother aura that he found appealing.

But, say he were to become her steady man—wouldn't that mean that he would have to become a kind of father to the girl? He imagined that there were certain duties that a man would have with a mother and a child. He wasn't sure what they were, but suspected that they would involve dropping his artistic ambitions for more practical ones. He didn't know if he would be willing to make such a sacrifice.

Something else that disturbed Steward and had come up more and more to disturb him, ever since that morning when he had seen Katherine naked in full light, was that, as he saw it, she was plain old too fat. He knew this was something he should be able to transcend or put in proper perspective, but whenever he thought about her, determined to think of her as a beautiful woman, this other image of her flabby backside and thighs would intrude into his mind. Not only did it disturb him, it made him angry. He could see that if only she set her mind to it she would be a stunning beauty. There was nothing preventing her except her lack of self-discipline. He was so exacting regarding his own physical discipline that he found it hard to excuse people who were more lax in their physical disciplines. Sometimes when he looked at her, he almost wanted to put a chisel and mallet to her so that she would live up to her potential.

Her matter-of-fact attitude, which he had initially been so intrigued by, had started to bother him. also. He kept thinking she would show some other side of her personality, but it never happened. Even though he wasn't sure about her himself, he wanted her to be more demonstrative to him. He couldn't understand why she never wanted to hug or kiss. He knew that he had helped to create this situation by talking about his conflicts, but he told himself that his conflicts would have been a lot less urgent if she had been more warm-hearted from the start.

Since he was unsure of his own worth, it was extremely important to him to be regarded as sexually attractive. She had a way of making him feel almost neutral. But, on the other hand, the fact that she herself seemed almost neutral was one of the most appealing things about her. She was so much against everything that he regarded as feminine that it

was as though she was the feminine principle boiled down to the bones. There was something extremely real about this stern-faced woman. He wanted to connect with it, whatever it was, control it, break through.

Despite all his conflicts, he was glad when the time came around to see her. He was still interested enough in her to precede his meeting with a long run. He had nothing in mind except to have a nice evening. After returning from his he shaved and showered. As he emerged from the front door of his apartment building, a fresh breeze gusted in his face. He felt in a good mood. In his hip pocket he had a wad of folded five and ten dollar bills. He was dressed in his usual corduroy pants, but instead of his blue work shirt he had a tan polo shirt on that he thought made him look lean and athletic.

When she came to the door to meet him, the first thing he noticed was that she hadn't bothered to dress up. The pants she had on emphasized the bigness at her hips. He almost felt like suggesting that she bring a sweater with her, but then she brought one anyway. But he soon forgot about this and then, all of sudden, he felt glad to see her. Sitting on the bus with her, he noticed how lovely her face was. And aside from his judgements of how she rated as a woman, he felt like he was with an old friend. More and more, he was feeling comfortable with her.

She was in a light mood. "Well, Tom, are we going to have a conflicted evening?" On the way home from school on the bus, she had decided not to make a big deal out of the evening or out of Tom Steward either. She would just be herself and if he didn't like it too bad. But now that she was with him she felt glad to be and was sorry that she hadn't made more of an effort to look nice.

"I'm afraid my whole mind is one big conflicted mess," said Steward, laughing. "You're lucky to see me in one piece."

"You poor man, You are a mess, aren't you?"

"Well, not totally, Katherine. I do have some minor good qualities."

"You do?"

“I don’t suppose you’ve noticed.”

“Well, actually, Tom, I have.”

“Tell me. I’m all braced to hear.”

“I like your arms. They’re strong.”

“Thank you.”

“But I don’t like your ears.”

“How come?”

“The left one is different from the right one. Haven’t you ever noticed?”

“No.”

“Well, it’s true.”

They went on in this kind of banter for a while, the gist of it being that neither one of them was really happy with the other but was going to have to do with what was available until something better came along. Whenever Katherine Hewitt delivered a *touche*, her eyes flared like coals and her lips curled up into a mischievous smile. Steward contented himself with good-naturedly warding off her thrusts. Whenever she hit home, he smiled and looked out the window.

“I’ve heard stories about feisty women, Mrs. Hewitt,” he said. “But you get the prize.”

It was near sunset. The place that Steward had in mind was a small family-style restaurant in North Beach. From Hewitt’s house to Chinatown it was a straight shot on the bus. There they planned to disembark and walk the remaining six or so blocks to the restaurant. The bus headed over Nob Hill through a neighborhood of bay-windowed apartment buildings. After getting out of the bus, they walked along the main commercial street in Chinatown toward North Beach. By this time the sun had disappeared behind the buildings on the top of the hill. An orange light had settled on the whole scene. A group of Chinese schoolchildren came towards them shouting to one another in Cantonese. A cool wind had come up.

Katherine Hewitt put on her sweater. It was a gray cardigan, very becoming to her. She walked along with her hands in the side pockets. Meanwhile, Tom Steward, glancing sideways at her, was newly impressed with how

beautiful she could be when conditions were right. He put his hand on her shoulder, but when she continued to walk with her hands in her pockets, he let his arm drop to the side.

“You know, you never did show me your drawings,” she said, noticing that he had been annoyed when she had not settled more under his arm.

“Yea, that’s right. I forgot.”

“I’d still like to see them sometime.”

“I’ll bring them over sometime then.”

“Did I tell you my old man was a painter?”

“No. That makes me all the more self-conscious. Being compared.”

“Well, you shouldn’t be, Tom. I’m sure what you do is more solid than what he does.”

Looking down the street toward the orange-tinted buildings, she had fallen into a softer mood. Despite her contentiousness, she wanted the evening to go well.

“How do you know? For all you know, I could be totally inept.”

“I can tell you’re a substantial person,” she said, turning toward him with a glance that meant that she really believed what she was saying.

“Even with my ears?”

“Yes, Thomas. Even with your ears.”

When they arrived at the restaurant and looked in, they saw that it was already crowded with people. They went in. In the room right off the door was a bar and tables along the wall, all occupied. The bar counter was also crowded. Everyone was talking loudly. Steward went ahead and asked the bartender about getting a table. It turned out that there was a second room entered to by a door at the end of the counter. There was one table available there. They went and sat down. It was the worst table in the room. It was right next to the waiters’ station where there was a bright light above a small stand that looked like a speaker’s podium. Two of the waiters, seeking refuge from the customers, had gotten together by this table which was in an open closet. They kept talking loudly and pointing into the room. It was disturbing to have this bright light above their heads but both of them

decided to make the best of an imperfect situation. They leaned toward one another while looking at the menu. A tiny waitress with jet black hair came to take their order.

Hewitt ordered crab, the Wednesday special. Steward ordered chicken caccitore and asked for a carafe of chablis. Soon the waiters, noticing Steward's perturbed glances, left their retreat, turning off the light behind them. The waitress brought the wine, pouring each of them a glassfull, and lit the candle in the middle of the table. Then she came back with a plate of olives, peppers, pickle, and lunch meat. With the candle flickering, the waiters gone, and food in front of them, everything seemed much better. After a few glasses of wine, they both felt content.

Katherine Hewitt, on a sudden impulse, reached over and took Steward's hand, stroking it lightly. "I love this restaurant, Tom. Where did you find out about it?"

"I don't know. You know how it goes. I heard about it when I was driving cab."

He liked to talk about what he saw and learned driving cab as though it was some kind of esoteric knowledge. He was relieved that the big-mouthed waiters had left them to themselves.

"A very romantic place."

"Didn't think you had it in you, Katherine."

"Just a little bit of it, Tom. I suppose you think that I seem out of place."

"Not at all, Katherine. I think you're lovely."

Wrapped in her gray cardigan, her green eyes sparkling in the candlelight, she looked very lovely indeed.

"Do you really?"

"Uh-huh."

The waitress came with a large bowl of soup. She set smaller bowls in front of each of them. Steward served Katherine some soup and then took some himself. In this kind of situation he could be very charming. The room was crowded and noisy. The tables were so close together that even the tiny waitress had to turn sideways to get between them with plates of food. The maitre d' had stuffed as many people into the place as it could possibly hold. Everyone was

eating with gusto and talking noisily. Hewitt and Steward, in a different mood, ate quietly, now and then sharing food from one another's plates which soon arrived.

"So what have you been thinking about?" Katherine said after a while, looking up at him.

"About you."

"Haw! I bet you have, Tom. You're such a liar."

"No, I'm serious. I have."

"So what were you thinking about me then?"

"I don't know. I guess I'm just trying to figure you out."

"Haw! Don't even try. You'll just get a headache, and you won't even get close."

"Close to you or close to the truth?"

"Close to either of them, I guarantee you."

Her eyes flared up like coals again. He reached for the carafe and filled her glass with more wine."

"In any case, you don't really want to know, Tom. You're just playing around for your amusement."

He laughed and shook his head. "Sure I do." He was buttering some bread. "When I first met you, you know what I thought?"

"No, what did you think?"

"Thought you were some kind of a honky-tonk waitress . you know like a truck stop queen."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, totally. I did."

That irritated her to no end. To her a honky-tonk anything was a floozie of some sort or another, and anyway it didn't exist. She didn't like to think that he had started out with such a simplistic idea of her.

"That's depressing," she said.

"Why is it depressing?" he said in surprise. "I thought I was giving you a compliment."

"It's just one of the stupid ways men categorize women."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't say you're a honky-tonk queen. I just said that my original conception."

"Sometimes you're so stupid," she said, shaking her head contemptuously.

He still couldn't quite figure out what he said wrong, so he just let the matter drop. He turned his attention back to his food.

After a few moments, it seemed stupid to her that she had flared up at anything as ridiculous as that. "Did I tell you I got a letter today?" she said to change the subject. All afternoon this particular letter had been on her mind.

"No, you didn't. From who?"

"From my mother back home."

"What did she say?"

"Wants me to visit her."

"And will you?"

"I suppose."

"You don't sound enthused."

"I don't have the money, you know. She has to send it to me. It makes me feel weird."

"Ummm," said Steward leaning toward her. He wanted to make up for his previous indiscretion, whatever it had been. "I can see how it would make you feel weird, going back as a child, kind of."

"And she disapproves of how I handle Stephanie."

"How come?"

"Thinks I'm not strict enough."

Katherine wanted very much to continue the subject. But Steward didn't go any further into it. She wasn't convinced that he actually cared. As the night went on, she became more and more irritated with him. It bothered her that the conversation stayed on the same level. She couldn't forget his comment about thinking she was a honky-tonk queen. Then she started to notice that whenever an attractive woman crossed the room, his eyes went right along with her. He even flirted with the skinny waitress in the exact same shy-boy way he had flirted with her. She was starting to see that his awkwardness and shyness were partly sincere and partly a device to get women's attention. When she and he left the restaurant, he insisted on paying the tab, flashing around the little wad of money that he kept in his hip pocket. He left a tip that she considered extravagant.

Later, when they went to a bar over near Washington

Square, the same thing kept up. He was flashing his money all around and eyeing the women. By the time they headed for the bus stop, he was a little, bit souzed. She walked along next to him, her hands in her sweater pockets, her face cringed against the wind had turned from chilly to cold. She was feeling tired and annoyed and sick of the whole routine of going out with men.

They walked across the same commercial street through Chinatown. All the stores were closed-. The awnings above the darkened store-front windows were clinking in the wind. There was trash piled up in front of the stores along the sidewalk. When they got to Sacramento Street, they looked down the hill, Not a bus in sight all the way down to the Embarcadero. She stood in a doorway to get out of the wind.

He came over and stood by her. She was just about to tell him that she hoped he didn't plan on accompanying her all the way home when a cab came up the street. With a flamboyant gesture, he hailed it down. Irritated as she was with him, she was glad to get in the warm cab.

The cab headed up straight up the steep incline toward the top of Nob Hill. He put his arm around her. He was still in a good mood. She sat rigidly not leaning toward him.

"Thomas, I'm very tired. I hope you're planning to get off on Larkin Street."

Larkin Street was the street that his apartment building was on.

"Naw, that's okay. I'll come along for the ride."

"It's really not necessary, Tom. If you want to help me pay for it, you can. I'll call you tomorrow."

The driver, overhearing their conversation, hesitated at Larkin Street. "No, that's okay, man. Go on." said Steward, waving his hand.

When they' pulled up to Katherine Hewitt 's apartment, the meter said "4.10." Steward handed the driver six dollars. "You can call it square."

They got out. For a moment, they stood on the sidewalk in front of the door.

"Well, I appreciate that you came all this way with me, Tom. I'm sorry you have to walk home in the wind."

“Come on, Katherine. I hope you’re not going to give me that cold treatment again.”

She sighed. “What do you want me to do?”

“Do what you feel like doing,” he said turning around. “I don’t care what you do.” He started walking away.

She called after him. “Can’t you understand that I’m tired.”

“All I can understand is you’re cold.”

“Well, if I ask you in, can it be with the understanding that there won’t be any sex “

“Whatever you say.”

She unlocked the door.

No sooner were they in the bedroom when he pulled her on his lap.

“I told you I didn’t want to do this, Tom.”

“Least you can do is give me a kiss.”

She kissed him but not on the mouth and got in the bed. He crawled on top of her and kept rocking his pelvis into her and nibbling on her. Finally she said, “If you’re going to be so insistent, let me go get some wine.”

She went out in her bathrobe. A few minutes later she came back with a bottle of wine and some glasses. “You’re such a horny guy. What do you eat for breakfast? You must eat too much fish.”

“Why fish?” he said nibbling on her ear as she tried to pour out the wine.

“I heard fish makes you horny.”

“I never heard anything like that.”

“Why you think there are so many fish?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s why. They’re horny.”

She drank down two glasses of wine and lay back in the bed. He knelt over her kissing her face and shoulders, moving down toward her breasts. Now that he had had sex with her once, he no longer feared impotence. He only feared impotence the first time. He wanted to show her that he was a tremendous lover.

After he had persisted in his efforts for a while, she said, “There’s no need for such a rigamarole. Get under the covers

with me.” He threw-off his underpants and got in. He reached back and turned off the light, lying down beside her.

He brushed her hair back and stroked her face. He reached back and lit the candle on the entable.

“Did you have a nice evening?”

“Yes, it was very nice, Tom. I enjoyed myself.”

Once again, he started to make love to her. He went about it systematically, first her face, then her breasts, then moving slowly down her body. He was concentrating very hard on what he was doing because he wanted to do a good job. He had almost started to think that she couldn't be aroused. But to his surprise he noticed that her pelvis was rocking back and forth. After a few more preliminaries, he entered her. For a while it seemed as though everything was going well. He thought she was nearing an orgasm. She was sighing. He thought it was from pleasure. But when he looked down at her face, he saw she looked angry.

“Just go ahead and come, Tom.”

“There's no hurry, Kath.”

“Goddam it, just come.”

He whaled away at her a few moments, came to an orgasm, and settled down on top her. Immediately, he disengaged from her and lay down beside her. He couldn't make out her face clearly enough to see if she was frowning or relaxed.

He wiped the perspiration off his face and looked toward the window where a cool breeze was coming in. Finally he said: “Are you angry at something?”

“No, I am not angry, As I told you before you forced your way in, I'm just plain tired.”

“I didn't force my way in,” he said getting up on one arm.

“I told you I was tired.”

“I know you did, Katherine, but I thought you got in the mood. You were joking around about fish and you went to get the wine.”

“You're just too insensitive to know what I'm thinking. He sighed and lay down again. “I suppose I am.”

“Well, at least you're satisfied.”

“I m not satisfied. I wanted to please you.”

“Nice lie,” she said from the darkness. “Your idea of me is that I’m some kind of honky-tonk one-night stand.”

“You misunderstood me, Katherine. I meant that as a compliment. I think of a honky-tonk queen as a kind of femme fatale, you know. To me it doesn’t have negative connotations. I think very highly of you.”

“I know you do, Tom. Thanks for your esteem.”

He looked out the window, then leaned over her to pour himself a glass of wine. “Would you like some wine, Kath?”

“No, but I’d sure like a glass of water.”

“Where should I get it?”

“In the bathroom.”

He groped his way to the bathroom and came back with a glass of water. She sat up in the bed. “If you’re so interested in me, why don’t you talk to me more?”

“I talked to you all night.”

“Tangential things.”

“What else was there to talk about?”

“My mother’s letter, for instance. You weren’t even interested.”

“Yes I was.”

“Not really.”

“Well, then tell me about it now.”

“Now I’m too tired.”

He got up before she did in the morning. He sat on the side of the bed and wrote a note, “Katherine, I’ll call you in the next few days.” He wrapped the covers around her shoulders, kissed her softly on the forehead, and went out to the kitchen to see what time it was. Stephanie was sitting at the table drawing. She looked up at him.

“Hi there, Stephanie,” he said. “You’re up early.”

“I like to get up early,” she said in her matter-of-fact way, staring at him.

He felt even more sternly regarded by the girl than he did by her mother. He said goodbye to her and went out. The sun was just coming up and he heard some sparrows chirping in the trees on the side of the house. Throwing his coat over his shoulder, he walked briskly toward home.

“So how is Katherine Hewitt? Are you still seeing her?”

“You got me, David. I don’t know.”

It was Saturday afternoon, and Tom Steward, on his way back from a drawing class, had taken a detour to Brod’s place so that he could catch a ride with Brod to work. He was standing at the door of Brod’s room. Brod was sitting on his bed, which was on the floor. The only furniture Brod had in his room was a dining room chair that he used like an entable. There were books and magazines piled on the chair, and a couple of his coats, which were both Army surplus types, were strewn over the top of it. To the side of the bed were some cardboard boxes full of paperback books. Though he had lived in San Francisco for a half year, Brod had never bothered to unpack a lot of his belongings. On the wall were some drawings that he had done in an art class that he had taken for one semester. He wasn’t much of an artist. He was too gregarious to concentrate on any one thing long enough to master it.

“You haven’t been over to Wyley’s?”

“Not for the past week.”

“That night you went to North Beach was the last time you saw her?”

“No, one time since then.”

“Where was that?”

“She hangs out in this bar right down the block from where she lives. I stopped in there one night. I was going by in my cab.”

“Just going by, huh?”

“Yea, just happening by.”

“She give you the cold shoulder?”

“No, she’s always glad to see me. It’s just when we’re together for any length of time.”

“What happens then?”

“I don’t know. She gets aggravated. You got me.”

Brod finished putting on his boots and began bracing himself on the chair which he had to do to get up because of his bum knee. Steward reached down and pulled him up by

the arm. Brod ran his hand over his beard and smiled at him. He clapped him on the shoulder. "What are we going to do with you, Steward? These women are going to be the end of you."

Brod's room exited to a hallway; To the right of that was a large kitchen. To one side, in an alcove, was the table where Brod's household ate their meals; to, the other side were the cupboards and the kitchen sink. A scrawny plant hung above the sink next to a window; the dish counter was stacked with freshly washed dishes. They walked through the kitchen-to the back door of the flat which was between the aldove and the kitchen sink.

So you're not going to see her again?"

"I don't know. I go hot and cold on her. I suppose I will, though. I keep gravitating back there."

"You lusty devil. I know just what you mean."

The flat that Brod lived in was on the second floor of a three-story building. There was another flat on the floor above. The ground floor was one big garage which a friend of Brod's used as a mechanic's shop. The back door exited to a stairway. The stairway led straight down to the garage. The building next door was so close that, even though the stairway was outside, it seemed like another part of the interior. Looking down the stairway, they saw Joan Weinstein, one of the women that Brod shared the flat with, coming up with her five-year-old son. She was an attractive woman with dark hair and dark eyes.

"Sounds like the big boys are on their favorite subject," she said.

Brod took the steps slowly, leading with his left leg, and then bringing his injured right leg slowly around behind him. Due to his size, he took up thw whole stairway, so everyone stood aside as he came down.

"It's not me, Joan. You know me better than that. It's the kid here. He's always got stars in his eyes,"

"Oh, I see.

The boy had dark hair and eyes like his mother. He hid behind his mother because Brod invariably tickled him when he went by.

“Hey, and there’s the little Abbie,” said Brod, acting as though he had just discovered him. He grabbed the boy, tickled him, and let him go. The boy ran up three stairs and shouted back: “Where are you going, David? Can I come with?”

“Naw, were going to work, Abe. We’ll play basketball tomorrow.”

In order to go outside, you had to go through the garage. There were a couple Volkswagens parked in the garage and parts all over the floor. Another doorway led outside. Brad’s blue Plymouth was parked in the driveway. It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky. A group of boys came running by bouncing a basketball down the sidewalk.

Once they were on their way, Steward took up the conversation where it had left off. “The odd thing, though, is that sex is the worst part.”

Brod had his side window down. He was looking out, sniffing the air. The only way to describe it is terrible.”

“Oh yea. She’s not into it or something?”

“Not into it or not into me.”

“How come she sees you then?”

“I don’t know. Everything I do makes her angry.”

“You sleep with her the other night?”

“When I stopped at that bar by her place?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Thought you said you just stopped by.”

“Somehow or other we wound up in her bedroom.”

“And it didn’t go okay?”

“Oh, it went all right in a minimal way.”

“So?”

“I don’t know. She never seems to enjoy it, you know. She never has an orgasm.

“How do you know?”

“I asked her.”

“What did she say?”

“She said, quote: ‘I don’t want to get into a big discussion about orgasms.’ End-quote.”

They were heading down Folsom Street past an area of warehouses and gay bars.

“You going to play the gay circuit tonight?” said Brod.

“I might do Chinatown.”

“There’s a big convention at the Hilton.”

“Oh yea. What kind?”

“Surgeons or something.”

“They never tip.”

They turned up 9th Street toward the Civic Center.

“This whole sex thing really gets to be a mes,“ said Steward after a pause. “I used to think I knew what I was doing. But more and more, man, I don’t know what’s going on.”

Brod scratched his beard and nodded his head. “Well, in the first place, it doesn’t sound like there’s much communication. And in the second place, you have to understand that there’s a lot of malice in what’s she’s doing. She’s laying a trip on you. You have to recognize that. This trick, is as old as the books. You say you can’t please her. Well, what does that mean? She won’t let you feel good about yourself. She doesn’t want you to. If she did, she wouldn’t have any power over you.”

“So why does she want power over me if she’s so pissed at me all the time?”

“Maybe she’s lonely or something. She wants to hold on to you. You. know what I mean. It’s not just sex, it’s a battle of ego’s.”

“Yea, ain’t it the truth? You’re supposed to be making love, but you’re not making love. It’s an out and out battle. It’s just plain old tooth and nails.”

“So anyhow,” said Brod after another pause, “it doesn’t seem like there’s much there to build on.”

“Except for the one small factor that I want to see her. I feel this weird kinship with her. And then I think that, well, maybe she’s sincerely confused about what she wants. So then it’s not malice. It’s mutual confusion.”

“Maybe you should try to turn it into a friendship, wind it down somehow.”

“Fat chance of that.”

They were crossing Larkin Street past, the Civic Center Plaza. There were crowds of people on the corners waiting

for buses.

“Did I ever tell you she has a kid?” said Steward.

“No, how came you never mentioned it?”

“I don’t know.”

“That bother you?”

“In a way.”

“What kind of kid?”

“Seven-year-old girl. Poker-face like her mother. I don’t think she likes me very much.”

“Well, your relationship is with Katherine. There’s no reason why it has to bring in the kid.”

“Eventually, it seems like it would.”

“You, don’t like that?”

“I like that Katherine is a mother. After a certain age, a woman is more attractive, don’t you think?”

“I suppose.”

“You know what bugs me about her most of all? She’s a little bit on the heavy side.”

“You never mentioned that before.”

“It didn’t bother me as much at first.

“You mean she’s actually fat?”

“Just a little bit heavy, you know. Just enough to take the edge off.”

“I remember you telling me how lovely she was.

“Well, that’s the weird thing. She is lovely. Sometimes I look at her and I’m- totally amazed. You know what I mean? I look at her and it’s like I’m looking at a goddess. And then, blam. I see her walking around-nude.

“Steward, you’re a mess.”

“Yea, I am. I can’t transcend it. I mean, if it were kind of physical defect, I could transcend that. But it becomes this. symbol of her whole attitude toward men. She’s at war with everything she is. You. know what I man? Deep inside her, she hates herself for being a woman. She hates the. whole-idea of receptivity.”

“So what’s that to you? It’s her body.”

“I. grant you that. But, one, I’m involved with her and, two, it just bugs. me.”

“You’re something’ else”

A BAD RELATIONSHIP 101

“Purely on philosophical grounds, it bugs. me. I-mean, isn't it true that man is naturally' transcendent and. woman is naturally immanent?”

“I just know that whenever you get confused by the concrete world, you try to make it abstract.”

“Even Simone De Beauvoir would say that.”

“So, is she the spokesman of all the women in the. world?”

“The spokesman of many. Isn't she considered the spokesman of liberated men?”

“Not any more.”

“Then who is?”

“I don't. know. But consider this,”said Brod, stroking his beard. “She's an intelligent woman. She's a matter-of-fact intellectual person. From what you've told me about her, this is the way I understand her. Can a woman like this, in this. day and age just point-blank accept whatever's been instinctually and naturally given? I read somewhere, I don't remember where, the proudest intellect stands in the most direct relation to animality. And. from the way you describe Katherine Hewitt, that's the impression I have of her, this fiercely proud person. Even the poker-face mask that you talk about. That's part of it, isn't it? that fierce pride. And you try to imagine a person like this being submissive, even sexually submissive. You just can't do it. There's a real struggle there for something. I suppose this is some tremendous sexist statement. So then where do you and I and people like us stand in that whole struggle? This might sound a little far-fetched. I say we stand against nature with them and help them to carve out this new space, because supposedly we're their friend.“

“Yea, but what does that mean, David? What does that mean in everyday reality? Those are words, you know. There's only so far you can go with this.”

“Maybe, but you just have to be more understanding of what's going on.”

“I don't know. Maybe you're right. We got to evolve. But how far can you take this? Sometimes I think something very basic-is out of whack. You know what I mean?”

A BAD RELATIONSHIP 102

“But, look, what are you talking about? Are you still talking about Katherine Hewitt?”

“I guess not. I guess I’m reading a lot into the situation.”

“It sure sounds like it to me.”

“I just feel like I have to confront her about all these things. It just can’t go on this way. We’re ripping one another apart.”

“Well, be careful. You’re talking about how she’s fat. You’re talking about her whole identity. Don’t assume that she’s stronger than she is. Who knows what she thinks of herself?”

“I wouldn’t attack her; I’d try to do it in a nice way.”

Later that night, Steward stopped by Wyley’s Pub. in his cab. All evening he had been thinking about Katherine Hewitt. The bar was crowded. She saw him come in and waved. She immediately came across the room. “Aren’t you working tonight?”

“Yea, my cab’s outside in the alley.”

“You want a beer.”

“Yea, Katherine. That would be nice.”

She brought over a beer and sat on the stool next to him. “What’s been happening?” she said.

“Not much.”

“I didn’t expect you to come by.”

“Why was that?” he said, sipping on the beer.

“Because the last time we were together, you seemed so dissatisfied.”

“I thought you were the one who was dissatisfied.”

“I. must be a hard person to deal with.”

“Yea, sometimes you are.”

He stood up. “Hey, Kath, you mind if I get myself some beer nuts?”

“Go ahead.”

He came back with them and sat down. “I was with David Brod today. We had this big talk.”

“Big talk about what?”

“About me and you.”

“I didn’t realize I was so much on your mind.”

“You’re on my mind a lot. I mean, it’s not always good,

A BAD RELATIONSHIP 103

you know. I feel a lot of hostility toward you.”

“I know you were angry last week when you left.”

“Not angry, Katherine. Just frustrated.”

“Frustrated about what?”

“About a lot of things. But mostly about sex.”

“I figured that. We haven’t exactly been swept up in passion.”

“Well, it’s getting to be a big thing in my mind. It really is.”

“Well, just don’t see me then.”

“Is that the way you want it?”

She touched his arm. “I’m sorry. Go ahead.”

“The deal is that I come out of it feeling incompetent, you know. And I really don’t like that. My sexual identity is very important to me. I’m a really quiet person, you know, and sex is one of the few ways I connect with other life

She sighed with exasperation. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. You mean that you’re upset because I don’t come?”

“Well, yea, that’s a good part of it.”

“Why don’t you just say that then. Why do you have to be so circuitous about it?”

“I wasn’t being circuitous. It just bothers me because I can’t please you. I mean, emotionally, sexually, in every conceivable way, you keep this tremendous distance from me.”

“In the first place, Tom, number one problem, first, foremost, and central problem, you’re very immature and paranoid. So even if I was pleased, you would perceive it as displeasure.”

“Why don’t you just tell me when—”

“Second problem,” she held up two fingers, “second problem, Thomas, to put it very simply, as simply as I can, as simply as I am capable of putting it, I am not a highly sexed person. Sex is a thing of minor importance in my life. I have various concrete goals, none of which is to be a sexual object. I don’t particularly like having some frothing idiot ram me in the ass. It seems bizarre to me. It seems weird. And if you want to know whether I think that you’re a gypsy

type like in “The Virgin and the Gypsy,” no, I don’t think you’re a dark haired, dark-eyed sexual dynamo phallic symbol. I just like your company once in a while when I can’t think of anything better to do.”

Her green eyes flashed with anger. He patted her on the hand. “Hey, now, Katherine, don’t get all bent out of shape. Wow, you really take these extreme positions. You should hear yourself talk. Put yourself in my shoes.”

She pulled her hand away. “I don’t want to be in your shoes.” She went behind the bar to wait on some other people.

A few minutes later, she came back and said: “We’re both crazy, Tom. Why does everything have to be so heavy? Why can’t we just be friends?”

Puzzled by this quick switch in moods, he shook his head. “I don’t know. I guess we can. You mean you don’t want to be sexually involved with me anymore?” He blew the foam off the beer.

“I never said that.”

“You were just telling me that you’re such a sexless-person.”

She laughed. “Well, I do like to keep trying.”

He kept shaking his head. “Really, Kath, you know what you are?”

“No, what?”

“A walking paradox.”

She laughed. “I like that one, Tom. Sometimes you’re amusing.”

“Well, at least I’m good for something.”

“Yes, as they say, ‘if only as a bad example’.”

“Thanks.”

After a while he said to her: “You mean to tell me that you don’t like sex?”

“Well, sure I do in an affectionate way.”

“What does that mean?”

“‘Affection’ A-F-F-E-C-T-I-O-N -- look it up in the dictionary.”

“Okay, I will. My God, you’re a difficult woman. I’ll say one thing for you. You’re a hard nut to crack.”

“I did have good sex for a while. With this guy I lived with in North Beach. That was even before I met John. We had a terrible relationship. He used to throw me down and fuck me whenever he wanted to. And he was always coming home with other women so I was terribly jealous of him. I used to watch out the window to see which way he was going. He always told me lies. But the sex was spectacular.”

He groaned. She laughed at his consternation.

“That’s what it takes for me to have good sex in a relationship, a sick dynamic right in the middle of it.”

The whole thing was so absurd to him that it was amusing. He was drawing circles on the counter-top with his finger.

“Now you know where I’m coming from,” she said.

“So if you liked this dynamic brute, how come you like me?”

“Because you’re sensitive. Because at times you’re a nice person. And anyhow, it doesn’t matter if you’re a brute because I was talking about something years in the past. That happened when I was 18 years old.. That’s ten years ago, Tom. Just think of it—a full decade. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. See, what you don’t understand, I have to focus. I really do. I have to focus on my life. Look where I live. Look where I work. I don’t want things to be this way my whole life. That’s what I mean about sex being unimportant. I just mean that I can’t let every little incident throw me off-balance. And I do go off-balance. I go off-balance easy. My whole life now is a struggle against what I used to be. And if you care about me, you’ll understand that and help me.”

She got up to go wait on some customers. He called to her, “Hey, Kath, I have to hit it.” She smiled and waved. “Have a good one!” she called.

Steward went out the door into the cool evening air. It turned out to be a busy night. By the time he got home, he was exhausted. He thought about her before he went to sleep but the whole complex of what he expected and what she expected, what she thought and what he thought, was too staggering to sort out.

Several days later, she called him: "I want to apologize for how crazy I acted in the bar."

He was relieved to hear from her-- because once again he had made a half-hearted resolution to forget her and hadn't been successful at it. "You didn't act crazy, Kath. You were just speaking your mind."

They talked for a while. She told him she was planning to go back to Riverton at the end of the month.

"Hey, what are you doing next Sunday?" he said. impulsively.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I'll just be getting ready to go back home. But I don't have all that much to do."

"Well, how about if I come by in my cab We'll go for a ride. Maybe can go out to the ocean or something."

"That really sounds nice."

9

The next Sunday started out beautifully. It was one of those days, such as you have now and then in San Francisco, when everything seemed perfect. It was about, 60 degrees with a mild breeze and not a cloud in the sky. The air was as clear as a bell. Steward went to work early. On Sundays, since business was generally slow, a lot of the day-shift cabs didn't go out. If you were lucky, you could get out a couple hours earlier than. five o'clock, which was when the night shift usually went out.

Sitting on the bus, Steward felt in a good mood. He watched the people and buildings as he rode along. It was such a bright day that the street almost shimmered; it looked like a river of sunlight. The cars and buses moving up and down the street sparkled with sunlight; they seemed to glide rather than roll. Even the busdriver was in a good mood. He kept saying,. Good day... Watch your step now... There, there, now, sister... Let me give you a hand."

Getting off the bus, Steward walked briskly around the corner, then broke into a run, looking back over his shoulder for traffic as he crossed the street diagonally toward the garage which was a half block away.

He strode into the garage to make his bid for an early

cab. His boss, a small attractive middle-aged woman, was, sitting behind her desk.

“What’s the situation with the cabs?” said Steward. “I was hoping to get out early.”

Some of the daydrivers were standing in the Office. “Now’s here’s Steward,” she said, winking at them. “You know if he comes in early, he’s got something up his sleeve.”

“To tell you the truth, Mary, I got some special plans for tonight.”

“What am I going to do with you boys? I hire you to drive cabs and you’re out entertaining women.”

Steward didn’t answer. He was standing with his hands in the pockets of his blue coat. He shrugged his shoulders.

One the other drivers said, “Hey, come on, Mary. Don’t give him a hard time. Can’t you see he’s in love?”

“Is that what it is, Tom. Is it love?”

“I don’t think it’s quite that serious, Mary. We’re just going to ride around for a while.”

“She’s got him in a spin, Mary. Look at his eyes. You can see he’s delirious.”

“But he always looks delirious.”

“Well, even more delirious than normal. He looks obsessed. He looks like a maniac. Why’d you ever hire this guy?”

“Give me a break,” said Steward. “What do I have to do to get on the streets ”

“Why don’t you give him 296? It’s out in the lot.” 296 was a notorious piece of junk. When it got to the bottom of a hill, it bottomed out on its oil pan.

“Okay, you can have 296.”

“Thanks, Mary. Why don’t you just give me a Sherman tank?”

Relenting, she came over and took him by the arm. “Tommie, since you’re such a nice young man. I’m going to let you have whatever you want. Go out there and look for yourself.”

He went out to the side parking lot and came back. “I’ll take 278.” 278 was a good, tight cab. Everything worked except the tail lights. He took the key off the rack by the

door and went out.

He had only gone a couple blocks when a couple women hailed him. It turned out they were going downtown. No sooner had he dropped them by the Curan Theater when a couple more people hailed him who were going to Chinatown. In Chinatown he picked up a Chinese family that was going to Chinatown in Oakland. After returning to the city Steward picked up a guy that wanted to go to the airport. When he got to the airport, he found that there were people everywhere screaming for cabs. He double-loaded in from the airport, shaking his head in amusement at his good luck and looking off toward the cities across the bay. Going down Powell Street, he saw Brod's bearded face approaching him in another cab. He gave him the thumbs-up signal. "I've been smoking it, man! I already had an Oakland and an airport and I double-loaded in!"

"Hey! All right!"

"The airport is bananas, totally bananas!"

"You think it's worth a dead-head?"

"For sure, David. For sure."

"You ever see what's-her-name?"

"I'm going to see her right now."

Steward wheeled around unto Ellis Street, passing up a fare at the Hilton. Now his only thought was Katherine Hewitt. He zoomed up the Taylor Street hill that headed out Pine Street toward her house, settling back in his seat to take the easy greens. He was hitting all the stop-lights right on the button. Bing-bing-bing. They were going down like ducks in a carnival shooting range.

He screeched to a stop in front of her building, jumped out of the cab, and pressed the doorbell. Pressing his face against the glass panel next to the door, he looked across the front lobby toward the door of her apartment. In a moment the door opened. She came running across the lobby, her face flushed. When she opened the door, she stepped back to hold it for her.

"At your service, madam. Your vehicle is waiting."

"Well, it's about time. I have to be at the opera at eight o'clock sharp."

He bowed again. “Madam, I’ll have you there in three minutes.”

She bowed back and walked toward the car. “They didn’t tell me I’d have such a good-looking driver.”

She was dressed in freshly-washed blue jeans, a white blouse with an embroidered collar, and a hip-length rust-green sweater. The sweater was just the thing to deemphasize her hippiness. It made her look soft and inviting. She had arranged her hair in a way that he had never seem before. It was still parted in the middle but with more of a wave; it wasn’t pulled as severely to the side as it normally was. In the back, she had drawn it up into a bun, which made her look maternal. There were ringlet curls on either side of her head in front of her ears. The whole effect was very lovely.

He closed the door behind her, went around to the other side of the car, and got in beside her, kissing her cheek. “Where would you like to go? Would you still like to go out to the ocean?”

“That sounds wonderful, Tom.”

He took a detour route through a pleasant neighborhood with shaded streets and brick houses. Then they headed out Lake Street through an area called Sea Cliff Estates where the houses were even more extravagant and overlooked the Golden Gate channel. By this time, it was late afternoon. The sky was still cloudless. A freighter was making its way slowly into the channel past the flashing beacon at Mile Rock. From this vista, they continued through the park on the top of the hill above the channel where there was a museum of art. Some kind of exhibition was going on at the museum. A large circus tent had been pitched on the lawn in front of it. Brightly colored flags waved in the wind, and people were passing back and forth from the tent to the parking lot across the street.

Katherine Hewitt had spent the earlier part of the day studying, doing some preliminary packing for her trip to Riverton, and talking to her daughter. Now she felt glad to be away and out in the fresh air.

“How you doing over there, Kath?” Steward said, tapping

her on the shoulder.

“Pretty good, Tom. I’m enjoying myself. I’m just looking. There’s a whole lot of things that I don’t normally see.”

“Like what?”

“Tourist places, I guess. I’m so busy. I just don’t get out all that much.

“What were you doing earlier today?”

“Just getting things ready.”

“For Riverton?”

“Uh-huh.”

“There can’t be that much to get ready, can there?”

“No, I make it into more than it is. So I did little things like that most of the afternoon, and then I was just waiting around for you.”

“You expect me earlier?”

“No. The weird thing, though, is I always think you won’t come at all.”

“I always come when I say I will.”

“I know you do, Tom. I guess. it’s just a projection from other men. Past disappointments.”

At a corner near the park, they stopped at a grocery store to get some beer and pretzels. Then they headed out toward the ocean, stopping in a tourist area by Seal Rock where there a couple restaurants built into the hill above the cliffs. Buses and cars were parked in front of the restaurant. People in evening clothes were going in to eat dinner.

“C’mon, Katherine,” said Steward. “I got this great place in mind where we can watch the sunset.”

Next to the restaurant was a wood plank fence that ran along the sidewalk above the cliffs. Immediately below the fence was Seal Rock itself, a flat rugged rock next to a taller, more pointed one. Beyond that was the shimmering expanse of the ocean which blended indistinctly with the swirled clouds on the horizon. The air was so clear you could see the shadowy outline of the Farallon Islands, twenty miles offshore.

Katherine Hewitt stood by the fence looking off toward Seal Rock. There were seals and sea gulls all over the sunny

side of the rock. Apparently, they, too, had gathered to watch the sunset. The seals were barking and the seagulls, their white bodies distinct against the black rock, stood together in a group like little soldiers. Now and then, one of them flew up, did a couple swoops through the air as if from impatience, then settled in place beside the others.

Steward came over with the bag of beers in his hand.

“Thomas, look, all the birds are lined up in formation.”

“Oh yea, they do that. They’re just like people, you know. I mean, what would you do if you were a seagull?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, that’s what they do. They fish all day, and then in the evening they lie around and watch the sunset.”

“You seem to know a lot about birds.”

“I like to watch them. I come out here all the time.”

“So where is this place you were talking about?”

“Over there,” he said, pointing. To the side of the hill they were standing on was a small cove. At the bottom of the cove were the stone ruins of an old salt-water bath house that had burned down in the 60’s. The rectangular pools between the remaining stones were filled with brackish water. On the other side of the ruins were the ocean-side cliffs that led toward Land’s End. The sides of the cliffs were covered with succulents, seapinks, and twisted cypress trees. At the near side of these cliffs was a platform that looked like a stone patio. “Over there by that platform or whatever it is.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Way over there? Why don’t we just stay here?”

“There’s all kinds of people here.”

“I don’t want to climb down this steep hill.”

“Come on,, Katherine. Don’t be a spoil sport.”

She followed him down the hill toward the cove. By this time, the sun had already sunk into the swirled clouds above the horizon. They stopped for a moment to look at the ruins. There were yellow flowers growing among the seaweed on the brackish water. Two boys, their fishing rods in their hands, were throwing rock into the pool next to them. Except for the ripples created by the landing rocks, the water in the pools was a quiet contrast to the incoming surf which

boomed again and again against the rocks. Starting out again, Steward pointed to the hills above the cove which were tinted with orange light, then he looked back at Katherine. Her face was flushed from walking. Her hair was disheveled by the wind and her green eyes were sparkling. He thought to himself that she looked very beautiful.

“Come on, Kath. Let’s get a good seat.”

Despite her complaints about hiking, the scene had put her in a peaceful mood. She felt strangely calm as though suddenly connected with everything around her. She followed him toward a narrow path that led up around a shallow cave full of water. The stone platform was on a mound of rock above this cave. She stool by the wall and looked off, sniffing in the breeze.

Steward immediately began reaching into the paper bag to get a beer. “You want one?”

“Sure.”

She looked around, sipping on the beer. “How come they built this here?”

“What?”

“This little courtyard or whatever it is.”

“I think it was a battery in World. War Two. See that cement pedestal there. I think they had a. gun mounted there. They were paranoid about the Japs.” He drank the beer in big gulps. Within a minute, he had downed the first bottle. He reached for another.

“Gee whiz, Tom. Slow down.”

“I want to get a little buzz for the sunset.”

He drank the second one just as fast, then sat down beside her, immediately throwing his arm over her shoulder. He smiled at her, his white teeth gleaming, his eyes already showing the effect of the booze. “Hey, ain’t this the greatest?”

She allowed him to keep his arm around her but drew away a little. “Yes, it’s wonderful. It’s so peaceful,. I feel so calm. I can’t explain it.”

Well, down a couple more of those beers and you’ll feel even calmer.”

She laughed. The sun was nearing the horizon. The clouds above the sun were fringed with orange. They looked like they were on fire.

“You say you used to come here a lot?” she said, pulling away from him and sitting on the wall a couple feet away.

“Uh-huh.”

“How come?”

“I don’t know. I just like to hike around. I’m a real outdoorsy person.”

“Yes, you are, aren’t you? I never realized that before.”

As she said this, she had an insight that this was what he was more than. anything else, a simple, physically-oriented man who had somehow wound up in San Francisco, driving a cab because it was the only job he could find in which he could dispel his restless energy. And somehow he had wound up with all his strange ideas about being an artist. Where had that come from? She couldn’t figure out how it all worked together.

He reached over and pulled her towards him. “Come on and sit by me, Katherine. How come you’re being so remote?”

She went over and sat down beside him. “I’m not being remote. I’m just not as physical as you are.”

As it neared the horizon, the sun had turned reddish in hue. It disappeared behind some clouds, then reappeared beneath them, glowing like a ball of hot metal.

Looking down the shore toward the south, Katherine saw that a fog bank had come in by: a point of land that jutted into the water several miles away. The whole scene, both water and land, seemed transfigured by the sundown light. Some pelicans flew by below the cliffs, travelling in single file, following the trough of the waves.

He put his arm around her. She nuzzled against him.

“You ever come out here much?” he said, looking at her. He seemed gratly calmed down, and his face had taken on a thoughtful expression. He brushed back, her hair from her brow, kissed her cheek, and played with the ringlet by her ear. He was looking at her intently, studying her face.

“Oh, I don’t know. I used to sometimes when I first

moved here when I was going with John.”

“Oh yea? When was that?”

“I guess about nine years ago. It seems so long ago that I can hardly remember it.”

“Were you in love with him then?”

“Oh, very much.”

“And what was he like?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess you could say he was very bon vivant.”

“And you didn’t like that?”

“Sure, I liked it in a way.” She looked around at him.

“So where were you then?”

“Nine years ago? Let’s see... I was a senior in college. I was just a kid running around in white tennis shoes.”

“I hate to tell you this, Tom, but you’re still running around in tennis shoes. It’s kind of hard not to see it when your feet are right in front of my eyes.

He laughed. “Yea, but those feet have seen a lot of miles.”

“I can just imagine what you were like. I bet you were a real wild man.”

“No, I wasn’t. I was a total student. Just a dumb student. I always had my nose in a book.”

“What ever happened to all that? I can’t figure you out.”

“I kind of rebelled against it, you know. I wanted to experience life. Wanted to see things. Everybody does it in his own way. But the weird thing is as I get older, I keep going back to that intellectual past of me. I can’t get away from it. And I keep coming back to this idea that my best chance to do something good—you know what I mean, for humanity or whatever—is to use my mind. You’re probably thinking, ‘what’s he talking about, his mind?’ Because I know that you don’t exactly think I’m a genius --”

She patted his hand. I think you’re very bright, Tom. Your speediness confuses me at times. I think it gives a false impression of you. It makes you appear more shallow than you are. I know you’re a responsible person. I see that side of you more and more as I get to know you.”

He looked away, embarrassed. She was surprised to see

that he was touched by what she was saying. He got up, picked up a stone, and threw it toward the water.

“But the odd thing about you is your lack of self-confidence. I wonder where that came from?”

“Yea, I don’t know, he said, looking back at her. She was still sitting on the wall. He was flipping a rock back and forth from one hand to another. “I believe in myself in a way, you know. I believe in myself or in my fate or whatever it is enough to persist in my life, my art-form, because I really hope I might do something good in it. Who knows? Maybe I’m a great artist.”

She laughed. “Maybe you are.”

The sun had already gone down, but a diffuse rosy glow lingered in the sky all the way from the mist-covered point of land in the south that Hewitt had noticed earlier to the headlands on the other side of the channel to the north.

He threw the rock toward the water.

She watched it arch high in the air then plummet toward the surf. He was still standing a ways down the wall from her, looking toward the water. She felt a sudden affection for him. There was something very sad about him. He tried to act cheerful and high-spirited, but beneath it, she could see that he was sad. “Was that really-hard for you?” she said, watching him.

He shrugged his shoulders. “It’s a long time ago now. You know how it is with the past and with people that were once close to you—they seem a part of you and yet they almost seem unreal. You know what I mean? I think back to her. She was a real flesh-and-blood person that I loved with all my heart. I thought we’d always be together and now I don’t even know where she is. I mean, I’m too old now to get all teary-eyed about it. I just think that it’s strange, that’s all.”

“Well, it’s not so strange, Tom. You were really in love with her, weren’t you?” It must have been difficult for you, the whole proceeding.”

“What was hardest about it at first is I didn’t understand what had gone wrong. It was like she saw something drastically wrong with me. But what did she see? I was

always good to her. But maybe I was suffocating her, cramping her style, you know what I mean? You know what she said to me when she left?"

"No, what did she say?"

"She said, quote, 'I just want to be a person, too.' End-quote."

Katherine laughed. "Well, it does sound like she felt constrained all right."

Steward laughed, too. "Yea, I guess she did. But I was not trying to prevent her from anything. It was that I thought too much. And whenever we discussed anything I was so much better with words. I overwhelmed her."

The twilight had progressed from from pink and purple to the first blue of night.

"Hey, we got to get going," he said, reaching out his hand to her. "It's going to get dark." He felt warmer to her than he ever had. It had been such a long time since he had talked to anyone about these things from his past, and talking about them was like calling up old ghosts.

She took his hand. She kissed his cheek. "That's so sad. Do you think she didn't love you when she left?"

His put his arm around her, looking back at it, I think actually, she did. She just had to find her own way. I don't hold it against her."

"You know what I was thinking we could do?" he said when they were back in, the cab. She was rubbing her hands together and blowing into them to get warm.

"No, what, Tom? It couldn't beat the sunset. The sunset was fantastic!"

"Yea, wasn't it something else? he said, throwing the car into reverse. He backed away from the curb and drove down along the beach. "I heard about this Vietnamese restaurant in the Haight. It supposed to be pretty good."

"That sounds interesting. Where is it?"

"Right on Haight Street near the park."

An hour or so later, they were sitting in this restaurant, Steward with a plate of chicken in front of him, and Hewitt with a dish of fried rice and vegetables, Between them burned a candle. In the background was some Vietnamese:

music-, a girl singing an Oriental lullaby in a dissonant scale. Everything-had turned out just right. The chicken was wonderful.

Across from them was a small group of young adults, four men and two women, who were apparently: medical students from the university hospital which was about a mile away. They were wearing white frocks and. had piled their thick textbooks on an empty table.

After the windy wall above the ocean, the restaurant seemed cozy. Steward was making an effort to eat his food slowly instead of at his usual breakneck pace. Throughout the meal, he had been especially attentive to Katherine Hewitt, first holding her chair for her while she sat down, then pouring wine for her and watching her glass to see whenever she needed more, ladling her soup, offering her the small plate of flat bread that came with the meal, arranging the candle and centerpiece so. that they weren't in her way, and in general acting in such an exaggeratedly courteous manner.

"Really, Thomas, you're going to have me so full, you'll have to carry me out. It's not my birthday, you know."

"Don't give me a hard time, Mrs. Hewitt. I'm just trying to be nice to you. Besides, What could be more pleasant than. carrying you?"

At. the beach he had resolved that this was the night when he would really talk to her, really break through for the first. time.. On the way from the beach to the restaurant, he. had been muttering to himself, "Be a good listener."

He finished his chicken, scraping every' last drop of sauce from the plate With his spoon,, which, he held with his whole hand like a shovel, then he looked around to locate the waitress. Catching her eye, he pointed to his empty beer bottle. She disappeared into the kitchen and several seconds later came running-across the room with a couple more beers. She opened one of them and bowed, her brown eyes smiling good-naturedly. "You like chicken?"

Steward bowed back. "Oh very good, very good." He lifted his hand and made. a little circle with his thumb and index finger. "Very good." He rubbed his stomach and

smiled.

Katherine Hewitt observed his interchange with the waitress, amused by his theatrics. The ocean sunset, cozy restaurant, soft music, and wine, not to mention Steward's attentiveness, had all come together to make her feel relaxed and content. She looked at him, her green eyes glinting in the candlelight, her lips set in an almost imperceptible smile like a Renaissance madonna.

"So tell me about you," said Steward, leaning towards her. He had cleared off the dishes from both sides of the table and had stacked them in a neat little pile with the napkins crumpled in the small bowl at the top and the silverware arranged around the plate at the bottom. He sat with his elbows on the table, playing with the straw flowers in the centerpiece. "You know, I hardly know anything about you."

She took a sip of wine and looked at him. "You're just saying that because you think you should, Tom. I know what you're like. You've just made some big resolution to show an interest in me, haven't you?"

He poured himself some beer. "You want some?"

"No, I got this," she said, gesturing toward her wine.

She watched his face contorting as he prepared his next move. He leaned forward again with his elbows on the table, rocking his beer glass back and forth and swishing the beer around. She took another sip of wine, biting her lip to keep herself from smiling.

"Well, you know," he said, lifting his arms. "I really can't understand why you give me such a hard time. Why can't you just accept that there's a sincere dimension to it? It's true that I'm methodical in how I deal with people, but that doesn't mean that I don't care. When it comes right down to it, I'm a pretty nice guy."

She laughed. "I didn't say you weren't a nice guy."

"You treat me like a stranger."

"I hardly know you, Tom. And you hardly know me."

"And I guess I never will know you, will I?"

"What is it you want to know about me, Tom? What is this great secret you're trying to uncover?"

“I just wonder what you’re like behind that mysterious smile.”

She laughed. “I was never aware that I looked at you with a mysterious smile. What does it look like?”

He tried to imitate her smile, pushing his lips together tightly and tilting his head to the side. She reached across the table and shook him. “That’s enough, Tom. I get the point.”

“Well, now you know how I feel.”

“You’re too sensitive.”

“I suppose I am,” he said, perturbed. He reached for the bill. “Anyhow, it’s time for us to go.”

She realized that she had pushed him too far. She leaned over the table and taking him by both arms, held him gently in place. “I was riding you. I’m sorry. Sometimes I get nasty. I don’t know what it is.”

“Okay,” he said.

“I was going to order some banana flambe. Would you like some?”

“No, that’s okay. I’ll pass.”

“I’ll order you some anyway, and if you don’t like it, I’ll eat it myself.”

When the flambe came, she set one plate in front of him and watched his nostrils quiver. He resisted it for a minute or so, and then began to mash the biinana, with his fork.”

“You like it?”

“Yes, I do. What’s it called?”

“Banana flambe.”

“It’s very good. Thanks for ordering it for me.”

“You’re welcome, Tom. You deserve to be treated nice.”

“The other night you were asking me about my mother,” she said after a pause. “In a weird way, my relationship with her was similar to Stephannie’s with me. My dad was hardly ever around. I thought the world of him, but I didn’t see him very much. Even before my parents separated, he didn’t spend much time at home. I was always aware that there was this subdued hostility between my parents. Especially with my mother. She couldn’t talk about my dad without her face

getting angry. It wasn't what she said so much as her expressions. And I suppose it's the same for Stephanie when I talk about John. I never bedmouth him or put him down in front of her. know it's important for her to think highly of him. But I can't hide the resentment in my face. I know she's aware of it. She's a precocious little kid."

"She sure seems to be."

"You should see the drawings she's been doing. There's so much-there, you know. I'm just very aware of my responsibilities to her. It's not even because I'm her mother, you know. It's just because I care about her as a, human being. I just want her to have an equal chance, especially with men. I don't want her to be distorted by the things that have distorted.me."

Some tears appeared in the corner, of her eyes. "I want her to be more capable of love than I am." She wiped them away.

"I don't see any lack of love in you, Katherine," Steward replied. "I really don't. You've had a hard life. You've had some big-disappointments. It's like all your strength is absorbed in not repeating your mistakes."

"Yes, so much of it is. But I'm more realistic now. than I've ever been before. That was a big struggle for me. I've gotten rid of that little girl inside of me that was afraid to strike out on her own."

She paused. to pour herself another glass of wine. "I suppose I've killed a lot of good things in the process—you know, good, sweet things, the whole carefree side of my psyche that used to be so much more a part of me. Maybe what it boils down to is just getting older. I see. it in my mother to an advanced degree. It's sad to see it sometimes. She's such a strong person but she's so terribly alone... And we never really communicate, you know."

"Maybe this time yu will?"

"I don't know. I make all, these resolutions. I was mocking you before about resolutions, but I'm the same way"

"What kind of resolutions?"

"Like I was saying, to-communicate better. Lately it's

become more important to me to know her. But you know how things go.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Yea, it’s too bad. Why is it so hard for people to connect? You think it was easier when everything was more defined? You know, when everyone lived in villages and family life was more stable?”

“I just know that people have to do their best with a lot of half-way relationships. I just know I have to carve out a little area of sanity for myself or I’ll be shuffled to the side. And I don’t want that to happen, not for my own sake or Stephanie’s either. No one’s going to do it for me. I can see that right now. I’m going to have to fend for myself. That’s why I’ve been studying so hard. See, Tom, you don’t appreciate, you don’t even understand that whole side of me. You think I’m just a bartender-mother, or whatever, and I’m just entertaining myself. But I’m not. I spend four days a week in the midst of those crazy students who are all younger than me. I’m very serious about it. I’m trying to work my way to something better.”

He kept nodding while she talked. “I do understand... I do appreciate... you don’t think I respect that? That’s one of the things that makes you so intriguing to me, that whole strong side of you...”

The medical students had long gone. There were only two other customers left in the restaurant and they were standing by the cashier, waiting to pay. The Vietnamese waitress was going around blowing out the candles. She looked at them as if to say that it was time to go.

The bill for the meal was lying on the table. Steward reached for it. She tried to look at it. “Let me see it, Tom.” He held it away from her. “This one’s on me. I insist, Katherine. Let it be my treat.”

She felt-herself getting annoyed, but thought it best to let things end on a happy note. “Okay,” she said. Peering down at the bill, she saw that it was for \$6.30. He threw down a ten. The big tip annoyed her, too.

The conversation had put her in a serious mood. Looking him over as they walked to the door, she could see that he was in a totally different one. They walked down the

street, she with her hands in her pockets, he with his normal bouyant stride. He ran ahead like a boy, jumped over a fire hydrant, turned back, and laughed.

When they were seated in the cab, he reached over towards her. "How about a kiss?"

She kissed him on the cheek.

"Not that kind of kiss. A real one."

She leaned over towards him and for the first time let him kiss her as he wanted to.

He smiled. "Did I ever tell you you're a very pretty lady?"

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"You have a good time?" he said when they started. for home.

"Yes, Tom. It was very nice."

From Haight Street, it was two blocks to a main thoroughfare. He made a quick stop, looked to the left, and darted to the right. He leaned forward with both hands on the steering wheel until he had maneuvered his way into the traffic, then feeling the transmission pop into high gear, he settled back in the seat. They were going along between a row of shabby apartment buildings and a narrow section of the park with tall eucalyptus trees. A thick fog had come in. The trees were shrouded in fog and the low clouds that hung above the apartment buildings reflected the diffuse glow of the stop-lights and moving traffic. The fog began to precipitate on the windshield. He leaned forward and turned on the wipers and looked over toward Katherine Hewitt. She was sitting with her sweater wrapped around her shoulders and her arms folded as though she was chilly. Her face was lifted slightly to watch the motion of the car; her thin upper lip arched delicately above her white teeth and a strand of hair hung over her cheek. She looked pensive and inexpressively lovely with that special loveliness that she had when she seemed sad. He reached over and pulled her sweater up more snugly around her shoulders. She looked at him.

"Are you doing Okay?" he said. "You're awfully

quiet.”

“Yea, I’m doing fine. I’m just. tired.”

He was in a good mood. The ocean air had made, him feel healthy and vigorous. He was glad that she had seen that outdoorsy side, of him because it was the side of him that he felt most sure was. Attractive. Being outside always made him feel strong, and it made him feel strong, too, that she had at last confided in him. He felt newly protective: towards her as a result of her confessed vulnerability.

“And does it feel better because we had a good talk?” he said. “I enjoyed talking to you. Katherine. I really did.”

“I enjoyed talking to you also”

She was watching the hood of the car move back and forth between the red tail lights to both sides of them. They had started out in the back of the pack of cars travelling in time with the synchronized stop lights. In the space of three blocks, by weaving in and out of the other cars, he had gotten into the second row of cars. Then, anticipating that the next stop would be, slower than the others, he swung to the far right into an empty lane, hitting the intersection just as the light turned green. The cars in the first row had hesitated to wait for the stop light to click. He roared ahead of them and took the first position. After another block, he, turned left, and headed through a poor neighborhood where there were soul-food restaurants and groups of young blacks standing in front of dimly-lit nightclubs. The fog had turned into a cold drizzle. The windshield wipers were creaking: back and forth.

By this time she was used to his speedy driving. She was beginning to like the quick back-and-forth motion of the cab. There was a sleepy rhythm to it that she found comforting. This movement between the moving red tail lights, the flashing stop lights, and the strangely-tinted, magical atmosphere of the city night were all part of what he was in her mind. She found it appealing, but also insubstantial, unreal, and at odds with her everyday concerns.

Soon after leaving the restaurant, she had forgotten her annoyance about how presumptuously he had snapped up the bill. Sitting in the cab, looking toward the fog-covered

buildings, her mind went back over the events of the evening. The ocean and the sunset already seemed far away as though they, were a couple days in the past. There had been something there that she had vaguely awakened to, but what it had been she didn't know. Then had come the restaurant, Steward's well-meant- attentiveness, and her confessions about her mother and her past. At first she had liked-his attentiveness and complimented by it. Now, in retrospect, it seemed over-done and over-bearing. At first she had liked how he had pressed her to reveal her intimate thoughts. She knew that she had set up the situation herself by saying that he never asked her any questions about herself and by accusing.him of.insincerity. And she felt good, in a way, that she had shown:him more of her real self because she knew that not only with him tut in general she needed: to open up more in order to end her loneliness. But now that she had forced herself to do it, she felt exposed and invaded. It was as though by dropping the:appearance of strength she had lost the strength itself, as though the facade and the quality it purported to represent were inseparable. What's more, talking about:her emotional conflicts, far from resolving them, had just brought them up from the dark recesses of her mind where she had managed to rout them. She. looked at Tom:Steward, trying to feel the affection. for him that she had felt at the ocean, but all she could feel was anger and resentment. And she felt contemptuous of the blundering way that he had gone about cajoling her into self-exposure as well as of-the-exaggerated importance he placed on her opinion of him. She watched him lean over the steering wheel as he sped between two cars and: wedged an opening between them, and thought to herself that he was nothing but an. overgrown boy.

He saw her looking at him and flashed a smile at her. "How come you're looking at me like that?" He was still in. . high-spirited- mood.

"Just because I like to sit here behind my mysterious smile and scrutinize you. I like to look at you and decide, whether you're doing a good or bad job at your life, just a little way I amuse myself."

He laughed, not noticing the edge in her voice. “So how am I doing then?”

“Oh, you’re doing okay. I’ll give you a C minus.”

“Ah, can’t I get a B?”

“I’ll have to think about it for awhile,” she said. Her lips curled into a contemptuous smile. She looked back to the street. It was raining harder now. They had come to a deserted part of the street near a hospital. Her apartment building was several blocks away.

“Hey Katherine”-

“Yes, Thomas.”

“There are a couple things we should work out.”

“What kind of things?”

The stop light in front of them turned red just as he got to it. He screeched to a stop and sighed.

“What kind of things” she repeated irritably.

“Well, the most immediate thing...”

“You want to know whether you can sleep with me tonight?” she said drily. She heard how bitchy her voice sounded when it came out and then, looking at him, saw he was surprised by her irritability.

“Well, it seems better to make a definite decision rather than just falling into it.”

His unwillingness to meet anger with anger just made her feel all the more contemptuous of him, but at the same time she couldn’t find any fault with his reasoning. A voice inside of her berated her for being mean. “I don’t know. I feel very tired,” she said. She knew that: to him the logical extension of the events of the day was that they should sleep together, and when she thought about it, it seemed the same way to her. She knew that she was being unfair and irrationally resentful since in reality he had done nothing all day but show concern and affection for her. Though she wasn’t in the mood for intimacy and really wanted to get away from him and withdraw into herself, she was afraid that if she let the day end on a sour note the whole relationship would crumble. Despite all her negative feelings toward him, she didn’t want that to happen. She had a feeling that this was the day on which they would set a course for good or

bad, and she wanted, that course to be a positive one.

“Are-you saying you want to sleep: with me and you want to know if I will?”

“Well, yea,: of course, Katherine. You’re the one who always has the objections.”

“I’d like you to stay,” she said firmly. “However, I’m not sure, we should make love. I don’t want to feel pressured—”

“It can be totally- up to you, Katherine. Totally up to you. I’ll be on my best behavior.”

“Okay, then. That’s that.”

He pulled up to her apartment. “I’ll bring the cab in and come back.”

“So what was the other thing we were going to work out?”

He reached in his shirt pocket and pulled out a joint. “One of the guys gave me this and I’d like to smoke it.”

“What’s that to me?”

“Whenever I smoke grass, you start browbeating me.”

“I doet browbeat you,...” she said,, her anger rising again. “It’s just that you’re so paranoid.”

H: sighed with exasperation. “Okay, let’s just forget it. Really, I’m sorry I brought it up.”

She put her hand on the door but hesitated, thinking the matter hadn’t been resolved. He, patted her on the hand. “It’s okay, Kath, just forget it. We had a,nice day. I don’t need the grass. I’ll run this, crate in and see you in a few minutes.”

She watched,the cab going down the street. As soon as he drove away, she realized she was glad he was coming back. “What a bitch I am,” she thought to herself as she walked across the lobby to her apartment.

When he came in, she said “You, still got that joint?”

“Yea.”

“I’ll smoke it with you.”

“You’ll get pissed at me, Katherine.”

“No, I won’t. I’m sorry for being so bitchy.”

“You’re not bitchy.”

“Yea, I am. I don’t know what it is. I guess it’s resentment, you know.”

“Resentment at what?”

“At letting my guard drop, maybe. I don’t know.”

Suddenly, she went to the other extreme and felt like confiding in him again. But she checked herself, and, pointing him toward the bedroom, went to the kitchen for wine.

On the way down the hail, she peeked in to see if her daughter was asleep. Then she went in the bedroom, closing the door quietly behind. Steward was already in his underwear. He was sitting on the bed with his legs crossed and the joint in one hand. She set the wine on the entable, squatted down to pick out a record from the stack of records next to the bed, put one of them on the turntable, adjusted the volume, and sat down. She tried to light the candle but the wick had folded into the wax.

“I guess we’ll just have to do with the lamp,” she said.

“Oh, too, bad. Why don’t you put it over there on the floor. Will it reach?”

“Yea, I guess so.” She set it on the floor by the dresser..
“Yea, I suppose that’s better than right in our faces.”

With the lamp on the floor, the room was in a kind of half-light. The dresser, bed, and entable threw giant shadows on the ceiling. It was a pleasant atmosphere, not as romantic. as a- candle would have been, but cozy and relaxing nonetheless. It was still raining outside. They could hear the rain hitting against- the window pane.

She came back and sat next to him on the bed. He put his hands on her shoulders, pulled her hair back, and started to gently massage her neck. While sitting at the garage, he had resolved not to pressure her at all.

“Aren’t you going to smoke your joint?” she said.

“I’d like to.”

“Please do.”

He lit it and took a deep puff, offering it to her. She took a. tiny puff. and handed it back to him. “That’s all I want, Tom.” She poured herself a glass of wine.

He smoked about half the joint and set it down. He felt pleasantly stoned and for the first: time felt totally relaxed and at one with her.

He was watching her face from behind her shoulder. When she breathed in and out, her nostrils quivered and her breasts rose up and down. He felt very attracted to her but checked himself from making any gestures that could be interpreted as a lead-in to sex. He kept massaging her neck, and shoulders.

“That feels very nice, Tom.”

“Does it?”

“Uh-huh.”

She drank one glass of wine and poured herself another. Gradually, she began feeling aroused. She wasn't sure if she wanted to make love, but it felt good to be touched so gently. She realized he was: making an effort to meet her halfway and that sincerely impressed her. She finished the second glass of wine and leaned back to look at him. He smiled at her. Suddenly it occurred to her that he was a very handsome man. It was as if she had forgotten what a handsome man was. She felt attracted to him as she never had before. She reached up and ran her fingers through his hair.

“You got any more of that grass?” she said.

“Yea, sure. I only did about half of it.”

“I'll have a little more.”

He laughed. He leaned over and lit it again, took a deep puff and handed it to her. She took several big drags, blowing the smoke out her nose and laughing.

“You are a crazy lady,” he said.

“How come you say that?”

“You're - so changeable.”

“Can't keep up with me, huh?”

“I ain't got a chance.”

She felt relaxed from the wine and now the grass, too, had taken effect. Suddenly she said: “Do you want to make love?”

All this while he had been watching her carefully, trying to interpret her messages. He had thought she was making overtures for sex, but hadn't been sure of it. And he hadn't wanted to ask her directly because he was afraid that that, too, might be interpreted as pressure. So he was relieved she had decided to be more direct.

“Well, yea. Of course I do.”

He kissed her softly on the face- and began undressing her slowly, admiring her shoulders and breasts. In his stoned state of mind, she looked more beautiful to him than she had ever looked before, and he wanted to make love to her more slowly and thoroughly than he had ever done before. He wanted to prove- that he could be a good lover. Hewanted to make love not just to the woman in her, but to her, Katherine Hewitt, the woman who had been with him at the beach. He wanted to make love to this new, more.vulnerable part of her being which she had disclosed to him. He kissed her neck and shoulders and then bent-down-to kiss her breasts, first touching the nipples lightly with his tongue, then sucking on them gently until they engorged with blood.

She was leaning back against the bed board with her eyes closed, but she didn't feel as though she was on the bed. She felt as though she was floating somewhere, turning in a circle. At th emiddle of the circle were her pelvis and womb. Her feet were far away, nonexistent. Her mind had scattered in every direction. She could feel the moist touch of his lips as they moved around between her shoulders and breasts, and coul feel her thighs relax and feel herself moistening and opening. But then, as if from somewhere far in the distance or deep within- her, a feeling of repulsion appeared and grew steamly larger. It was like a counterpoint to his kisses. A part of her tried to push it.down and another part of her smiled at its approach and welcomed it. Finally, it grew so large she could no longer contain it. She laughed.

“What's the matter?” he said, startled' by the sudden change in mood.

“Oh, nothing,” she said. “I'm sorry. It just all seems weird to me. I feel self-conscious.”

He sighed and sat up beside her. He, too, had sunk. into another world, and. it was as though-her laughter had called him up from it. Now he could no longer return to it.. He felt. irritated that she had broken the spell, and it took- his self-confidence away.

She was as startled as he was, and no sooner had she laughed than she had repented of it. “I'm sorry,” she said

again. "Come here and kiss. me."

He kissed her half-heartedly and looked out the window. The rain, was still coming. down. He settled back in the bed, feeling a subdued rage towards her. She rolled over on top of him. "Now you're angry, aren't you?"

"Not, angry, just disappointed."

She lay down beside him. He still had his T-shirt on. She pulled his shirt up and looked at him. His stomach was lean and well-muscled. There was a patch of thick black hair on his chest which narrowed, ran. down the center of his stomach and expanded into a smaller patch around. his navel. She pulled his underpants down and and looked how it expanded again into the soft luxuriance by his penis. She kissed his navel and pulled up his underpants. He was still looking toward the window. She moved her hand across his stomach again, moved it down into his underpants, and watched his pelvis rise in anticipation of her touch. The idea that he was a big animal was amusing to her. She smiled.

He suddenly rolled. toward her and came down on her, biting her gently in the nape of the neck. She felt his hand moving up her thigh. She lifted up her legs and waited for his touch.. He grabbed her firmly, rocking her back and forth. His hands were very strong. He touched her lips lightly, parting them gently like petals.

Once again, she felt herself sinking into a circular-moving sea. She reached down and caressed him, pulling him softly towards her. Though her laughter had confused him, he was now fully caught up in her again. He knelt above her, buffing her with his lips, biting her neck. Then, ever so slowly he began to. approach her. His being able to approach her in a leisurely, controlled manner with no fear of impotence in itself gave him a feeling of strength. He touched her and then, hearing her sigh, pulled back. Then he touched her again and entered her slowly and moving back and forth rhythmically, listening to her breathing and sighing.

Once again, after first feeling aroused, she felt increasing repulsed. First, she was rocking back and forth with his motion, but then, suddenly, her dependence on it

angered her. Shifting his weight, he brought himself down on her thighs, nearly wrenching them out of joint. She groaned. Interpreting her groan as an indication that she was near an orgasm, he pushed his pelvis against her more and brought his hand from her breast to her rectum, pressing against, it and scratching her with his fingernail. She took his hand firmly and pulled it away. Confused by this gesture, he slowed the rate of his thrusting, settling on top of her all the more oppressively. She let out a long groan.

“What are you doing?” she cried. “Are you trying to cut me in half?” Startled, he; looked at her. “What do you mean what am I doing?” She sighed, angry at herself as much as him. “Can’t you be gentle?”

“I thought you were coming.”

He tried to start up again, but the magic had vanished. He began to disengage from her. She held him in firmly with both arms “God damn you, Tom. Don’t stop.”

He groaned. “What do you want me to, do?”

“Just keep doing it. Everything is fine.”

He started in again, moving back and forth half-heartedly.

“Now you’re going too slow,” she said. “You have to: do it a little harder than that.”

He pushed against her harder, watching her face but her face was expressionless. He couldn’t tell whether the sounds she made were from pleasure or discomfort. Finally she whispered “Tom, I know I won’t come. You go ahead. Please just go ahead.” He felt her brace her legs in anticipation of more vigorous thrusting. He began moving back and forth once more. He wanted to save the situation from becoming a total catastrophe by having an orgasm himself. But when he tried to tune into her body, it seemed sexless and unappealing. He gave a few more hopeless thrusts and then pulled himself out and sunk onto the bed beside her.

Neither of them said anything for a few minutes, and then he said: “I’m not a robot, you know. I’m not a machine with no feelings that you switch off and on.”

“Well, you know, you’re almost thirty years old. It’s not

up to me to teach you the elementaries.”

“The elementaries of what?”

“Of what to do in bed.”

“So what exactly did I do wrong?”

“I just said it’s not up to me to teach you.”

He groaned. I can tell you the problem in one sentence.”

“Oh yea, pray tell. What is it?”

“You don’t want to be fucked.”

“Haw! So that’s what the problem is?”

“Yes.”

“And your idea of fucking is to ram me like a buffalo.”

“I don’t know any way else to do it. There’s only so many ways that you can stick a peg in. a hole.”

“For one thing you could be more gentle.”

“Just last week you were telling: me how you were so turned on by some guy that threw you down and fucked you whenever he felt like it.

“I also told you—if you will try to clear your mind for a moment and be rational,—that that was years ago, Tom, years ago.”

He sat up on the:side of the-bed. “Okay, okay, Katherine. That much I’ll grant you.” He looked. Around the room. Now the giant shadows on the walls and ceiling looked stark and devoid of nuance. He hated her room, hated how grim and unfeminine it was. He thought about walking home, but then a gust of wind pressing against the window pane reminded him that it was still raining outside. He got up to turn on the light.

She looked up alarmed. “So now where are you going?”

“I’m not going anywhere, Kath. I just want. to shut off this light. This room reminds. me of the ‘Manchurian Candidate’.”

He shut off the light, and sat down next to her, putting his hand on her lap. He. wanted to make peace.

“Sometime remind meto have you cut your fingernails,” she said.

That made him angry again.

“Katherine, the problem is not my fingernails. The problem is that don’t know what you want. One minute

you're telling me, 'Go softer, go softer.' The next minute you're telling me, 'Go harder, go harder.' Why don't you decide if you want me to be, aggressive or sensitive? I'm sick and tired of trying to be both at the same time."

"I could tell you that I want you to be emphatic, not aggressive. But you, couldn't possibly understand that, could you?"

"No, I guess such fine distinctions are beyond the capacity of my gross masculine brain."

"I'm starting to think so."

He lay back on the bed: "Just consider this from my perspective a minute." He looked at her, but the shade was down and he couldn't see her face. When she made no objection, he went on "I'm the one who has to do everything, right? I mean, usually.—I know this is changing a little bit—but usually, a man -makes love-to a woman, a man touches the woman, right?"

"Well, yea, to a certain extent."

"So here I am trying to figure out what you like. I'm watching your face. I'm listening to your sighs... looking, for these various indications of where you're at. But your face has no expressions. You always seem to have this subdued anger toward me."

She sighed,

"So let me ask you. this. Let's bring it down to specifics. When I was kissing your breasts, did you like it?"

"Liked it for a while."

"But you didn't really get into it, did you?"

"Not totally. I wasn't swept up in it like in a movie."

"He started in again. "Okay, so let's go on with the specifics, when I was..."

She cut that off at once. "This little-routine you're going through right now is a good example of where the real problem is."

"And where's that?"

"You are immature, paranoid, insecure, and sexually confused. As I told you in the bar that night, even if I was writhing around in passion having multiple orgasms, you. would still perceive it as displeasure."

He got up and paced around the room in the dark. She lay back against the pillow, feeling thoroughly exhausted and at a breaking point but determined to regain what she felt had been lost in the restaurant. She sighed and waited for his next onslaught.

“And I suppose you’re so sexually healthy...” His sarcastic voice came. Across the dark room.

“I am in almost every respect more together than you are, Tom,” she said. “All you need to do is to compare your confused, disorganized life to my more organized one. At least I have my energy directed toward practical goals. At least...”

“Okay, so let me ask you this, Katherine, why are you:continually destroying-yourself? Why...”

“In no way, shape, or form, do I. destroy myself, Thomas...”

“Your cigarettes, Katherine. You smoke like a fiend.”

“A small bad habit maybe, but what is that compared o your whole life being wasted?”

“I’ll tell you. what it is. It’s symptomatic of your whole attitude toward yourself, toward your body. You are continually trying to dull yourself down

“Your idea is that a woman is someone who spends half the day primping in front of a mirror and walks down the street wiggling her ass.”

“To me a woman is someone who is happy being a female animal and you are not. Your whole identity...”

Now he was touching on matters that were painful and confusing to her, but she fought on gamely. “So how do you know what my identity is? What are you, some kind of shrink? You’re making empty, meaningless...”

“I tell you how I know, Katherine. It’s written all over you in everything you do... in how you talk, in what you wear...”

“What’s wrong with what I wear?”

“You always wear the same clothes. You never try to dress up.”

“Well, I’ll have you know those are the only clothes I can afford, Tom.”

Her voice had taken on a different tone, but he didn't notice.

"Okay, then, forget about your clothes. But let's go on to this, to come to a more sensitive point, why is it you never lose weight?"

"What do you mean, 'lose weight'?"

"You know very well that you're overweight... All you have to do is stand in front of a mirror."

"So what business is that of yours?" she said, her voice rising shrilly. "What right? What right?" -

"It is business of mine because I'm involved, with you and because you could be a stunning woman, and it bugs me to hell..."

She made a final effort at composure and then broke down crying. "If I had known, Tom, I would have never... I would have never... You're cruel! You're absolutely cruel!"

He suddenly realized that the argument had taken a sinister turn. He rushed across the room to her. "Katherine, are you crying?" He had almost thought that it was impossible for her to break. Now, faced with a crying woman, he immediately repented of his accusations, but he didn't know what to do. He leaned forward to touch her. "Katherine, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know." He put her arm. She drew it away. "Don't you dare touch me! If you touch me, I'll scream!"

"Katherine, I'm sincerely sorry," he said.

"You knew, you just knew, where my weakest spot was."

"I didn't know, Katherine. I didn't know... I was just arguing. We were both arguing. I didn't mean to hurt you. Honestly, I didn't. I care about you very much."

Stewrd did in fact all of a sudden feel as though he had never cared about Katherine as much as he did now at this moment. He leaned forward again. "Won't you please let me hold your hand, at least."

She felt too exhausted to offer any resistance. She was still sobbing though now more lightly. He kissed her on the forehead. "I'm so sorry" he whispered. "I think you're a beautiful woman. I'm so sorry I said that."

She leaned forward into his arms. He hugged her, kissing her cheek, then took a kleenex and began dabbing her tears away and kissing her eyes. She allowed herself to be cared for like a little girl. When she had stopped crying, he got in bed beside her, pulling her against him. She settled into his arms with her lips pressed against his neck. He kept petting her face and whispering, "Katherine, I care about you so much. Please forgive me."

Finally she said: "If you only knew how self-conscious I am about that. Because, you see, when I was living. With John..." She tried to continue talking but began crying again.

He cradled her in his arms.

It was late in the night when they fell asleep in one another's arms. When he woke up in the morning, the bed was empty. He immediately remembered what had happened and jumped up. He still felt mildly stoned from the previous night.

He went down the hall to the kitchen, but she wasn't there. He looked in the bathroom, but didn't find her there either. The door to Stephanie's room was open. She, too, was gone. Paulsen was in his room, in bed alone. Then he heard her voice from the sitting room. "Thomas?"

He rushed down the hall. "Katherine, I'm so glad to see you. I was afraid you'd already left."

She looked at him coldly. He knew right away that he hadn't been forgiven.

"You're still angry, aren't you?" he said.

"Right now, Tom, I'm just worn out."

"You don't want to talk about it?"

"What's there to talk about?"

"Last night."

"All I can remember is a vicious argument. Why or how it took place, I don't know."

"You don't have any thoughts about it?"

"Just I'm not sure I want to see you again."

"Are you serious?"

"Very."

He got up. "Katherine, it wasn't just me. We were both angry. It's true I attacked you, but you also attacked me. I

didn't know that that particular subject was such a sore spot with you.”“

She softened a little. “I know you didn't, Tom. But can't you see we're just tearing one another down?”

“I can see that we did that last night, but we don't do it all the time.”

She sighed. “What do you want me to say?”

“Just promise we'll talk it over sometime.”

“All right, Tom. I promise. It will have to be after I get back from Riverton.”

He turned around to go. “Well, okay, I guess there's nothing else to say.”

“Thomas?”

“Yes.” He stopped at the door.

“Come here a moment.”

She took his hand. “I know it was hard for you, too. I'm sorry.”

He kissed her on the cheek. and left.

11

Katherine Hewitt was still in the sitting room when Scott Paulsen came down the hall and peeked in at her. He put his hand on her shoulder. “So tired at nine-in-the morning?”

She put her hand on top of his and looked at him with a wane smile. “Always start my days like this. Didn't you know? I'm- a real dynamo.”

“Aren't going to your classes?”

“Not today. We're leaving for Riverton tomorrow and just not into it, I guess.”

Though Paulsen only talked with Katherine about once-a week, he was a perceptive man and knew her moods very well.

“Did Tom come by yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“You go out to the ocean?”

“Yes.”

He sat down next to her on the couch and studied her face. “And how was that?”

“It was nice. We watched. the sunset.”

“And then?”

“Went to a restaurant.”

“Katherine, talking to you is like prying open a clam. So how was the restaurant?”

“Nice.”

“And then?”

She smiled.wanely again. “We had this horrendous argument.”

“Oh no.” He already knew that that was at the bottom of the glum expression. “About. what?”

She shook her. head. “I really don’t know. We, started to make love. I don’t know. Everything went wrong.”

“Like- what?”

“Well, first, everything was going great... For me, too... I was really getting into it... And then- I just couldn’t... I just wasn’t there. I couldn’t keep- my mind there. You know what I. mean, Scott?”

“Uh-huh.

“So I tried to keep going...but I just. couldn’t. And then we started to argue about it... you know, who was right or who was doing this or that wrong and it got more and more vicious, and then he told me I was fat...”

“Oh no!” He was one of the only people who knew how self-conscious she .was. “That must have made you so bad!”

Tears came. to her eyes again. “And then to make thing worse, I broke down and started bawling like a little kid.”

“Everybody cries, sweetheart. Everybody cries at some time or another in their life.”

“But I’ve worked so hard to, get rid of that little whining part of me, and now when I look back at what happened, I feel so humiliated. And I resent him so much for doing that to me.”

“Well, do you think it was pre-meditated malice? Or did it just come out? There’s a big-difference, you know.”

“Yea, I know. But still I feel like he meant it, and it still happened, and now look where I am.”

“You’re right there on the couch, Katherine. You’re all

in one piece. And you know what? I bought some fresh ground coffee. I was just about to make it. And I have all kinds of fruit for a fruit salad. Would you like some?"

"I have to admit that sounds pretty good."

"Well, better get a move on:then. I'm taking orders right now."

That perked her up. She felt better until about an hour later when Paulsen left to meet some friends. Then she felt upset again. She sat in the kitchen and thought about what had happened, trying to get a clear picture of it in her mind, but the events: of the. previous night, when she looked back at them, were just a jumbled mess of misfired expectations and vicious put-downs.

The rest of the day Katherine tried to forget about Tom Steward completely. Fortunately, she had all kinds of small chores to do before she went to Riverton. They didn't really have to be done, but she felt that it was important to get them out of the way. She paid all her bills even though she was only planning to: be gone for five days. She cleaned the apartment thoroughly, aired out her room, and took. some of her clothes to the cleaner, something which under normal circumstances she would never have done. Then she took the bus downtown to pick up the plane tickets, which her mother had paid for in advance, and worked on a dress that Stephanie was going to wear on the trip.

Much as she tried to forget Tom Steward, however, he was much on her mind. All day long, she went back and forth between anger and depression.

She was apprehensive about going to Riverton, afraid her mother would be critical of her in some way, and afraid that communication would be difficult. But at the same time, she was excited about. going back to her hometown: and seeing it again. And she very much wanted to see her mother because her-feelings of affection for her and sense of kinship with her greatly exceeded her apprehensions.

By this. time, it was the middle of October. In San Francisco, she hardly ever thought about the. seasons because the weather didn't change much. But she was very much aware that it would be autumn in Riverton. Autumn

had always been her favorite season. She had many childhood memories associated with it.

As the time grew closer to leave,, she became. excited and her finished. She even forgot about Tom Steward temporarily. That evening she was busy putting the finishing touches on Stephanie's dress. Stephanie was with her. It wasn't absolutely necessary that the dress be finished before they left, but they had gone together to get the material and had chosen the pattern with this trip specifically in mind. It was a matter of ritual that they get it done. The job could have proceeded faster without Stephanie's assistance, but she insisted on being part or every step of the process. The girl, too, was in a strange mood about the trip, blowing it all up in her mind.. She kept asking questions about where her mother had grown. What had the neighborhood been like, what had her house been like, and soon. She had only been to Riverton a couple times.

"And, Mother, I was just wondering, did you have a porch?"

"A porch?"

"You know, a big, wide place to sit on the front of the house."

They were in the sitting room, hemming the new dress, Katherine on one knee with pins in her mouth, and Stephanie in front of her being fitted. The girl was so intent on talking that she couldn't stand still.

"Yes, of course, we did," said Katherine, grabbing her daughter's two stocky knees and holding them firmly until they stopped moving. "All those old-houses have porches." She grabbed her arms and pulled them straight down to the side.

"Jana Frymm has a porch on her house."

"Jana from your music class?"

"Uh-huh."

"How nice."

"It has a wide railing. It comes up to here." Stephanie had been standing with her body as stiff as a toy soldier while her head and face moved all the more expressively as if the excess energy from her immobile body had been

transferred to her head. But now it was necessary for her to move just a little in order to indicate with her hand where the railing came, up to her chest. “And they have pots along the railing, you know, the kind with little clumpy orange flowers.” Once again she needed to use her hands to show: the shape and size of the flowers.

Katherine smiled. “Yes, we had a porch like that. It overlooked a river.”

“What kind of river?”

“An ugly one with all kinds of warehouses and factories. Didn’t you ever see it with me?”

“I don’t think so*”

“I used to like to look out. I could see a railroad yard from my bed. I used to watch the diesels moving the boxes back and forth. At night they had yellow blinking lights on top of them. And during the summer we’d sit on the porch and have lemonade. It gets very hot in the summer.”

“Will it be hot when we’re there?”

“No, sweetheart, this is fall. All the trees will be colored.

“Oh, won’t that be wonderful?”

“Yes, it certainly will.”

“And, can we sit on the porch?”

“Honey, I told you that my mother doesn’t own that house anymore. But we can go over to: see it, I guess/ I think it’s still there.”

“We can?”

“Yes, if you’d like to. Maybe Grandma will come with us.”

“Oh, won’t that be wonderful?”

“Yes, it will.”

It wasn’t until she went to bed that she thought about Steward again. She took a bath and then, with her hair wrapped in a towel, stood looking at herself in the bathroom mirror, thinking that he had been right. She was fat and unattractive. She hated herself for being so unsightly.

Alma Kerwin—Katherine’s mother—met them at the airport. When Katherine and Stephanie came up the exit ramp from the plane, they saw her standing at the railing above them. She was a large woman with a wide, peasant-

like face and with the same deep-set intelligent eyes that had been passed down to her daughter and granddaughter. Standing among the other people waiting to greet the new arrivals, she was immediately distinguishable not only because of her size but because her clothes seemed slightly too formal for the occasion. She wore her best coat, a fur stole, a black wide-brimmed hat with a feather and black gloves. She looked like she was on her way to church.

When Mrs. Kerwin saw Katherine and Stephanie she smiled and waved. Stephanie ran forward to hug her. Katherine, standing behind them, noticed the extra wrinkles in her mother's face and the great care she had taken to dress. To fuss that much was uncharacteristic. Katherine knew that her mother had dressed up as a way of showing how important she regarded the visit.

"You look wonderful," Katherine said, going forward to hug her mother after her mother had finished saying how pretty Stephanie was." Not knowing what else to say, and afraid that she'd embarrass everyone by letting tears come to her eyes, Alma Kerwin grabbed the small suitcase that Katherine had in her hands and led her daughter and granddaughter across the lobby. Though an overhead sign indicated the way to the luggage carousel, she stopped to inquire where it was, and though she had many times seen cabs parked in front of the terminal, she asked a redcap where to get a cab.

Soon the three of them were in the back seat of a cab, Mrs. Kerwin in the middle, Stephanie to her left and Katherine to her right. Mrs. Hewitt was asking Stephanie about school and Katherine looked back and forth from her mother to the view outside the window.

The airport was ten miles from the city. It was a beautiful morning. The trees were in full color. The area between the airport and the city was a mixture of old farms and new suburbs. They passed a field where a man in a tractor was plowing under the last few rows of cornstalks. The field was bordered by red and orange maples. At the corner of the field was a large golden oak with several broken lower branches that rested on the roof of a grayboard

shed surrounding it with brown leaves. The sun had just come up; a faint mist rose up from the field pervading the whole scene with a yellow glow. The highway was busy with the first of the rush-hour traffic.

“And I was thinking that tonight we could go to Oblonsky’s,” Mrs. Kerwin was saying.

“Oblonsky’s. Is that where: they have the goulash?” said Katherine.

“Yes, but tonight they have Irish stew.”

“That sounds wonderful, Mother. I’d love to.”

Soon they got to the bridge that spanned the Suskenon River. From here the skyline could be seen, a small group of tall gray buildings with windows that glimmered in the sun, and stretching out from them, like spokes from the spoke of a wheel, the grain elevators, railroad tracks, powerplants, factories, slaughter houses, and warehouses that occupied both banks of the river. A ferry laden with a brown barge was making its way slowly upriver toward a trestle bridge: that gleamed with sunlight. A constant stream of cars and trucks passed over the bridge in both directions. A long freight train was just leaving a grain terminal at the base of the bridge. Katherine Hewitt looked at this scene and many memories came back to her.

They turned off the freeway unto a wide thoroughfare with elm trees and large houses. After a short distance, they turned off again onto a narrower, quieter street that went along a railroad track.. There were empty boxcars sitting on the track. They passed a junkyard where there were piles of rusty metal and old cars in various stages of dismemberment. Then they pulled up to a three-story modern apartment building. It was here that Alma Kerwin lived.

They got out of the cab and looked around. There was a red-brick building across the street with a sign that said, “R.M. Henders Auto Parts, Warehouse Number 3.” Next to it were a couple-houses that badly needed painting. Some kids were playing in a leaf-house that they had built between the side of one of the houses and the warehouse.

“Well, have to give you a little tour,” Alma said as they entered her apartment, which was on the third floor at the

front of the building.

Riding in from the airport in the cab, Katherine Hewitt had been thinking to herself that everything was just as it had been, just as she remembered it, and yet it was though she'd never seen it before. Now, following her mother around the apartment, she noticed how much in it pertained to Stephanie and herself.

In the living room was a bookcase full of nick-nacks, family memorabilia, and photographs. In the center of the top shelf was a framed picture of herself and Stephanie, on the day they had left to go on a trip to Washington, D.C. after visiting in Riverton. Her hair was arranged in braids like an Indian squaw; she noticed how much thinner and more youthful she had looked. Stephanie wore a straw hat with a band. that said "Bon Voyage"—that had been a present from Alma Kerwin. In her mother's bedroom, Katherine noticed that the vanity mirror above the dresser was plastered with more photographs, some of them of herself and Stephanie at various stages in their lives, and some of them—to her surprise—of her-father. In one photograph, he was standing next, to the truck that for many years he had. driven for the Johnson Paper Company. Seeing her father's' face-brought back to her a whole different world that she had almost forgotten about. She looked at his picture, trying to remember who and what he had been as a living person. Seeing him made her feel sad. Then. looking out the window of her mother's bedroom toward the railroad track on the other side of the auto-parts warehouse, she-thought to herself that her mother had probably chosen this, apartment because the view was similar to the view at the old. house. She remembered that her mother had once written that she had moved out of the old house because living there was like living in the past. And yet, denying herself that connection with the past, she nonetheless had tried to cling to it by surrounding herself with photographs and looking out toward this view that was a watered-down version of the view from the old house.

"I like your place, Mom," she said. "You seem to have everything you need."

“Yes, it’s only a block to the bus and there’s a store on the same corner.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“Everything is in reach, except you and Stephanie.”

Katherine shook her head. “It’s sad. Do you ever go over to the old house?”

“No, it breaks my heart to see it. It’s all boarded up.”

“How sad!”

“That whole neighborhood is being-redeveloped.”

“Stephanie and I are thinking of going over there. Will you come with?”

“No, I just don’t want to go over there. I’ll sure you understand.”

She noticed that her mother had changed in little ways. She wasn’t as stern as she had been, though she still had her formal bearing—that odd combination of self-dignity and shyness. And there were some other signs. of advancing age. Her hair was thinner and the wrinkles beneath her eyes were more pronounced; her hands were knotted with arthritis. It hurt Katherine to see these changes.

That evening they went over to Oblonsky’s. The bar was in one room and in another room was a kind of dining hall with a half dozen or so picnic tables.

They ordered a few beers and had some Irish stew, which was delicious. Alma Kerwin was very concerned that everything would go right. When the order was too long in coming, she went into the other room and spoke to the bartender. And she awkwardly tried to initiate conversation in a way that Katherine had never seen. before. Watching her-mother run back and forth, it occurred to Katherine how important the whole proceedings were to her mother. And for the first time she noticed that her mother felt ill-at-ease with her and Stephanie as though they were strangers instead of family. That hurt her most of all.

Later in the week, she managed to get in touch with two old friends. That, too, was a sobering-experience.

The first of them, whose name was Mary Sue Gebbler, turned out to be a happily-married woman with two little children and a good-natured mustachioed husband who wore

a T-shirt and baseball cap around the house and lay on the living room floor wrestling with his four-year-old son while Katherine and her high-school friend sat at the dining room table and talked.

The glass-doored cupboard behind the table was stacked with new stoneware and chinaware; silver-rimmed goblets and wine glasses sparkled from some other shelves by the kitchen door. Mary Sue Gebbler looked as pretty and trim as she had in high school.

“Oh, that sounds so exciting—living in San Francisco and working in a bar. You always were such a brave one. Have you been seeing any men?”

“Just one, a cabdriver.”

“A cabdriver and a bartender—it sounds so romantic! And you look so lovely, Katy. You really do. I wish I had your green eyes. He must think you’re a goddess.”

Later they took a little tour through the house.

Everything about it was cheerful and cozy. On the mantel of the fireplace in the living room was a large framed picture of the family, Mary Sue’s husband seated in the middle with his baseball cap on his head, Mary Sue behind him looking less like a housewife than like a model for Vogue magazine, and the two children, who were both boys, to either side of them with their hair swept neatly back from their foreheads and their feet in brand new white tennis shoes. In the backyard was a big box elder tree with a rope swing attached to one of the lower limbs.

Not wanting to, she compared all of this against her own world—her apartment, her job at Wyley’s, her relationship with Tom Steward. It made her own life look ridiculously pale. If only Mary Sue had been condescending or judgemental or had in some way made herself eligible for blame, it would have been easier to slough off as inconsequential, but she was as sweet as she’s always been.

Katherine’s other friend, whose name was Jane Morrow, had gone to the other extreme. At Morrow’s suggestion, they went to a lecture together. She showed up wearing construction boots and an Army field jacket. She was working in a women’s carpentry collective. She said that she

had become a “separatist” which didn’t mean that she was a lesbian exactly, but just meant that she had chosen to confine her interactions with other people to women.

“And I may become a lesbian, too—not because I feel that way, really, but just as a revolutionary act.”

The lecture was held in an old church that had been converted to a community center. The topic of the lecture was “The Place of Feminism in the Aquarian Age.”

The lecturer, a Jungian analyst, was a little man with thinning gray hair and glasses. The audience was almost entirely composed of young women who listened to him politely but leaned forward in their seats as though waiting for him to make a mistake. He got off on the wrong foot by asking if he could sit at the table next to the podium instead of standing. There was a rousing chorus of “no’s”.

Throughout his lecture, he was on the defensive. He kept pointing out that most of his sources were women. His basic idea was that mankind, throughout its entire evolution, had gone through four stages of collective consciousness, during each of which women had played a different role. He called these four stages magical, mythical, rational, and integral. The magical stage had existed during the whole span of time, encompassing thousands of years, when human beings had been unable to separate their psyches from outside reality. This was the stage, he said, when Nietzsche’s statement had been true that “as man now thinks only in dreams, he once thought in his everyday life.” The mythical stage had come into being when people began to construct stories to explain their existence and origins. He said that the epic poem *Beowulf*, for example, had been of this period. Then had come the rational stage of consciousness, which had existed from the Age of Reason to the modern day. During this period of time, the human community had developed a Cartesian subject-object duality as a way to separate the mind from natural phenomena and subordinate the world to empirical investigation and rational control. During the first two stages, he said, the role of women, though greatly restricted by child-bearing, had nonetheless been significant because—here he revealed the assumption underlying his

whole argument—woman, being essentially receptive and intuitive, had better psychic equipment for comprehending the poetic reality which was the focus of the magical and mythical types of consciousness, but during the third, rational, stage, this role had diminished, because then this poetic understanding of reality, being unitary and nondiscriminating, stood at odds with the subject-object dichotomy that was needed to understand the world scientifically. That was why, for example, the Church had published various treatises during that period describing women as “an evil of nature”. But now a fourth stage, the integral, had arrived during which through a long struggle the stiff scientific view of reality would tumble to be replaced by a view that combined the rational and the intuitive. During this stage, women, being more intuitive, would again play a prominent role. Describing this in terms of the Chinese concept of yin-yang, he said that the rational stage of consciousness, though appropriate for its time, was too yang for modern times, and that the addition to it of the yin influence of women would offset this predominance of yang. He talked about how traditional Chinese medicine explained illness in terms of yin-yang imbalance and suggested that much of the sickness of Western society was due to such an imbalance.

Jane Morrow was furious after the lecture. “He’s just throwing around a bunch of Oriental ideas to come up with the same old Freudian bullshit that anatomy is destiny.”

She lived in a flat that she shared with two other women whom she described as “actual lesbians.” There were posters on the wall showing Cuban women with rifles.

It was all a little bit too much for Katherine Hewitt to handle in the course of several days. She felt just as out of place there as she had at the idyllic home of her other friend.

Throughout the week she was trying to figure out where her past had gone and what it had meant. She spent a lot of time with her mother, feeling a greater kinship with her than she had ever felt before, and for the first time really understanding what the difficulties of her mother’s life had been. She wanted to tell her that but the right time never

presented itself. Though they talked a good deal, the conversation stayed on incidental topics. Despite being mother and daughter, they were shy with one another.

Mrs Kerwin still worked part-time as a waitress in a large shopping center about a half-mile from her apartment. One morning toward the end of her visit, Katherine went with her mother to see where she worked and meet her fellow employees.

Stephanie also came along, wearing the dress that had been especially made for her visit to Riverton. From the way the other workers in the restaurant came out to greet them, Katherine gathered that they weren't really close friends of her mother's. They were polite and friendly but didn't know what to say. On the way home, she asked her mother what she did for amusement. She said that sometimes she went over to the Catholic church to play bingo, but otherwise she pretty much kept to herself.

Gradually, a picture of her mother's life had formed in Katherine's mind. She realized as never before what a lonely woman her mother was. When she would watch her mother walking down the street, it would make her sad. She moved slowly because of her arthritis, but never complained. She was like a world contained in herself.

Later that same day, after returning from the restaurant, Katherine and Stephanie took a bus to see the old house, which was across the town from her mother's new place.

The morning had been splendid, clear and crisp with a bright sun overhead and gray clouds in the west, but by the time they left for the house the gray clouds had nearly covered the sky and a chilly wind had come up. She didn't mind. The gray backdrop wasn't as cheerful as the blue one had been, but it made the green look deeper on the lawns in front of the houses that they passed by in the bus; the autumn trees, relieved against it, looked less brilliant but more solemn and majestic. She opened the bus window and sniffed the air. The smell of burning leaves was coming from somewhere. Looking down a side street, she saw a man in a red-checkered jacket standing by a fire with a group of children. Next to the fire was a huge pile of leaves. That

brought back memories of her father. She remembered raking leaves, with him, stuffing them in bushel baskets and carrying them to the alley behind the house.

The corner they got out on was about on Bradley Street about three blocks from the house. The only building on the corner that Katherine recognized was the corner bar which had a neon sign that said "Partner's". Kiddy corner from it, in the spot where had been a small store, a new apartment building was going in. Down the block a little ways was a new addition, a food coop, but, except for that, most of the buildings on the block were boarded up. Walking by the coop, she noticed that the people behind the counter and the customers were all young people. So new blood was coming in from somewhere, and the Old was giving way, as, of course, it had to. But just the same it made her sad to see that so much had changed.

The whole neighborhood was in a state of transition. A good half of the houses had been torn down. Others were boarded up, the grass in the yards grown to knee-length and infested with weeds. At some of the houses she saw children playing, but there weren't enough of them to counteract the general impression of demise. The gray sky added to the effect. It was only four in the afternoon but already the sky was so dark that it seemed close to sunset. In some of the occupied houses, the lights were already lit. A couple old women, bundled up against the cold, emerged from an immense house with multiple gables, helping one another down the wide front steps. She was in a thoughtful mood. Walking along with her daughter's hand in her own, she felt as though she was both the woman she was and the child she had been.

"So much has changed here, Stephanie," she said. "I wish you could see it the way it was."

"It looks fine to me, Mom. I like the big houses."

The grade school Katherine had attended was on the way to the house. They stopped by it for a moment. It was a typical two-story brick school building with a blacktop playground on the side. There were Halloween cut-outs in the windows.

A couple boys came running out with a football and began throwing it around in the playground. They crossed the playground and then walked along the alley that as a girl she had walked through every day on her way to school. Once again, the smell of burning leaves came through the air. At first she couldn't tell where it was coming from, but then, looking behind her down the alley, she saw a man and little girl by a leaf-fire on the other side of the school. The man was resting on the rake; the girl was still dressed in her school uniform with blue knee-socks.

Seeing the girl, noticing the thoughtful expression with which she was watching the fire, Katherine almost felt as though she was seeing herself as she had once been, and the man with the rake again brought back memories of her father. She could hear him saying, "You're a sweetheart, Katy. You know that, don't you?" Then she heard him laughing. They were standing in the backyard and he was watching her climb a tree. "Be careful now, Katy. I can't afford to pay the doctor."

Emerging from the alley, they got their first view of the Bradley Street bridge, which was right in front of them almost, and the bluffs on the other side of the river. Pulling Stephanie along with her, she immediately crossed the street to the stone wall to look off. First, she looked down toward the railroad yard. That was one thing that hadn't changed. It was still there and there were some diesel engines going back and forth with yellow lights blinking on top of them. Then she scanned the whole scene—the brown river itself, the cement company across from the railroad yard, the red girders of the bridge, and in the other direction, to the west, the redbrick buildings of the Suskenon Electric Company where from a tall brick chimney brown smoke was swirling up against the dull glow of the late afternoon sun. Stephanie jumped up on the wall to walk along it. Katherine walked beside her, breathing in deeply, to smell the river. In the distance, she could already see the old house, and could see that the windows were boarded up as her mother had said.

The first thought that occurred to her was that it looked so much smaller than how she had remembered it. It was just

an ordinary two-story house with an almost box-like shape shape except for the protuberances of the front and side porches. The only thing that distinguished it at all was her memory of it.

She stopped a moment to look at it as though to carve the picture of what it looked like more sharply in her mind. The front porch was open to the outside, just bordered by a railing; the back porch was closed in. There were three large windows side by side, together forming a kind of picture window, on the front of the house to the left of the front door. On the second floor, above the roof of the porch, were two more windows, widely separate from one another.

One of these, the one to the left, on the western side of the house, had been the window of her bedroom. The floor of the porch was three steps up from the narrow sidewalk that led from the public sidewalk to the front door. There was a row of carraghena bushes along the outside of the porch on two sides. The top of the bushes were level with the railing. In the middle of the porch was a wooden seat on a swing. In the side yard was an immense lilac bush and several trees. When she looked at the lilac bush, more memories crowded into her mind. The yard was overgrown with weeds. There were a couple of old tires in the yard.

Katherine motioned to the porch and smiled. ‘We may as well go up there. It looks like there’s nobody home.’”

They went up into the porch and sat down in the swing. The sky had lightened a little; the sun could be seen behind the thin clouds in the western sky. It had already sunk as low as the tops of the elm trees across from the porch. The afternoon had turned colder. Every time the wind gusted, leaves swirled through the air. Billows of smoke rose up from the chimney of the electric company. The air felt moist and smelled of decomposing leaves.

“‘When you were little, where did you play?’” asked Stephanie. “‘Sometimes here in the yard. Sometimes we went up to the school. Sometimes we’d hike down the hill to the tracks. Stuff like that.’”

Katherine got up and stood by the railing of the porch, looking off. “I might go for a tiny walk, Stephanie. Do you

mind?”

“Not at all. I can sit here and draw.”

Katherine walked across the street to the wall, climbed over it, and discovered that an old path was still there. The grass on the side of the hill was tall and so dry that it rustled when the wind blew through it. A short distance away from her was a clump of maples that were already stripped of their leaves. She left the path and waded through the brown grass to them. The clump of maples was right above the bluffs, she discovered. She sat down and looked off. On the other side of the river, right beneath the bridge, was a company that sold refurbished oil barrels. The barrels were stacked up neatly in an immense pile. A long freight train was moving slowly along the railroad track that ran parallel to the river beneath the bluff.

Katherine sat looking off for a while and then headed back up the path where about a hundred yards ahead she could see Stephanie with her sketchpad. The sun had broken through the clouds. It was low in the sky between the electric company chimney and the house. As she walked, another memory came back to her. It was a day in autumn—as she recalled, right before Halloween. She had gone out looking for leaves and was returning with them pressed in a book. Coming up the path, she had seen the house just like it appeared at this moment only the little girl on the porch had been not her daughter but herself. So much of what she had believed in and hoped for then, she admitted to herself, had given way to adult reality, so much of it was gone, and yet this new little girl,—her own little girl,—was full of hope for the future.

Later that evening, long after supper was over, she came out of the bathroom and found her mother sitting alone in the kitchen. She put some water on the stove mixed herself some instant coffee, and sat down beside her.

“Well, you must be all excited about going home,” said Alma Kerwin.

“This will always be my home as long as you’re here, Mother,” said Katherine softly. She wanted to find some way to express her affection and concern.

“Did you get a good look at the house? You didn’t say much about it at supper.”

“Yes, it’s just like you said. It’s all boarded up.”

“The people I sold it to, I thought they were responsible, but they let it go to pot.”

“You used to take care of it so well. I remember you out in the yard with your work gloves on. I used to admire what a plucky woman you were.”

Her mother smiled. “That’s not the way I remember it, Katy. I remember some real humdingers. I remember you kicking up a storm about going to Denver.”

Katherine laughed. “I recall that one all right. That was the worst. I was so mean to you! And I didn’t even go to Denver. I wound up in Monterey. You have hated me, Mother.”

“No, Katy, never that. I wanted to keep the reins on you a little bit. But I wasn’t all that far from understanding. I was a tiger myself for a while.”

“A tiger?”

“A rebellious, contrary girl.”

“Oh, Mother, you’re kidding me. I don’t believe it.”

Alma laughed. “Well, it’s true. It’s goes without saying that you didn’t know me then.”

“Did Daddy?”

“Oh, he caught a little bit of it. He always said I was a hard-headed woman and that’s what he liked the most about me. He said he didn’t like women that he could push around.”

“He didn’t ever push you around, as I remember.”

“But he tried, God bless him.”

“You know, Mother, I don’t mean to pry, but I always wondered... you always seemed so angry at him... was that all there was to it?”

“No, in an odd kind of way, I loved the man, too. He was always whipping up a storm, but inside the storm, he was a lonely man, you know, a very lonely man. And he always used to say that nobody liked him.”

“Daddy?”

“Yes, goodtimer that he was, he used to say that. That’s

a side of him that you never saw because he wanted so much for you to look up to him. He always used to say, 'I want Katy to think she's got a good dad.' Mind you, he didn't say, want her to 'know.' He said 'think', because when it came right down to it he had a pretty low opinion of himself."

"How sad!"

Mrs. Kerwin started getting up to make herself some coffee, but Katherine gently pushed her down. "Just relax, Mom. The least I can do for you is throw some instant coffee in same hot water."

She handed- her mother the cup of coffee, made herself another cup, and sat down. "I suppose you think it's strange that I'm asking you about him."

"No, I don't. think it's. strange,. Katy. He was your father. I know that you loved both of us. and what you mostly saw between us was bitterness."

"Another thing I wondered about... I hope you don't think it's wrong for me to ask..."

"No, Katy, go ahead."

"Well, I guess what I want to hear about is the circumstances of his death. As I remember, you took his death so hard."

"Yes, I did."

"I was never really in on that, you know. I just knew he was very sick."

"Well, the circumstances... He had a heart attack you know."

"Yes, that much I. remember."

"And then, after that he just seemed to lose his spirit. It wasn't anything the doctors could put their finger on."

"Were you close to him then?"

"Oh, yes. I was. Closer to him at that time, then we had been for years. You see, when it came right down to it, despite all the bitterness that had gone between us, I was the only one he could depend on. And he was in a pretty bad way right then, not only in his spirit but in, his pocketbook. You know, he never could save any money and Johnson Paper... well, that was before they had any kind of medical plan."

“You mean you, paid. for his medical bills?”

“Oh, yes.”

“But I don’t understand why you just didn’t make a clean break with him.”

“Oh, for one thing, I was his, wife. Even though I hadn’t lived with the man for years, I was still his wife. And anyhow, I don’t know how anybody could make a clean break, like you say. Movie stars do that. But real people hang on. I know I’m old fashioned about things like that. But after you’ve loved-somebody, how can you stop loving him? I don’t know. I never had. it in me to throw my love around. And I couldn’t go on to anyone else. It was too hard for me to love that one time and not have it turn out right. I couldn’t stick with it and I couldn’t turn against, it. I could forget him when he didn’t need me, but when he needed me I couldn’t forget.”

“So how much of your savings, did you spend on him then?”

“Everything I had.”

“Wow, I never knew that. And then afterwards you became so stern.”

“I. figured I had to save you from going down the same road. I didn’t know. I’m so sorry now for all the grief I caused you then.”

“You never caused me any grief that was more important to me than you were.”

“But afterwards, after I left, you must have been so lonely.”

“Yes, it was hard for a while. I felt that I had... “Her voice suddenly cracked. Katherine looked up and was surprised to see a tear in her eye. That was something she’d never seen before. “... had made so many... mistakes with you.” For a moment- her face had softened, and then it became stern again. •

“But I never thought you made any mistakes, Mom... Oh, I did back then, but I don’t now... I didn’t know everything that was involved. And since then, in the years since- then, I’ve come to respect you so much.”

For a moment, Alma Kerwin. didn’t respond and then

she said: “Thank you, Katy. I appreciate that so much.. And I want to tell you... I’m so proud of you. I’m proud you’re, my daughter.” She got up. “And here we are like two school girls talking late into the night. Now you’ll have to forgive me for going to bed. I’m very tired, But I’ve enjoyed our little talk.”

Katherine wanted to rush over and hug her, but something in her mother’s bearing prevented it. She watched her mother disappear into her room, made herself another cup of coffee and walked into the other room. She felt disconcerted. She had wanted so much to talk to her mother. really talk to her, and she had talked in a way, more than she had ever. talked to her before,. that is, more intimately. But why hadn’t she gone up to her:and said, “I love you.” Why had that been so impossible?

She went over to the book case and looked at the photographs that were sitting here and there. among the nick-nack’s on the shelves. Among them was a small picture of her father that she hadn’t noticed before. He was standing next to a ‘47 Plymouth that he had owned for several years. The Plymouth looked like it had just been shined. He was smiling and holding a fishing rod and tackle box. So her mother, despite her bitterness toward him. had also cared about him. It was as if some deep wound had been healed. And yet it made her sad that she could never speak to her father again. She wished that she could have known him as he had been as a young man. She wished that she could have known the other side of him that, her mother had.talked about.

She thought about, the house—about all her memories from the past. This was the place where she had grown up. She had always regarded it as something to get away from. Why did she now feel such an urge to connect with it again? Was it just a matter of getting older, of becoming nostalgic? No, it was more than that. It was her realization, that some of the ways in which she had departed had done her no good. It was her need to have roots.

And yet, no sooner had. this thought formulated in her mind, then she understood that she couldn’t possibly stay,

that, much as she now hated to be separate from her mother, her past, the places she had known in the past, were gone and couldn't be brought back. As never before, she felt alone in the world. Seeing old friends and old places, far from making her feel more rooted, had made her feel all the more like an island to herself.

When she thought about the future, the very thought of it frightened her. For one thing, her Mother would die. She would die as a lonely woman. For another thing, having got a distant perspective on her life, she realized how flimsily constructed it was, all of it riding on her studies, and her plans regarding what to do, with her education not really defined. It occurred to her that she was getting old, that in five years she would be the age that her mother had been when her father had died. She realized that much of the rest of her life would be a struggle, a continual struggle, that to win this struggle, she would have to keep her spirits up and keep hoping.

She also thought about Tom Steward. All through the week, he had been in the back of her mind. When she thought of San Francisco and her life there, she thought of him. Would he really become an intricate part of her life? In a way, despite her continuing resentment, she wanted him to be if for no other reason than because she wanted to have something or someone to hold on to. She wanted to feel that there was somewhere she belonged.

The big question in her mind was the one which Scott Paulsen had planted there: Had he been deliberately malicious. If he had, she could never forgive him. If he hadn't, there was maybe some hope. Her initial anger and humiliation at being criticized by him had abated somewhat to be replaced by a more general picture of what had taken place that whole evening that they had been together. Hiking with him by the ocean, she had felt something that she hadn't felt for many years, not since the first days of her marriage. For a few hours there, life had seemed magical and happy again. She realized how much she needed that kind of closeness with a man. Her brief visit with Jane Morrow had just convinced her all the more that it couldn't be substituted

for by other kinds of intimacy. Much is she rebelled against the romantacism of the idea, she knew that only closeness with a man which could bring out this magical dimension of reality for her. She had been pursuing her other interests in life, trying to deceive herself into thinking that a relationship with a man wasn't important.

Wasn't that the truth? She went back and forth on it, and went back and forth from feeling angry, resentful, or depressed, to feeling sweet towards him. The thought that she would wind up, as lonely and closed off as her mother was scary to her, but at the same time she didn't want to give up the independence that she had worked so hard to find. The more she thought about it, the more distressing and unbearable the whole situation became because she knew that it was up to her now to either continue or end the relationship.

Walking into the kitchen, she noticed the clock above the stove. It was two o'clock. It occurred to her that it was two hours earlier in San Francisco. She went to the phone and dialed Steward's number.

12

It was Thursday, four days after Kathrine Hewitt had left for Riverton. Tom Steward was in his cab making a final run for fares. The bars were already closed and the stop lights were set on blinkers, which he hated. He was driving down a deserted street in the South of Market district where occasionally he would get a late-night fare from one of the gay baths. A light rain was coming down. The windshield wipers were creaking back and forth. The stoplights ahead of him were set on blinking yellow. He drove with his back caved into the seat, his right hand on the steering wheel, his left elbow propped on the window frame, and his head in his left hand. The road curved to the left. At the next intersection after the curve, he applied the brake with both feet, taking advantage of this change in position to stretch his back as the car's momentum decreased. Then with a sigh of fatigue, he released the brake, yanked the steering wheel to the left, and headed off on a side street. After going one block, he turned

left again and began cruising a street that ran parallel to the first one in the opposite direction. Business was so slow that he didn't really think he'd get a fare, but he kept driving anyway, repeating the same basic pattern over and over: the gay circuit to Greyhound, Greyhound to the airliner terminal, and from there to Nob Hill, Chinatown, North Beach, and down Columbus to the wharf.

All week he had been thinking about Katherine Hewitt. Though she had only been gone a short time, it seemed much longer. He had even gone by the bar a few times though he knew she wouldn't be there. He was anxious to see her again because he wanted to work out some kind of reconciliation. He felt that he was entirely to blame for the argument that had taken place, that somehow, not wanting to, he had pressured into a situation in which she had felt uncomfortable. His whole attitude toward the relationship had changed. He no longer felt critical of her. Whether his sexual interaction with her was good or bad seemed almost unimportant. He felt that he had at last understood who the real Katherine Hewitt was behind that poker face. When he thought about her, what immediately came to mind, was how she had cried. He hadn't known that she was so vulnerable. Now that he had seen that vulnerable side of her, he cared for her all the more. He told himself that he had been a fool because he had been thinking of her as nothing more than a body, but she was more than that, she was some kind of weird force in the world. These were the words that he used to explain it to himself. He realized he was more attached to her than he had been to admit to himself, and now he was worried that she wouldn't give him another chance.

Finding no fares by the gay baths, he turned left onto Seventh Street. Ahead of him was a giant neon sign that said "Greyhound." He slowed down as he passed it, tilting his head to see if anyone with luggage was coming out of the terminal. No one was there. A half block further was Market Street where there was a hamburger joint that stayed open all night. A man came running out and whistled. "Hey, taxi!" He gave him a quick once-over, thought to himself that the guy looked suspicious, and went on. After another quarter

block, the street curved to the left to a blinking red light. He rolled through it and headed to the right. One block more and to the right by the YMCA. Two blocks to another red blinker. He turned left. On the corner was a sign that said, "See a nude girl for a buck."

Not far from there was the airliner terminal. Some cabbies were standing in a group by the front door but there were no buses in sight. He slowed down to give them the hi sign and then accelerated again. He felt tired but he didn't want to go home. After he got tired enough, the movement of the cab was hypnotic. There was a point where you stopped fighting it and then it became soothing. Even so, after another half hour of purposeless cruising, he headed for the garage.

At the garage, he made out his waybill, folded his money inside it, gathered his other belongings, and walked across the street to drop his waybill in the slot. Looking toward the parking lot next to the garage, he saw that a bunch of the drivers were crammed into one cab smoking grass. It was a little tradition at Pacific Cab to have these occasional gatherings, which everyone called "smoke-out's". He waved at the people in the cab and hesitated because they were people he didn't know very well but he wanted to get stoned. They called across to him. "Hey Stewie. Come on: We got some Maui Zowie." He walked across to the cab and got into the back seat where there were already three other drivers. As was usually the case, there were several joints being passed from hand to hand, and people were taking turns telling cabdriver stories, all of which began the same way, "I picked up this..." Steward said hello to everyone, puffed on the joints, listened to the stories, but instead of feeling more sociable from the grass, he felt more introspective. He kept thinking about Katherine Hewitt, particularly about how she had confided in him at the Vietnamese restaurant and how afterwards he had insulted her and she had broken down. He felt as though she had trusted him and he had somehow betrayed her trust. Everything else seemed peripheral to this one central consideration.

After the smoke-out had broken up for the night, he walked home alone, feeling desolate and lonely. It was a cold night. From the garage to where he lived was a straight shot down a street that went through a mostly residential section of the city. By now it was four o'clock in the morning. There was no traffic on the street, and the apartment buildings were all dark. He walked with his hands in his pockets, his shoulders slightly hunched, his mind lost in thought. Once in a while, he looked up and around him. The rain had stopped but the air was still misty. The wet streets reflected the glow of the yellow lights that blinked at every intersection. The buildings and trees around him seemed to float in the mist. Now and then a siren rose up in the air and faded off again. The sky above the city was violet and red. Many times when he walked home alone like this, the city night seemed mysterious and magical, but on this particular night, all he could think about was Katherine Hewitt.

Whenever he thought about how she had cried, he would shake his head and cuss himself out. Several times, he raised up his right hand, gestured at his face with his finger, and said to himself, "Fuck.me."

The next night he drove as aimlessly and half-heartedly as he had driven the night before, and once again he stayed out late because he didn't want to go home. When he got to the garage, he noticed that almost all the cabs were already parked along the street. He did a quick run up and down the street and through the parking lot in his cab and saw that there was no one around.

He filled out his waybill, folded up his money in it, and walked across the street to the slot. Then, feeling alone in the world, he crossed the street, in the other direction toward home. Looking over his shoulder, he saw a cab turn unto the street a couple blocks away. He waited to see who it was. When the cab was about a half block away, he saw the bearded face of David Brod.

He waved at him, ran across the street, and stood outside the cab while Brod backed it into a parking place.

Brod rolled down the window: 'Hey, it's the kid. How

come you stayed out so late?”

“Just driving around.”

“An incorrigible cabbie.”

Steward got in the back seat and stretched out his legs while Brod did his waybill. “Where you been, David? I’ve been looking for you all week.”

“I haven’t been driving this week.”

“How come?”

“To tell you the truth, I’ve been terribly bored.”

“With driving?”

“Yes, at they say, with ‘pushing the hack’.”

“Yea, it’s been slow, hasn’t it? Nothing out there at all.”

“A total drag.”

Brod was leaning over his waybill. When he wrote, he stuck the point of his tongue between his teeth. He counted his money carefully. Though casual in most respects, he was fastidious about his money.

“Something else has come up,” he said, pulling on his beard. My father has had a minor’ stroke.”

“Oh no.”

“It’s not serious, but I might wind up spending the winter in New York.”

“It would be dismal around here without you.”

Brod smiled. He was never afraid of an exchange of intimacy. “Thank you, my good friend. I’d miss you, also. But in any case, it wouldn’t be until a month or so from now.”

Later, Brod gave Steward a ride home in his blue Plymouth. They rode along without talking for a while and then Brod said: “I meant to ask you about Katherine Hewitt. Did I ever tell you I met her one night?”

“No, when was that?”

“At Wyley’s Pub. That same day we had our last talk about her, or maybe it was the day after. Our writing group went in there together. We were coming from an apartment right up the block from you.”

“So you really met her, huh?”

“Well, in a mininal way. I told her my name and said I was your friend and she said she’d heard of me a little from

you.”

“Yea, all bad.”

“I can imagine.”

“So what did you think of her?”

“Well, I thought you described her very well. She’s a real poker face. She acts very formal.”

“Yea, and what else?”

“Looks like a madonna just like you said, There’s a really mysterious quality about her all right. And her face isn’t just pretty, Tom. She’s a beautiful woman. I didn’t really notice if she’s overweight. If she is, it can’t be much because her top half isn’t at all. She has really nice breasts. In any case, it would take a lot of being out of shape to detract from that face.”

While Brod was saying this, Steward was getting more and more agitated on the one hand angry at himself for possibly blowing the whole relationship, and on the other, worried it was too late to make repairs.

Brod looked over and saw the consternation on Steward’s face. “I say something wrong?”

“Not you. I did. Remember that big confrontation I said I had to have with her? We had it and it was a total catastrophe.”

“A catastrophe? How?”

Steward briefly told what had happened -- the exchange of intimacies at the beach and restaurant, the little arguments about whether to sleep together and smoke the joint, the unsuccessful attempt at making love, and the big argument that had ended up with Katherine Hewitt in tears.

Brod listened attentively, nodding and shaking his head. When Steward was all done, he said: “Sounds like you really hurt her. Did she say anything afterwards?”

“She was really just: too upset to say anything right after it happened. She kept sobbing and. I was holding her. And then in the morning, she was cold, very cold.”

“She must have been hyper-sensitive about that. And I’m sure she didn’t like you knowing about it.”

“Why?”

“It just sets up this bad dynamic, you know. Gives you

something to use against her. And obviously she doesn't like to be emotional. Whatever is inside of her, she's got it protected very well."

Steward sighed. "It all came out in the argument, you know. We were exchanging blows. And I guess I had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to have honest interaction with her."

"Yea, but honesty, you know... there's even a time and place for that. Sometimes honesty" is cruel."

"What good is a relationship if you can't play it straight and lay your cards on the table?"

"Sure, Tom, but in an atmosphere of trust and mutual concern. It sounds like that kind of atmosphere was sorely lacking."

"For sure, David. It all happened at the wrong time and under the wrong circumstances... Man! I just feel like I really blew it with her."

Brod nodded sadly. "You probably did."

"You really don't think she forgive me?"

"Maybe as an insult, pure and simple. But can she forgive the aesthetics?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just that, the aesthetics of the relationship, the way it developed step by step like a poem or a book. She wanted it to happen just right. You see, that's where I maybe know her better than you do even though I just saw her that one night. She's a romantic, an incurable romantic. It's written all over her face. She tries hard to hide it but she doesn't quite succeed at it. Most probably, she's tried very hard to kill it out in herself because it's brought her nothing but disappointment. But it's still there despite her opposition to it in principle. It's still a part of her emotional make-up, or whatever. And, as you've told me, she's a lonely person who sticks to herself. Probably she hasn't had any big involvement for a while. And here comes Tom Steward. He's good-looking. He asks her out like a gentleman. Even though he's a total idiot,..."

Steward smiled. He was listening very carefully.

"... he does everything more or less right. I mean, let's

face it, Tom. You're a romantic guy. Even your lack of stability, your impracticality, your craziness are romantic in a weird, distorted way. And that's what she wanted from you, another try at romance. But you've, ruined it for her by making her feel like she doesn't fit the role she imagined for herself."

They had pulled up in front of Steward's apartment.

"Maybe you're right, David. But your explanation just seems too pat. You don't take into consideration that people can accept disappointments. I mean, in any relationship, you start out with: high expectations, and some of them have to yield to reality, I guess."

"Yes,. I know, Tom. For your sake, I hope you're right.. In any case, you were ready to throw in the towel on it a week ago, so: if it doesn't work out it won't be the end of the world."

"But the weird thing is, I feel totally different about her now. Now know I care for her and then I wasn't sure. It's like I didn't really know what she was until she cried. All I knew was that. cold facade."

"What you're saying is she finally acted the way you expect a woman to act and you feel more comfortable with that."

"That's not what I'm, saying. I'm saying I didn't know the more vulnerable side of her.

"Yes, but there's a flaw in your reasoning. Maybe she's worked very hard to become that cold facade. And now you're going to try to take it away from her."

"I don't want to take anything away from her, I don't think I do."

They went on this way for another fifteen minutes before Brod finally gave Steward a brotherly pat on the arm and left for home.

No sooner. had Steward walked into his apartment when the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Thomas?"

"Katherine?"

"Yes."

"I'm very glad to hear from you. I've missed you.

“Well, to tell you the truth, I’ve missed you, too.

“Where are you? Are you at home? Can I come over to see you?”

“I’m still in Riverton. We leave this afternoon.”

“You’re calling long distance?”

“Uh-huh. With an ulterior purpose.”

“What’s that?”

“I have all kinds of boxes, things my mother gave me. I was wondering if you could pick us up at the airport.”

“Tonight?”

“Yes.”

He was pacing back and forth with the phone in his hand. “Let me see. Let me see. Tomorrow’s not one of my regular nights.”

“Oh, you don’t work tonight. Well, then...”

“No, I’ll get a cab. I’ll get a cab. I’m almost sure that I can get one.”

“You don’t have to drive an extra night just for me.”

“I want to, Katherine.”

“Tom, I can just as easily take the bus.”

“Katherine, I’ll be out there. If I can’t get a cab, I’ll take the bus and meet you. Tell me the arrival time.”

He wrote it down.

“I tried to call you earlier. You certainly keep late hours. Did you find some little floozie to keep you company?”

He laughed. “Nothing so exciting. I was talking to David Brod. I heard you met him.”

“Yes, he’s a very charming man. What were, you talking about?”

“We had this big discussion. I’ll tell you about it later.”

Tom Steward felt as though he had been given a new lease on life, as though a load had been lifted from his shoulders. He hung up the phone and walked across the room to the bay window that overlooked the street. In front of the window, on a large wooden box were some coleus plants and a Boston fern. The window faced east; the coleus plants

were tilted towards it in anticipation' of the morning sun. For a long time he stood by the window looking out. The buildings across the street from his apartment were all three- and four-story Victorian-style buildings like the one that he lived in himself. Each had a central door, and, above and to the sides of this central door, rows of bay windows; each bay window belonged to some occupant who was unknown to him. On the corner to his left was a Chinese-grocery store with a sign that said, "Wing Lee Groceries. Beer, Liquor, and Wine." On the corner to his right were a stoplight and a tree. The red and the leaves of the tree, immediately above the stoplight, were tinted at the moment with red. Then, after a period of time he instinctively knew from his experience as a-cabbie, the light changed to green. Now the leaves were tinted green also.

Steward had looked at this scene so many times in lonely moods that the very sight of it made him feel lonely. But then he thought about Katherine Hewitt. A draft of air came through the window, causing the leaves on the coleus plants to tremble. He noticed that the sky above the buildings had lightened from a murky purple to metallic blue. He turned from the window, opened the closet next to his roll-away bed, took out his blue coat, and then, with his coat over his arm, he locked the double locks on the door of his apartment, bounded down the stairs, and headed out. When he emerged from the front door of the building, a fresh breeze touched his face. He drew in the air, looking down the street to the corner with the stoplight. The sides of the buildings were just beginning to lighten. As was usually the case on Sunday morning, the city was quiet. It suddenly occurred him that everything was alright. The whole world was out there. Everything was alright. There was a restaurant nearby that stayed open all night. He decided to treat himself to an omelette. With a smile on his face, he strode up the street.

What Tom Steward had always wanted most of all. was to be a strong man, to be good at something, and to have something to offer to other people. He now believed more than ever that this was a real possibility. When he left the

restaurant, the sun was just coming up. The orange light glinted from the windows of the tall hotel across the street. Now there were people on the sidewalks. The city was waking up.

He threw his coat over his shoulder and walked down the street. His first thought was to go home but then he changed his mind. He kept going over Nob Hill and down the other side to Chinatown. A bearded man in a long gray coat came up to him. "Hey, fellow, you got a quarter?" He gave him fifty cents. It was only 11 o'clock, but already Chinatown was busy. First he walked down Grant Street past all the tourist restaurants where people were eating dim sum. Then he continued to Stockton Street where the sidewalks were crowded with vendors selling every thing from fruits and vegetables to live chicken and fish that they speared out of tanks.

He stopped at one stand to buy himself an apple, and then stood and watched some Chinese teenagers as they went through a ceremony with swords, and a paper mache dragon. By the time he started hiking up the hill again, the sun was high in the-sky.

He felt tired but also felt as though some great change had taken place inside of him. He felt as though he had somehow been outside the stream of life and now was part of it again. He was determined to set his life in order and to turn his hope of being a strong man into reality. Once again, as he had done the week before, he went to the garage early and managed to get out. Ahead of schedule he wasn't as lucky as he had been the previous week. The cab was a junker. The front end shimmied. Only one of the headlights worked. It was hard to find fares, but he kept plugging away at it and, by seven o'clock he had earned enough to pay for his cab rental and gas. He worked another half hour, made another five dollars, and went home to get some more money from the shoe box where he kept his cash. During the course of the day, he had made various resolutions, one of which was to be more responsible about money. He wanted to be able to provide financial assistance if it was needed. He had also decided to try to get to know Stephanie. And never again, he

had told himself would he pressure Katherine into a sexual. Situation that she didn't want to be in. He would try to make up for the harm he had done and be-supportive to her self-image. These were the: exact words that he used to define his new attitudes. He wanted her to see that he could be a source of strength. and stability.

While at home getting his money, he took a shower and changed into fresh clothes, then, with his hair still wet, he ran down the stairs and out to his cab, he turned over the ignition, revved up the engine, and took off down the street. It was still only eight o'clock. Katherine Hewitt's plane wasn't due until ten. He didn't feel like working any more, so he drove around looking for David Brod. He didn't find Brod at the airliner terminal but he came upon a bunch of drivers he sort of knew. He got out to talk to them. They were handing around a joint. At first he:said he. didn't want any but he couldn't pass it. up.

From there Steward headed right out to the freeway. As soon as he got on the freeway, he realized he was really stoned. The car was shimmying like crazy. In. his stoned state of mind, it seemed worse. He kept to the slow lane, watching in his rear view mirror to stay clear of other traffic. Meanwhile, he was trying to get de-stoned by shaking his head, which never worked, and cussing himself out for not having the self-discipline to pass up the grass.

The first part of the freeway was elevated on concrete pillars. Below it, alongside bay was an industrial area with factories and dry docks. Now and then, an orange glow' went up from the welding torches at the dry docks. In the distance, beyond the, stillness of the bay, were the glimmering lights of the cities on its other side. Steward looked off at the dry docks and distant cities, wanting to feel the strange kinship with them that he often felt, but he was apprehensive about Katherine Hewitt and worried that one: of the front wheels would fall off.

The freeway curved around a hill, merged with another freeway, then led up another ramp beneath a bridge. Now it was possible to see several miles into the distance. In front of him was a column of red tail lights that moved in unison like

a river. For the first time, he felt relaxed. He settled back in the seat and went over his resolutions again.

He was standing at the railing when the mother and daughter came off the plane, Katherine in the lead with a small piece of luggage in one hand and her coat in the other, Stephanie several steps behind, looking sleepy-eyed, with her sketchpad under her arm.

Seeing Steward, Katherine nodded at him and smile.. When she got up to him, she shrugged her shoulders. "Well, here we are, back from the country."

His first impulse was to hug her, but noticing that Stephanie's dark eyes were directed at him, he responded instead with a shoulder shrug of his own.

"Yea, here you are. I got a cab okay. It's a real junker, though. It's out in the parking lot." He was very much aware that he was still stoned and didn't want her to know, so he made an extra effort to look sober and dignified.

By this time, Stephanie had come up from behind. She stood at her mother's side, slightly behind her, and looked at him gravely.

"Hey, kid, how are you doing?" he said, tapping her shoulder like a football coach.

"Okay. How are you?"

"Fine. Thank you."

He took the small piece of luggage from Katherine's hand. He and she began walking down the long hall that led to the main part of the terminal, side by side with the girl several paces behind.

"You. have a good.flight?" said Steward. He had prepared a number of questions to ask.

"It was long."

"What kind of stuff did you bring back?"

"Oh, some of my old books and things, and my mother gave: me some kitchenware."

"Oh, that's good. You. must be glad to get it."

"Yes."

"Are you still angry at me?"

"No, Tom. I'm glad- to see you."

He kept nodding his head like a priest giving counsel.

“And how did things go with your mom?”

“Much better than I expected. We had a good talk. So much was happening inside me. This time it was much more powerful for me to be back home. I guess I’m getting nostalgic.”

“How do you mean?”

They continued in this vein all the way up the long hall to the main terminal.

“I came to one big decision though,” said Katherine when they standing at the baggage carousel.

“What was that?”

“Just that I need. to work all the harder at linguistics. I suppose you think there’s nothing new in that. But I feel more committed to it. I feel more certain that I have to work hard at it. I’m more ready to concentrate. Wow, when I was home, I realized that life is going by, I’m getting old.”

“Come, on. Kath. You’re not even 30.”

“But I’ll be 30 before I know it, and I want to be somewhere substantial by then.”

Steward still felt so stoned that his questions seemed as though they were far away from him and his voice sounded strange and hollow as he listened to himself when he talked. He wasn’t worried about that. He just didn’t want Katherine to know that he was stoned because he was afraid that she would think he had been irresponsible coming out to meet her and Stephanie in that condition. He wanted everything to go well, and he felt like everything was going well for the time being. He was asking all kinds of questions and she seemed eager to confide in him.

Stephanie was sitting by herself on some boxes. watching the baggage come onto the carousel. Bolstered-by-how well everything was going with Katherine, he drew-in a breath and walked-over to where she was. She had her sketchpad next to her. He squatted down next to her. She looked up, surprised.

“Bet you’re getting tired of waiting. huh, Stephanie?”

“A little bit.”

“Did you sleep on the plane.”

“I couldn’t at first, but then I finally did.”

“Did you like being back in Riverton?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Did you do any drawings?”

“Just a couple from my grandma’s window and one from the porch of the old house.”

“Do you mind if I look at them?”

“You can look if you want to.”

He looked at her drawing of the old house. She had drawn the smoke stack and the bridge. “That’s really-nice.” For the first time, he showed her the charm that he only had in intimate exchanges, and for the first time she warmed up to him.

A few minutes later, Katherine spotted the luggage. They yanked it off and waited for the boxes. Then they went out, Steward carrying the boxes—there were three of them,—and Katherine and Stephanie carrying their bugs.

As soon as he started the car up, he remembered the shimmy.

“This call is not the best, Katherine as. you’ll soon see.”

“Is it safe?”

“Sure, it’s safe.”

Truth was he hoped it was, but wasn’t sure.

They headed out of the: garage. He was so stoned that the signs confused him, but he managed to figure the way out. They turned unto the road that ran along the front at the terminal. As the cab picked up speed, the. front end started to rattle.

“What’s that noise, Tom?”

“Just a shimmy.”

“You think you should check it?”

“Yea, I guess so, just to be sure.”

He pulled into a service station that was a little bit to the side of the main road. He got out. Katherine Hewitt got out also. He lay down on the ground under the front end and, yanked at the tie rods to make sure they weren’t disconnected. It was a cold night. She stood with her arms folded, shivering and watching what he was doing..

He got up and shrugged his shoulders. “Yea, it seems to be all right.”

He didn't really know but he didn't want to act like he didn't know what was going on.

They started up again. The filling station was one that he came in all the time, but somehow he turned the wrong way coming out of it. Instead of turning left back to the main road that led to the freeway, he turned right to a service road that went off in the other direction to the freight terminals. He thought that this service road connected right up to the freeway, and when it didn't he began to get flustered. The road was dark and unfamiliar to him and it didn't help to be missing one headlight. His vision was slightly blurred from the grass. He leaned forward squinting. The front end was rattling and the heater didn't work.

"Tom, where are you going?"

"I got off on a service road somehow. It connects with the freeway eventually. Don't get, excited."

For the first time, she noticed that he was acting more agitated than usual. She studied his face for a few minutes and then said: "Are you stoned?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked at her sheepishly. "Just a little."

The three of them were all in the front seat. Stephanie was in the middle. Katherine didn't say anything more about it or show any disapproval, but after they had gone another quarter mile or so without coming to the freeway; she pulled Stephanie over towards her and held her.

After about another half mile, they came to an on-ramp to the freeway. Once they were on the freeway again, Steward felt relieved though he sensed that Katherine had lost faith in him. He had noticed how she'd pulled Stephanie toward her.

"You doing okay, Katherine?"

"Yes, now I'm fine. I just got worried when we were on that dark road.."

She still had her arm around Stephanie who had fallen asleep with her hands folded in her lap. She took her coat and arranged it around her, then she looked ahead toward the freeway. They were going along a part of the road that seemed to have a roof because there was an upper level for

traffic going in the other direction. The front end of the cab was still shimmying but she hardly noticed it anymore. She felt tired.

Emerging from the double-decker part of the freeway, they went round a long curve. Now they were on the part that ran above the industrial area that Steward had been looking at on his way to the airport. The torches at the dry docks were still glowing. The lights, on the other side of the bay looked as though they were in a different world. After rounding another bend, they could see the city skyline all the way from the giant television tower on top of Twin Peaks to bridge. Most of the television tower was shrouded in fog. Only a few blinking red lights at the very top of it could be seen. The skyscrapers in the downtown district sparkled with lights. They, too, were shrouded in fog, though the fog only came halfway up to the taller of them. The bay bridge was marked with a string of yellow lights. The elevated part of the freeway ended, at a long ramp that connected with one of the streets in the South of Market district. The street went through the middle of the wine section. There, were shabbily-dressed men sitting in doorways with bottles in paper bags.

On the plane, Katherine Hewitt had felt strangely depressed. Whether that had been due to separating with her mother and the accumulated effect of all the things that had happened in Riverton, or whether, instead, it was related to Tom Steward, she hadn't been able to figure out. She hadn't been sure whether she wanted to see him or not, and hadn't known whether her decision to call him had been a good one or bad one. It just had seemed good to be going home to someone.

At first, when she had seen him standing by the railing, she had been happy he was there. Walking down the long hallway with him, she had felt as though he was a real friend. Then, when they had gotten lost there momentarily, all her fears about his unreliability had come back. Now riding through the city with him, she once more felt glad to be with him. Looking at him, she felt affectionate towards him and felt as though she had judged him unfairly. She kept going

back and forth in this way.

“You must be tired, Tom,” she said.

He looked across toward her and smiled. “No, I just feel a little bad.”

“About what?”

“About coming stoned.”

“I don’t mind, Tom. I just got scared because I didn’t think you knew the way.”

“Yea, I know.”

“Where did you get stoned?”

“I ran into some guys downtown. I didn’t know it was so strong.”

“You feel okay now?”

“Yea, except for thinking you lost faith in me.”

“I-didn’t lose faith in you.”

“Yea, okay.”

“You have a good week?”

“Pretty good, I guess. But it was really slow.”

“Too bad.

“Yea, it was.”

They had left the wino district.. They were going through an area of porno shops and drag bars. They passed the airliner terminal where the line of cabs waiting for fares extended half-way around the block.

“You mentioned you had a talk with David Brod,” Katherine said, when they had gone a little further.

“Yea, you met him, you said. What did you think of him?”

“He has a nice air about him. It seems as though everyone likes him.”

“Just about everyone does.”

“And what were you talking about?”

“About you and. me.”

“Well, be more specific.”

“We just generally went over what had happened, you know.”

“You mean last Sunday?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Oh.”

He looked across towards her and noticed that she seemed a little upset. “Why? Does that bother you?”

“In a way?”

“How come?”

“Just because it’s somebody I don’t know. You mean you told him about our big argument and our sexual problems or whatever?”

“Well, yea.”

“That really upsets me, Tom. It makes me feel like I’m being put in a fish bowl.”

“Gee, Katherine. He’s my best friend. He’s about the only friend I got.”

“Yea, I suppose, but still I don’t like it.”

After another silence, she said, “And did. you tell him I cried when you said I was overweight?”

“Well, yea. That was the main thing that happened between us that night. That was what I was really confused about.”

“That really upsets me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. It just seems like a breach of trust or something. It just really upsets me. What did he say?”

“He said that you seem to be a really romantic person.— you know, not overtly but despite yourself-- and that you wanted for the relationship to be aesthetically appealing, and that ruined it for you.”

“Why?”

“Because now you couldn’t see yourself in. that role.”

“That’s really upsetting.”

“Just because we discussed it?”

“Because what right do the two of you have to do a biopsy like that on me?”

“Is that the reason he came to the bar? To look me over and see if I was prime beef?”

“No, Katherine, that had nothing to do with it. He just happened in.”

“Happened in,” she said. sarcastically. “It makes me. feel like a cow at a fair.”

“He went in with his writing group. One of the guys in

the group lives right up the street from me.”

She didn't respond.

“You don't believe me?” he said.

“It- doesn't matter if I believe you or not.”

“It does to me.”

“And what did Brod have to say? Did I' pass the test?”

“There wasn't any test, Katherine. And anyhow he said you were stunningly beautiful.”

“Now I know you're lying.”

They continued like this until they pulled up at her apartment. Steward put his arm on her. shoulder. “Now you're angry with me again.”

“Yes, I do feel angry. I don't know why. I don't know if it's justified.”

“Well, where does that leave us? The only reason I talked to him was because I wanted. to turn things in a. positive, direction.”“

“I don't know, Tom. I just feel tired. I thought I'd be glad to see you, and in a way I was, but I'm just so confused now. You make me feel like a nut job.”

“I didn't mean to.”

Her. eyes flashed with anger. “Tom, you never mean to. You always have the very best motives. But you injure people just the same. You think you're so wonderful because you're honest. Well, I'm starting to think your honesty is one of your most despicable qualities. You come out to get me. I can't even rely on you for that. You show up blasted out of your mind.”

Steward kept shaking his head. She wanted him to fight back but he just backed off in the same way he always did. It made her furious with him.

Stephanie was still asleep on the front seat. She roused her. “Wake up, honey.. We're home.” She looked over at Steward. again. “We're not going to figure this out now, Tom. I'm exhausted.”

He. sighed with exasperation. “Yea, I guess we won't. But let me just say one more thing, Katherine. David. Brod did not come over there as my envoy.”

He. helped bring the luggage in, then stood at the door

while she led Stephanie to her room. She came back. “I’m sorry, Tom. I guess we’re not the best combination.”

“I guess not.

“I don’t know what to say. Obviously we have to talk about this sometime.”

“Yea, I don’t know.”

“How about if we leave it this way? I’ll call you in a couple days.”

“Okay, Katherine.”

He turned around and walked toward the door. He didn’t turn to see if she was watching him leave. He brought in his cab and put his waybill in the slot.

Seeing that there were some guys having a smoke-out, he went over to join them. He felt exhausted and confused and just wanted to blow his mind out and forget the whole miserable evening.

During the next few days, she went back and forth between anger and depression. She felt like she had treated him unfairly. She knew that he hadn’t really done anything that bad. So, what—he had showed up a little bit stoned and had gone off on a service road. And she couldn’t begrudge him for having confided in his friend. But even so, with or without just cause, she felt a smoldering resentment towards him. Whenever she looked in the mirror, she hated herself for being overweight and out of shape, and hated him for making her more conscious of her defects. Even though he had had a perfect right to talk to Brod, that had been like having the wound reopened. She felt as though she’s been laid on an operating table, and dissected. She had once regarded his honesty as one of his best qualities. Now she was beginning to see that it was more akin to a kind of bungling overdone sincerity. She didn’t respect it as much as she once had.

She wasn’t sure what she wanted to do. She was confused because she realized that she was vacillating crazily between not wanting to give up on him and utter hatred. One minute she would decide to try to stick in the relationship and make the best of it and the next minute she would be scheming how to get her revenge.

Finally, it was the stick-with-it side that won out. She decided to stay in the relationship for a while and, along with that, she made up her mind to reform her whole life and get in better shape.

When he called after several days, she said: "Why don't you just come over for supper? We can go to a movie or something. We don't need to have any big talk."

On the night he came over, she cooked a vegetarian meal. She did up her hair and wore a dress. "See, Tom, I'm reforming my whole life."

Stephanie was spending the night with a friend. They ate quietly. Now whenever they were together there was a slight amount of tension in the air. The only sound was the hum of the refrigerator. She talked a little about her classes and said that she was planning to go to a seminar on linguistics. Steward listened attentively but the conversation never left the ground.

The theater that they decided to go to was only a half mile away so they walked. It was a pleasant evening, but they didn't look around much or talk. They walked several feet apart from one another. Despite wearing a dress, Katherine felt clunky and unattractive, which made her feel resentful towards him.

He sensed her resentment and acted with exaggerated courtesy. His polite, apologetic manner just made her feel contemptuous of him.

At the movie, they sat in the back, hardly touching one another. The film was an Italian romantic comedy, the very worst film that they could have chosen to see. At one point the hero made love to a woman who was grotesquely obese. Her legs were so heavy they were wrinkled with fat. The film made much of the absurdity of his attempts to make love to her by showing them from various perspectives. Everyone in the audience was roaring with laughter, but Steward and Hewitt sat in dead ! silence.

"I suppose you enjoyed that scene with the fat woman," she said when they were walking home. "You must have been thinking of me."

He sighed and shook his head. "Katherine, I've never

thought of you as an obese person or even a fat person. I think you're a lovely woman. You're one of the loveliest women I've ever gone out with."

"That's a lie, Tom, an outright lie. Maybe it's time you face up to how you've gone through life doing and saying things for effect."

"I never said anything for effect. I like you and respect you very much. 'Even now... I mean, is the situation really so bad? You're changing your life. I'm trying to change mine. Maybe we can help one another. Maybe I can be supportive of you."

"Haw! That's all I need is to have you hanging around watching to see if I lose weight. I don't need that kind of support. I don't need to have someone breathing over my shoulder."

"I wouldn't be breathing over your shoulder."

"You'd be watching every step I made."

On the way home, she became more and more angry inside. It occurred to her that the whole situation was hopeless, that there was no way it could be anything but demeaning for her if it continued. By the time they arrived at her apartment, she had made her decision. "Tom, I want you to go home, and I don't think I want to see you again."

"So what good was this then?" he protested. "What good was our attempt at reconciliation? I thought we were going to try to figure things out."

She looked at him sternly. "I'm very tired, Tom. I'm tired of you. I'm tired of this whole business. Savvy? Where could it lead to?"

"How will we know if we don't try?"

"We have tried, Tom. We've tried over and over again."

He kept standing by the door, hesitant to go.

"Can't you understand we can't be lovers anymore?" she said. "Can't you understand how self-conscious you've made me?" All the while we'd be making love, I'd be, thinking that I look like that woman in the movie—a freak, something to laugh at." She began crying.

He tried to hug her. She pulled away. "Don't you dare

touch me!”

“Katherine, you know I. don’t think that about you. I. care about you very much.”

Her eyes were red and her whole body was trembling. “I’m a lonely person, Tom. You think you. can use people for your amusement. Well, you can’t use me. I’m a lonely person. I don’t have any close friends except you. I trusted you and you just tore me down.”

14

“You ever see Katherine Hewitt anymore?”

“No actual dates. I talk to her now and then.”

A couple, weeks had passed since the night on which Steward and Hewitt had gone to the movie together. He was sitting with David Brod in the Paradise Cafe, in fact, at the very same table by the window where, three months earlier, their first conversation regarding Katherine Hewitt had taken place. Once again, they had a pile of pretzels and a couple of beers in front of them, but aside from that the mood was much different. from what it had been on that previous occasion.

After hanging on half-heartedly for several weeks, the tourist season had come to a definite end. The bar, which mostly catered to cabbies, had begun to show the effects of the lack of ready cash. There were only a few people in the room. The waitress was playing pool.

“What do you mean? On the phone?”

“Yea. Talked to her: a few times. Four times, to be exact.”

“Is it always something you initiate?”

“It was the first couple times. But then I made this big resolution not to call her and she called me. Then last night I called her again.”

Brod shook his head and smiled. “You poor people: don’t know what you want.”

“You can say that again, David. You want another beer?”

“Yea, I’ll have a Heineken dark.”

Steward went over to the counter and in a few minutes

returned with a couple more beers and some potato chips, which he dumped on the table next to the pretzels.

Brod had been looking out the window. Broadway Street was deserted and a steady rain was coming down. The, tw. friends. had become closer now that Brod's departure, to New York was imminent. If he had decided to postpone his trip for a while, but even with the postponement, it was only three weeks away.

"What's she act like: on the phone?"

"Oh, I don't know. She's been going through a lot of changes. The first two times I. talked to her, she seemed-really glad to hear from me, but also really confused. She even started crying again. And as you know, for her that's highly atypical."

"Crying about what?"

"About:feeling bad about herself, about how she looks."

"What: did she act like after that?"

"Increasingly cold, increasingly resentful."

"Even when she called you?"

"Yea, after the first several minutes."

Another cabdriver came in the bar and looked around. They both nodded et him. Nobody spoke for a few minutes and then Steward said: "So what do you think?"

"About her?"

"About the whole business."

"I just don't understand why you keep hanging on. It doesn't seem like there's much going on that's positive anymore."

"Yea, I don't know either. I guess I just feel this bond with her, and I feel sorry for what happened. My whole image of her has changed. She's a really lonely person, a real loner."

"She doesn't. have any close friends?"

"Not to speak of. The only person she seems close to is this gay guy that lives with her—you, know., he gets room and board for taking care of Stephanie. But the way she's got it set up, he's home when she's gone, and when she's home, that's his recreation time, so naturally he takes off. So she doesn't see him that much. And aside from that, as far as I

know, she just does a solo job.

“So you keep in touch with her out of pity?”

“No, it’s not just that. I really care about her. Sometimes I think in love with her. Maybe I’m just waiting for a second chance. Or who can say? Maybe we’ll wind up as just plain old friends, if such a thing is conceivable. That ever happen to you?”

“A couple times it has. But it’s so difficult to pull off because you keep slipping back into a sexual relationship.”

“Ay, there’s the rub.”

Later when they were driving home, Brod said: “You know, I’ve been thinking, Tom. If you’d like to invite Katherine over to dinner sometime, that might be a possibility. Maybe she’d hit it off with Joan and Elisabeth.” He was referring to the two women who shared his flat in the Mission district.

“The only problem is I’d have-to see her again.”

“You were just saying you want to keep up a friendship with her.”

“Yea. But it might be better to leave well-enough alone.”

The thought of it was tempting to, him. For all his talk about Katherine Hewitt’s loneliness, he had been feeling lonely himself. Brod was working all the time trying, to get, money together for his trip to New York. Despite the increased affection that Steward felt for his friend, he had been seeing him less than normal. He had been trying to reconstruct his life and turn his attention back to his art, and he had done this to a certain extent, but his emotions were not so easily reconstructed. Once again, the feeling of dull emptiness had come back to him that he had felt after the break-up of his marriage.

He told himself that it didn’t matter if he saw Katherine Hewitt again, but part of him eared about her very much and didn’t want to let go of her.

Several nights after talking to Brod, he was standing at the bay window in his apartment, watching the last light of day as it faded on the Chinese grocery store and apartment buildings across the -street. Some children were playing in

front of the grocery store. At the other corner, a column of cars waited for the stop light to change. The light popped to green; the cars moved forward and went out of sight. A man came by with a shopping bag full of groceries. Then a blind man came by, tapping his cane one-two-three to the left, one-two-three to the right. The buildings across the street were touched with orange light. There were flowers in some of the windows. He looked out until the orange light faded to pink. Then, as often happened at sunset, a vague feeling of apprehension came over him. He walked back into his apartment, putting on the lamp by the couch as he passed by it. Another few steps took him up the short hallway to the kitchen. He sat down at the table and put on the lamp.

On the table was a spiral notebook and a pen. He opened it and wrote: "Tomorrow three hours drawing at the very least. Forget about the charcoal. I don't like it. It's too messy." He sat with his chin in his hand for a moment, tapped his pen on the table, and then drawing a heavy horizontal line beneath his first entry, he made a second: "As for Katherine Hewitt -- what can I say? I'd like to be her friend. Is that a possibility? If I see her again, I have to remember it's a friendship, not, a relationship. Beneath this second entry, he also drew a horizontal line. He put his hand in his chin again and studied what he had written. Then he drew vertical lines on both sides of the two entries enclosing them in a box. He wrote the date in the top right corner of the box and closed the notebook.

On the counter-across from the table, stacked up against the oblong horizontal mirror that divided, the upper and lower portions of the cupboard, were his sketchbooks. Next to them were his pencils, newly-sharpened and arranged side by side with their sharpened ends all facing the same direction. He got up from the table, reached over for his sketchbooks, and with a serious expression on his face, sat down to look through them.

There were six sketchbooks in all. His early drawings were mostly of female models. They were correct in proportion and perspective, but owing to their linearity looked primitive. Some of them were done with such

painstaking detail that the portrayed models looked rigid and unreal. He was aware, of this but didn't know how to correct it. In addition to these drawings of models, he had done a series of self-portraits in pencil, labeling them, "Self-Portrait #1," "Self-Portrait #2," and so on. There were twelve of these in all of them he depicted himself as severe and forlorn. He also had many drawing of hands, hands in all kinds of holding positions and gestures, and conceptual drawings with titles such as "Line and Mass" and "The North Wind and the South." Many of his drawings had sexual connotations. The, drawing called "Line and Mass," for instance, was an attempt to convert volume without the use of shading. It depicted a man and a woman. The man was muscular and had a demonic, mask-like face, the woman, who was in front of the man and turned away from him but looking back over her shoulder at him, had large breasts and hips, one of the man's hands was raised in a fist. There were other drawings of women in provocative poses, not explicitly sexual but suggesting latent sexuality. Steward also had a series of drawings of Joan of Arc, whom he portrayed as a young woman. with a boyish face.

Looking at his drawings, he felt a certain, satisfaction in what he had done, a working-man's pride in a product which though not perfect had been made to the best. of his ability. He had sprayed all of them with hair spray which worked as a fixative and prevented them from smearing. He knew that they showed a certain amount of artistic ability. But at heart he doubted his talent. He kept up his studies for two reasons—because he felt there was some kind of spiritual truth that he was supposed to find through them, and because he had nothing else to fall back on to prove he wasn't as worthless as he feared himself to be. In an odd sort of way, he did hope that he would one day 'be successful,' but his, hopes were so overshadowed by his self-deprecation that they didn't enter much into his daily life. He had a vague ambition to do murals depicting the life of the city—something on the order of Rivera or Oroszco. He drew in pencil because he wanted to be an artist of the people and be free to draw in places like coffee shops and. restaurants. But

he didn't know how to advance toward his goal in terms of practical steps. He didn't have any friends who were artists and hated artsy talk.

He put his sketchbooks away and walked into the other room. Now the street outside was dark. An arc light swayed in the wind. The Chinese grocery store was closed for the night. There were lights in some of the bay windows across the street. A fog had come in. He could smell the faint sea smell that accompanied the fog. Looking toward California Street, he watched the light changing; green, yellow, red it went, then it turned back again to green.

Next to the double-door that led to his stow-away bed was the single door to his closet. He opened it. Inside were several pairs of corduroy pants, a few shirts, and his blue denim coat. On the floor were some tennis shoes. He took out the coat, put it on, buttoned it, and then stood lost in thought with his fingers still on the top button. He nodded, then as if suddenly remembering himself, he closed the closet and walked toward the door. He went through the door, locked the two locks on it, and with his keys in his right hand, and both hands in his pockets, made his way down the three flights of stairs to the front door. As soon as he got outside, he realized that he had nowhere to go. He thought of going to the deli, but he wasn't hungry and the very thought of it was depressing.

He walked down to the coffee shop on the next block and ordered a cup of coffee. He drank only half of it and went out. Unable to think of anywhere else to go, he walked down toward the wharf. The street was full of people. Couples strolled by: beautiful women, elaborately coiffed, their faces delicately painted, their lips curled in smiles, their hands on the arms of confident men in three-piece suits. Steward came by, his hands in his pockets. One woman looked at him with curiosity. He looked away, ashamed of his appearance.

After walking for about a half hour, he arrived at the municipal pier at the end of Van Ness Avenue. There were people fishing on the pier, each small group with its own radio and own type of music. A group of Latinos was

listening to some Spanish country-western; a couple of hippies were listening to jazz. He walked to the end of the pier where there was a round cement tower. Some seagulls flew by shrieking. He felt terribly alone., He' walked back, hardly hearing the music that rose and faded with each group of fishermen. On the sidewalk by the aquatic museum, a woman came by pushing a shopping cart full of clothes and other paraphernalia. She was a young woman. His first thought was that she was beautiful. She had long dark hair and dark eyes. But when she came past him, he noticed she had a large scar across her brow and her eyes were frenzied. She was mumbling to herself: "A little bit of this. A little bit of that. Do you think I care? Ha-ha. I don't care at all."

On the way home Steward walked britkly. At one point he broke into a run, ran at a full stride for several blocks, then as abruptly as he had started, he came to a halt, looked around him for a moment, swept his hair back, took a deep breath, and continued at a walk.

By this time, he felt very hungry, but the thought of going to the deli was was still more unpleasant than his hunger. Instead he turned up California Street for home. He couldn't go up California Street without passing Wyley's Pub. Turning the corner, Steward saw the gas lamp and the square wooden sign on which the bar's name was printed in Gothic letters. He knew very well that Katherine Hewitt would be working. As he neared the bar, he felt a sudden impulse to go in. But controlling himself he walked past, looking sideways to get a glimpse of her. She was standing at the near end of the counter by the door, leaning with one elbow on the counter and her weight on one hip. As he came by, she looked up. When he was already past her, he saw out of the corner of his eye that her hand had gone up in a wave. He pretended he hadn't seen her. He continued up the:street.

Her voice came from behind him: "Thomas, aren't you even going to say hello?"

He looked back. "I didn't think you saw me. I'm in a down mood. Just want to be alone."

"Well, why don't you come in for a beer? You don't have to talk. After all, this place is a bar. It's not my house.

Just because: I'm here doesn't mean you have to talk to me."

He hesitated. She was standing on the sidewalk in the shaft of light that came from the open door. She looked different outside the bar than she looked inside it. She looked smaller. Her shoulders looked exposed. She was holding a dish towel in both hands with her hands in front of her stomach. Her face was raised up so that her nostrils were prominent. She looked like an animal sniffing. He shook his head in amusement and walked towards her.

"What are you laughing about?" she, said, eyeing him with curiosity. "I suppose you're stoned out of your mind. Have you had any supper?"

"No, I thought of going over to the deli, but I wasn't in the mood."

"Come on in. I'll get you some chili. Did you know we sell chili?"

"No."

"We just got a chill machine. We sell it for 65 cents."

He felt in his pockets. "I don't think I have my money with me."

"That's okay. I'll treat you."

He went in behind her. The bar was crowded with people. The juke box was playing. Some people were in. back by, the pool table playing darts. The only one missing was the old man who drank whiskey with a chaser.

We have a dart tournament every week now. The manager just started it. He wants to start a team and go around to other bars."

"Seems to be working. Lots of people."

"Yea. I've been running my ass off."

"Where's the old man? Whiskey and Chasers?"

"Oh Bill... Poor Bill. His old lady kicked the bucket."

"Oh no, that's too bad. When did that happen?"

"A couple weeks ago, We took up a collection-for him."

"Too bad."

"Yea, he took it pretty-hard."

She sat Steward down at a table and came over with a beer and some chili. "Do you want any crackers?" She had a bunch of them in her hand.

“Yes, thank you,” he said, reaching for them. He unwrapped the crackers, dumped them in his chili, and mashed them with his spoon, as usual holding the spoon with his whole hand like a little shovel.

“Go to it., Geronimo,” she said, laughing. “You’re so odd.”

“Why am I so odd?”

“I don’t know. You tell me.”

“Okay, be mysterious then,” he said, looking back to his chili. For several minutes, he was intensely absorbed in the chili, which he ate in big gulps, scarcely bothering to chew.

She laughed. “Thomas, your one saving grace is how basic you are. I put you down for it. But to tell you the truth I like it.”

She went over to wait on some customers and then came back. “So what have you been doing?”

“Been looking at my drawings. I’ve been trying to get some momentum going in my art.”

“You been doing any drawing?”

“I did three hours worth today.”

“What were you working on?”

“I was: doing some hands. Looking at my hands in a mirror.”

“Can I see- what you did?”

“They’re at my place.”

“You could go and get them.”

“No, I’d rather not.”

She let the matter drop. She looked over toward the other side of the room where the TV was going. He studied her face once again impressed by how lovely it was. When she looked at him, he said: “So how about you? What’s been happening?”

“Not much. I’m going to a seminar on Saturday.”

“Seminar in what?”

“‘Modern Problems in Linguistics’.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“Yea, I hope so. I just want to get a more definite idea of what’s going on so I can plan out my life better.”

She shrugged her shoulders and got up to wait on the

customers again. "I'll be back in a minute." She served up a few drinks and came back. "So what was the down mood all about?"

"What do you mean?"

"You said you were down."

He noticed how quickly she'd changed the focus of the conversation away from herself, but didn't want to pressure her into talking if she didn't feel like it.

"I: don't know. I've been in a restless mood and I can't sit still. So I go down to the bay to get some fresh air and there's this crazy lady down there."

"What kind of crazy lady?"

"Just this lady who was all flipped out. She was pushing her things around in a grocery cart."

"Too bad. But what were you upset about before that?"

"About a lot of things. About my art. It just doesn't go anywhere. I feel like I'm not self-disciplined enough. I have this obsession with self-discipline. I don't know. I just get all wound up."

"Was it partly about me?"

"Well, of course it was, Katherine. I feel like we're in limbo."

"I know."

He got up. "Can I get myself a beer?"

"Sure, just reach over the counter and pour it yourself."

The dart game had ended. After having a round at beers, the people who had been playing had decided to go home. They came by, shouting good-bye to Hewitt.

With them gone, the mood in the bar was considerably abated. The only customers left were a couple guys from.. the Stanton who were sitting by a back table, watching-the television. The juke box had stopped. Katherine got up and put a couple quarters in it and came back.

"Well, you're going to hate hearing about this, but Brod and I had another talk."

"I don't mind if you talk with him. You're entitled to have friends. I was being reasonable about that. Were you talking about me?"

"In part."

“You come to any magnificent conclusions?”

“Not really.”

“You don’t want to tell me, right?”

“Weil, the basic thing we were talking about is whether it would be conceivable for you and me to be friends.”

“You-mean without having a sexual relationship?”

“Uh-huh.”

She nodded thoughtfully. “I’ve thought about that a little myself.”

“You don’t look too enthused about the idea.”

“It’s not that I don’t care about you, Tom. It just seems like the closer we get, the more destructive we are to one another.”

“Yea, but then again,, our problems are all related to sex. So if we don’t have sex, then the problems won’t come up. We can just be friends like anybody else.” He looked at her. “Right?”

“Sounds good in theory.”

“Yea, easy to say and hard to do.”

Neither one of them said anything for a few minutes, and then she said: “So tell me this wonderful plan for an a-sexual companionship. Even on a purely philosophical basis, the idea of it is intriguing to me. It reminds me of when I was a teenager. I was so self-conscious about my body that I never touched it myself, let alone let anyone else touch me. That’s the time for Platonic friendships. And here I am, almost 30 years old—excuse the expression, Tom, with a well-worn cunt—and now I’m going to be Platonic. Very interesting. I’d like to hear more about it.”

He smiled wryly. “I can tell you’re really interested.”

“I am. I sincerely am. Because maybe some weird spiritual trip is the solution to my dilemma.”

“Maybe so.” He shook his head.

“Tom?”

“Yes, Katherine.”

“I’m still waiting to hear your plan.”

He laughed. “I don’t have any big stupendous plan. I just thought we could keep in touch, you know. Maybe we could see one another in the day or in situations where we

wouldn't get sexually involved. And then we could just get to know one another, and all that" ...

She. laughed. "And all that?"

"I would just be a friend. You know what I mean? It wouldn't be so heavy. It wouldn't be a full-scale relationship."

"Where could we meet then? I have classes every day."

"I don't know. You know what I've been thinking?"

Maybe sometime you could come over for supper at Brod's house.

"What for? I hardly know him."

"He lives with this group of people, you know. You always say you don't have any close friends."

"What kind. of people?"

"Two women. Joan and Elisabeth, and Joan has two sons, nine and five years old."

"He lives with two women?"

"Communally."

"What are they like?"

"Just people.. I don't know... I guess you would call them Noe Valley specials. You know what I mean... latter-day hippies, alternative types."

"It sounds so exciting. I like to meet other people who are abnormal, other social deviants. It's so nice of you to ask me."

He:shook his head. "So forget it, Katherine. Who you going to be friends with then? You want to meet some weird three-piecer who works for Standard Oil? Or maybe you want to meet a socialite who lives in Saint Francis Woods and drives all the way to Half- Moon Bay to take a sunbath. I know some people like this. So what's it to me?"

He-got up to go. "I. got to get going, Katherine. I can't sit here -all night."

"So when is this big dinner?"

"We were thinking on Saturday because that's the only evening Joan could arrange it. David doesn't drive that night and you and I could arrange to take off. But you said you're going to that seminar."

"No, that would be okay. It's over at three o'clock. And

that is my weekend off.”

“I’m not making any promises.”

“Yea, I know. I’ll give it a try.”

That night Steward thought over what had happened. He couldn’t think of any definite reason to be critical of it, but he was afraid that he was setting up a situation that would reopen the wounds that had been made before, and he didn’t trust his own motives. But it was too late to turn back. He phoned Brod the next morning and told him what had happened. Brod said he would arrange it.

When Brod mentioned the idea to Joan Weinstein, she bristled. “Since when are you playing social chairman, David?” She was active in all kinds of committees and didn’t like to be handed unexpected obligations.

“I’m not playing social chairman, Joan. All I’m doing is inviting her over for dinner.”

“Okay, but I. have a. meeting that night at eight o’clock.”

“So? Eat supper and go.”

Elisabeth Creely, the third adult of the household, came out when Brod and Weinstein were talking. She was a:thin* anemic poet with baggy eyes who looked perpetually sad, a state of affairs that she often made worse by trying to be coquettish. She was taking an assertiveness class because she could never show anger.

“David’s been widening our horizons for us,” said Joan, turning her dark eyes first to Creely and then to Brod. Her problem was opposite from Creely’s; she was more attractive than she wanted to be.

“Oh, thank you, David. Don’t expect me to play hostess.”

Brod finally worked out an agreement that everyone would be decent. Not wanting to worry Steward, he just told him that the dinner was arranged.

Katherine Hewitt also had her doubts about the dinner, but she had been feeling lonely and berating herself for. not trying to meet new people, so she could hardly pass it up as a social opportunity.

As for the prospect of getting together with Steward

again, about that she was more ambivalent. At first she, had, thought that she would be able to forget him without much ado, but it had proven more difficult than she'd expected. So in a way she felt relieved that she would be seeing-him again. At the same time, she found herself feeling more and more resentful. This had been the case even before she had invited him into the bar. Every time she looked in the mirror, she felt angry at him. She blamed him for her poor self-image even though it had been in a sorry state before she'd met him. She didn't believe in revenge, but part of her wanted to get back at him for putting her down. Even more than she resented his disparaging remarks, she resented the power he had over her, resented her inability to make a clean break from him. It made her mad that he was still on the scene despite how obviously he failed to provide what she needed. She wasn't so sure, either that a friendship would just be a friendship. She didn't know if she could keep it at that level and didn't know if she wanted to.

On Saturday morning she took a bus to the linguistics seminar, which was being held at University of California extension campus near the San Francisco mint. The campus was only three miles away, but poorly located from her apartment. In order to get there, she had to transfer two times. Most of the people at the seminar looked prosperous and trim. She felt a little out of place and didn't know who to talk to when everyone was milling around before the seminar began so she went and stood by the coffee machine then for a while she looked at the bulletin board where new classes were posted.

The seminar consisted of a formal discussion by a three-member panel followed by questions. Part of the discussion had to do with academic problems such as differences of opinion regarding curricula, and part with current programs and employment possibilities. In general, the picture painted was a bleak one. The member of the panel who seemed most well-informed said that there were few openings in academia because competition was fierce and the government was cutting back on programs.

She found this upsetting, to say the least. It had never

occured to her that once she got a degree she wouldn't be able to do anything with it. She had thought that maybe she wouldn't be able to get exactly what she wanted, but nothing at all—that was a sobering thought! She wanted to raise her hand and ask for a clarification, but she was afraid that she, would sound stupid, and she felt self-conscious because most of the women had dresses on and she had come in pants.

After the question period was over, there was a short coffee break. She went up to talk to the person on the panel she had thought was well-informed. He was a middle-aged professorial type with a neat beard. She asked him if the situation was as dismal as it sounded.

“Well, yes, it is, ma'am. You see, you have a two-fold situation right now, both aspects of it due to what I guess you might describe as a social backlash. On the one hand, people are tired of throwing money into programs of any sort. People are just generally OD'ed on them. Too many of them didn't work. It's a shame because a lot of good things are going to be thrown out with the trash. And on the other hand, here again the demise of the '60's comes in, you have a lot of people in the 25 to 35 age- bradket who spent 5 or 10 years of their young adulthood in activist or alternative pursuits of one sort or another, and now all these people are feeding back into the System, going back to school, trying to get jobs, and so on. That makes for some vicious-competition. To say it all in a few words: not many jobs and a lot of highly-qualified people. Or if you want to be more basic, a few scraps of meat and a hell of a lot of dogs.

“Well, is this just the case in linguistics?”

“Oh, no, ma'am. It seems to be happening everywhere, at least in academia. Political, science, sociology, you name it, even in fields like physics. What it comes down to is that we are just an over-educated society, and it seems to be getting worse, because as I hate to admit, having a vested interest in education myself, any idiot can go to school. You're going to be seeing a lot of people with masters working as waitresses or whatever. You can't have a situation where everybody is making their living as a thinker. Somebody's got to mihd the store.”

“Well, what does a person do if he or she is in the midst of a study program—you know, if you have a lot of time already invested in it?”

“I’d say, you keep at it and hope for the best.”

She went back to her seat, feeling as though her insides had been scraped out. The final portion of the seminar consisted in the description of existing programs. There was only one that really interested her, a program in the study of Oriental languages at Halifax University. She wrote down all the information about it. As soon as the meeting ended, she went out.

On the way home on the bus, she kept thinking about what the well-informed member of the panel had said. She felt frantic. She thought that maybe she should change her course of studies, but she didn’t know to what. It bothered her that he had called her “ma’am” as though she was a middle-aged lady. But maybe she looked like a middle-aged lady. She didn’t know. “Middle-aged” -- the thought of that was depressing. After all, she was almost 30. Maybe she was starting to look middle-aged. She tried to see the reflection of her face in the bus window, but she couldn’t make it out. The way he had described the ‘60’s was as though they were extinct, as though they were like the jitterbug or the Charleston or the Hindenburg blimp, not a living reality anymore, just an artifact, a memento on a dusty shelf. That disturbed her because her own youth and the flamboyance of the ‘60’s had developed hand in hand. If the ‘60’s were demising, then she was, too.

At home, she took a bath. She looked at her face in the mirror, noticing for the first time that there were tiny wrinkles by her eyes. She took some face cream from the medicine cabinet and applied it to the wrinkles. Then she dressed and waited for Steward, feeling drained and apprehensive about meeting new people.

Steward came by at seven o’clock. The arrangement was that, since Joan’s son, Abraham, was only two years older than Stephanie, she would come, too. Stephanie took more time preparing herself than Katherine did, and when she came walking into the kitchen, Katherine had a sudden flash

that her daughter was becoming a young woman.

This trip, too, required a couple transfers on the bus. They had no trouble getting a bus to start out with. It was coming over the hill when they came out the door. But at the second connection, they had to wait a half hour.

Steward was in a good mood. Katherine and Stephanie were sitting in the windwell of the bank on the corner. He kept pacing back and forth, kicking his legs out, raising up and down on his toes, and firing questions at Stephanie, who was no longer so aloof from him. Every now and then, he would come over to his two female companions, squat down, and say, "How you guys doing? The bus should be along any minute."

After a while, Katherine started to talk about the seminar. Her voice was higher and more girlish than it usually was. "That's the absurd thing, Tom. When it comes right down to it, there are maybe five worthwhile jobs in the whole field of linguistics. And the rest of those people, you know what they're doing? They're doing nothing. They're making up work. It's the same old story—all these smart people running around doing boring, nonsensical, and sometimes even destructive jobs. Like making freeways, for instance, or making napalm or herbicides. All these smart people with their heads up their asses, or else they're stuck in the rat race. Did you ever think about that? What a mind-blower! What a drag!"

She was distraught about how convincingly the seminar had robbed her of her illusions, and worried about meeting new people. She felt as though she had nothing to fall back on, as though she was like a walking shadow, a stupid, insubstantial person. Even as she talked, she felt stupid, clunky, old, and insecure, like a terrified little girl in a fat, aging body. The more she talked about the seminar, the more sarcastic and bitter she became. Steward was preoccupied with whether the bus would come, and whether everyone would be happy. When he didn't respond to what she was talking about, she started to feel angry at him. All her resentment came forward. She wanted him to be a strong, stable person she could depend on, somebody whose lap she

could sit on in the same way that she'd sat on her father's lap. But when she watched him pacing up and down on the sidewalk, instead of feeling drawn to him, she just felt contempt.

The meal turned out to be quiet and awkward. The women had nothing to say to one another except niceties. Elisabeth Creely came in wearing a '20's-style flapper dress. that made her look like a character from. "The Wizard of Oz." Joan Weinstein, though her usual charming self, excused herself right after the meal to go to her meeting. Creely seemed to resent Katherine Hewitt for her physical beauty, as though it was something she had worn like a brocade. The only two people who hit it off at all were Abraham and Stephanie. Abraham was more concerned about Stephanie's plate than his own. Whenever she ran out of anything, he promptly replenished it. By the end of the meal, Stephanie looked like she was going to bust. The younger boy sat beside his hero David.

Elisabeth Creely in her characteristic self-righteous manner asked Katherine about what she was "doing in her. life." Katherine tried to describe her life-goals assuredly but she sounded. unsure of herself. Throughout the' meal, David Brod tried to make the occasion as pleasant as possible while he exchanged banter with the yonger boy. When Joan Weinstein left, David explained that she was a busy person. When Elisabeth Creely started to get snide, he dexterously made light of her comments. Steward was as attentive to Katherine as Abraham had been to Stephanie, but Katherine found the attention far less pleasant than her daughter.

Steward and the Hewitt's left as soon as the dishes were done. On his way out, Steward shrugged at Brod. "You can't win them all, can you?"

It was a cold night. After they had stood at the bus stop for fifteen minutes, Steward hailed a cab. On the way to her apartment, Katherine Hewitt hardly talked to Steward. She scolded Stephanie for eating too much food, and looked at Steward as if to say, "Look what a syndrome you've caused."

By the time the three of them arrived at Katherine's

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place, Steward felt exhausted. He was just beginning to realize that the evening had somehow ended up as a disaster. The fare was \$2.10. He gave the driver four dollars. It had started to rain. Stephanie smiled, waved goodbye to Steward, and went in the buildilt. Steward and Katherine stood in front of the door. Katherine was shivering. He pressed close to her to keep her warm. She moved away: "You can go home, Tom. Thanks for your company. I'm tired."

"I'd,like to come in."

"Why?"

"Because you seem so angry with me."

She looked at him a moment, shrugged her shoulders, and unlocked the door. He followed her across the front lobby to the door of her apartment. Stephanie had turned on the light in the kitchen. The sound of running water came from the bathroom. They walked down the hall without turning on the light.

"I was going to get myself a drink," Katherine said. "Would you like one?"

He nodded assent. She left the:room and several minutes later came back with a bottle of brandy, two glasses with ice cubes in them, and a bottle of Seven-Up.

She was dressed in her nightgown. She mixed a drink for him, poured herself one which was about 2/3 brandy, and sat on the bed. He moved closer to her.

"Let's get something understood before you get your engines going, Geronimo. We are not going, to make love. You got that straight? We're going to sit here and talk and then you can go home.

He nodded and moved across from her to the chair by the bed. She seemed distraught. She frowned as if thinking what to say. She lit a cigarette. The only sound in the house was from Stephanie's room where there, was now some rock music playing.

"Thomas, I know you meant well by tonight," she said. "But when I meet people like that, it just convinces me all the more strongly that all that is in the past. I mean that whole '60ish way of looking at life. And even this situation between us now where we're trying to transcend sex, and so

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on, that's in the past, too. I just feel that anymore. I'm very different from these kind of people. You understand?"

"Yes."

"I can't go back where I was before. I don't know where I'm going, but I know I can't go back and be what I was. I have to move away from whatever I was. I have to be something new."

"I feel the same way, Kath. They're just friends."

"You just don't take into consideration all the factors in my situation."

"I try to, Katherine. I know you're lonely. I'm sorry I can't do anything about it. I tried to be your lover. I tried' to be your friend. You have no idea how much I've thought about how to approach you. But I guess I never will get through. I don't understand you. I don't understand what you want. I thought you might be interested in meeting these other women."

"You're such a simpleton. You assume all women have something in common. You're like somebody in Toledo, Ohio, thinking that Casablanca and Johannesburg are close, to one another because they're both in Africa."

"I'm not quite that simple."

"Sometimes I think that you are."

She puffed furiously on her cigarette, taking huge gulps of her brandy. "I suppose you thought I found it amusing to sit there in that excruciating atmosphere."

"I didn't create, the atmosphere."

"It was all your idea, wasn't it?"

"No, it was David's."

"You were supposed to prepare the way, make the crooked ways straight, etcetera, etcetera, weren't you?"

"I did my best."

"That wimpy little poet. She looked like a Saint Bernard that had just got out of intensive:care. I could have wrung her little neck."

"I: don't like her either .I really had, no other motive in the whole deal other than being your friend and helping you to get to know some people. I know because I went about it very formally in my mind."

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The way he kept retreating in face of her fury made her despise him all the more. All her resentments were standing at her side. "I know you meant well, Tom. You always have: such wonderful motives. You're so wonderfully honest."

He shook his head. "I don't understand why you're so angry."

"Why am I angry? Maybe because you've made me feel like a walking pear. Maybe because I trusted you then I discovered you don't know the left from the-right."

"I'm not as mixed up as you say I am..."

"Not as mixed up? [Tom Steward, you are 'mixed-up' personified. E.G. your money. You throw money around like crazy. You think it makes you a big deal. E.G. your so-called art which you will show to noone and which you make no money from and probably never will.]"

You don't understand the artistic life and you know why?"

"No, Tom, pray tell me."

"Because you're a materialistic person. You don't understand the whole concept of karma and purposeless action because you're materialistic."

"Well, maybe I'm materialistic because I have a child."

"You use Stephanie as a crutch." And that's a fact, Katherine." He continued to talk in the same even monotone, his voice not sounding any angrier than it would have been if he was talking about the menu at a restaurant.. As he talked, he moved his head from one side to another and sighed as though engaged in a monologue. He was retreating into his shell again like a turtle. It infuriated her.

"Another E.G, Thomas, your sex life, your so-called sexuality, to be as euphemistic about it as I can. Your sex life is a total disaster. You are the most incompetent, sexually-confused man I have ever met."

"That's not true."

"I suppose I don't know, as if I haven't been the sad recipient of your feeble attempts at sex."

"You're. just blaming me for all the men in your past life."

"Haw!"

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He got up to go. "I just wanted to be your friend, Katherine. I don't understand why you're so bitter about it."

"I trusted in you, Tom. I wanted you to be a strong person, but you're not. Like tonight. when I was talking about the seminar. I wanted to look up to you. I wanted you to be a real man that I could come to. But you're not a real man, Tom. How can I look up to you when you're more fucked up than I am? Can't you see what would happen to us? We're both so confused. Can't you see what would happen to us? We'd go down in a whirlwind hanging on to one another."

He was standing by the side of the bed with his coat in his hand. Suddenly she noticed how much he had been affected by her words. He was terribly distraught. Her face softened. She went up to him and pressed against him. He put his arms around her.

"I'm sorry, Tom. I don't want to hurt you. I've had some beautiful moments with you. I really have. But can't you see that this won't work: Can't you see that I'm in the midst of this struggle for everything, for my whole life, for my sanity? It is just with the greatest effort that I manage to hold on. There's nothing wrong with you, but I need someone who's strong. You can't be what I need and I can't be what you need. When we get together, it's with good intentions, but it winds up as this weird collision of our mutual insecurities. We just end up tearing one another down. Can't you see that? We have to make a clean break. We have to help one another to do that."

"Okay, okay, Katherine. I guess I agree," he said, shaking his head in exasperation. "I admit I didn't know what I wanted from you tonight. I missed you. I wanted to see you again. In a weird way I love you, Kath. But okay, let's just let it be. Let's part wishing one another the best."

She followed him to the door. He kissed her brow, looked at her a moment, turned, and went out. It was a cold night. He fastened the top button of his coat and trudged the two blocks to the Pacific garage to see if any of the drivers were hanging around. Finding no one there, he headed for home by himself.

A week and a half later, Tom Steward and David Brod were in a cab heading for the airport. Steward was driving. Brod's luggage, which consisted of a small battered suitcase and a knapsack, was in the middle of the front seat. Brod was holding a book of poems and a compass that Stewart had given him as a going-away present. The poems were by Allen Ginsburg, who was one of Brod's heroes. The compass had been accompanied by a note that said, "Don't get lost in the big reality."

Earlier in the evening, at Stewart's expense, they had eaten together at Original Joe's, an Italian restaurant in the Tenderloin district. Then they had gone to the Paradise Cafe for a final round of beers. During the course of the evening they had talked about a number of subjects, from cabdriving to Brod's father to an association of independent cabdrivers that Brad had tried to start but not gotten off the ground yet. Now the conversation had turned to Katherine Hewitt. They were heading up the on-ramp at the bottom of Broadway Street. It led around in a wide arc between the bay and the financial district. The bay glimmered with the reflection of the yellow lights on the East Bay Bridge. The downtown buildings were lit up, too. A steady rain was coming down. It was now early December. The rainy winter season had settled in with a vengeance.

"So that was it?" Brod was saying. "It ended just like that?"

"What could I do about it? She wouldn't listen to me at all."

"And you haven't talked to her since?"

"Haven't talked to her and haven't even walked by the bar."

"Well, maybe it's for the best."

"Yea, in a way I feel relieved that it's all over."

The freeway had made a wide turn to the southwest. Now they were on the southern side of the downtown area and had a wider view of it. The tops of some of the taller buildings were hidden in clouds. In the distance the red lights

on the Sutro Tower blinked off and on. There was heavy traffic on the freeway, and everyone was driving slowly due to the rain, which had increased in intensity.

“Did you part on good terms?” said Brad.

“I guess you can call them good terms. She really, tore into me at the end.”

“Tore into you how?”

“In every conceivable way—the way my life is set up, the way I handle my money, the way I make love. Total tooth and nails. She brought out the whole armory.”

“Sounds like she wanted to pay you back.”

“Well, she did. a pretty good job at it.”

Now, after making another turn, they were heading out of town. It was raining so hard it was difficult to see.

“So do you feel bad about it?”

“I don’t feel bad because it’s over with. I’m just sorry that. we couldn’t transcend our difficulties more, transcend our insecurities.”

Brad nodded thoughtfully but made no comment.

“You know what the weird thing was, David? We spent all that time together, and we never really connected at all—not sexually, not emotionally, not psychically, not in any way except the most superficial ones. And what did we do? We blasted one another. We tore one another down.”

Brad shrugged. “What can you say? It was just a bad relationship. It happens all the time.”

“A bad relationship, yea... But just think about that, David. What a ridiculous situation. Especially, when you assume the basis of the whole interaction is the need for love.”

“Who assumes that?”

“I do.”

“You expect some kind of mystical communion with someone you hardly know. That kind of unity takes years to establish. It takes more than a qualified commitment. It has to be unconditional. That’s how marriage, or some kind of definite commitment puts people like us to. shame. Because I know what you’re saying. What’s the sense of it? Where is it going to? Is it really an improvement to be sexually free? I.

mean, you can:fuck a hundred women. So what? Any way you look at it, it comes down to a couple of boobs and a cunt.”

“Yea, and the more you get into it , the less personal it seems. You’re fucking somebody and you’re not even there because you’ve through it so many times it’s like waxing. the floor. You’re telling yourself, ‘This is a beautiful woman. This is everything I wanted. This is what I’ve been seeing in the movies... raw lust. But it isn’t raw lust. It’s this complicated psychological situation. You know what I meant David? This complicated psychological situation—I don’t know what else to call it.

Steward tried to get that straight in his mind because he didn’t want to repeat the same catastrophe, but after Brod had been gone about a week, he started:feeling all the more. lonely, and not only lonely but sexually hungry. He watched every woman who approached him on the sidewalk and started coming on to women in his cab. Deep inside of him he was worried that Hewitt had been right about his lack of sexual competence. He-wanted:to prove to himself that everything was all right. The more he thought about the whole idea of commitment and so on, the more boring and. squeamishly conventional it seemed. He didn’t want to fall back into being a straight-laced cerebral person. He wanted his life to be more passionate than that.

One evening when he stopped at the deli in his cab, he noticed that there was a pretty young woman in line. She was dressed in a very sophisticated way. She had dark brown hair and a well-developed body. He kept eyeing her as she moved through the line with her tray. She took a table not far from him. He watched her as she ate. She sat for about five minutes- and went out.

He didn’t really have any plans to pursue anything with her. He was just giving her a good once-over. But when he came out, he noticed that she was standing by the door looking at a city map. Impulsively he said: “Would you like some help from an expert? I drive a cab.”

She smiled. “I’m trying to get to the Harley Hotel.”

“That’s close to Chinatown, right?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Come on, I’ll run you down there in my cab.”

He talked a little with her on the way to the hotel. She said she was visiting town with a couple girlfriends. When he pulled up to the hotel, she said: “I’m sorry the ride was so short.”

That was too much of a hint for him to pass up. He arranged to meet her the next day. He got up early in the morning and ran six miles. Then feeling fresh and ready, he went down to meet her. They took the bus out to the ocean and walked from the beach through Golden Gate park to the tea garden. By then it was about four in the afternoon. They went over to a grocery store near the park and bought some wine, fruit, and cheese. He said he knew a good place to sit and have a picnic. The place he chose was a meadow near the polo fields. There was no one else around. As soon as they finished eating, he started coming on. At first she went along with but after a half hour or so of kissing, she got up.

“What’s the matter?” he said.

“Oh. nothing. I’m just chilly.”

They walked around for a while. She seemed more relaxed. He threw his arm over her shoulder and she put hers around his waist. He asked her if she wanted to smoke a joint and she said yes. After they were stoned, he came on a second time. Again, she jumped up after rolling around for a little while.

“What’s the matter?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s not that I don’t like you. You’re a good-looking guy. But you’re so romantic. I’m just not used to it, I guess.”

They went back downtown on the bus. He asked her to come up to his place but she said no. The next day he called to ask her out again. She said she wasn’t sure if she wanted to, but she finally agreed to stop up after shopping. He smoked a joint before she came up. She said she could only stay for a little while. He was sitting on the couch and she was on a chair right in front of him. When they were talking, he started running his hand up and down her leg. She acted like she didn’t notice it, but she didn’t make any effort to

stop him. After a while, he took her hand and pulled on it. She let herself be pulled on the couch. He began to undress: her.

“I don’t make love a lot,” she said.

“Well, that’s okay. Then. you’ll like it all the more,” he murmured.

He: was anxious to get the penetration over with because he was afraid that something would go wrong, He was hard when he started to mount her but as he got near her, he went limp. He tried to take his half-limp penis and push it inside her with his hand,, because he knew that once he got inside he’d get hard again. But it was hopeless. He rolled to the side.

She had enough sexual experience to know what had happened. Under other circumstances she might have been more understanding, but the disparity between his big come-on and little follow-up was too much to be patient with. She looked at him contemptuously and said: “What a drag for both of us.”

He tried to shake it off as unimportant, but the combination of Katherine Hewitt’s criticism and this other woman’s scorn had made a big dent in his self-confidence. He didn’t want to start up a full-scale relationship again, and anyway he didn’t know anybody he could have started one with even if he’d wanted to. And he was afraid to try any more flings because he was too worried about being impotent. He told himself, “Well, that was just an isolated case. It doesn’t mean I’m totally dysfunctional.” He wanted to talk it over with someone but the logical person was David Brod and Brod wasn’t around. The more he continued without talking to anyone and without having a sexual success to reassure himself of his virility, the more depressed he felt. He had a whole different feeling inside his body. He felt a terrible emptiness in his loins and in general started thinking of himself as incompetent and unattractive. His sexual identity had been the one thing that he’d had to fall back on. With that gone, he felt like a walking shadow, an incomplete man.

After a couple weeks more had gone by, he went over to

Wyley's Pub one night to see Katherine Hewitt. It was partly because he missed her and wanted to see her again, partly because of his loneliness, and partly because he was hoping that he'd wind up in bed with her. He knew that even if all the fine points of the encounter went wrong, he'd at least be able to reassure to have intercourse on the same level as before.

When he came in the bar, he noticed right that she saw him, but she didn't come towards him and wave at him. He took a seat at the counter. It was a quiet night in the bar. The juke box was playing but there weren't many people around.

Steward noticed that the old man was back but that a drastic change had come over him. He had a three-day beard and splotches on his face.

Finally, Katherine Hewitt came over, but she wasn't friendly at all. She stared at him and said, "Hello, Tom. What do you want?"

"I just came by to say hello."

"I thought we agreed not to see one another."

"Yea,. we, did."

"So why are you here?"

"I'm just lonely, Katherine."

She sighed. She brought him a beer and came to sit on the stool next to him, her face still severe. "Tom, listen carefully to what I have to say. I'm sorry you're lonely. I still care about you in a way. But we can't start in again."

"I'm not starting in."

"The very fact that you're here is a start."

"Okay, okay. So what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to leave."

"God, Katherine, you're the only..."

"I am not your woman."

"I never said you were. I thought you were my friend."

"I am not your friend. Not in an active way. Now please just go."

He gradually came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to go deeper into himself, into his own private thoughts and artistic studies, and along with this, into his night-time existence as a cabdriver. He felt like there was '

something in the night-time world he was supposed to confront and learn from. He couldn't put his finger on what it was, but there was some kind of misery there. Even when everything else was going wrong, he could get a sense of peace from driving around by himself late at night. It was as though the city was his own city then, as though he had a personal relationship with it. The way this made him feel was akin to a feeling that he had gotten at times in the wilderness or camping by himself on the side of the road. It wasn't a happy feeling; it was sad. He felt cut off from everyone but there was a consolation in being alone.

He started staying out later and more-often than he had done in the past. At the company he worked for, there were only two shifts, day and night. The night shift began at five in the afternoon and went to five in the morning. You paid a set fee,—at this time it was twenty-five dollars,—regardless of how many hours you worked. Most of the drivers went in at about 2:30, which was right after bar-closing. This is what Steward had usually done. But he started staying out for an hour or two more. By the time he pulled up to the garage* it was four or five o'clock. It was getting dark when he started his shift and still dark when he walked home. He liked it that way. The city seemed more magical at night. Soon he started doing his art work at night also. When the sun appeared above the buildings across from his bay window, he pulled down the shades and went to bed.

He also started going to the smoke-outs and getting stoned more often, in fact every night he worked. One advantage of associating with the drivers who attended the smoke-outs was that the grass was really choice. He felt a little sheepish at first about showing up so often because much as he liked, to get stoned he seldom had his own grass and the grass he occasionally had wasn't very good. But the way he got around it was by bringing a six-pack of beer. Most of the other drivers got more sociable and relaxed when they were stoned, but Steward became more introspective and ponderous. He didn't interact much with the other drivers despite being crammed with six or seven of them into one cab. Sometimes he would pull out his pocket

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journal and look at it or jot something down. The other drivers regarded him as an okay person but as a little bit strange and incomprehensible. After getting stoned, he would walk home alone, looking off at the city and listening, to the foghorns and sirens that rose and faded in the air, or sometimes he would get back in his cab and go out again to drive around.

Toward the end of December, he decided to get his, own supply of good grass. He talked to one of the other drivers about it and went with him to make a purchase. The person who sold it, a latter-day hippie, lived in a large Victorian house on Castro Street a couple blocks from Market Street at the bottom of the hill that divided Castro Village from Noe Valley. The house had huge bay windows and curlicued eaves. On his way upstairs to the attic room, where the purchases were made, Steward noticed that there were pictures of swami's and guru's on the walls. Several rooms had expensive stereos. Young women with long hair lounged on pillowed chairs looking at record albums. When he and his friend arrived upstairs, the latter-day hippie clasped his left hand in a hip handshake, and introduced him: to four other people who were going: to make purchases. A little ritual followed. There was a large bowl of grass in the middle of the room on a coffee-table. Several joints were passed around.

Everything was done with phony camaradery, Steward thought. He tried to be courteous but wound up showing his contempt for the whole proceeding by talking about conventional politics, which he knew was regarded as square.

By the time he left with his plastic bag of grass, he was thoroughly stoned.. He had ridden his ten-speed bike over to meet his friend. After saying goodbye to him, he got on his bike and headed home. The sky was overcast; a light rain had begun to fall. Everything seemed strangely heavy, as though floating in the same viscous sea that before this he had only imagined to exist in the night. As soon as he got home, he rolled another joint, and stood in his living room by the bay window smoking it.

What he liked about, getting stoned was that. it made him feel as though he was seeing things for the first time, as though he had come to earth from some other planet. That people lived in houses, that they walked. down the street wearing shoes, drove around in metal boxes,— all this seemed strange to him. He would look at a tree. It was like he had never-seen a tree before, never noticed that it waved its branches back and forth like one of those plants at the bottom of the ocean that sweep the water for nutrients. He would walk into his apartment. It was as though he had never been there- before, had never noticed that everything there, the way it was arranged, looked, smelled all told of his existence. He would drive his cab. It seemed like a marvelous thing to have such command over a machine and over traffic conditions, to be able to charge down the street, weaving in and out of traffic, hitting the stop- lights with such precision that it was like they were obeying. his. command. He looked at the city at night. What it was at night was a. configuration of lights that continually changed, changed because moving toward them-in his cab he would change his position with respect to them, and changed because they themselves were constantly—the stop lights went through their cycles, the red lights blinked on fire trucks neon lights flashed off and on. All it took was for one light to change and then the whole constellation of lights would assume a different tone. And then, like a counter-point to this configuration of lights, were the sounds, such as the whining of motors, honking of horns, wailing of sirens, that wove their way in and out of the flashing lights. The sounds, too, had colors, he thought; the sirens were orange and honking was red. But the night itself was blue, and this blueness covered and flowed through the lights and sounds in the sane way that the water at the bottom of the ocean flowed in and out of the creatures who lived there.

Another thing he liked about getting stoned was that it made everything seem more. significant. He started to think that reality,—that is, what he had always regarded as reality,—was just the surface of a deeper reality, like the shadows in Plato 's allegory of the cave. He started thinking

that the events that took place in his life, far from being happenstance, were meant to happen when they did and meant to be interpreted as signs suggesting the nature of this deeper reality. They were all part of a riddle, a very complicated, riddle that was continually being presented on one plane to hint at this other plane, which wasn't to say that, the events that took place on the first plane weren't subject to. natural laws, it was just to say that they had another dimension and performed two functions at once, being and telling.

He was always looking looking for signs. He got to a point where he couldn't regard any event as accidental or meaningless. For instance, if a man came up to the window of his cab, as frequently happened, and mumbled something to him, he listened. If what was said was irrational or: cryptic, he was all the more apt to take it seriously. If someone gestured to him,—such as, for example, the old... woman who stopped in front of his, cab one night, signalled- the number five, and pointed to the gutter,—he would keep thinking about it all night. He would ask himself, “Now what did that mean?” Sometimes he would take note of it in his pocket journal: “A crazy lady made the number five at me and pointed to the gutter.” The fact that he was away up at night, and that, driving around in his cab, he saw and talked to so many bizarre people, just contributed all the more to. his notion that this riddle was being asked and asked in a very personal way.

At the heart of this riddle, and at the heart, too, of his experience with the city-night, and also, of his artistic studies, was the enigma of femininity. Even though, due to. his fear of impotence, he felt more cut off from the feminine world than ever before, or perhaps because he felt so cut off from it, he wanted to connect with it and understand it. Sex, which had once- seemed so simple and one-dimensional to him, now seemed complex and multi-dimensiona like an intricate mandala. That the world, and mast probably the entire universe, stretching as it did for billions of light years as they appeared to human perception, were divided- into masculine and feminine, too,—as he understood,—that also

was a mystery to him. Ever since his college days, he had felt like he was searching for something. At first, in the years right after college, his: searching had been political and social. He had read all kinds of books about government and the nature of society. After that, his searching had become more active and physical; he had searched by moving around, going to different places, doing different things. Then his searching had focused on art and the spiritual meaning of art. Now all his art centered on an image of the swollen lips of the womb. The feminine wasn't only something he wanted to connect with, it was also something he wanted to be. He, sensed that he needed to be more, feminine in order to develop as an artist.

To be feminine, as he understood it, was to be receptive. The essential feminine act was receptivity. To be an artist, as he understood it, required first and foremost that one break down his own ego so as to become a vessel for the supra-personal ideas that informed the artist's material and made it into art. It required being a woman to these ideas in much the same way that achieving a mystical union with God required being a woman to Him. It required being open. He read in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: "O son of noble family, listen. At this moment your state of mind is by nature pure emptiness. It does not possess any nature whatever, neither substance nor quality such as color. It is pure emptiness. This is the female Buddha, Sarantabhadri. But this state of mind is not just blank emptiness. It is unobstructed sparkling, pure and vibrant. This mind is the male Buddha, Samantabhadra." Steward wanted to be open in this way, and that was one reason why the city night was so fascinating to him. He sensed that the night itself, the pervasive blueness of the night, was by nature empty nothingness. When it flowed through him, as it flowed through the lights and sounds of the night, then he felt as though he shared in and became part of this nothingness.

What he really wanted to do was to bury himself in the night like a kernel of wheat in the ground. Nothing more concerned him than his lack of fruition and he thought that maybe what the Bible said was true, that the kernel had to

die in order to live. Nothing was more important to him than to prove his competence.

In order to concentrate on his art, Steward kept to himself more and more. He didn't go his drawing sessions because, he thought that going there, back and forth on the bus, was just a waste of time. He secluded himself in his apartment, doing self-portraits, drawing of hands, and drawings of the chairs and plants in his living room. He started doing a lot of conceptual drawings, too, a lot more than he had done before. They had names like "North Dakota Winter" and "A Vague Apprehension." He did them all in pencil, as usual too impatient to do shading. Their main technical characteristic was their excessive linearity. With David Brod gone, Steward had no close friends. About the only human contact he had was the minimal amount he got at the smoke-outs and from talking to passengers in his cab. But even there very little interaction ever took place because he seldom talked.

December passed. January and February came in. The heavy rains continued. Business was slow. Steward drove up and down the hill's with the windshield wipers creaking, looking off toward the rain-washed streets that, glowed with the light of unwatched stop lights, then walked home alone down a deserted thoroughfare through a corridor of rain and blinking yellow lights. A couple times he went over to North Beach to the Paradise Cafe, but the bar was deserted, just empty chairs and unused tables. The waitress sat at the far end of the counter looking blankly toward the street.

At first he just got stoned at the smoke-outs and maybe a couple times a week. Then he, came to the: conclusion that he could concentrate better on his art when he was stoned. He started smoking every night and bringing a couple joints with him to work to smoke while he was driving. He liked to drive when he was stoned. He felt like his driving-reflexes were better when he was in that condition. He even started getting stoned before he went running.

Gradually, things got worse and worse. Driving was terribly tiring because he had the cabbie endurance concept that a driver should never stop moving during his entire shift.

On his driving nights, he came home bone-tired from his entire night of moving the steering wheel. It got to be that he didn't really like getting stoned any more, and he developed all kinds of conflicts because he was afraid it was ruining his health. He had always been proud of his health and vigilant about staying in good shape. It bothered him a lot that he was inhaling so much smoke. He started developing all kinds of weird body feelings. When he was driving cab, his whole body ached. He often felt the upper middle part of his chest because he was starting to think something was wrong there in his bronchial tubes. When he walked down the street, the sidewalk seemed too hard beneath his feet. His body jarred with every step. He felt stiff and old and strangely contorted, as though his body was twisted to one side. He began to talk to himself, was discourteous with everyone, and beside himself with loneliness.

He had always noticed there a lot of strange characters who hung out at night, destitute or deformed people who for some reason or another were ashamed to come out during the day. Now he started noticing a lot more of them. There was a skinny woman, for instance, who always wore a green coat and pink and blue kerchief. She had a regular route of trash cans and phone booths that she did every night, scrounging for scraps and change. And there was a guy that he always saw walking up Nob Hill from the Tenderloin. Half of this guy's face was paralyzed. He never once saw him talking to another human being. There were all kinds of characters like this, distorted, discarded people that kept to themselves.

He lay alone at night, listening to the fog horns from the bay which sounded again and again as though from some faraway kingdom. Now and then, as if in circles of overlapping sound, the wails of fire engines rose up in the air from the various sectors of the city. He went on walks by himself late at night. The stop lights clicked unheard on silent streets. Sometimes he walked up to the top of Nob Hill, where there was a Gothic cathedral, and stood on the plaza in front of the church looking off towards the hotels and apartment buildings that surrounded the little park in front of the church.

He began to be obsessed with his lack of arrival at anything substantial and with his delusions of sexual incompetence. As more than ever before, it seemed to him that his life had come to nothing, that there had been no fruition. The excitement of the previous summer, his sense of living a romantic life, his notions about the mystery of the night, all seemed as though they had been an illusions and the women he had loved—all the pretty faces that blended into one,—they seemed like an illusion, too, like so many islands of companionship and sunlight in the midst of his essential loneliness and darkness. He looked back over his past life, and realized that his ex-wife had been the only woman he had really loved, really cared for, and, that ever since his disappointment with her, he had been trying to prove to himself that he could love women sexually with no expenditure of heart.

Toward the end of February, he was passing through the wine district south of Market when a man in a stocking cap hailed him from in front of a seedy hotel. Steward gave him a once-over and decided he'd probably be okay. It was a slow night. Again it was raining. At least, it was, a fare.

When Steward pulled up to the curb, he saw that there was a golden retriever in the doorway behind the man. The dog was soaking wet. The man came running over to the cab and pulled open the door. He got in. The dog piled in, too. He sat on the seat next to the passenger.

Steward looked around at him. "So where we going?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, chief."

"You want a cab or not?"

"Twenty-second and Harrison."

No sooner had he flipped the flag when the man in the cab started laughing. "Don't mind me, man. I'm in a state of delirium. You know what I mean?"

The whole car stunk from the dog. Steward didn't answer.

"You know what I mean?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"I'm wired to the whole cosmos, man. I'm in a state of total delirium. Like I got antennas, man... Everywhere."

“Good for you.”

The man didn't say anything for a while. Every now and then, Steward checked him out in the rear-view mirror. The man had a wide, plain-featured face and half-closed eyes. The dog was panting.

Pretty soon, the smell of marijuana came from the back seat. Steward looked in the rear-view mirror and saw that the man in the stocking cap had lit up a joint.

“Hey, I see you looking, man. I see you. You can't fool me. I bet you want some, don't you, man? Look at him! Look at him, Traveler. He wants to get delirious, too.”

The truth was that Steward had just run out of grass. He didn't mind the thought of getting stoned. When the man handed it to him, he took it, puffed on it, and handed it back.

“Hey, keep it, man. Puff on it a few times. I'm telling you, I'm already there. I'm already there, man. Seventh heaven. You get the picture? Total nirvana.”

Several minutes after dropping the guy off at 22nd and Harrison, Steward realized he was tremendously, frightfully stoned. “What is this shit anyhow?” he said. He didn't feel comfortable at all. He drove a few blocks and pulled the cab up to a curb. He trotted around the block, slapping his face. “I don't like this.. I don't like this shit at all.”

He started out again. He had only made enough to pay for his cab and gas. He needed to make some money. But he just couldn't carry on with it. He felt too confused. He headed toward home.

“No, I can't go home. I can't go home. That would be too much of a bummer. I don't want to go home.”

Steward headed up to Nob Hill, and parked the car across from the Gothic cathedral. There was no one around. He got out of the cab, locked all the doors, checking them several times though there was nothing in the cab worth locking in.

Steward went across the street to the park. There was a waist-high wall around the outside of it. What the park consisted of was a small plot of grass, a fountain, and a tiny children's playground. He walked up the steps to the park feeling weird and uncomfortable. There were some trees

around the side of the park. The cathedral was dark except for the rose window above the central front door.

Steward kept slapping his, face and pacing around. At first, he thought there was noone in the park. He was standing by a sculptured fountain with four dancing figures holding up a container of water. The only sound was from the dripping water and the wind. But then he heard breathing. Looking over toward one of the benches that were grouped around the fountain, he saw someone sleeping on the bench.

Steward turned- to go. On his way out, he saw that it was the person on the bench was the old man from Wyley's Pub. His clothes were dirty, he was more roughly unshaven, and the blotches on his face had grown larger. It sent a chill through Steward to look at them. He left without waking the old man.

Steward drove down the hill toward his own apartment, parked his cab at a fire hydrant, and went in. He still hated the feeling of being stoned. He hated to go back into his grim apartment. He was trying to reinember the half-life of grass. As he recalled, it was a half hour. That meant if he could last for thirty minutes more, it would be half as intense.

The first thing he did was go in the bathroom to take a shower. His clothes had suddenly become unbearable to him. He took off all his clothes and left them in a pile on the floor. For a long time while taking a shower, he was lost in the feeling of the water on his face. Then he woke up from it. He stepped out of the shower stall, but then he realized he had not even washed. He got back in the stall and covered himself with soap. Then he rinsed and got out.

The feeling of being stoned was still unbearable to him.. He kept slapping his face. Everything terrified him. His body terrified him. The thought that he couldn't get out of it was worst. He was stuck in his body and it felt tight and strained, as though he'd been placed on the wrack. He looked in the mirror, staring at his face. Its clean-shaven boyishness amazed him. And yet, when examined the image in the mirror more closely, put his nose against the glass such that the mirror clouded with vapor, he saw that the image was

that of a mature man who was masquerading as a youth. He noticed how long his face was, like that of horse. He smiled. He looked like a horse that had bared its teeth in a neigh. He took a piss. His cock felt like a piece of sausage. It made him laugh. Ha-ha-ha.

Steward watched how the foreskin went back and forth over the top of the glans. He jacked off looking at pictures of naked women in one of the stack of the magazines hidden in the bathroom closet. Then he put on fresh underwear and went into the kitchen to look at his drawings. He paged through them. They were depressingly primitive, nothing but lines. He looked at his drawing, "The North Wind and the South." The north wind was angular lines; the south wind was wavy ones. What a stupid concept! He jerked into his clothes and bounded down the steps to his cab and stared around. There were no lines anywhere. He walked through the various spaces that he had perceived of as made up of lines,—no lines at all! His whole approach to art had been trivial. He unlocked his cab.

When Steward got in his cab, it suddenly occurred to him that he knew where everything was. He always put his things in exactly the same place,—his money under the seat in a brown paper bag; his waybill and pencil on the visor; his empty yogurt cartons and other trash to the left of the seat between the seat and the door, his pen in the ashtray, his notebook on the seat. He turned the key and started up the engine. A light rain was coming. down. He turned on the windshield wipers. They made an arc-shaped smear. on the window as they creaked back and forth.

Steward put the car in drive, looked up the hill to see if any cars were coming, and headed down toward the nearest busy street. Once he was on it, he just automatically began following his regular pattern. The streets were deserted. The windshield wipers were going back and forth. The cab, its four wheels reacting to the ups-and-downs and crevices in the street, was like an extension of his own body, a part of himself. He knew its every whim, knew when it felt good and when it got hurt on a bump.

Down Polk Street to Post, Post to Hyde, Hyde to 8th, 8th

to Howard, Howard to 12th, 12th to Folsom, Folsom to 7 th; —he had no particular destination. It was a cold, dreary night. He felt more alone than ever before.

A drunk man accosted him, opening the right front door. Steward barred him from entering by leaning over and extending his hand. “You got any money?”

“Do I got any money? I got the. Yankee dollar,” he said, holding up a small wad of crumpled one-dollar bills. “You can’t go wrong with that.”

Steward let him get in. The man had gray hair and a face burned or scarred on one side. He smelled of liquor and urine. His breath smelled like grabage.

“Where you going, dad?”

“De-tox on 8th Street.”

Steward flipped the meter, did a U-turn, and headed down 5th for Harrison. He was still stoned. The old man kept falling over toward him. Angrily, Steward kept pushing him to the other side of the seat.

At the Detox Center, the old man got out. The fare was \$2.90. He gave Steward three dollars then asked for two of them back. “You know how it is. It takes a hell of a lot of conniving to stay drunk.”

Steward eyed him a moment, then gave him back the three dollars. “Okay, take care of yourself.”

The old man’s voice faded behind him: ‘Thanks a million, Mac. God bless God bless.’

After this, Steward tried to make an effort at rehabilitation. He had a small desk calender that his father had given him. Every day he marked a check on it if he didn’t get stoned, and if he did, he made an “X”. After a couple weeks of this; he had so many “X’s” that he gave up on it.

He asked a driver what the pro’s and con’s were of grass. He said: ‘The are all in the bin, and the pro is, “An, sweet mystery of life.”’

He told another driver he was going to give it up. He said: “You got to learn to jockey your drugs, man. Like when I take a Qualude, I know right wher it’s going to hit. If I feel myself getting down, I snort a little power.”

Soon after this, he had a small accident. It was a rainy night and the streets were slippery. Coming over a small hill, he braked to avoid a double-parked car and slid into a parked car behind it. The owner of the car was a young Chinese man who barely spoke English. Stewart explained to him that he preferred to pay him outright "rather than to file a report and soil his record. He borrowed \$200 to pay for the damages, and then to pay off his debt, began working six nights a week.

His second night at this, he had another accident, this time with a Porsche that he hit when he was making an illegal left. This accident he had to report. The damages were \$550. His job was in jeopardy and with that his whole life.

He kept waiting for David to come back. But then David wrote saying that his father was getting worse and he doubted that he'd be back before the end of the summer.

16

A week or so after she broke up with Tom Steward, on a Sunday when her daughter was staying with her ex-husband, Katherine Hewitt took a bus by herself to Golden Gate Park. First she went to the museum, where there was a special exhibit of Korean art, then she took a walk through the arboretum. Finally, in late afternoon, she went to the tea garden. For a while she stood on a wooden bridge, watching gold fish swimming back and forth beneath some lily pods. Then she continued around through the garden to the tea hut and took a seat that looked out to a pond bordered by crimson-colored trees. She ordered tea and cookies and sat for a long time looking from the trees to the small notebook she had brought with her for the specific purpose of ordering her life and making resolutions for the future.

After finishing her tea, she broke open her fortune cookie. It contained an orange slip of paper that said, "Forget the entanglements of love, forget not to practice charity." She smiled, folded the paper, and put it in the pocket of her blouse. About charity she didn't know what to think one way or the other, but she was ready to forget the entanglements of love. That, in fact, had been the main resolution she'd

written in her notebook so far that day. To have the cookie say the same, thing seemed propitious.

There were several other resolutions, too, which she had made in the past few days and in the next several weeks she began to put them to effect. One was to get in shape. She had begun eating a vegetarian diet and watching her calorie intake, and had started a fitness class at the downtown YWCA. She had also decided to continue in linguistics and focus her energy on the Halifax Program she had heard about at the seminar. Since the program was in Asiatic studies, she had started looking around for some Asiatic language that she could study. She didn't want to take the class at the university itself because she was afraid that the course would be too demanding and bring down her average. Someone who stopped in the bar one-night told her the public schools had evening classes in Mandarin. She enrolled in a class which met just one evening a week on a night she didn't work at the bar. The fitness classes were twice a week. They were on days she had to be at Wyley's but took place earlier in the afternoon and at location only eight blocks from the bar; it was possible to attend them and then walk, to work without much inconvenience, except missing supper,— she thought that was for the best anyway since she got more exercise this way and ate less food. With these new activities plus her regular classes and her work at the bar, plus of course her precious time with her daughter, she was totally-hemmed in time-wise, which she liked because when she sat around she got depressed.

Katherine still thought about Steward from time to time. She felt sad that there was no way to stay in touch with him without mutual problems. On that night when he had stopped in at the bar, she had only maintained her severity with a great effort of will, and afterwards had needed a second effort to keep from calling him. Whenever she thought about him, she felt emotional about it because in a way it seemed as if he had been meant to be her friend. But her experience with him had confirmed her in the belief that life was a complicated thing far too delicate to face with emotions alone.

Her resolutions went well for a while. She managed to lose a few pounds and started feeling a little better about herself. She noticed that more men were giving her the eye when she walked down the street.—noticed it but didn't show any interest in return. She was satisfied with her classes, and doing fairly well at them, both her ones at school and her evening course in Mandarin.

Gradually, though, Katherine started to feel dissatisfied. Due to the demands on her time and her self-containment, she made no friends. Sometimes it seemed as if her life was nothing but work. She began to get nostalgic about the nicer moments she had shared with Tom Steward, and to think that the kind of magic she had felt with him that day at the ocean was something that sooner or later she would have to get back in her life. She thought of going to various places where she could meet some new men, but she put it off from one week to the next, telling herself that she didn't have the time for it. She was afraid that if she got emotionally involved with anyone, her whole world would fall apart—just when she needed to keep it together. But still she felt lonely.

Her one safeguard still against loneliness was Scott Paulsen. Even though she only really talked to him about once a week, it was comfort to know he was there if she needed him. He could always be relied upon for warm-heartedness and sympathy. She had come to regard him as almost a member of the family. One thing she had failed to consider, however, was how he himself felt about being regarded this way. Then one afternoon in January, Scott informed her he had made up his mind that he had to look for another living arrangement.

“I know it must make you feel deserted, Katherine, because we've been such dear friends, and I've come to care about you and Stephanie very much. But you have to try to understand my own situation,—what I mean is my emotional situation. I can't stay on forever. I can't spend my life keeping house. And Stephanie is getting older. There's really no need for me to be here with her when you're away. She's old enough now to take care of herself. So, you see, I'm not offering anything anymore that's really needed.”

“But, you are, Scott!” Katherine objected with alarm. “You are! Your presence...”

“Yes, I know, my presence. But I know you see that I need to do more than presence. I care very much about Stephanie. But I’m not her father. Eventually, I’ll have to leave so that I can proceed with my own life. And whenever I go it’s going to be difficult for all three of us.”

“I know what you’re saying, Scott. But maybe after another year or so, when I’m more established and Stephanie’s a little older, it would be easier than now. I don’t know. I just hate to see things come to an end, I guess.”

“I know you do, sweetheart. And -I know you’re on the rebound from Tom. But from my perspective, you see, to be truthful with you... well, lately, it just weighs on me a lot. On the one hand, I’m apprehensive about the eventual break, and on the other hand, I want to have the freedom to move into some other situation romantically in my own gay world beyond the gay baths.

“I know what you’re saying, Scott. You need love, too.”

“Yea, and someone I’ve been involved with --”

“Vince?”

“Yes, the one I told you about. I do care about him very much, and I want to have the option to move in with him. But there are so many factors. I feel generally stymied. I’d like to try a regular job for a while. I miss doing that. I just feel like this time is as good as any. You know what I’m saying, Katherine? I just feel like I need to act.”

“Sure, I understand, Scott. When were you thinking about?”

“It doesn’t have to be cut and dry. Maybe in a couple weeks.”

Paulsen moved out in the middle of the month. Then a week or so later, John Hewitt, Stephanie’s father, moved with his girlfriend and some other people to a farm about 60 miles north of the city. He worked out a deal with Katherine for Stephanie to come and visit for several days at a time not on such a regular schedule as in the past but twice a month depending on school and holidays.

During these short periods, usually on the weekends, when Stephanie went to visit her father, Katherine was for the first time in a long time entirely alone. Not having anyone at all around. She found herself sitting with Stephanie more, trying to use her like a friend. But Stephanie, pleasant and attentive, as she was at times, was getting older and had more of a desire to be away from home with her friends.

Katherine started to think that she just had to have some kind of real, intimate contact with other human beings. She began to do things that she had never done before, such as trying to initiate conversations with people in her classes, for example. It was, extremely difficult for her to do because she was so used to holding back. She could only do it by resolving on it ahead of time. She did have some conversations with class-mates, but to move from there to a real friendship was difficult. because most of them were sev much younger than she. And she tried talking to people in her fitness class but everyone was in a rush to get somewhere or another. Wyley's Pub was another remote possibility. After all, it was a gathering place for-people But the, situation was complicated by the fact that she was a female bartender and most of the customers were men. Most of them she had talked to many times and her interaction with them had already reached a point that was comfortable for both parties. When she exceeded this point it was looked upon as either a come-on or rather strange, and, anyway there wasn't anyone in the bar that she really wanted to be close to. Within a couple week, she had exhausted all the possibilities. for friendships in her immediate situation, and still feeling desperate, had begun to look around for others.

One night, while walking from the YWCA to Wyley's, Katherine noticed a place called "The Fellowship Coffee House." Outside the door was a bulletin board with a schedule of. activities. On Mondays, they had "Job Seekers. Night," on Tuesdays, they had "Ideas Night," and so on. She noticed that on the following Wednesday (Wednesday was "Singles Night") there was a discussion on "Relationships. We Will Explore the Possibilities of Human Togetherness."

Thinking that it was better to do something than to just allow herself to waste away in loneliness, but feeling apprehensive about what was in store for her there, she went to the discussion. It turned out to be not a discussion at all but rather a kind of encounter group. Everyone was seated on folding chairs in a circle facing one another. Almost all the participants were middle-aged and looked uncomfortable. There were only three men in attendance, two of them pudgy and passive-looking, and the third tall and skinny with a bald head and beak-like nose. The discussion leader was blonde-haired, plain-featured, and far too smiley. He began the discussion with a little introduction about how, in order to be friends with people you had to let your feelings be known. He said that he himself was often lonely, that at times, in fact, he cried at home in bed, and that he felt uncomfortable leading discussions, and only did it because he loved God and other human beings. Then he began making his way round the circle, calling upon each person to tell his or her name, and say why they had come and what they were searching for in life. Luckily, Katherine Hewitt was on the far side of the circle from the person he pointed at first. After a couple minutes, she got up to go to the bathroom, and noticing that the bathroom was close to the door, she went out.

A couple weeks later, Katherine made a big decision. She decided that she was deceiving herself by telling herself that she didn't want to meet men. What it came down to was that she didn't have any guts. She took a shower, fixed up her hair, put on her one good dress, the one that had a low-cut V-neckline, and called a cab, determined that she was going to force herself into some situation where she could meet men.

When the driver asked her where she wanted to go, she said: "I don't know. I want to go somewhere exciting. Do you have any ideas?"

He laughed. "What are you saying, lady? I can take you to the Vallejo airport. They can teach you to sky-dive. My kid is an instructor there.

"That does sound exciting, but I'm afraid I wouldn't

land.”

“Well, let’s see. Here on this earth for a lady I guess the most exciting thing is men.”

“Now, you’re getting- warm.”

“I can take you to what they call a ‘fern. bar’—you know, fern plants and wood paneling, and you sit around and look pretty. Which I’m sure you won’t have any trouble doing. Then there are all these handsome guys in three-piece suits who wander around and give you the once-over. Maybe they get an interest in you. They mosy over and buy you a drink. That kind of thing. I’m sure you get the picture.”

“Can you go by one of them?”

“Sure, lady, this is my job. I just drive around.”

The driver headed to a place called “Lord Goerge.” He pulled to the curb in front of it. She leaned over to look in. The bar was busy but not crowded. There were a few chairs by a coffee table that were empty. She hesitated.

“Hey, let me tell you, lady. A pretty woman like you, you’re just right for this kind of set-up. All you. gotta do-is. go in there and sit down. Chances are nine out of ten some guy is going to put the hustle on you. If you don’t like him, so what? Talk to him alittle and say you have to go to a meeting. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. You know what I mean? With them green eyes, let me tell you, you ain’t going to be sitting there alone.”

“You’re so kind. Thank you. Guess I will try it.” She thanked him, paid the fare, and gave him a generous tip.

She sat down on one of the chairs by the coffee table, ordered a daquiri, and sighed. She-had just taken her first sip. when a man sat down on the chair next to her. He was a well-dressed, good-looking man with rugged features, and thick black hair graying at the temples.

“Guess this place is as good as any,” he said. “I was getting tired standing up there by the bar.”

She sipped on her drink. “Yes, I imagine it would be tiring.”

He motioned for the waitress and ordered himself a Double-Martini. “Well, are you a local yokel or are you one of us despicable tourists?”

“Local yokel, I guess. I’ve lived here for quite a while.”

“Well, you don’t look old enough to have quite-a-whiled anything, but I know better than to ask a lady her age.”

“So you’re here on a vacation?” she said.

“Not exactl,, not exactly. I am here in the capacity of avocatus legis. I think those are the Latin words. What I’m trying to say is I practice law.”

“You’re a lawyer?”

“Yes. Of all the weird things, that’s what I do.”

“So where•are you from then?”

From Chicago. I have a little bachelor apartment back there. It’s not bad. I have a view of Lake Michigan. Not bad at all.”

“That sounds nice.’

“Yes, not bad at all.”

“And you come here on business then?”

“Yes, we’re involved in some litigation here.”

“Doing what?”

“Well, to simplify, making war.”

“Making war?”

“Corporate war, that is. You see, I represent this huge corporation. We’re suing another corporation. Each of these corporations is like a little army. We just keep locking horns. That’s what I’m doing—I’m here with my shield and my spear. We sue them, we grab a couple of baskets of bread or cheese or whatever. Then they come back and sue us, and grab it back. It goes on endlessly.”

She noticed he was a little bit drunk. “So what good is that?”

“No good at all. But it keeps us lawyers in money. If it weren’t for senseless interactions, we’d all be in the poor house.”

Katherine thought this lawyer was a little bit odd, but nonetheless quite handsome. He insisted on buying her another drink, and then, in varying degrees, began getting more intimate. After an hour had passed, he was asking her what she did in her spare time. Finally, he asked if she’d care to go out for dinner the next night. She hesitated and then said yes.

He picked her up in a rented car. He wasn't as drunk as he had been the night before. She noticed that he had a really charming side to him.

"I don't suppose you come here much," she said.

"Au contrar, all the time. As they say, ol' Frisco is the financial center of the West. If you want to do some grabbing, this is the place to try."

They ate dinner in a restaurant on Telegraph Hill that looked off toward the Golden Gate Bridge. It was very romantic. There were candles on the table and the food was superb. She found herself feeling more and more enchanted with him.

He was staying at the downtown Hilton. He asked her up to his room. She said yes. His room was on one of the top floors. His window looked out toward the city skyline. It was an impressive view, dazzling in fact. He called room service and ordered some brandy, soda, and ice, from which she helped herself, also. After a few drinks, he started coming on. She let him undress her. He led her into a small second room with a large double bed. Next to the bed was a portable AM-FM radio. He put on some soft music and began to kiss her. He made love in a methodical manner -- first the head, then the breasts, then down toward the pelvis. She felt a little weird. She couldn't get into it, really. After he had pumped away for a few minutes, she faked an orgasm.

"I guess you liked that okay, didn't you, girl?"

"Yea, it was nice. You're a good lover."

She skipped her classes the next day so that she could get together with him again. Again he came in a rented car. They drove up to the wine country and ate in a country-type inn. He had all kinds of credit cards and besides that had a wad of crisp twenty-dollar bills. Every place they went was expensive and he left huge tips.

She stayed with him the second night, too. Once again they made love and once again she faked an orgasm. Afterwards he told her that she was leaving for Chicago the next morning. She asked him if he would write and when would he be back.

"I guess I should tell you the situation with me is a little

more complicated than I let on,” he said.

“Complicated, how?” She was lying next to him in the dark.

“One thing I failed to tell you is I got a little lady back there.”

“You’re involved with someone else? Why didn’t you just tell me?”

“Well, you know how it goes. No harm in a little white lie now and then.

“To what extent are you involved with this little lady?”

“Oh, to quite an extent. It’s down on paper.”

“Are you trying to say you’re married?”

“I guess that’s one way to look at it all right.”

She sat up in bed. “I can’t believe you would do this to me. You lied. You just used me.”

“Hey, kid, you’re never going to win a case if you overstate it like that.”

“I just can’t believe it. I feel so upset.”

“Hey, you got a couple of good meals out of it, didn’t you? You had a good time. I haven’t exactly been stingy with you.”

“What are you saying: You think I’m some kind of a call girl?”

“I didn’t say that. I just said... Come on, you’re not a teenager. Life is not cut and dry. If you’re going to be so moralistic, you won’t get anywhere.”

“You know what you are?”

“No, tell me, honey. I’m sure it won’t be pleasant.”

“You’re an asshole and I thought you were all right. I thought you had some interest in me as a human being. But you didn’t. You just lied. And that’s why, because you’re a total asshole.”

She dressed and went out, feeling infuriated but realizing that there was no way to pay him back.

She reacted to this in an exaggerated manner. It wasn’t having had sex with him that bothered her, it was having been misled. She felt as though she’d been humiliated and robbed. It made her angry that she had faked an orgasm with him. She had did her little bit to bolster his ego and in return

had had her own self-esteem torn down.

Katherine took what had happened to represent her whole status in life. She felt like she needed to make some drastic changes. She wanted to break free of everything in her life that she associated with past mistakes. Again, she did a formal reevaluation. She decided that, no matter what else happened, she wanted to continue with her schooling. That left her places of work and residence as the only variables in her situation. Both of these she wanted to change. There had been a time when she had looked upon Wyley's Pub as a tolerable place to work. But more and more she hated to go there. It wasn't the bar itself that made her feel this way so much as the whole idea of working at night. Once she had thought that it was adventurous to work at night. Now it seemed like a bizarre, marginal thing to do, something that people wound up doing because they didn't have any other options. In any case, with Scott Paulsen gone, she didn't feel quite right about leaving her daughter home alone. So she started looking through the newspaper for other part-time job. Along with this she started looking for a new apartment. She went back and forth about these matters in her mind. She was afraid that she was acting rashly, that maybe it would be wiser to keep her same job and same apartment and find another house-keeper to replace Scott Paulsen. But eventually she decided that Paulsen had been right, that Stephanie was too old to need one anymore. The best thing to do would be to move to a smaller place and work days. Just making those changes would be a commitment to a better life.

The very next week,—it was now early March,—she saw in the want-ads that a nearby restaurant was hiring breakfast-shift help. She went to apply for a waitress job and got it. The same afternoon she called up the manager of Wyley's Pub. He said that he was sorry to see her go but he understood that she needed to make improvements in her life just like anyone else. She worked a final week at the bar and then started in at her new job. She never did follow through on her idea to move to a new apartment.

At first everything seemed better. It was nice to get up

early in the morning and walk to work when the sun was coming up. The restaurant she worked at was 'about a half mile away on the top of a hill near the main garage for the city bus system.

There was a place above the bus lot adjacent to the garage where she always stopped to look back toward the city. The whole downtown skyline could be seen from the pointed peak of the Trans-America pyramid on the left to the sleek twin towers of a hotel on the right. Early in the morning, the buildings looked like monuments. When the sun first hit them, they seemed to stretch to meet it. On a more elevated part of the hill across from the municipal garage was a huge apartment complex. The hillside beneath it was covered with nasturniums and poppies. The nasturniums had oval leaves like discs. They, too, seemed to turn to catch the sunlight. When it touched them they glowed. The orange and red poppies and tiny orange flowers on the nasturniums swayed back and forth in the breeze. Down in the bus lot, the drivers shouted to one another as they moved their buses out to the street. She felt as though she had at last broken free of her night-time existence and with that her loneliness.

After a few weeks at her new job, though, Katherine realized that her loneliness hadn't just been due to her nocturnal existence, that it was more pervasive than that, and would be more difficult to resolve. She had hoped to meet some new people at work but the job was a grind from the starting gun to the tape. There were fifteen tables and ten counter seats, and only two waitresses. The manager kept saying he was trying to find a third but no one ever showed up. The restaurant was right across from a large department store. All the employees came in for breakfast in the morning, and no sooner was breakfast over when coffee breaks began. During breakfast time she made decent tips, not because people were generous but just from pure volume. During break time she ran around like crazy with ' coffee and rolls and hardly made any tips at all. By the time she finished her shift she was exhausted. She went straight home or on certain days changed clothes and went right out

to her classes. Nothing had really changed. She was pretty much in the same predicament except that the walk to work was always pleasant. She still felt very lonely.

She told herself she should get out more and that she shouldn't let her bad experiences turn her off to the whole bar scene. But she just couldn't get herself to give it another try.

One day in late March after she had made especially good tips, Katherine Hewitt came home from work, made herself a vodka daquiri, and sat by herself in the kitchen trying to think of something to do. Stephanie had gone up to visit her father. She had already been gone for two days and wouldn't be back until the weekend. She had obtained special permission from school in order to help the people at the farm plant their garden. The apartment seemed dismal without her. On the table, Katherine had a notebook the same one in which a few months before she had written her resolutions in the tea garden. She opened the notebook and read over what she had written. The resolutions already seemed like ancient history. She had stopped taking her fitness class and had gained back every pound she had lost and she had found out life was pretty boring without the entanglements of love.

On the next page after the resolutions were several notices for a new housekeeper that she had never acted on. On the page after that were notices for a room-mate she had also never acted on going to the next page, she began writing down things she might possibly do. The most logical thing was "watch TV". She wrote it down, crossed it out, and wrote next to it the words "clean the apartment." The next most logical thing was the corner bar. She wrote it down, crossed it out, and wrote next to it, "What an incredible drag." Then, she wrote down the name of the singles bar where she had met the lawyer from Chicago. After crossing it out, she wrote, "Fake it, baby." She went on like this for about ten minutes, got up, made herself another daquiri, sat down again, tapped her pencil on the table, and finally decided she would dress up and treat herself the way that she wanted other people to treat her.

After Katherine was dressed, she called a cab, telling the driver the name of a restaurant in North Beach where she had always wanted to go. She went in, feeling proud of her independence. She ordered steak and lobster and a half-carafe of wine and sat by herself watching the other people in the room. The main course was preceded by oer d'ouerves, salad, and soup. She ordered a good brand of wine instead of ordering house wine. The steak and lobster were delicious. While eating the meal, she was in an excellent mood. She had never before gone to an expensive restaurant by herself, and just the thought that she had done it made her feel good, to say nothing of the wonderful food.

After finishing her meal, she walked down to:the corner, wondering what to do next. She walked down to City Lights bookstore and browsed through the books for a half hour, then she hailed a cab and asked to go to Wyley's Pub.

When she got to Wyley's, she found it just about deserted. The only people there were a couple guys watching TV in the back. The manager was tending the bar.

"Hey, Kathy. How you doing? You look nice. You been out on the town?"

"Yea, kind of, Larry. I was over to Tony's in North Beach."

Hey, Tony's. That's a classy joint. You find yourself a sugar daddy or something?"

"Just went with a couple friends."

"How's your new job?"

"It's okay. They keep me running."

"You been making good tips?"

"Pretty good. They're all working people. You know how working people are. A little bit more generous than people with a wad."

"Hey, you're telling me? Don't I know it? I used to tend bar downtown."

She looked around at the familiar juke box and tables. "Larry, I hope you don't mind if I get a little hang on. I'm just in a mood. I... "

"Hey, Katherine, don't need to apologize to me. You .do whatever you want. Just so you walk out of here. Hey, this

place is like your home.”

He brought here a stiff double manhattan and then went over to watch TV.,She finished it, had a couple more, and went out. ‘Wow Where can I go? I don’t want to go home. Who could I call?’”

The person who immediately came to mind was Tom Steward. She shook her head no, but on the next corner she went into a phone booth and called him.

“Thomas, is this you?”

“Katherine?”

“None but.”

“What a nice surprise! I’ve wondered what happened to you. I passed by the bar one night. and you weren’t there.”

“Yea, I quit. I’m working at the Rusty Nickel.”

“Hey, all right.”

“Yea, I work the breakfast shift.”

“Sunshine.”

“Yea.”

“So what are you doing?” she said.

“You mean in general?”

“No, right now.”

“Just sitting here. Not working tonight. Just smoked a joint. Where are you?”

“Well, would you believe it, I am about 200 feet away on the corner of California by the bar. I’ve been hitting it a little bit.”

“That’s okay, Kath. You deserve a little transgression now and then.”

“I guess it was stupid of me to call. It’s been a couple months, and last time I saw you I was so cold.” Her voice on the phone sounded quiet and sad.

“Yea, you really were.”

“It wasn’t easy for me, Tom. I was trying to do what was best.”

“Yea, I can understand that, Kath, and I know you are always trying hard.”

Thomas,” she said. Her voice became more serious. “The reason I called you, to be frank, is because I’m terribly lonely. Stephanie is spending the week up at Russian River

with her dad. I try to tell myself that I'm a mother and she's my daughter, but the truth is that I depend on her terribly for companionship. And so tonight..."

"You don't have to explain it to me, Katherine. Would you like to go somewhere and have breakfast? It's oe me."

"No... I was wondering.. What I would really like to do is to come up there, and stay with you for one night... I'm at my wit's end. I just can't bear to go home. I was thinking of getting a room somewhere, but I don'the money."

"I'd love to have-you, Katherine. I can't imagine anything nicer. You've never even been here, have you?"

"No, it would be interesting to see your place. Do you really think it would be all right?"

"Yes, I think it would be all right"

"Is that an official invitation?"

"Yes, please accept my official invitation."

"Okay, then, I will.... But, Tom..."

"Yes."

"I just want to make it clear that this doesn't mean that we're starting up our relationship again."

"Katherine, you're welcome as a friend. You don't have to provide me any services. You can camp on the couch. Please don't feel embarassed because you need a friend. I know how that is, believe me."

"Okay, Tom. You're being so nice to me. I'll be right up. I'm a little drunk."

"I like you when you're drunk, actually. Do you want me to come and meet you?"

"No, I'll see you in a little while."

After Katherine hung up, Steward paced around the room, smoking the rest of the joint that he had started before she called. He was worried that she would change her mind and wouldn't come. The buzzer rang. He pressed the button that released the front door, then stood in the doorway to the hall, watching the steps. After a few moments, she appeared on the last flight of stairs. As she walked up, she held up the side of her skirt. When she saw him, she smiled. He waited for her to reach the door and kissed her on the brow. She looked very beautiful but her eyes were bloodshot. After he

closed the door, she pressed against him.

He hugged her. "Boy, you're on a real downer, aren't you?"

"Yea, I guess so. I just want to be held."

After they had hugged for a long time, she said: "You got any grass?"

"Yes I do."

"I just want to blow my mind."

"Okay, Kath. I got one already rolled."

He went out to the kitchen to get it. She sat on the couch in the room that doubled as his bedroom and living room, looked around at the sparse furniture and the hanging plants in the bay windows. The room was a mess. She had never been to his apartment before.

He came in and sat next to her. He lit up the joint. She took it from him and took a deep puff. It was powerful stuff. After a few minutes, she felt blasted. Unfortunately, however, the grass just made the whole situation seem more unpleasant, but she didn't want to act ungrateful for his kindness. She had a terrible headache.

"This is, all so stupid, Tom," she said. "I don't mean to lay it on you. I don't understand what's happening to me. I don't understand what's going on. She began to shiver. "And now I got the damn shivers," she said.

He got a blanket and put it over her shoulders. "Hey, Katherine, you're really in a bad way, aren't you? Here* keep yourself warm. I'll make you some tea."

He brought in some tea and sat down next to her again. Suddenly, she began crying. He began dobbing away her tears. "Poor Katherine. Somebody do you in?"

He drew, in a deep breath and stopped crying. She laughed. "I'm okay, Tom. I don't know what's wrong with me, okay?" This is all so stupid, isn't it?"

"It's not stupid. You're just in a down mood. I'm going to make you some soup. Will you eat it?"

"Okay."

He went out in the kitchen, opened a can of soup, and put it on the stove. He looked in at her. She was wrapped in the blanket, still dobbing her tears.

He put the soup in a bowl and brought it into her. She took it and began eating it slowly. She mumbled, "I'm so dumb." She started to calm down.

"How much did you drink?" he said.

"A lot."

When she was done eating, he asked her if she wanted to lay down. She lay down on the couch. He covered her with the blanket. "Katherine, you're a case tonight."

"Yes, I know I am and I don't care."

"Sure, you care. That's your main problem. You care too much."

"No, I don't care. I don't give a shit about anyone."

"Yes, you do. You care about Stephanie."

"So what? That's just instinct."

"Yea, I guess it is. You seem to be in one of your extremist moods."

"Maybe I am."

"Yes, you are, Katherine. Just go to sleep."

She closed her eyes. He pulled down the stowaway bed and started to lay down.

"Thomas?"

"What?"

"I don't want to sleep alone."

"In that case, I'm afraid I'm the only thing available."

She got up and came over to the bed. She still had her coat and dress on. He undressed her. "Would you like to wear one of my T-shirts?"

"Yes."

He got up and opened his closet door. On the floor of the closet was a cardboard box full of underwear. He brought the T-shirt to her. She put it on.

"Here, Kath, get in,"

She got in the bed. He covered her shoulders with the blanket. He got in beside her. She snuggled up next to him and began rocking her pelvis against his thigh. He laughed.

"Katherine?"

"What?"

"I hate to put a damper on this situation but I was bound and determined to transcend my sexuality."

“Tom, you know what’s wrong with you?”

He sighed. “No, what?”

“You think too much.”

He started out making love very slowly and affectionately, but once again he couldn’t understand her responses. She was totally passive as though not caring one way or another what happened. He grew more and more irritated with her and more and more angry. Finally, he gave up on trying to figure out what she wanted. He rammed himself into her and fucked her as he had never fucked her before, so that in the frenzy of his movement he brought out of himself, once and for all, all his hatred of her and of how she had contained and controlled him, and at the same time all his love and passion for her, and all his desperate searching for the feminine world.

At the very last moment, he thought that maybe she was approaching an orgasm. He slowed down his thrusting so as to time it with her sighing, but after listening carefully to her, he realized that she was sighing from discomfort. Without waiting for her to give the go ahead, he felt himself approaching an orgasm, and then settled on top of her, allowing the sperm to shoot out the blanket.

“Oh, well,” he said.

At first she didn’t respond and then she said, “Oh well, what?”

“I guess we never will hit it off.”

“I guess not.”

After first being glad to see him, Katherine had found all the doings and incommunication more and more oppressive. She had felt excited at first and had felt herself approaching a climax, but she had lost it when Steward slowed down. Now she didn’t feel like being in bed with him. She didn’t like being anywhere, she thought to herself. Despite Steward’s attempts at kindness, she felt angry at him, angry at herself, and angry at her whole life. The shades on the windows facing the street were only partly closed. There was some light coming in from the arc light in front of the building. He rolled over towards her and looked at her face. She looked at him for a moment and looked away.

She began, fumbling around for her purse. “Got to get me a damn cigarette.”

She lit up her cigarette. He kept looking at her. Finally she said: “Why do you keep staring at me?”

“I don’t know. I was just trying to figure out where you’re at.”

“Well, stop trying. It makes me nervous.”

“Are you angry?”

“Yea, I’m angry.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I just like to feel angry.”

“Was that okay for you?”

“Was what okay?”

“Sex.”

“Sure, I loved it. Thanks.”

“I. don’t understand why you do this, Katherine. I don’t understand why you set up this situation. Who was the one that initiated sex? It wasn’t me. It was you. You were the one who was coming on, and then when it’s over with, you act like it was a drag. I’m sick of this, Kath. I’m really sick of this little routine. Why did you come up here?”

“I came up here because I was lonely. You were extremely considerate and nice to me. For that I am sincerely grateful. I initiated sex because I had this weird idea that for once, just for once, there was a remote possibility that I would enjoy it. Instead of trying to figure out what I want, you whale away like a madman. You might as well be in the other room.”

“The other room! Look who’s talking about the other room. You’re the one who’s too proud to give any messages or even any hints. You’re the one who uses the bedroom as a battleground. You prevent me from showing passion, Kath. It makes you mad when I treat you like a woman. And when I’m don’t show passion, you despise me for being passive and cautious. So tell me this, what could be more devious than to start out making love, only you’re not making love, you’re making war?”

“Now who’s talking in: extremes?” she cried. “You’re so insecure! Tell me about, your feelings, Tom! Your real

feelings! Ha!”

“You want to make me into an asexual being. Well...”

“So why do you persist in seeing it as your problem instead of mine? Do you know why? Because you’re a glutton for punishment. So suck it up! Suck it up! Make yourself feel good. Suck up all the punishment you can get. Ha! You’re so insecure!”

He laughed scornfully. He was now sitting on the side of the bed. She was wrapped up in the covers with a contemptuous smirk on her face.

“You say that I’m insecure, Katherine. And why? Because I’m honest—”

“Honest! What a joke!”

“—Because I tell you how I feel. And there’s Katherine Hewitt wrapped up in the covers, hiding behind her phony mask! Big deal, Katherine! You don’t fool me anymore. You’re just as insecure behind your walls as I am when I’m, up front. I mean, if you were this big, powerful person back there, I might be impressed. But you’re not a big, powerful person, you’re just this weak little girl surrounded by walls. You’re a joke, Katherine. You’re a catastrophe.”

She threw the covers off her, jumped up from the bed, and stood in her underpants and his T-shirt, glaring hatefully at him. The first light of dawn was coming through the windows.

She went over to the phone. “What’s the address?” she said as she changed into her street clothes.

“1451.”

“1451 Larkin, please.”

He shook his head. “I can’t believe it. You’re going to leave in the midst of this?”

“Yes, I’m going to leave. Don’t worry, Tom,. It will do wonders for your paranoid delusions.”

The buzzer rang. Without a further word, she went out and he heard her footsteps going down the stairs. He looked out the window and saw her below getting into a cab.

At 10 A.M. the next morning, the phone rang. He picked it up.

“Thomas?”

“Yes.”

“This is Katherine Hewitt.”

“You get home all right?”

“Yes, I got home.”

“I’m sorry I cussed you out.”

“Don’t apologize, Tom. I’m the one who should apologize.”

“You don’t need to, Kath.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Okay, thanks. I accept.”

“You were very nice to me. You were as sweet as could be. I must have been obnoxious. I was drunk.”

“You weren’t obnoxious.”

“Yes, I was.”

“Okay, well, it’s all forgotten. I don’t suppose you want to see me again

“No, I don’t, Tom. But I wish you the best.”

“The same to you, Kath. Good luck.”

17

When Katherine Hewitt looked back at it, that last meeting with Tom Steward seemed like a nightmare. She couldn’t remember exactly what had happened. She just remembered that she had gone to see him, that he had been kind and considerate, that she had slept with him, and that afterwards he and she had both been vicious. She didn’t want to remember it anymore closely than that. The whole evening, despite how she had started it with good intentions, had been another calamity, another mistake. She wanted to forget it.

One thing Katherine could not forget, however, was how Steward’s attempt at kindness had backfired on him. She felt responsible for that. In an odd way, she still cared about him, she admitted to herself. After several days had gone by, she wrote him a note.

Dear Thomas,

I find myself feeling, worse and worse about how rudely I responded to your kindness. I

know that, I can't make it, up to you, and I wouldn't feel right about seeing you again, but I want to apologize another time. I was in a desperate, lonely mood. I guess I thought it was all right to use you because other people have used me. But it wasn't all right. So forgive me, Tom. I wish you the best.

Katherine- Hewitt

After sending this note, she felt better. She felt that she had at least made an effort to repair the damage she had done. Once again she set her mind firmly on her goals. She went to work several mornings a week as she had done before, stopped by the bus lot as she had done before to look off toward the downtown buildings as they stretched to meet the morning sun, ran back and forth with plates of omelettes and hash browns, as she had done before, and worked hard at her studies. For all practical purposes, everything was back to normal and after a few days that nightmarish evening seemed far in the past.

There was another factor, though, effecting her situations she was afraid that she was pregnant. She, normally used the pill, but following her experience with the lawyer from Chicago, she had stopped using them. She was as knowledgeable as any modern woman regarding the menstrual cycle. She knew that ovulation generally occurred on the fourteenth day after the onset of menses. She had slept with Stewart on the twelfth day. That was far enough away from normal ovulation to give her a slight feeling of security, but she was afraid that stopping the pill might have upset her hormonal balance, causing premature production of an egg. Also, she recalled that Stewart had pulled out and had ejaculated on the sheets, but she knew that there, too, there was a slight chance of some material have leaked into her before he had done that.

After about a week had gone by, Katherine noticed she was urinating more frequently and that her breasts were slightly swollen. From her earlier experience with pregnancy, she was familiar with these bodily changes as

early symptoms of it. But she wasn't certain that she was urinating more frequently, and wasn't certain that her breasts were swollen. She thought maybe her mind was creating the symptoms out of anxiety, that she was deceiving herself. She never looked in the mirror anymore. She hated to look at her body. But she forced herself to stand in front of a mirror and examine her breasts. Even after doing this, however, she wasn't sure.

Within the next few weeks, the symptoms became more pronounced. Her lower abdomen felt heavy. She kept watching for her period to arrive, but it didn't. Several times while working at the restaurant, she sensed that the flow had begun and went to the bathroom to examine herself. Each time, after finding no evidence of menstruation, she returned to her work feeling drained and apprehensive. The frequent urination and tenderness in her breast continued.

The normal time for her period passed by. She was hoping that due to duress or some other factor her period was late. Another half month passed. With foreboding, she went to the university clinic to ask for a test. The next day she returned and learned it was positive.

The nurse who told her the news was a bright-eyed twenty-one-year-old who assumed it was a happy occasion. "You know, we have maternity services here. We can follow you all the way through your pregnancy."

"Oh, thank you, thank you. But I don't think that will be necessary. I have my own gynecologist," she said.

She walked across the campus in a daze. Despite how obvious the symptoms had been, she had hoped until the very last moment that it wouldn't be true. The realization that she was actually pregnant sent her into a panic. Riding home on the bus, she kept telling herself she had to make immediate arrangements for an abortion. But she put it off for several days as though thinking that if she ignored it, the pregnancy would go away. She tried to keep up her studies, but she couldn't concentrate. At work, she felt irritable and hostile. Her earning from tips decreased.

A-week or so after first getting the news, Katherine went to a women's clinic about a half mile away from her

apartment. The clinic- had just opened. Some of the rooms were still being painted. After waiting for a half hour, she went in to see a counselor and informed her of her predicament.

“To tell you the truth, Katherine,—did you say your name is. Katherine?—you are not in a good situation, legally speaking. As the law now stands, you can only get a legal abortion, if you can prove either severe emotional duress or possible physical harm. But from: the way you describe your situation. you have a job, you’re going to school, and so on; it appears you’re managing your life well. I say ‘appears’ because, unfortunately, appearances are what we’re dealing with here. We’re talking about what can legally be done.

“Yes, I understand that” Katherine replied, “but my life is far from pat and dry. I’ve been doing this balancing act, you know. Everything is intricately arranged,—my finances, my time, and, to be frank, my sanity, too. I just couldn’t go through with this pregnancy. It would throw everything into disaster. I’ve been in an absolute panic.”

“Well, let me be clear about something, I’m on your side. I don’t think you should have to prove anything one way or the other. And I can well understand how you feel under pressure and resources are limited. There is one loophole, however. If you can find someone,—some psychiatrist,—who will make a statement:to the effect that you are under severe emotional duress, then the legal qualifications could be met. But we’re.... as, you can see, this clinic is brand new... we just don’t have those resources yet. This is something you’re going to have to take your own initiative with.. And maybe if you come back in several weeks...

“I don’t think I can wait. I want to get this done.”

“There’s no need to do things so rapidly, Katherine. Calm down. Consider your options. Make sure you know what you’re doing. Meanwhile, I’ll see what I can come up with. That’s all you can do right now.”

Katherine walked away from the clinic absorbed in thought. Just to know she could wait several weeks without any urgent need for action was a relief. She felt as if part of

the burden had been lifted off her shoulders. She took the advice like a child. She tried to calm down, as she had been exhorted to, and tried to think out just how and when she should proceed.

At first she tried to do this just in her own mind, but then she began thinking she just had to talk with someone. The person she came up with was Scott Paulsen. After moving out, he had left town for a couple months, but she had just received a note from him saying he was temporarily back in town and was staying with some people in Castro Village. She called him one night at nine o'clock. She had just finished tucking Stephanie in bed.

"Katherine, sweetheart, what a pleasant surprise!" he said when he answered the phone.

She asked him when he had got back to town and how his vacation had been, then said: "The reason I called is because I really need to talk to you."

"Well, of course. When should we meet?"

"I was thinking right now. Are you busy?"

"Oh, we have a few-people here. We were going to have a little party. But I can always party. Is something wrong?"

"Not between you and me."

"What is it then?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Oh no. When did you find out?"

"A couple weeks ago."

"By who?"

"Tom Steward."

"Oh no. I thought you weren't seeing him any more."

"I was lonely one night and I went over to see him."

"You must be terribly upset. Poor girl."

"Yes, I am. And the ironic thing is we didn't even hit it off that night. We had a terrible fight. It was all my fault. I was drunk."

"Well, I would love to see you. How can we arrange it?"

"Give me your address. I'll come over in a cab."

The people he was staying with had a large flat about two blocks from Castro Street. Paulsen introduced Katherine to his friends, then he and she split off and walked down to a

Castro Street where the sidewalks in front of the little shops and bars along the way were crowded with gay men, most of whom were dressed in jeans and T-shirts. It was a beautiful evening. On a balcony above one of the stores, a man was dancing and gesturing to the people below. Here Katherine and Paulsen found a table in a quaint little coffee house with sunny windows and overhanging plants.

“I suppose the first thing to ask is whether you’re going to have the baby,” Paulsen said as he sat by a window with hanging plants and little purple flowers. His face, as only his could be, or so it seemed to Katherine at this moment, was full of sympathy. “I just assumed you would not.”

“Yea, I don’t know... At first, there was no doubt in my mind about it. But lately I don’t know. It hard to just disregard it.”

“Disregard what?”

“That’s it’s a living being. I want to dismiss that, but I can’t. It’s really been weighing on me.”

“I can imagine.”

“The whole thing just doesn’t seem real to me, you know what I mean, Scott? It seems Kafkesque.”

“Kafkesque?”

“Like in *The Trial*. You’re walking down the hall and you open a closet, but it’s not a closet. It’s a torture chamber. It isn’t what you expected, and yet it doesn’t really surprise you because you’ve seen so many weird things. It just kind of sinks in. You don’t care one way or the other.”

“But you do care.”

“Yes I care. But practically, psychologically, from the perspective of mental hygiene or whatever, I know what I got to do.”

“What’s that?”

“Get an abortion.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure? Is anything ever sure?”

“There are all kinds of ways to look at this, Katherine. Maybe part of you wants to have a kid. You said you’ve been lonely. Stephanie is getting older.

“Yea, I’ve thought of that. I thought to myself, ‘Is this

some kind of mind game that I'm playing: with myself?' But I can't let myself sink into that."

"Why not?"

"Because what I did with Tom it was not love. It was self-destructive. If I had another kid, what would happen to me? I'd never get out."

"Never get out of what?"

"Never break out of this syndrome of doing shit work for low wages. I'd be doing this all of my life. What good would that be for me, or for Stephanie, or for the potential kid? It would just be hell for all of us."

"Have you talked to Tom about it at all?"

"No, I thought about it... In fact, I went by his place one night and rang the doorbell, but he wasn't home."

"You never went back?"

"No, I got to thinking about it and it occurred to me that it wouldn't do any good to see him. He'd try to offer emotional support. I know he would. But before too long we'd be tearing one another down. And it would make us into a father-mother type thing. I don't want that. I don't really want to see him. It wasn't his fault, but still I resent him so much. I want to put all the blame on him. And in a way, the whole thing goes back to that night when he tore into me. Ever since then, I haven't been able to get my balance again. I resent him so much. I really do."

When they were walking back, Scott said: "So what's the timing on this then?"

"I'm a month and a half pregnant already. I'll have to do something in the next month or so or soon after."

"You said you have to see a psychiatrist?"

"Yea, get certified as officially messed up."

"Where you going to do that?"

"I don't know."

"Well, don't you think you should get going on this, Katherine? You say you have a conflict about what to do. The longer that fetus is there, the more it's going to seem like part of you."

"Yea, I know. I'm very much aware."

Katherine kept going back and forth about it. Despite

what she had told Paulsen, she couldn't act. At times, it almost made her joyful to know that she had the fetus inside of her. It gave her a primitive sense of well-being and self-importance. But at other times when she imagined it inside of her, she could see its large froglike eyes and its tiny fin-like limbs and could feel it growing larger and larger and demanding more and more of her strength. Sometimes it seemed less like a fetus than a cancer or growth. It was some kind of aberration of nature that had shown up in the wrong place and at the wrong time. She felt as though she'd been possessed, as though something had defiled her. It sent a chill up her spine to think of it in there fastened like a leech to her insides.

She kept telling herself that she had to arrange to see some psychiatrist or go back to the women's clinic to get their assistance in finding one. But the thought of going to someone to get recognized as distraught was depressing to her because she felt too close to being actually distraught. She didn't want to subject herself to personal questions. She didn't want to give someone the key to her inner domain. She kept procrastinating from one week to another, meanwhile feeling more and more upset. She started drinking again, until someone warned her that alcohol could damage the fetus, and then she stopped.

She was still working several mornings a week at the Rusty Nickel. One day after work, when she was standing by the time clock, the other morning shift waitress came up to her and said: "Hey honey, you're starting to show there a little, aren't you?"

"Yea, I guess I am."

"You expecting?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"I noticed last week You don't got an old man?"

"No, I don't."

"You looking for a way out?"

"Actually, yes."

The waitress said she had a friend who had obtained an abortion from a doctor in the Mission district. He was a licensed physician. He worked as a surgeon at the county

hospital and did this on the side as a way to pick up extra cash. As far as she knew, he was reliable

Katherine took down the doctor's name and after a final ordeal of decision-making called him the next day. That same afternoon she went out to talk to him.

His office was on Mission Street in the heart of the Latino area. Down the block from it on the corner was an all-night doughnut shop. Next door to it was a movie house that showed Spanish-language films. A single door led in to a long stairway with wooden railings. The stairway went straight up to a small, dimly-lit waiting room where there were a few chairs and some entables with magazines. She gave her name to the olive-skinned receptionist, sat down, and began paging through the magazines one after another without finding anything of interest in them. Then the receptionist nodded to her.

Katherine was ushered into a second, larger room that looked out to the red-and-blue marquis of the movie house and some telephone wires on slanting poles.

The doctor was a tall, lean man with thinning hair, a light brown mustache, and a dignified bearing. He nodded to her and motioned to a chair.

"From what you told the receptionist on the phone, I take it that you're interested in an abortion."

"Yes."

"Okay, then, let me be very direct. Firstly, I am a licensed physician. I work as a surgeon at the county hospital here in the Mission. Secondly, as you know, as the California state law is now written, abortions in cases such as yours are illegal. Therefore, I expect you to keep confidence."

She nodded.

"Thirdly, the operation required for this is from a technical standpoint a very simple one. If you wish, we place you under a total anesthetic."

"Yes, that's what I wish."

"The entire procedure takes less than a half hour. You never feel anything and you never see the aborted fetus. I work with one assistant. Everything is hygienic and surgically correct. Fourthly, the cost is a straight three hundred dollars.

You must pay in advance and you must pay cash. Finally, with regard to my ethics, I believe in freedom of choice. I regard the present law as wrong.”

“That sounds fine. I’d like to arrange a time.”

“It can be tomorrow night if you wish.”

“Yes, that’s fine. Is there anything I need to bring.?”

“Just the cash.”

The next evening, Katherine took a cab out to the abortion office, walked up the long stairway again, and paused for a moment at the top of the stairs. There was a single lamp burning, next to one of the chairs. The receptionist’s desk was empty. She heard talking in the inner room and saw that there was light coming under the door. She went over and knocked.

The door opened. The tall, lean doctor nodded at her and said, “Mrs. Hewitt? Come in.”

He led her to a third- room that she hadn’t yet seen. In the middle of the room was a cushioned table that had been spread over with a white cloth. Next to it was a small table with instruments. On the far side of the table was the cap-like mask used for anesthesia.

In a few minutes, the doctor’s assistant arrived and began washing her hands. She was an olive-skinned, heavy-set woman with ratted hair. She appeared to be in her late 40’s. She was dressed in a white uniform.

Within ten minutes, Katherine had undressed, put on a gown, and was lying on her back on the table with her feet in stirrups. The heavy-set woman placed the cup over her face. Everything turned green and then dots appeared in a green field and spread to the side.

An hour later, Katherine was riding home in the back of a cab. When she got back to her apartment, she went in the kitchen and made herself a drink. She was hoping that her ordeal would be over with that, but she felt a terrible grief and felt as though she had been stigmatized. When she was in bed that night, she could still see the fetus with its large, lidless eyes and fish-like limbs.

A couple days after the operation, Katherine noticed her vagina was swollen and red. Over the next half week, the

soreness got worse. She called the tall, lean doctor and told him about it. He said that she had most probably contracted a minor infection and called a drug store near her apartment to prescribe a wide-spectrum antibiotic.

That worked for a short time. The inflammation decreased. But, taking advantage of the disturbed ecosystem in the womb, a yeast infection set in. Katherine went to the clinic and received another antibiotic for the treatment of candidiasis.

It was a couple months, before Katherine began feeling normal again, and even then she was bothered with guilt. She felt irritable and resentful toward everyone, and especially toward Tom Steward.

18

On an evening in early October, Tom Steward, his blue coat thrown over his shoulder, emerged from the Jewish deli. He paused at the door for a moment, put on his coat, buttoned it up to the neck, and began walking up the street towards his apartment. People were passing by. Except for young women, he hardly noticed anyone at all. He appeared to be lost in thought. At the corner, while waiting for a stop light, he pulled a crumpled letter from his coat pocket and looked at it.

The letter was from David Brod. The writing was scrawled and difficult to read, but he had already deciphered it. The letter began as follows:

Dear Tom, my good friend,
Further complications have come up. Looks like I won't make it back for a couple of months and maybe not at all, I am sad to inform you.

The stop light clicked. Without even looking up at it, Steward knew that it had changed. He started crossing the street, still reading the letter. It was a foggy night. The sound of fog horns could be heard in the distance. A siren went up in the air. Looking down the street, he saw the flashing red

lights of fire engines approaching. He watched as the trucks weaved in and out of the traffic blaring their horns. They swung to, the left around some double-parked cars then made a wide right onto a side street. The red lights disappeared. He listened until the siren had faded in the night. Then the fog horns could be heard again. Steward walked on with the letter in his hand.

Since the time seven months before when Steward had last seen Katherine Hewitt, there had been some small changes in his life. He now drove cab five nights a week instead of four, and he had switched to a radio-dispatched company. In his art work, he had begun using colors. First he had experimented with acrylics and now he was just learning to mix oils. Using colors instead of lines made him feel like his art was a truer representation of what he wanted to convey. Having a radio in the cab made him feel more connected to other human beings than he had been before. But for the most part his life was the same. He still lived in his studio apartment on Larkin Street and still felt lonely most of the time. He was still very much concerned about arrival and fruition, though he was no longer using grass as a way to speed his progress toward his vaguely-defined spiritual and artistic goals.

The note Katherine had sent him had been very important to Steward. For a time he had kept it on a wood box near his bed. He had written several notes in response, but had never sent them. They hadn't been notes, really, they had been more like long letters. He no longer felt any bitterness toward her. He had come to the conclusion that she had been one of the most significant women in his life. He still thought of her fondly. Since breaking up with her, except for that one misfired fling he had had in December, he hadn't been involved with anyone else.

Steward had gone through some more general changes regarding women, also. He was much more hesitant about rushing into affairs.

When Steward thought back to Katherine Hewitt, what he mostly thought about was that one evening that had begun at the ocean and ended up her bed, when he had gotten so

close to her and then had hurt her. He remembered the moment when she had broken down in tears. It made him sad to think about.

Steward put the letter from Brod back in his coat pocket, and, drawing in a deep breath, looked up the street. A man was approaching him that he vaguely recognized from somewhere. He was a bearded guy with long hair. Evidently, the recognition was mutual. The bearded man pointed at him as he passed.

“Hey, aren’t you the dude that used to hang out with Katherine Hewitt?”

“Yea, I went out with her for a while. But I haven’t seen her in a half-year or more.”

“Oh yea? Well, I just thought I’d tell you she’s up at Wyley’s Pub bent over a stiff one.”

“That right? How does she look? She seem okay?”

“She’s wide, man. She’s really wide. It’s too bad. She used to be a pretty chick.”

Steward stepped up his pace a little. He was only a block or so away from the bar. Turning unto California Street, he looked up toward the wooden sign that said “Wyley’s Pub.” He was trying to decide whether to go in to see her. He decided against it. He crossed to the opposite side of the street from the bar and walked up the hill toward his apartment. But after reaching the end of the block and turning up the side street that he lived on, he suddenly wheeled around and walked briskly back.

Coming into the bar, he immediately saw Katherine Hewitt. She was sitting at one of the side tables by herself. She looked disconsolate but not drunk. She was writing with her finger on the table top. As the bearded guy had said, she had gained a little weight. But to Steward she still looked lovely because to him anymore she was never lovelier than when she had that sad look on her face.

The bar was crowded with people. The juke box was going and the counter was full. There was a group of guys back by the pool table and the counter was full. The only person at the side tables was Katherine Hewitt.

He went across to her. She didn’t see him until he was

right next to her. At first she looked surprised, then her face passed quickly from an expression of pleased recognition to a frown.

“Tom Steward. Fancy meeting you here.”

“Hello, Katherine. Can I sit down?”

“You can sit anywhere you want to, Tom. This is a bar.”

He sat down. “Somebody told me you were here. I just wanted to say hello.”

“Well, say it then.”

“You going to give me the total cold shoulder?”

“No, I’m sorry, Tom. I’m in a mood. Why don’t you get yourself a beer?”

“Can I get something for you?”

“No, I got this.”

He went over to get a beer and came back.

“If you don’t want to talk to me, don’t. I’ll drink my beer and go.”

“No, stay a minute, Tom. Tell me how you been.”

“There’s not much to say. I’ve been doing the same things.”

He told her he had switched to a new company and had started with oils. He asked her what she was doing. She said she was still working at the Rusty Nickel.

After that, there wasn’t much more to say. He shrugged and got up to go.

He was about to leave when she said: “Tom, there’s something I want to tell you.”

He sat down again. “What’s that?”

“Remember that night I came up to see you?”

“Of course.”

“I got pregnant from it.”

“Wow. That’s really something. And what happened? Are you pregnant now?”

“No, I got an abortion from this dude in the Mission.”

“A doctor?”

“Yea, I guess you could call him that.”

“Wow. When was that?”

“A couple months ago.”

“Did it go all right?”

"I'm still here and I'm not pregnant any more. So I guess it went okay

He kept shaking his head. "And you didn't want to tell me about it before now?"

"What good would that have done? What good would it have done, Tom? It would just have created this complicated psychological situation."

He shrugged. "Yea, I suppose. In any case, it's in the past, so now there's nothing I can do. But when you were trying to decide... about another kid... maybe I could have given you some emotional support, at least. I would sure have tried, Kath... Whatever you wanted."

"It wasn't a kid, Tom. It was an unformed little monster."

"Okay, Kath. There you go again, talking in extremes. But like I say there's nothing for me to do now except I'm sorry you struggled through it alone."

"The worst thing was I got this tremendous infection from it."

"From me?"

"No, from the abortion,"

"I'm sorry."

"It lasted for weeks. It just wouldn't go away. I've hated you, Tom. I've resented you so much."

"What can I say? I'm sorry." He waited for her to say something else, but she didn't so he picked up his coat and went out.

Steward walked up the street, turned the corner, and went up to his apartment. He tried to do some art work but he felt distracted. He went out and hiked over the top of Nob Hill to Chinatown. In North Beach he ran into a couple of drivers he knew and bummed a few joints. He walked back through Chinatown and stopped in a children's playground to smoke one of the joints. Then he climbed back up the hill and went home.

The next morning at the break of dawn Steward went up to Sacramento Street and waited for the bus. He got on the bus, not knowing where he was going. He got off at the end of the line, at Seal Rock, the same place where he stopped

with Katherine Hewitt on their evening date, though that had been at sunset not dawn. The water was reflecting the golden glow of the rising sun. Steward went down the winding path through the woods to the fence above the cliffs where he had sat with Katherine. It made him sad to see the scene again that had been so romantic with Katherine and that now had lost that magic.

He returned up the path to the winding road that led to the beach about a quarter mile away on lower ground. Now the sun was glimmering on the water, children were running back and forth, pelicans were flying along the trough of an incoming wave.

Steward lit another joint and smoked it. Soon the scene had acquired a new, different kind of magic, but he felt more estranged from the figures on the beach.

Later that afternoon, Steward walked through Golden Gate Park. He had a regular route that he had followed many times. It began at the beach, led through some cedar trees, then around a small lake with tall reeds, then past an enclosed area with buffaloes, then up a small hill to a lake he liked to go to because it reminded him of the Minnesota lake he had lived on as a boy. He bought some peanuts and fed them to the ducks.

Steward walked around the lake, watching the ripples in the water. By this time it was late afternoon. He kept moving from one spot to another to keep in the sunlight. He noticed that there was some sunlight on the shore of the island in the middle of the lake. He crossed a little bridge to get to it and sat down by himself. When the sun sunk into the branches of the trees across from him, he got up. He crossed the bridge again and kept walking.

A white pigeon waddled up to Steward and began doing circles in front of him. He squatted down to look at it and then went on. Looking back, he noticed that the sun could still be seen in a low area between two groves of trees. But then the sun went down. The sky turned from orange to red to violet to blue.

All day as he walked, Steward thought about Katherine Hewitt and what she had said. That she had gotten pregnant,

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had had an abortion, had been infected, indirectly because of him, all of that, since he hadn't been in on it, seemed unreal. It was as though it hadn't taken place and yet it had.

He berated himself because he didn't care more. He took it as an indication that something in him had died, but what it was he didn't know. Only late in the day did he start to care, and then he just felt disappointed that she hadn't come to him for strength.

12-23-1979