LIMBO TOWER

WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

LOST IN THE OBLIVION OF A BIG CITY HOSPITAL,
DOCTORS, NURSES, AND PATIENTS FIGHT THE DAILY TERRORS
OF DEATH . . . AND THEIR PASSIONATE DESIRES.

BEN WAS WAITING FOR DEATH,

but before he died there was something he had to do.

Anne Gallagher, the black-haired nurse of the ninth floor in the tuberculosis hospital, was Ben's angel of mercy. Her tender presence shielded him from night's lonely terror; her care aided his comfort; her woman's beauty tormented his love. Though he was dying, Ben drew all the strength that remained to him to free Anne from the binding secret that made her fear marriage—and love.

In this searching novel, which explores the minds of men whose bodies are stricken with serious disease, the author unfolds the delicate relationship between patient and professional, and also tells the story of the devoted nurse and doctor who learn a lesson from the men they care for . . . a lesson of love.

LIMBO TOWER

by William Lindsay Gresham

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To the Memory of ALEXANDER F. BERGMAN

There was no Gallagher. Alec died alone, writing in a notebook. His poems were published in a volume called *They Look Like Men*. He was a genius, a revolutionary, and an expert at handling small boats. God rest him, he's dead now.

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Hath the news of the Overwhelming reached thee?
Countenances on that day shall be abased,
Laboring, toiling:
They shall feel the heat of scorching fire,
They shall be given to drink from a fountain fiercely boiling,
There shall be no food for them but thorns
It shall not fatten nor satisfy hunger.

Al Koran

Bismallah

IN THE NAME OF GOD, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Harken, oh fellow townsmen, to the voice of Abu Yakzan, the Wakener, teller of tales. You have heard how a certain magician, meeting a sorceress of greater evil than himself, was cast down into a pit. Harken now to a tale freighted with wisdom for him who has ears to hear, the tale of the Blind Beggars of Ind.

Alms fall first into God's hands before reaching the hands of the poor, oh defenders of the Faith. The sound of coppers in the bowl is but the echo of blessings.

Know then, that in the Land of Ind were four beggars, blessed of Allah, for they saw not the leper with his sores, the proud man's scornful glance, nor the kiss of Azrael upon the cheek of the first born when the body wastes and the eyes grow brighter than lamps. They saw not these things, for they were blind. At morning they sat against the west wall of a certain rich man's house, and when the sun had crossed the sky and they felt its heat upon their foreheads they arose and, touching the wall with their hands, made their way to the eastern side where they sat, imploring alms in the shadows, until nightfall.

When darkness hid them, each placed in a common store the coppers bestowed by the beneficent during the day and from this they purchased their evening meal, which they ate from a single dish, and thus they trod the round of days in the place wherein it had pleased Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, to set them up.

Now the rich man against whose wall they sat, when he went forth upon his business, rode an elephant, and the elephant's trumpetings sounded afar. And the beggars heard the trumpetings and marveled thereat, wondering in their hearts what manner of beast could raise such an outcry, and what form that beast took, for they were blind.

At last they fell into dispute and so contentious were they that they spent their days in argument, the one with the other; they neglected to cry out for alms and the coppers in their common store were fewer at nightfall and the dish from which they ate grew emptier and emptier. Then the oldest of the beggars, calling to his companions, said, "Let us learn

what we can of the Trumpeting Beast by touch for logic can avail us no longer." And so they waited for such time as the elephant was led from the courtyard of the rich man, that they might touch him and thus end the dispute as to his form.

Oh, my fellow townsmen, know that the generous man is nigh unto Paradise and far from hell. He who shuts his gate in the face of the poor will find the gates of Heaven closed unto him. The sound of coppers in the bowl is but the echo of blessings.

Know then, that on a certain evening the gates of the courtyard were opened and the beggars knew by the cries of the driver and by the shaking of the earth that the elephant stood before the house. "Allow us, oh protector of the poor," they called out to the elephant driver, "allow us, whom Allah has deprived of sight, to touch the Trumpeting Beast, the ground shaker, and thus gain knowledge of his form, that we may marvel at it." And the elephant driver, being a man whom Allah had blessed with a generous heart, said to them, "Come hither and fear not for he is a gentle beast, albeit mighty."

Thereat the beggars joined hands lest they stumble in pits where stones were missing from the street, and came near to the elephant and the rustle of his great breathings guided them thither, when they let go one another and groped forward with outstretched hands, in search of truth.

Now the first of the beggars, chancing upon the elephant's tail, cried out in a voice of triumph, "Wondrous are the works of God, the High, the Great, who hath created a beast mighty enough to shake the earth with his stride and hath made him in the form of a rope's end! Inscrutable are His ways, for the elephant is like unto a rope, that tieth the load upon the jackass."

Now the second beggar, when he heard his companion cry out, lifted his voice from where he crouched with his hands circling the elephant's leg. "Thou liest," he cried, "for what I feel with my hands is truth and I perceive the elephant to be a kind of tree. Wondrous are the ways of God, the Inscrutable, the Mighty, for whereas the palm must pass her days rooted to a single spot, the elephant can lift himself in air and hang suspended like the coffin of the Prophet. Great girth hath he, and weight and strength, yet when he so wills it he can float as a single hair."

Now when the third beggar heard his fellows call out their discoveries he did not lift his voice but held it level, muttering in his beard with self-content as he passed his palms back and forth over the elephant's side. Yet his companions heard the words said to his beard and they were, "Twice blind

are ye, for the elephant is like unto a wall, without window or door or other opening. A wall. A wall."

Meanwhile the fourth beggar, he who was at the end, groping in the darkness which was his country, found a vast serpentine form which twisted about continually and was never still, for the elephant with his trunk was examining the beggar. "Oh ye of little wisdom and less belief," he sang out above the voices of the others, "thrice blind—harken unto me. For the elephant is like unto a great serpent. He toucheth me with his mouth; he nibbleth at my beard and caresseth me upon the breast. Wondrous are the ways of God, whose name be exalted, to bestow upon such a serpent the sound of feet upon the earth when he passeth by."

Now it happened that at this moment the rich man came forth from his house and the elephant knelt and the rich man climbed into the saddle, assisted by the elephant driver, and went off through the city about his business. And the townsmen scattered before him, lest they be trampled beneath the elephant's feet.

But the blind beggars fell again into argument, each bringing forth the testimony of his hands and his own experience.

And whether, in the end, they composed their differences, adding to a common store their separate grains of truth, or whether they wandered each a different way into the desert and perished alone, or whether they are disputing still, no man knoweth and the tale sayeth not.

Oh, my fellow townsmen, the bestower of alms is a key to good, a lock to evil. Who gives a copper to the poor gives one and reaps a thousand. The sound of coppers in the bowl is but the echo of blessings. . . .

Wednesday

IN A GRIMY JUMBLE of frame tenements, warehouses, gas works and auto junkyards, dark and still with winter night, only one building was clean. Slim, white, aseptic, it pointed a stone finger hopefully at the sky. Below it, past a stretch of snowy rooftops, lay a river; at this hour no lights crept upstream toward the hills or downstream to the sea. On the far shore, eastward, the skyline of a giant city hung in darkness, unlighted, unseen, waiting for the first flicker of day.

Inside the white rectangular pillar men coughed, woke, coughed, and slept again or lay in fretful half-sleep, fearing death, fearing the wing-swoop of night and the plunge of time. Those who were awake thought of wives, thought of chest films, insurance policies allowed to lapse, of that girl who was a clutching grip of pleasure once, and whose body was too warm, whose eyes were too bright—could have been her? Or in a crowded trolley, an old man who tore his lungs out behind a cupped hand with dirty knuckles. Could have been him? Could have been anyone. Revenge of the hours stolen from sleep, between night school and morning time clock. There was the time I came here and they looked at me and told me to keep in touch with them. They knew then. Only there wasn't room for me: I wasn't bad enough. And now what's the story? And when will night end and why should I care? except I want the morning coffee hot in my belly.

In one of the darkened sunrooms of the ninth floor, its wide panes misted by steam, a window was raised an inch and beside it, blowing smoke like a silvery secret out into the cold, sat a man in a tattered bathrobe, smoking a pipe with a short curved stem. He had a bald forehead, ox eyes, and the tiny, full lips of a child. His face in the darkness was doubly dark, for by day it was swarthy. The man's name was Abdullah; he was a sad fat man, far from home, who had stolen a smoke at this moment before dawn throughout many years, sitting beside a window in this place or another like it.

His thoughts could hardly be called thoughts at all; they were so small, so still, so silent they might have been the thoughts of mice. He mused of other men—fellow patients—of their arrival, their deaths or departures, their tears, their

arguments, their jokes; small, quiet thoughts which he had often thought before.

At last, from beyond the towers of great Babylon across the water, came a streak of gray which spread along the horizon, pale and chill. Daybreak.

Stretching out his finger, Abdullah wrote on the misted glass a word in the old language, looped and dotted; the old, valiant language of stony hills, olives, and fierce trust in the Lord. His thoughts then were even calmer than before. Knocking the embers from his pipe on the window sill, he blew ashes gently into the air, pressed down the window, and sat back watching the dawn and smiling faintly with his full lips. Another day, another year, its contents written as on a page, as on a tablet of gold beside the Throne of Thrones. The sun rises and a man goes forth to meet the day. Over him, as over everything in his world, stretches the thunderous hand of the Maker. The past a dream and the future of the stuff of dreams. And what of the Now, where dream meets dream?

It is written.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

When the sunroom light flashed on, the windows became sheets of onyx, impenetrable, the night beyond them lost. "Get that pipe out of the way, Abba Dabba," Anne Gallagher said from the doorway. "Come on and help me wake up your pals."

Gallagher was a large girl whose hair was so black it seemed like part of the night itself. It lay in soft, natural waves and was drawn back simply into a knot at the nape of her neck. She wore a winged cap of starched white linen, held in place by two bobby pins. Her skin was clear and pale and at the temple, where a blood vessel lay close to the surface, there was a faint blue shadow. She stood looking at Abdullah for a moment, her thoughts turned inward, her lips slightly parted like those of a sleeping child. Then her gray eyes snapped alert; she pressed her lips into a line and planted fists on her hips in a caricature of a bossy wife. "Come along with you, now."

Abdullah sighed, a faint smile at his mouth corners, and closed one great, liquid eye in a wink. "I already put away the pipe. You never get in any trouble from old Abba Dabba. Now I help wake up some boys."

As they passed through the arched doorway she said quietly, "Don't bother with Benny. I . . . I want to look in on him myself."

Abdullah grunted sympathetically. "I hope Benny feel good today. Was yesterday not so good."

Gallagher snapped the switch in Room 906 and called,

"Good morning, good morning, good morning. And you, Kincaid, brush your teeth before breakfast. Come on, boys. Hit the deck."

The figure in the far bed by the window groaned and sat up suddenly, rubbing big-knuckled hands through his hair, which was dark and stuck out jaggedly. "Never brushed my teeth but once a week all my life," he said thickly, "and I got every one I was born with."

Abdullah, plodding in quietly behind Gallagher, said, "Come on, Joe. Be good fellow. You brush teeth like everybody."

Joe Kincaid threw back the covers and groped under the bed for his slippers. "I ain't a-doing it, 'cept they forcing me," he announced. "Whole blame country's tooth crazy. Can't pick up a magazine, 'thout coming across a picture: some gal, purty as sin, can't get no fellows to court her on account she ain't a-brushin' and a-brushin'."

He took a metal tumbler from the rack of his bed table, picked a toothbrush and a tube of paste from the drawer, closed the drawer with an irritable crash, and went over to the wash bowl beside the door, his angular, long-limbed body still hunched with sleep.

"Why, down home," he said over his shoulder, "I've had gals borrow my snuff dipper and give their gums a rub and that was the most brushin' they ever done. And it never stopped me courtin' 'em none." He turned on the cold water full force, let it splash over his hands and then drenched his face and the back of his neck, saying, "Whoo!"

Kincaid's voice had awakened the patient in the bed nearest the wash bowl. The man opened one eye, searched left and right with it, then opened the other eye. "Good morning, Miss G.," he said in a muffled, whistling voice.

"Good morning, Judge. At least I don't have to nag you about your teeth." When Gallagher smiled two tiny creases appeared in her cheeks like dimples.

The old man called "the Judge" said, "Ah." He picked his dentures from a tumbler of water, snapped them in place, and smiled flashingly at the girl out of a face seamed from so many triumphs and disasters, scarred by so much bitterness and sweetness of experience that it was like a chart of all the virtues and vices of man. Even in sleep his pearly white hair, lying in rigid waves, never got uncombed. "Alas, alas, Gallagher," he said resonantly, "you have failed me. I thought you were going to get me some fish and a little aquarium in which my dentures could while away the weary hours of the night: guppies, swimming in and out among the porcelain pillars like sharks in sea-cold Lyonnesse, their tiny eyes a-gleam."

Gallagher pushed down a window firmly and then with a single twitch replaced a strand of hair under her cap. "Never get tired of the old gags, do you, Judge?"

Jasper Stone, alias the Judge, was putting on his slippers. "Certainly not. Jokes mature; they mellow with age." He drew on a robe of midnight blue silk and tied the cord around his waist. "Ah, Gallagher, what of the night? No deaths? No births? No cablegrams from Singapore? And how is our Benjamin today?"

"Haven't been in yet," she said softly over her shoulder. She approached a bed on the other side of the room and stood looking down on the sleeper, whose great, mahogany face was as unlined as a child's.

She scratched the pillow with her short, unpainted nails. "Wake up, Lee. I don't have to start counting ten over you, do I?"

There was no movement at first, only a melodious chuckle from beneath the covers. Then a voice in the bass register said, "Yeah, ma'am. I'm right here. Big as life and twice as homely."

The Negro lad stretched his great arms and yawned, showing teeth and wide, pink tongue. He snapped his mouth shut, reached up and gripped the head of the bed and drew himself erect. Then he bent forward, touching his toes.

"None of that, Lee," Gallagher said sharply. "Quit it, now."

He grinned up at her. "Take the kinks out of my back, Miss Gallagher. I always does a couple dozen sit-ups when I wakes up. Give you a good strong belly right where it count."

"Your belly is strong enough for anything you're likely to be doing in here," she said dryly. "Quit throwing yourself around."

Washington Lee closed his hands and rotated them on his wrists, feeling the forearm muscles bunch and relax. "Won't be long now. Tomorrow I going to crawl between the ropes for the big fight. This here the last day I have these old ribs." He pulled up his pajama coat and spread his fingers, feeling the ridges of his left side under their sheath of muscle. "They going saw a chunk out of me big as a telephone book. Tomorrow morning's the big event."

He sank his chin into his shoulder and jabbed the air gently with his left hand.

The black mirror-surface of the windows had changed. Now they were transparent, giving on a world of winter sky and distant towers. The light changed from green to azure, and suddenly was filtered through with watery gold. The tip of the rising sun sparkled behind a skyscraper's cornice.

"This day going to go by like running through molasses," Lee said to the room at large. He turned his head on its column

of bone and muscle to regard the dawn, then drove his right fist lightly into the palm of his left hand. Deep in his chest he began humming mournfully. "Go down, go down, you little red red ruby rising sun . . ."

Gallagher had gone, and from 908 next door they heard her voice saying, "Okay, Frankie, hit the deck."

Frank Vitiello's voice complained, "Hey, quit it. Come on, sister, gimme them covers. This joint's as cold as a witch's kiss."

"Well, get up, then."

"Okay. Okay. Okay."

Abdullah sighed, ran his hand once over his polished bald head, and pulled the cord of his robe tighter. The robe was tattered and patched at the elbows and had one enormous patch across the rump. He padded slowly to the window. Sun now glittered on the chill water of the bay where the river entered it, flowing sluggishly between ice-encrusted piers. Abdullah closed his eyes and opened them again; his lips moved silently.

Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and in the ship that runneth in the sea, with that which profits a man . . . are signs to those who can understand. In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. I bear witness that there is no God but God. I bear witness that Mohammed is the prophet of God. God is Great. God is Great. There is no other God but God.

Consciousness, returning, brought to Ben first a triangle of golden light which was the edge of the sheet with heavy blankets pulled over. The light was from the ceiling lamp. Then a sound of whistling, very soft and close, yet with a feeling that it was far away, a tune which to him was one of the loveliest on earth:

Oh, for the nights of the Kerry dancin' . . .

Anne Gallagher folded back the covers from his face and for a moment held her hand between his eyes and the light. Ben blinked and said, "Hi."

"Top o' the mornin' to ye," she said, imitating an old Irishwoman. She stood looking down from her starched height at the emaciated youth who seemed all eyes and thatch of dark, curly hair. "How goes it, Benny?" She reached for his hand and held it, her finger automatically sliding up to rest on his pulse . . . as a nurse holds the hand of a patient going into shock. He was silent for a few moments adjusting his eyes to the light, and when he could bring her face into focus he said, "Dreamed about you, Anne. I was dreaming when you came

in." He paused, for breath was precious to him and speaking took breath.

"Did you now? And what were you dreaming?" There was an ironic quirk at the corner of her mouth.

Smiling, he said in his hoarse whisper, "Don't remember too much. Swimming. We were in swimming. You had a green bathing suit."

"Green for the Irish. And did it have a golden harp on it?"

"Don't remember, Anne. But it had you inside it. It was swell."

She took her hand from his as if something had burned her. Briskly she said, "I'll help you wash."

"Don't hurry, Anne."

"Benny, I've got to. I've got to be counting stuff and straightening up outside. I've got the night report to write up."

He was shaking his head gently as she spoke.

"Honest, Ben. And . . . look—don't call me Anne. Somebody might hear us. That Gaines fellow, the orderly. Somebody might . . ."

"Okay. Anne."

"You're the limit." But still she didn't get the wash basin.

He reached for her hand again, and his voice strengthened. "Stay a minute, Anne. Let's pretend. This room is a house in the forest. Outside . . . trees tall, all around it. It's always morning. Golden birds in the branches . . ."

Gallagher drew her breath quickly, shaking her head, and glanced, frowning, at the door, but the boy hurried on, "There's a switch on the wall where we turn off the daylight. We sit under the moon and hear fairy pipers inside the hill."

She turned away suddenly and was rattling the stainless steel wash basin. "Who's the Mick around here, you or me?" she said between her teeth. "A fine Jew you are, Benny Rosenbaum. It's dreaming like that that keeps the Irish from ever getting anywhere."

"Like J. J. Hanlon downtown in his club house?"

Gallagher filled the basin at the wash bowl, tested the water on the back of her hand. "Ed Gaines ought to do this, Benny. But I wouldn't trust him to wash a dog without drowning it." She brought the basin over to the bed table, set it down and began to soap a washcloth. "Don't talk to me about Hanlon," she said, lowering her voice. "Not with holes in the streets of this town as big as washtubs. The only thing he ever dreamed about was some . . . some woman he's got on the payroll as a bookkeeper or jail matron or something. And they have to go hunt her up in the apartment where he keeps her to get her to sign for her pay." She dried his face gently, twisting the towel around one of her white, muscular fingers and running it

over his eyelids and behind his ears. Ben had never heard her speak in such a tone before. When he opened his eyes he caught a strange expression on her face which bothered him until he realized where he had seen it before. It was the expression of an old mother cat when a stranger comes near the box housing her kittens.

Gallagher emptied the wash basin in the bowl across the room and drew a tumbler of warm water. The sleeves of her uniform were short and he noticed that when her arms were straightened there were dimples at the elbows. The outside of her arms still bore freckles from summer sun. She came back with the tumbler. "Here, Benny, brush your teeth."

He went through the motions because she had told him to do it.

"Oh well," Gallagher said, summing up her silent thoughts, "go fight City Hall."

"I did," Ben Rosenbaum said. He wiped his lips on a paper tissue and dropped it into a brown paper bag which hung at the edge of the bed table in a metal frame.

"And a fine lot of good it ever did you." She ran a comb through his hair quickly, trying to part it; but it would never stay parted. Then she slid her arm under his shoulders and lifted him farther up against the pillows. Under her hand his shoulder blade was knife sharp. She left her arm around him just a shade longer than was necessary, and he smiled up at her.

"Let's pretend," he whispered, "that you aren't afraid any more."

"Stop it, Benny."

"Let's pretend, Anne. That we used to sit on the stoop outside your house and talk. Because we couldn't say good-night."

She was walking toward the door and for one frantic moment Ben was afraid she would not turn, would not speak to him again. At the doorway she paused and then faced him, cool, starched, professional. "Have a good day, Ben. I'll see you this evening."

Ben pursed his lips, kissing the air toward her. Then she was gone.

Anne Gallagher started down the hall briskly, her face pale and calm. A voice inside her said, "This is what it means to have children. Well, you'd better start liking it; this is all you'll ever have."

Benny was such an odd number, such a crazy, sweet kid. You couldn't think of him as a man, even if he was twenty-four and she herself was only twenty-six. You just couldn't think of him, lying there, his weight down to ninety pounds and still dropping . . . a man. A man was like Dr. Crane, the resident, all sure of himself and with his college manners and

messing around with that tramp on his nights off. Or a man was like one of her brothers, and big-fisted, loud-voiced, whiskey-smelling Micks they were, and the only thing they ever did good in their lives was the time Tom was eighteen and Jack nineteen and they lit into Pop after he had cut Mamma's eye. Men were either cool and calculating, like the Protestant fellows, trying to marry money, or red-faced and terrifying and good Catholics who couldn't keep their hands off you. And Ben wasn't even a Catholic. It was a sin even to think of him as a man. You thought of him as a kid; you could not think of him . . .

You could.

She had left his room in such a quick, tough sort of way and how would the lad know she wasn't maybe mad at him for all the things he said to her? Being mad at him was like taking them seriously, wasn't it? And she didn't want any of that sort of thing, not ever.

She couldn't go off duty leaving him think she had taken all that stuff seriously because then the boy might just go on and on dreaming and really make it serious to himself. Patients get funny ideas, but what on earth was she to say to the boy so as not to hurt his feelings . . . ?

Gallagher turned back. Ben's face was sorrowful. But it always looked that way when he was alone. When he looked up and saw you, then was when he smiled and it was his smile that kept you from ever staying mad . . .

He was smiling now. Behind the sunken eyes, between the temples where the skin was stretched so tight, a light came on. Gallagher's throat worked, trying to swallow. She could feel the heat creeping over her face and knew that she was getting red right up to her hair and this made it worse. She couldn't meet his glance again; not now. She took one hurried glance up the corridor and then, her eyes on Benny's hands, folded together on the spread, she pursed her lips as if kissing the air toward him.

This time as she strode soundlessly down the corridor on rubber soles she was like a racing yacht sailing before the wind.

Ben leaned back against the hard, hair-stuffed pillows, listening to Ed Gaines slamming wash pans around outside. When the orderly came in he said, "Oh. Ya been fixed up, eh? Pretty soft, eh, getting the Duchess to fix ya up. Well, take it from me, buddy—that's the only way ya ever going to get fixed up with that baby. I musta tried dating her a dozen times. These nurses, they think they're little tin Jesus, you know what I mean?"

The orderly was a spindly, washed-out blond youth about Ben's own age, who always irritated Ben; and the sight of him, so soon after Anne, was too much. Ben grimaced and drew a breath as deep as he could to answer Gaines. But it was too deep. The sudden intake of breath brought the thick strangling cough up from inside. He rolled over on his elbow, coughing, plotting with infinite strategy how to get a breath in past that choking, stifling barrier inside him.

Gaines said, "Ya okay, buddy?"

Ben nodded, unable to speak. He groped for the wax paper cup in its metal holder, found it and then dropped it clattering to the linoleum. Gaines said, "Watch yourself, kid." He picked up the container and handed it back. Ben coughed. He drew in air, fighting to get it down so that he could cough it out again and with it the enemy. At last the thing which was tormenting him suddenly let go and his breath came easier, as if another section of lung had opened up. He lay back exhausted, feeling hot and cold at the same time.

Gaines was still there. "Ya okay, buddy? You ain't gonna hemorrhage?"

Ben shook his head, closing his eyes to shut out the ratlike face. He heard the orderly patter away. The guy was like a rat. When he took a basin out he skipped off with it like a rat carrying a piece of bacon.

Ben lay breathing. At last he opened his eyes. Outside his windows the walls of the other wing across the courtyard were beginning to show and the lights in them were golden against the dark of early morning. It had stopped snowing; the sun would be rising over the harbor. He wished he were back in his old room across the hall with the Judge, and Kincaid, the crazy coal miner, and old Abba Dabba.

Another day. That much more time stolen from night. Bitterness came to him like a bad taste on the tongue. "This isn't the way to do it," he muttered. "This isn't the way." This is a damn submarine with a leak in it, only the guys aren't fighting for the ladder, they're all lying in their bunks, waiting for the water to reach them.

It passed. He made himself dream, wove the dream, held on to it like a rope thrown to a man fallen overboard; the future. The gay, golden years, the New Jerusalem, flooded with sunlight, a victorious world. "Will any of them remember me?" he asked Time. "Will any remember me when the night of the world is over?"

The first thing Abdullah did when he came out into the cor-

ridor, before making his way to the dining room, was to go to the desk in the center of the floor where the elevators were and where Gallagher sat during the night. There he took from beneath the green-shaded desk lamp a flower pot no larger than a baseball. It contained a single shoot of ivy, with two new leaves light green. He carried it tenderly on his rounded palm and set off toward the locker room across from 906 and next to the lavatory. It was a narrow room, hardly more than a closet. The lockers had no locks, and their tops were slanted so that nothing could be hidden there. Once a week Miss Halligan, the supervisor, inspected the lockers, looking for liquor, cigarettes and anything else forbidden. She never came on the same day of the week, but Abdullah had observed that Miss Halligan was a woman of routine, and by marking her visits to lockers on a tiny calendar he had figured out her schedule.

In other hospitals where he had spent months or years plants were allowed, but here it was against the rules. It was claimed that the leaves of plants held dust. Or some other reason. Anyhow, it was against the rules. The ivy stayed inside the locker during the day and at night it soaked up light under the lamp on Gallagher's desk. If anybody said anything Gallagher would say it was hers. It was growing. Now there was a new baby leaf since last week.

Abdullah could not keep this news to himself. He took the pot and plodded down the hall to Ben Rosenbaum. Ben was half-propped up and was pushing corn flakes around with a spoon.

Abdullah held out the plant. "You see—new leaf. The little fellow. It grow."

Ben stopped playing with the corn flakes and stretched out his hand, thin, with prominent knuckles and dark hair on the backs of the fingers showing clear against the white skin. "Looks good, Abba Dabba," the lad said hoarsely. "What are you going to do with it when the old Battleaxe catches you?"

Abdullah shrugged. "I don't think she catch. I am old timer. I can keep anything in hospital. I been in hospital half my life."

He waddled away and put the ivy back into his locker, then he went in to breakfast.

At their table Stone was talking to Kincaid: ". . . so that the existence of God, or a First Cause, if you will, remains merely a logical hypothesis. Although I personally think that the odds are a good deal heavier than seven to five that He is there. However, the only data we have about the world is what is perceived by our senses—eyes, ears, fingers . . ." He paused to take a sip of coffee.

Kincaid, who had been champing corn flakes, wiped his

mouth with the back of his hand. "Sounds like hogwash to me, Judge. Ain't nobody claiming you can *see* God, same as you can a barn door. Place you see Him is inside your head. And then you got to wait for the blessed Grace to strike. Some folks pray and pray for Grace and it don't do no good. Can't get it; hearts too full of sin and orneriness. When I was preaching the Good News—" he took in the others with a circular glance by way of explanation, although both had heard Kincaid's story many times before, "—when I was preaching the Good News —I worked six days a week and preached on Sunday, Pentecostal Church of Christ—why then, brother, I've had 'em jumpin' and rollin', hollering for Grace. Wouldn't come. Then some fellows would just walk in and *blam!* Hits 'em. Hits 'em same as a pole-axe hits a steer."

Stone shook his head tolerantly and as Abdullah slid into the vacant chair he said, "I saved your coffee for you, Abba Dabba. These companions of ours would have put it where moth nor rust can corrupt nor thieves break through and steal."

"You can *have* coffee," said Washington Lee. "You can *have* it. Any amount. I never *have* drunk it. It knock your wind out bad as cigarettes. No, *sir.*"

"Brother," said Kincaid, running his tongue between his lips and teeth to dislodge some fugitive corn flakes, "it don't matter what a man puts in his mouth. It's what comes out—thieving and conniving words or blasphemous utterance or lying or whatever. I was a preacher once. I could preach day and night, or any old time when two or three was gathered together. But if you really wanted to hear preaching you'd give me a mason jar of corn and half an hour to drink it in and I'm telling you, you'd hear preaching then. I'd fair heist 'em right off'n their benches and have 'em shouting till they like to shook the poles down right on our heads. And then . . ." he pushed his chair back and folded his arms, leaning on the table with his shoulders hunched, "then the spirit forsook me. And the deputies run me out and here I am. I ain't a miner no more. I ain't a preacher. Darned if I know *what* I am. I ain't wuth fifteen cents, and that's a fact."

Jasper Stone finished his coffee, touched his lips with a paper napkin and then folded the napkin and laid it beside his plate. "What was this unpleasantness between you and the deputies, Elder?" he asked, winking at Wash Lee, for all had heard the story before in detail. But here any story, even an old one, was something to listen to. And sometimes by a judicious question now and then the story would go off on a strange, new tack and reveal unfamiliar fields and odd configurations in the landscape of the human heart.

But Kincaid was not to be drawn out along this line again.

He fumbled in the pocket of his bathrobe and took out a toothpick which he started to chew. "I had the tee-berculosis afore this," he said, changing the subject. "Why, shoot, down there in Macklin County everybody has the tee-berculosis, sometime or another. Think nothing of it. Down there they got more to worry about than coughing. That sure is a sorry, miserable county. I wished I was back there."

He stopped speaking, looking past Stone with a black-eyed, hot stare. Jasper Stone turned and then faced back, his heavy-lidded eyes half closed under arching white brows. "Ah, our Nell approaches, coffee-laden. See that you do not fall into the snare of Lust, Elder."

The maid in the bright blue uniform pushed past his chair and Kincaid held up his cup without looking at her.

Nellie Kazimierzska was a blonde girl with a face just a fraction too wide for beauty. Her hair, aided in its dazzling pale golden state by a bleach, was caught up in a net. She walked with an arrogance of carriage, holding her head very high, as she had seen girls do in the movies. "Will any of you gents care for more coffee?" she asked, her voice lowered almost an octave below its normal, shrill range.

The Judge met her eyes, let his own glance drop into a quick triangle and then returned it to her face. He inclined his head as if bowing to a duchess and held out his cup. "A half cup, if you please. How can I resist?"

Nellie poured and then under his deliberate stare began to giggle. "G'wan, Judge—don't knock our coffee, you'll be old and weak yourself someday, like the sign says in the diners." She moved away to another table and Stone's glance followed her.

"I wonder," he said, leaning forward and lowering his voice, "if Nellie's hips do that automatically or whether she has practiced that walk in front of poolrooms. Ah, me, she is fearfully and wonderfully made is our Nell. Two pounds more and she would be fat. There, Elder, you have pride. But at the opposite pole from spiritual pride. Our Nellie is proudest of two objects granted her by nature—twin spheres, like the double moons of Mars. And what confidence the child radiates—for every movie poster assures her that she has what it takes to achieve Happiness which is a Woman's Right."

Wash Lee said meditatively, wadding his paper napkin, "This the last breakfast I going to eat sitting up for a long time." He pressed his great shoulders against the back of the chair. "When I get them spare ribs cut out of me, they going to have to feed me through a straw or something. I hope that doctor don't make a mistake and cut out my gizzard along with the ribs. Be shame on *me,* then."

Abdullah said, "These doctors, they know what they cut. They don't cut nothing wrong. You be all right, Wash. Be all right."

"Tell you more about that this time tomorrow," the big Negro said, pushing back his chair. " 'Scuse me, gents. See you around." He got up and headed for the door, walking with a spring in his feet, his hands carried waist high, his shoulders sloping under the robe. He always wore a towel around his neck although it was against regulations. He said he didn't feel dressed without it.

Watching him go, Stone said dryly, "I wonder if Wash knows what a thoracoplasty does to the chest? That boy is a beautiful specimen of the human animal—by far the best I've seen around this museum of disintegration. 'What immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful symmetry?' Ah, well, that fearful symmetry is about to fall out of its frame."

"They told me, a year ago," Kincaid said, aiming his toothpick at the Judge as if it were a weapon, "that they was a-going to slice out my ribs. They'd tried their pneumothorax and they'd blowed air into me and it didn't work. They says, 'We'll have to cut.' Got to make that old lung quit working somehow. I says, 'I won't have it.' Told 'em I'd put my trust in the Lord. So they didn't cut. And I'm still here, ain't I? Only I ain't wuth fifteen cents, and that's a fact."

The Judge turned to Abdullah. "Feeling lucky today, Abba Dabba?"

"Lucky? Sure, am lucky. Today, tomorrow, next day. Lucky to be alive."

"Let us adjourn to the sun deck," Stone said, getting up from his chair and sliding it back under the table. "The stewards will be wanting to clear the tables. While we, without a care in the world, take ourselves to the sun deck and the fateful pasteboards. I knew a rich old gentleman once who rode the ocean liners year after year and never went ashore if he could help it. He should have come here. The routine is much the same; and he was past the age for the furtive knock at the stateroom door."

They went through the arched doorway of the dining room and nodded to Adele Corey, sitting starched and intently prim behind the desk. As they passed, Jasper Stone lowered one eyelid in a wink and Corey's face, elfin and angular, remained expressionless. Yet her eyelid dropped in reply.

They turned the corner of the corridor and headed toward the end of the hall. The floors over which they passed were of dark green linoleum. The walls were painted a lighter green to the height of a man's shoulder, and above that a neutral cream. The ceilings were white. In all that aseptic pile of white stone,

with its lengths of corridors, there was no picture, no ornament, no carpet, no growing thing save Abdullah's secret ivy. It was not a cheerful place; it was not gloomy. It was efficient and characterless, like a stainless steel basin.

"If we could have just one good painting," Stone had said once. "Just one. I know a beauty. It hangs behind the bar in a San Francisco saloon. But I would even settle for Van Gogh. Anything except the self portrait. He wouldn't like it here."

They reached the sunroom. Three sides of this room were windows, those to the east looking out on the harbor and beyond, the distant, looming city rising from its river. The north windows gave on a vista of factory chimneys, gas tanks, coal breakers, with here and there the spire of a church, dark and smoke-stained like everything else in the town. The western windows showed the other wing across a narrow courtyard. The white stone column, monolithic at night, was seen by day to be split north and south into the shape of a letter H.

Against the back wall of the sunroom were arranged a row of chaise longues with rubber-tired wheels in place of rear legs. They could be moved easily by picking up the curved front legs; they were upholstered in dark green oil cloth which was wiped with a disinfectant solution every other day. To the patients these were known as "worrying chairs." Now a half dozen men from the other end of the floor sat in them, reading newspapers and magazines or simply worrying.

In the northeast corner where the light was best, the card table had its traditional site. Jasper Stone had brought the cards and the box of chips from his locker since it was against regulations to leave them in the sunroom at night. The four players took their places and while Kincaid shuffled, Washington Lee helped to distribute the chips.

"You fellows is sure high flyers," he said, chuckling. "Whites, ten for a penny; reds five for a penny and blues—they is the real big shots—penny apiece. You sure won't go bust playing for them stakes."

"Just a friendly game," Stone said, the crows' feet deepening at the corners of his heavy-lidded eyes. "You wouldn't want us to fall out over filthy lucre, Wash. Birds in their little nests agree. You deal first, I believe, Elder Kincaid." Stone drew gold-rimmed pince nez glasses from the breast pocket of his pajamas under his robe and fitted them on his nose. They were guarded by a black ribbon with a tiny gold slide. When the pince nez was in place it was easy to see why Jasper Stone had been christened "the Judge."

Sun rose above the ice-filled harbor. Mingling with the rustle of cards, the click of chips and the subdued voices of the

players, came the faint, mournful notes of ships' whistles in the distance.

"I think I stay out this time."

"Just one, Elder. A single, fateful leaf from the Book of Chance."

"Three down. This old hand can't get no worse."

"Reckon I'll take two for myself. What you fixing to do, Judge?"

"I shall lift it by two red ones, Elder. Come, gentlemen, let us have action. Let us have more of those spine-chilling thrills and spills along this cardboard midway."

"Oh-oh. Two red lights. The judge, he sure must have something. Well, I going to jump up one more. Money don't mean nothing to me no more. I getting reckless."

"Brother, that ain't the way to play in this game. You got to play same as if it was real pay-money and children home, crying for side meat. Ain't that right, Judge?"

"As right as rain, Elder. As right as rain."

Two hours.

Once Nellie Kazimierzska came in with a bucket and cloth, wiping off window sills, and said, "You boys will have to excuse me for a brief moment. But business before pleasure."

"I got to go out for a minute anyhow," Kincaid said. When he stood up the bridge chair behind him toppled over. "Blame things are made out of tin cans."

Wash said, "Seventh inning stretch." He got up, rotating his shoulders easily, started to stretch, and then lowered his arms and stood looking out at the harbor, humming mournfully to himself, "Want you to love me baby, till my face shine cherry red . . ."

Stone took off his pince nez, and placed it in his pocket under his robe. "Ah, Miss Kazimierzska," he said, winking at Abdullah, "would that all interruptions were as pleasant."

"The name is still Nellie, Judge." She looked at him, practicing looking enigmatic, with her eyebrows raised and her lids lowered half-way. The Judge was a good safe one to fool around with that way on account he was not likely to go getting ideas. The Judge was always a perfect gentleman, keeping his hands to himself.

On his way back from the lavatory Kincaid stopped at the door of Ben Rosenbaum's room and stood looking at the foot of the bed, the muscles of his jaw twitching as he ground his teeth together, listening with one half of his mind to the faint creaking sound they made.

Ben glanced up at the tall, spare figure and suddenly realized whom Kincaid looked like. He was like Abraham Lincoln, if

you could imagine the Lincoln of the prairie years crushed by the nightmare of the world, hopeless and half-mad.

Kincaid said, "Benny, why bless God, son, you only got half of it."

"Come in, Joe."

"Can't. Fellows waiting outside in the game. But I tell you, son, you only got half of it. How you going to do anything, 'thout you got the living power of the Lord Jesus Christ backing you up? If the blind lead the blind, both of 'em bound to fall into a ditch."

Ben tightened his lips, wondering how to switch the conversation into more rational channels. He had no strength left for argument. Finally he said, "What happened to you down in Macklin County, Joe? In a situation like that which do you need more—God or the solidarity of the working class?"

Kincaid moved in until his great, hooked hands were grasping the foot of the bed. "Benny—I'm bound to say it, long's I got a breath left in me: you get any bunch of fellows together, ain't worth a hill of beans, 'thout you got the spirit of the Lord God holding 'em together, same as the mortar holds the bricks in a chimbley." He turned his face toward the window, jaw muscles rippling, and then left the foot of the bed and began to pace the linoleum from window to door and back. "Some of them old brothers and sisters, they says 'Elder, ain't no use trying to mix union talk and the Gospel.' Well, I says, I *will* talk union. I'll talk union week-days and I'll talk Gospel Sundays. I allows nobody going to stop me . . ."

He paused and clasped his hands together, rocking forward and Benny had a hot flash of embarrassment for fear Kincaid would drop to his knees and start praying right there in the lighted room where people going by could see him. But instead he launched into the old story, which by now was a set pattern, the words hardly varying at all.

"We had this organizer fellow come in, show us how to get unionized right. Larry Simmons, name was. There was all kinds of talk around, 'bout how he was an atheist and I don't know what all. I says, pay it no mind at all. If ever there was a boy had the hand of the Lord God on his shoulder it was this fellow Simmons. Why, you could just see the blessed Grace a-shinin' out of him. He could of took any gal in town out under the bushes easy only he never done it . . ."

Kincaid stopped and raised his hands to his head, raking his fingers through his black, spiky hair, his eyes on the floor. Then he dropped his arms and turned on Ben, eyes sick with anger. "Old Man Greer—he's the sheriff. He goes ahead and he deputizes a dozen fellas, all of 'em the meanest cusses he could find. They was real gun thugs. And then one evening,

Larry he don't come home—he was staying with us, sleeping in the kitchen on a pallet. My sister, Dorcas, she was fourteen year old. She asks me where Larry is and I tell her I ain't seen him and Dorcas runs out and I reckon she run all over town, trying to find him. No sign. It warn't until the next morning, me and three other fellows was driving to work. We had a old Ford and it run pretty good. We was crossing this little concrete bridge—and I says, 'Whoa up. I want to see something.' I'd seen something back there on the bridge, right on the railing, looked like blood." Kincaid was standing over Ben, his gnarled hands clasped and resting on the blankets.

"I looks over. And I seen a pair of legs in overhalls, alaying down there in the water, couldn't see no more'n the legs. I says, 'That's him, all right,' and we clumb down the bank. An' it *was* him. Bullet from one of them high-powered thirty-eights had went right in his cheek, come out the back of his head. There was a hole in back big as your fist. That was the first thing I saw; he was laying face down in the water, where they'd heaved him over and the water must of carried him under a ways during the night.

"Well, we drug him up the bank and we put him in the car and we went back and I took him over my shoulder and I come in the house. Dorcas was standing there, watching us come in. She says, 'Put him on his pallet,' and I done it. I laid him down on his back, so's the hole in the back of his head wouldn't show. And Dorcas—she warn't crying nor carrying on nor nothing. She just sat there by him, bare-legged, I can see her yet. She was just a-watchin' him, same as if he was asleep; same's a mother'll sit by a sick baby, shooing flies off'n him, so's he can sleep. Well, she sat there. And there we stood, not saying nothing. Bless God, we didn't know which way to go. We didn't know who it was had shot him—all them fellas was carrying thirty-eights.

"And then we all went out and got in the car and went to work, leaving him for the women folks to look after, 'count we didn't want to lose the day's pay."

Ben had closed his eyes and the scalding, impotent tears were sliding out from under his lids. No matter how often he heard the story, always told the same way, it was like this. It was the nightmare by daylight—the house is burning and I must warn the others. But I can't speak. I can't speak. And I can't wake up either, for this is it: the nightmare is the world.

Kincaid's voice brought him back to the bare room, the hard mattress, the hair-stuffed pillows, the winter light outside.

". . . well, that night somebody plants a bundle of dynamite under Old Man Greer's front porch. Blowed the whole front of the house off, pretty near. Nobody hurt. But Greer

allowed as how I done it. I ain't saying yes or no. But when I heard how Greer was talking around town I lit out. I never stopped till I got to this town. Fellow from down home was here, driving a coal truck, and I got took on as a helper. Started hemorrhagin' and here I am. I ain't a miner. I ain't a preacher. I just ain't nothing. Spirit's flew out of me. I'm just a whited sepulchre, full of dead bones, and that's a fact. And if you don't have the spirit of the Lord God upholding you, you can't preach, you can't hold your fool head up in the street. You can't preach and you can't talk union, neither, so's they will ketch fire . . ."

Benny did not seem to be listening. His head was turned away and Kincaid could see the sharp angle of cheekbone and temple. Benny was so thin he made hardly any mound in the blankets. It was like just his head was lying there. From the bed came a husky whisper. "You ought to have a mimeograph machine, Joe. Start a little paper. To hold your people together during the period of the triumph of reaction."

The ex-miner drew his hands apart and then closed them with a crack. "Why, bless God, brother, Larry Simmons had one of them machines. It's still up under the shed roof, back of the house. Leastways, it was, last I heard. What good's it going to do up there? And half the folks can't read anyhow. You got to talk to 'em. And how'm I going to talk, 'thout the spirit . . . ?"

"*Mister* Kincaid!" In the doorway stood the slim, brassy-haired, white-starched figure of Adele Corey, her carefully shaped brows drawn into a frown. "You get right out of here, now. Stop pestering Benny. Do you hear? Come on, now. Scram."

"Let him stay, Corey," the boy said peevishly. "Joe and I were discussing labor journalism."

"Never mind the topic of the discussion. Go on now, Mr. Kincaid. Your pals are waiting for you out there."

Kincaid stared through her as if she were a ghost whose haunting had become too habitual to bother him. He turned, his lips moving with some impassioned speech delivered only to himself, and strode out. His shoulder knocked against the door jamb, breaking his stride, but he kept on, eyes directed at the floor, long arms swinging.

Corey came over beside the bed with a rustle. "You mustn't talk so much. You know that. I don't know why all these fellows insist on hanging out in here when they've got all the rest of the floor to do their arguing in."

"Joe's okay. I like to listen to him. He's crazy. But he's okay."

She was frowning again, but this time at her own thoughts.

"Benny—I don't want to bother you. But, look—I've been saving up for a fur coat. And all of a sudden I've *got* it. I mean enough for it. A friend of mine was going to give me a wrist watch for my birthday only I told this person I'd rather have the money, on account of I want to get a coat. Only I wanted to ask you about it, because I know you were in the business and all. What I mean is, I want to get something that will look like real class, but I can wear it for a long time . . ."

His eyes were fully fixed on her now, taking in the glint of her hair, her large, slanting eyes, her little painted mouth with scarlet carried over the natural line to give her a bee-stung lower lip. He drew breath and said slowly, "Persian lamb, Corey. Get one with the sleeves cut nice and full. Now I'll tell you what to look for . . ."

Down the corridor, toward the sunroom and the waiting players, Kincaid strode to the rhythm of a text knocking at the back of his brain. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Proverbs, twenty-two and thirteen.

In memory the scent of that summer night came back; soft rustle of laurel on the dark hillside and below him, where he crouched, the pin-point lights of town, lying in the cup of the valley. A whippoorwill call repeated three times: fellas up on the road, waiting by the car. But I ain't leaving. I ain't leaving till I see it. A spurt of light, ground under him trembling, the sullen roar of dynamite and a clatter of chips falling as he scrambled up through the thicket to the road where the silent men waited by the old Ford, its headlight dark, its engine turning over, ready to roll.

What good did it do, bless God, what good?

"And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all."

Only that millstone is tied around my neck, seems like, getting heavier every day. And Babylon a-building, a-reaching its towers, higher towards heaven. Down home, what I hear, the gun thugs walking right into a saloon and taking a bottle from behind the bar and walking out, not paying nor nothing. The Lord must of turned his face away from the abominations; maybe getting ready to drown us all.

Then there came to him the image of the child, Dorcas, dry-eyed beside the murdered boy, watching him like he was just asleep . . .

Kincaid slid back into his place at the card table. "Ben don't look so good today. If I wasn't empty of the spirit I'd try

working with him in prayer. Only Ben's an atheist, what he lets on."

"Come, come, Elder," Stone said, dealing swiftly, "some people drop down and then bounce up again. Time was, Elder, when the price on you was twenty-to-one, and look at you now. You're practically ready to go back to Macklin County and play at Robin Hood with the adipose sheriff."

Abdullah laid a fat brown hand on his cards and drew them toward him placidly. "That boy not going to die yet, I think. Everybody going to die sometime. Let's come on, play cards."

Al Koran had much to say of death: *Every soul shall taste of death; and for trial will we prove you with evil and with good. Every soul shall taste of death and ye shall only receive your recompenses on the day of resurrection . . . and the life of this world is but a cheating fruition.*

"Why, bless God, I got so I can feel it a-sneaking along after us!" Kincaid beat his fist against the card before him. "I can *feel* it. It's a dark angel, sailing up and down, over this place; I can feel the cold wind off'n its wings. Yes, sir, a dark angel."

"This dark angel nothing new to Abba Dabba," the fat man said softly. He took up his cards, and Jasper Stone, picking up his own hand, was aware that Abdullah had frozen into tense concentration for a moment longer than usual. Stone himself held a flush in hearts. He took one glance at the cards and then laid them down again.

Wash Lee was humming faintly under his breath. The humming stopped. He discarded a card and asked for one. The humming started up again, faint and mellow.

Stone looked up at Kincaid and saw that the deep furrow between the bushy black brows had eased somewhat and that Kincaid had leaned back against his chair, holding his cards loosely in one of his big-knuckled hands. His other hand went into the pocket of his robe and came out with the toothpick which he placed between his lips.

Wash had opened with two white chips. Kincaid raised it one and Abba Dabba stayed. Stone raised it two. Silence fell upon the quartet of players.

Deep voiced, the whistles of ships in the harbor spoke of other lands, of mountainous seas met and split by the bows; whistles echoed the thunder of southern storms, and in the silence which followed them there closed in the memory of the flying wake under moonlight, league upon league about the earth.

Jasper Stone slid thumb and middle finger down his stack of blue chips, lifted one from the top and then held it poised delicately, his face toward the window, listening.

From far below came the sharp, insistent blast of a whistle. "Wait, gentlemen," Stone said, pushing back his chair. "Something is amiss out there."

They lined up at the windows, cards forgotten.

A string of sea barges lay at anchor, their hatches white with snow. A tug was curving away from them, its whistle showing repeated puffs of white.

Wash Lee said, "Fellow overboard. See him? This side the front barge."

Stone's quick tread sloped away down the corridor but none turned to see where he had gone. Kincaid said, "Them fellows better hurry. He'll get so cold he'll just give up and sink."

Stone was back, carrying a pair of binoculars which he had taken from his bed table drawer. He focused them and then steadied them by bracing his thumbs against his cheek bones, his forefingers against his forehead.

"Hey, Judge, gimme a look." The voice came from a slender, brown, good-looking youth with black patent-leather hair, wearing a wine-colored silk robe and pale green silk pajamas. He had risen from one of the worrying chairs, dropping a green racing form on the seat to hold his place, and was now standing at Stone's elbow, his clear-cut features impassive, only his eyes showing any curiosity.

"Why, Mr. Vitiello," said the Judge, lowering the glasses, "with pleasure. Anything which can flush you out of the cover of a racing sheet is indeed a subject worthy of note . . ."

"Jees, gimme them glasses, pal." He refocused them and then said, "What d'ye know? There's an old dame on that barge. I can tell it's a dame by the bumps in the sweater. Hey, she's throwing a rope! Jees, the guy in the water—he's got blood on his face."

Wash Lee stood with his hands on top of the window sash, his head bent, forehead pressed against the chill glass. "He must have been trying to make fast with a line from the tug and fell in. Cut hisself on ice. Man, that ice can cut, too."

Vitiello reluctantly took the binoculars from his eyes and held them toward Wash. "Take a look, pal."

Lee spread them a little and steadied them against the window. "That fellow's hands so stiff he can't catch hold on the line. Oh, man—just *wrap* 'er around. Go 'head, wrap 'er, ne'-mind grabbing. Oh, man!"

He surrendered the glasses to Stone who held them toward Abdullah. The sad, fat man shook his head. He sat with hands folded in his lap, waiting. Frank Vitiello grabbed the binoculars, "Just for a second. Jees!" He steadied them. "Boy, oh, boy—that tug better step on it, turning around. The guy's sinking. He's down."

Lee said, "Be better if he just lay limp and float. Be better if he stop trying to tread water so hard. But I s'pects he scared he freeze solid if he just float. Oh, man."

Vitiello's voice rapped out suddenly, "Wow! Say—that dame, the old dame in the sweater—holy gee, she jumped in! Can you beat that. Lookit, she jumped in after him!"

Stone tapped him on the shoulder and said gently, "May I?" He took the glasses. "A stout heart, that woman. She has him by the hair, holding his face out. Yes, he's cut badly."

The tug had turned and now cut its engines and reversed its screws as it approached the two tiny forms, dark specks against the leaden water and sluggishly creeping ice.

Wash whistled. "They goin' to make it! Look at them boys on the tug! Look like one of 'em's half-way over the side. Other one holdin' him by his belt."

Stone passed him the glasses. With the naked eye the whole scene was tantalizing, scaled down to a tug the size of a match box. "They got 'em!" Wash cried out triumphantly. "They pullin' 'em aboard. Man, I bet them folks is chilly now. Oh, man. That's *fine*."

Frank Vitiello jerked his chin up, as if fighting a tight collar. "Come on, kid. Give us a break." When he had located the tug in the gray circle of light within the glasses he said, "That guy's out cold. The old dame is helping the other guys carry him inside. Jees, what d'ye know—a dame."

The tug steamed away from the anchored barges and the harbor lost the bright light of drama and settled back again to its steady goings and comings, its undertone of far lands, cargoes, women in evening dresses, men in cummerbunds and stewards passing with trays of bouillon under the morning skies of kinder latitudes.

The three men settled back at the card table, joining Abdullah who had never left it.

"Rescue at sea," Jasper Stone said, sliding the binoculars back into their case and snapping the cover latch. "And we shall probably never know if the man overboard was badly hurt." He drew his hand of five cards from the pocket of his robe and laid them carefully on the table.

Wash Lee chuckled. "My cards laying down on the floor. I must of got up so quick they got caught in the wind." He picked up the pasteboards and threw them on the table face up. Wash had drawn to fill four kings and made it. "I bet that lady that jumped in, she was his mother. That's what I bet."

Stone smiled faintly, picked up his hand, looked at it for a moment and then turned it over, spreading the cards with his fingers. "Hearts, ten high. And dropped into my lap by the goddess of chance. Ah, Lee—we shall never know if the lad

overboard was the son, the husband, or the paramour of the lady. Or no relation at all. Perhaps that valiant lady was merely acting out Dr. John Donne's advice. Maybe she reads Mr. Hemingway. A thousand speculations are open to us. But we never learn the end. A flash of action, a cry of joy or grief. And we never stay for the final curtain. Ah, well, gentlemen, this hand has been disrupted by a happy diversion. Shall we return to our little two-dimensional world of certainty?"

Kincaid had sunk into his chair and his clasped hands were still firmly gripped together. He lifted his head and asked suddenly, as if coming back from a long distance, "Did they make it?"

"You bet," Vitiello called from his chaise longue, smoothing out the racing form against a raised knee. "Where you been, guy?"

"I . . . I was thinking about something else," Kincaid muttered, slapping his cards down upon the deck.

"Fibber." Stone's eyes crinkled into affectionate lines. "You were praying, Elder. Who knows—telepathy has been established for years. Perhaps it was the fervor you put into it which gave the lady the required resolution to dive into that icy sea. Although I don't think all the prayer in the world could have made me do it."

Reading the unspoken intent of his fellows he dealt back the chips already in the pot, gathered the cards and prepared to slip them into their case. After that burst of life upon them, cards seemed futile. Each man was quiet, within himself, reading his own meaning into the adventure of the barge.

Finally Stone said, to prime the conversational pump, "My old friend, that engaging rascal of whom you have heard me speak—The Morning Glory Kid—he was in a shipwreck once. He ducked down to the staterooms with the deck slanting under his feet. He just made it into the last lifeboat."

"What'd he go after?" Kincaid asked, his black eyes intent. "Somebody trapped, couldn't get out?"

"Alas, no. Nothing so praiseworthy. He went after a necklace of pearls. And it didn't belong to him, either. That is—not before the wreck. Ah, well, he gave it to a girl in Port Said. And in the end she lifted his dough and padded his money belt with paper. God help the poor hustlers at sea on a night like that."

The clock had a dark face and luminous hands; a mocking, insolent, domineering face set in a panel of leather. One could always shut it up in its fiat box like a cigarette case and then

its face was invisible and its ticking stilled. But Ben did not shut it up. He kept it in the drawer until Miss Halligan had made her round of inspection and then he took it out and opened it where he could see it. The Judge had given it to him: "Take it, my boy. I've called a truce with Time. No clocks, no calendars. I still wear a wrist watch from habit. But Jasper Stone and Time now go their separate ways."

Lunch soon and tepid mashed potatoes. Food sickened Ben lately. He dreamed of clear soup with matzoth balls, of strawberries and sour cream with the sweet, black bread.

And after lunch, rest period. No reading, no writing. Ben smiled a little, remembering Frank Vitiello and what he had said when rest period was first explained to him: "Jees. Is it against the rules to think about women?"

Ben looked up from the hard-covered notebook which said "Composition" on the cover, knowing who was standing beside the bed. It was Frank Vitiello.

"Hi-ya, Benny boy. What's new witcha?"

"Same old stuff, Frank. What do you know?"

Frank wrenched his chin up as if he were fighting a tight collar. "Jees, we been having excitement. No kidding, it was good as a moving picture. Guy falls off a barge. We seen it—the Judge got his horse race glasses and we seen it happen." He described the rescue, going into dramatic detail to make the story last longer; Ben's ghostly smile encouraged him to make it good. "So then the tug shoved off. I guess they took 'em inside and started de-frosting 'em. Jees, what a day! It's swell."

Ben, wishing he could have seen it, tasted the bitter flavor of frustration in his mouth and then forced his lips up at the corners into a smile. He changed the subject. "That empty bed in your room filled yet, Frank?"

Vitiello nodded. "Yeah. The new guy just come in. Corey brings him in and he's got enough stuff with him to start a second-hand store. He gives Corey an argument—he's got to keep all the stuff. Oh, yeah? Then she tells him he's got to shave off his mustache. Boy, oh, boy, what an argument comes up then! I'm going to have a sweet time, Benny boy. Of all the guys coming into this lung-stir I got to draw an old pappy of a guy with beefs."

"What's his name, Frank?"

"Goldfarb. I seen it when Corey wrote it on his razor case. What an argument to get the razor away from him after he finally shaves off the mustache! He asks me why and who and what's the idea, taking away his razor. I tell him, 'They don't want ya cutting your throat, Pop. It messes up the floor.

In this joint it's strictly a hanging proposition. Or a Steve Brody down the laundry chute.' "

"Send Goldfarb in to me if he wants to complain, Frank. I'm immune. Let him beef to me."

Vitiello grinned, grimaced against the ghost of a tight collar, and shook one of Ben's feet gently through the blankets. "Take it easy, Benny boy. Keep your legs crossed. I got to roll in now for eats. I tried to con Corey into letting me eat sitting up at the bed table until one of them guys in the dining room puts his checks back in the rack or gets sprung. But she says if I'm going to eat in the room I got to eat in bed. I couldn't con her into it. But, boy, I'd like to have that babe in a juke joint on my night out."

He grinned again, jerked his chin, and walked away, whistling between his teeth.

Ben read over what he had written in the notebook and held his eyes open for a little while; then he let them close of their own weight. Writing came harder as every week of time passed. There was a period, two, three years back, when it used to roll out. Now he always had to beat himself into it. It reminded him of a dray horse he had seen when he was a kid; the horse's head hanging with exhaustion and the driver lashing at him and bellowing. A worn horse in the slanting sun, there in the old neighborhood, in the long ago.

That morning he had gathered up stray notes, wisps of lines, rhymes jotted down in the back pages, and built a sonnet:

BOSS WITH PIE CHART

This circle represents the cash outlay
That keeps us turning wheels and stacking boxes.
I'll cut it up, pie fashion.
This I pay
For interest on my loans; the banks are foxes
Gnawing my guts. *This* slice goes up in smoke,
For coal is dear. *This* wedge for seasoned lumber.
The railroads are not tender-hearted folk
Bestowing alms . . .
This pie chart haunts my slumber.

The circle as a whole is made of prices
Ironbound by hoops called competition.
I slice and slice and then add up the slices.
If government control . . . but that's sedition.
Find me a profit, statesmen, prophets, sages!

He drew a line across the wedge marked "Wages."

Ben put the notebook painfully away in the drawer of the bed table, dropped the pencil in beside it and lay back against the pillows, resting before trying to slide farther down in the bed. He let his eyes drop against the light, closed their lids and watched the faint orange glare through them, wondering if it were worth the trouble to rummage in the drawer for his black silk eye-shield. Not worth the trouble; and he started to turn over to put his back to the light when a voice came from the foot of the bed.

"You Rosenbaum?"

The man was old, with thick iron-gray hair and a face scarred by a lifetime of drudgery.

"That's right," Ben whispered. "You're Mr. Goldfarb?"

"Yeh, yeh. Moishe Goldfarb. How long you been here?"

"Three years."

"Three *years? Ai, gevalt!* How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"You want to see the paper? I seen it already." He took from under his arm a Yiddish newspaper and held it out. Ben shook his head.

"Sorry, but I can't read Yiddish."

"No? But you read Hebrew, yeh? You an educated boy."

"No, I can't read Hebrew either, Mr. Goldfarb."

The old man put the paper back under his arm carefully and stood in thought, his pale gray eyes tormented with half-materialized ghosts; old anxieties of work unfinished, children ill, rent due, bills unpaid. And under it all the abiding gloom of the small retailer in a chain store world. When he spoke again he said suddenly, "You married?"

The boy in the bed smiled, his eyes more cavernous than ever. "Not a chance. I'd be in a sweet mess if I were. What good would it do me to have a wife, stuck away in here?"

"A man should have a wife. Look at me, at seventeen I was married, already. That was on the other side. Ai, what it's happening nowadays the young men? Married they wouldn't get; Hebrew they wouldn't learn."

Ben Rosenbaum grinned. "You'd better get back to bed, Mr. Goldfarb. Miss Corey will come and chase you in, if you don't."

The old man shook his head impatiently, shrugging at the same time. "Bed-schmed, what's all this business bed? I'm an old man, I'm tired. I ain't sick. I'm tired. I ain't sick."

"All right, all right. You're tired. Get in bed for your nap and you'll get rested up." Ben turned over, facing the window, but his visitor refused to take the hint.

"If I was sick would I be in a *goyisher* place like this? Would I? Wouldn't I go to a good Jewish hospital where they keep *kosher?* It's only for a few days' rest. My son-in-law, Dr. Hymie Katz, fixed it up for me to come in here just for a while, I should get rest up good. You think I can't work yet at my age? What do I know but work; how should I stop at my age? Hymie says, 'You got to take it easy, Pop.' How should I know how to take it easy? Did I ever take it easy?"

"Mr. Goldfarb!" Corey's voice came from the hall with a keen edge on it. "You get into bed this minute!"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh," he said over his shoulder. He came closer to Ben. "I'll tell my wife, when she comes, she should bring a nice plate chicken soup in a bottle. You're a sick boy. And the *goyisher* cooking—it's a wonder you ain't dead yet. A nice plate chicken soup in a bottle . . ."

"Mr. Goldfarb!"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh. I'm coming."

Corey switched in, the high heels of her little white shoes clicking in irritation. Without a word she seized the old man by the sleeve of his bathrobe and towed him out.

On her return trip to the desk she stopped in Ben's room and said, "Benny, you'll have to help me with that guy. You'll have to convince him he's not in here on a picnic."

The boy lay quiet, watching his breathing. Lying down flat wasn't good. He said, half-opening his eyes, "He's your patient, Corey. I can't even speak Yiddish well enough to make him feel at home. Time will educate him. When I came here I 'wasn't sick' either. I had 'bronchitis.' I was going to be out in a month."

"Yes, I know." She waited a moment, watching the emaciated boy. "Want a pillow under your head, Benny?"

He grunted something which was meant for "yes" and she arranged the pillow for him, while he kept his head turned away from her as per regulations, for the breath of a patient is a potential source of infection.

Corey clicked toward the door, waved her fingers to him and said over her shoulder, "Pleasant dreams."

He didn't sleep. Some of the old timers could sleep like logs, but if Ben slept now he would have the long night to reckon with. And when Gallagher was busy there was endless time and darkness. Every minute taken from his notebook was time wasted, time slipping by, time like golden leaves of life, blowing past him. Time, time, time; time, the unearthly, lovely essence of life. Lying on his side, his head high, his breath coming a little more easily, Ben watched time slip by, hearing it go with a great rushing of wings into the dustbin of the past.

East Nine was silent at the noon rest period.

In Room 906 Abdullah, in his bed by the windows, slumbered dreamlessly.

In the bed near the corridor wall Jasper Stone meditated on the mystery of consciousness. He withdrew the watcher in his mind from the train of thought and watched the thoughts pass in review like actors across a stage. Finally they stopped. The stage was empty and the watcher drew back until it was watching itself. Consciousness became focused into a needle-point just behind the eyes. Several times insistent thoughts clawed and mewed at the edges of consciousness but slunk away, frightened by the fiery light of that blazing needle-point. There was no longer any body, no longer any gravity tugging at that body, no chains of sensation fettering the mind to earth; there was nothing but that single point of life and then the waves of light began to pulse about it and consciousness floated on the sea of light as dust-moat on a stream . . . From the corridor came the creak of wheels as an orderly wheeled a metal carriage by, and Stone sighed, turned over and smiled grimly to himself. It was spectacular, while you held on to it. But what of the return to earth and the body? And the poor, brown-skinned beggars do that year in, year out. Sometimes they do it standing on their heads . . .

In the other bed by the corridor Joe Kincaid lay with eyes closed, his thin-lipped mouth compressed, so that he looked as Lincoln might have looked had a doctor been probing buck shot from a wound in his leg. The Lord had offered His forgiveness to a repentent Israel in the old days: *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.* Hosea, 14:4 and 5. Lord God, praying is just like heavin' gravel up against a window-shutter, don't open. Same as when the gal is a-scared of her Pa and getting a whipping. Or else is out sparking some other fellow. Window shutter don't move. You heave another handful; bounces right back in your eyes. Shut. Dark. Lord God, the windows of heaven are shut in my face; prayers bounce right back at me. Dark, bless God, dark as a cave-in and the boys put their lamps out, save air. Oh, Jesus, come get me. Let me hear you a-diggin'. Come get me 'fore the air's gone . . .

Washington Lee dreamed it was the middle of the ninth round; he felt the canvas cold under his knee, heard the bell and snapped awake. He said, "Shoot," and rolled over, shield-

ing his eyes with his arm against the blinding glare of the windows.

Across the corridor in 904 by himself young Ben Rosenbaum gave up thinking about his own work and lapsed into the joy, still strong and heartening, of the Great Work. That's what the alchemists called it—the arrival at gold from lead. And for Ben there was a Great Work indeed, and he hoped to memorize it all, every line of it before . . . He never completed the sentence in his mind. It was always *before*. Now he picked out a line, the first line that came into his head, and went on from there:

I am the Earth,
Thy mother, she within whose stony veins,
To the last fibre of the loftiest tree
Whose thin leaves trembled in the frozen air,
Joy ran, as blood within a living frame,
When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud
Of glory, arise, a spirit of keen joy!
And at thy voice her pining sons uplifted
Their prostrate brows from the polluting dust,
And our almighty Tyrant with fierce dread
Grew pale, until his thunder chained thee here . . .

The effort of memory was too much at last and Ben slid into dream: the sunlit bay cut with the scarlet sails of fishermen, the white sails of yachts. And there, beside him in the boat, there was the Alchemist, waistcoat unbuttoned, his shirt open at the neck, the Alchemist wearing stale custom no more than he wore a hat, his mind as free as the column of his throat. Spray showered them, sun dried them soon again, and the world was drenched in gold under an Italian sky.

Lying with his hands locked under his shiny, smooth hair, Frank Vitiello saw on the movie screen of his mind a low-ceilinged room, hazy with smoke, and with the soft beat of a solid combo cutting through the chatter. He was wearing a midnight blue dinner jacket, a pleated shirt and a dark red bow tie. His right hand was under the elbow of a girl whose shoulders were clad only in the cascade of her own pale golden hair. She was a girl whose evening gown was a shimmer of sequins, and from her wrist flashed the tokens of Vitiello's power, the bracelets of diamonds he had given her. Yet the diamonds were only a sign of power. For she could not resist him. She had tried, and when luck went against him that time, she had put the ice in hock to give him a stake again. Now he was on top once more and as they followed the headwaiter to their table by the ringside a girl leaned toward her com-

panion and whispered, just loud enough for Frank to hear, "There goes Vitiello, the gambler."

Frank opened his eyes, reached out and eased open the bed table drawer. He took out a racing form and studied it closely. Two bucks on Doremi, a long shot, would have paid off at eighteen. That would mean two bucks lost on the previous five long shots and by the system would have left him twenty-six bucks to the good.

In the bed across the room Moishe Goldfarb tossed and muttered. Lying in bed in the daytime, how could he get used to it? For a rest, a couple weeks with Sylvia and the grandsons was better. But that Hymie! "You couldn't go where there's young children." Doctor-schmoctor, what harm could young children do him? Hadn't he had plenty young children in his own house? What greater joy for the *alter zeyde* than grandsons? That Hymie. *Darf gehn zu* college!

Far below the window, at the foot of the white shaft in the muck and wallow of slush, uncollected garbage, soot and strewn paper that was the town, a siren howled. Goldfarb sat up straighter in bed, then quickly threw the covers aside and hurried to the window, pressing his forehead against the glass to see if it was a fire engine. The siren wail rose, fell, rose again demanding and arrogant. But it was too far below him. The old man gripped the handles of the window sash, heaved, and the metal window, traveling in counterweighted grooves, slid up without a sound. He leaned out into the bite of the wind. Down, down below, nine stories of straight drop to the street, there were motorcycle cops shooting along, blowing sirens and making cars stop and people run, mixing up everything—the trucks couldn't get through with the merchandise. And all for what? So it could pass through the limousine—it raced along the street now like a black, shiny beetle there below him—the limousine where it sits back, smoking dollar cigars, *Fonya*, the Czar, J. J. Hanlon. The Boss. Pfui!

The tiny drop of clear saliva was caught and whirled by wind and the old man's eyes followed it until it vanished, not to the pavement but out somewhere over rooftops, maybe all the way out to the river. When he pulled his head in he was trembling with the cold.

Out at the desk Adele Corey finished entering the temperature-pulse-respiration figures on the charts, added to her notes various data and ruled the "noon line" on each one. Around her the quiet, rubber-tired, well-oiled, sterile world wheeled on its way. In the cellar, ten stories down, the furnaces opened glowing mouths like images of Moloch to be fed. Steam hissed into sterilizer tanks; in vast kettle-drums of

stainless steel the steam poured through the double lining, setting to boil an acre of string-beans which had been dumped can after two-gallon can into the cookers; in the laundry a sharp chemical smell mingled with the odor of steam and the smell of wet concrete; in the hot baths of chemicals and soap the shame of feces, urine, blood or spilled cocoa on sheets was made white and given absolution; a small gray-and-white kitten which had ventured into a strange black cavern was suddenly attacked by an avalanche of hurtling boulders in the dark, pounded, buffeted and sent screeching to safety outside as coal thundered down the chute; in the dietician's office the telephone informed her that her son at the nursery school had vomited up his lunch and did not seem to adjust readily to the group; while above, in the corridor which separated East Nine from West Nine, Adele Corey pushed the last of the charts back in its place in the rack. Then she drew it out again and holding her fountain pen in her right hand, she slid open the desk drawer. In it was a book, its leaves held open by two rubber bands. Corey found her place:

". . . the oaken panel rang with the repeated blows of a sword hilt, driven against the wood. There was a splintering crash and then the great hand in its glove of beige velvet thrust itself in and threw the bolt. She stood, powerless to interfere, watching the heavy door swing inward. From the darkness of the inn corridor came a chuckle, and then, as she moved back a step, the beam of moonlight struck full on her bared shoulder. She heard a gasp as he drew breath. Disdainfully she unhooked her bodice, saying with the gesture, more eloquent than words, 'Here. Take it. It is a coin thrown to a beggar . . .'"

When Corey came around with the eggnogs, old Goldfarb was sitting in the metal chair beside his bed, gazing at the floor. Rest period was over anyhow, so it wasn't worth while scolding him. Vitiello, in the other bed, looked at her with eyes that didn't seem to focus on her. When she held out the glass of egg-and-milk he came alive and said, "Yeah, yeah. Set it down, sister."

She continued her round. Men were the limit. You never could tell what they were going to do or what they were thinking about except the times when they were thinking about It.

Frank Vitiello threw off the covers savagely, pulled on his slippers and plunged into his robe, tying the cord with a jerk which drew a sharp "wheet" from the silk. From his bed table he snatched a round, waxed-cardboard carton with a tight-fitting cover, the kind used by soda fountains for a pint of ice

cream to go. A label, pasted on the carton, said: *Vitiello. Rm. 908. 72 hr. sputum.*

Moving like a man walking through water, he crossed the hall to Ben Rosenbaum's room. Vitiello's face was gray, his eyes flashing, winking often. When Ben looked up Frank said hoarsely, "Kid—tell me something."

"What is it, Frank?"

"Listen—I heard these guys around here talking about 'streaking.' What do they mean, 'streaking?' "

Ben pushed himself up a little higher and took a breath. "It means that some of the smaller blood vessels have broken down. The mucus comes out with streaks of blood in it. It means that enough tissue has been destroyed for a small cavity to form . . ."

Vitiello swallowed twice, his Adam's apple jumping. With his free hand he smoothed back his hair. His chin went into a spasm of fighting against a tight collar which wasn't there. "That ain't good, huh?"

"No," said Ben, "it ain't good a bit. I'll never forget the first time I saw any streaking in my own cup."

Vitiello twisted the cover from the paper carton and held it out. "Take a look, kid. Is this it? Level with me, kid. Level."

Ben peered into the carton and then sank back, gathering his breath. He shook his head. "Relax, Frankie. That's not it."

"Jees! It's blood, kid."

"From your gums. Sitting around in here seems to soften up everybody's gums and they bleed. Rub them with your finger inside and outside when you brush your teeth and they'll toughen up. That's straight stuff, Frankie. I wouldn't kid you. You've got nothing there to worry about."

The grin slid back over Vitiello's face. He put the cover on the carton and dropped it into the pocket of his robe.

"You know, Benny boy—if I was playing the system with dough instead of on paper, I'd be in twenty-six bucks. Honest. You let me check this for another six months and we'll have it. I'll cut you in, kid. We'll split the bets and the take. We'll make us some dough."

Ben smiled in spite of the choking, strangling enemy working again inside him. "I might not be around six months from now."

"Aah, nuts!" Frank leaned down and gently shook one of Ben's feet through the blankets. "Inside six months you'll have your four hours up a day like the other guys. You been through the mill, Benny boy. But you're gaining. I wouldn't crud ya up, pal. I can see you gaining."

Corey called from the doorway, "Vitiello—get your bed

made. If the boss finds an unmade bed it'll be my neck in a sling."

Frank winked at Ben, made for the door and then stopped and raised his clasped hands toward Benny. "Take it easy, boy. See you around."

Six months to perfect his horse system. Six months is forever. And he's going to spend it working out a system for beating the races.

Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone looked like a statue of Woodrow Wilson done larger than life-size. He was a couple of inches over six feet in height, weighed two hundred pounds without being fat, and had hands that seemed as though they had been designed for a coal-heaver. With these hands he could thread a needle behind his back. His resemblance to the Great War President lay in the high-notched nostrils, the cool eyes behind rimless glasses, the expression of austere self-discipline which he wore at all times.

His arrival on East Nine was a daily event, following egg nog and preceded by a great flurry of last minute straightening up of bed tables, smoothing of sheets and bed spreads, and entering of essential data on charts.

When he stepped out of the elevator, smiling primly, Corey said, "Good afternoon, Doctor Rathbone," and picked up her fountain pen and the ledger marked "Doctor's Order Book." She followed him down the corridor, a respectful two paces to the rear and left, while the orderly pushed the carriage of charts along behind them silently on its rubber-tired wheels.

Outside of 904 they stopped; Ben heard the scrape of his chart board being withdrawn from the rack by Corey. There was a rustle of paper as the doctor leafed through its pages.

Rathbone entered the room, his long coat gleaming white over a suit of navy blue broadcloth, his Phi Beta Kappa key winking from his watch chain. "Good afternoon, Mr. Rosenbaum. How are you today?"

Ben grimaced. It was hard enough to talk to friends. It was hard enough to spare breath for important things, but this pretense of hope, this ritual of encouragement, of make believe that time lay ahead; it was too much. He simply shook his head.

"Come, come, old fellow. Cooperation's more than half the battle. You're getting codein at night—sleeping well?"

"Lousy."

"Cough?"

"Sure. But mostly it's having to lie in the dark."

Rathbone smiled, showing strong, yellow teeth. "Come now, you're a big boy to be afraid of the dark."

Ben took a deep breath, as deep as he could, dragging it down past complaining tissues, past blood vessels near the surface, dangerously balanced on a thin edge of membrane.

"Not of the dark. Wasted time."

The doctor regarded him coolly. "Wasted? Tell me this, old fellow—what would you do with your time, Rosenbaum, if you were not devoting it to getting well? Before you were admitted here you were an apprentice fur worker. What makes you so anxious to get back to a fur shop? I know that the routine here is not exciting. But you have books. You like to read."

Ben's shadowed face began to take on color. "It isn't life! Other people are doing things, making things."

"And perhaps most of the things they are doing are nonsense. And the things they are making useless. Ever thought of it in that light, Ben?"

The boy let his breath out in a scornful hiss between pursed lips. Rathbone tightened his faint, mountain-top smile. "Patience is our great ally, Ben. You know that. And you know that impatience is often fatal. Now there is no reason for you to lose hope—aside from your apparently unshakable conviction that this universe just grew like Topsy and is going nowhere. There have been cases as serious as yours . . ."

"I've heard it all before, doctor."

Rathbone shook his head and smiled at Corey who dutifully smiled back in the manner of a girl who has perfect teeth and is proud of them.

"You will probably hear it a great many times more before you walk out of here as an arrested case."

Ben turned away from him with a sour grin. "Doctor Rathbone—you may go to hell."

Corey flipped pages busily, burying herself in the order book. Rathbone stood erect, hands in the pockets of his white coat. His face wore an expression of tolerant patience and his voice, when he spoke, was filled with sweet reason.

"We have to put up with a lot of uncooperative attitudes in you, young fellow. We've overlooked it in view of your condition. But you must remember—it would have been quite easy for us to transfer you to a state institution like Gull Island Hospital, where you would not have had any of the conveniences you have here."

Ben's eyes, turned back now on the doctor, grew hotter. "Doctor Rathbone—I applied for admission to this place twice before I was accepted. I didn't know what was the matter with me then. But the people in the clinic knew. I wasn't sick enough to get in, at first. I wasn't sick enough to get in until I was too sick to get better."

"That is something over which I have no control, Rosenbaum," Rathbone said patiently. Yet there were now two spots of color on the doctor's cheekbones. "I have explained this to you approximately once a month for three years. It is unavoidable, in the light of circumstances . . ."

"Unavoidable because everything in the whole set-up hinges on showing a profit."

"My dear boy, have you any idea how much this institution costs the taxpayers of the city?"

"I don't mean that. I mean production for profit and not for use."

"I didn't invent that."

"You uphold it."

"Look here, Rosenbaum, I have never been given to panic at the thought of socialized medicine. I simply know how it would work out. I know something of politics, my boy, believe me. And I know how little any one man—or socially minded group—can do against the indifference, the ignorance and the stupidity of the voters at large. That's the trouble with you radicals—you deny God and then you see Him in overalls with a sledge hammer in His hand. I notice that your cartoonists always draw these deified 'workers' with thick ankles and microcephalic heads."

Ben struggled to sit up. "I'm not afraid of death: parts get worn, the machine stops. That's all. And I'm not afraid of being shipped to Gull Island. Even if you weren't afraid to move me now. I'm afraid of only one thing. Has nothing to do with me. I'm afraid the working class won't see through the cloud of lies in time to save millions who will die in famines, in prisons, in wars, before the people of the world realize their own strength and sweep away the bloodsuckers, the sowers of discord and the thieves."

The doctor shook his head. "Rosenbaum, how long do you think a stormy personality like yours would survive under a totalitarian one party system?"

"One party system? What kind of a system do we have in this town?" Ben jabbed his forefinger toward the window. "How many parties have you got here? When Boss Hanlon tells the Republicans what straw man to put up at election time for one of his ward-heelers to knock over?"

"All right, all right. Don't get excited, Ben. I'll not argue with you. I'll not get drawn into any more political debates."

"You're in one now, doctor—only it's not with me. It's with your own conscience. And that's what stings you to the bottom of your cautious, Episcopalian, Republican soul."

Rathbone's jaw muscle rippled once and then he laughed, his big hands coming out of the white coat pockets open and

relaxed. "Ah, Ben—we've been playing this game of ping pong for too many years. Let's put away our paddles."

Ben was exhausted. Deep down he felt the enemy gathering its force to throttle him. He couldn't speak, he could only shake his head. Rathbone said, "Good-bye—until tomorrow, old fellow. Turn some of that fighting spirit into getting well. Don't worry—the social problem is not going to run away."

When he had gone Ben lay back and closed his eyes, fighting for breath. His eyelids were suddenly hot and tears of helpless rage began to slip down his face. It was rage, not at the cool, supercilious face and the power behind the big, scrubbed hands, but rage at his own weakness. That old story of the Dutch boy who stuck his finger in the dyke and saved the countryside . . . but suppose he had broken his leg a few yards from the dyke and had to lie there, with the water petting out, watching it?

Beyond the windows Babylon lay golden in the light of afternoon, bounded by its rivers, slow running between the ice of the shores. Smoke from its furnaces slanted into winter air, mingling in tattered shreds with the blue high above roofs and turrets. From the harbor rose the voices of tugs and the deep bellow of liners being nosed up the channel or warped into docks, their sound faint, muffled by distance in the cold. And over the sluggish creep of winter waters sailed, circled and swooped the white flicks of gulls' wings.

In the sunroom the voices of the players were low, and the click of chips sounded harsh in that muffled stillness; winter beyond the glass and the silence of waiting men.

Men were waiting in the rooms, some cutting airplane models from balsa wood, some reading sports pages, some laying out hands of solitaire, some dreaming, and some just waiting. Waiting for night, waiting for morning, waiting for supper, waiting for sleep, waiting for mail, waiting for visitors, waiting for life or death or something new.

"Hmmm. Well, gentlemen, the fates are kind to me."

"I ain't doing so bad myself. Lady luck shine on this boy. I staying if I don't drop dead."

"Reckon I'll string along this time, brother."

"I stay. I raise one." In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

In Room 908 Moishe Goldfarb sighed heavily. "Ai."

"What's a matter, Pop?" Vitiello was intently writing in a

little notebook; the notebook held a chart of the frequency of long shots running in the money and the prices paid. These were not any ordinary long shots, however, because the system called for recording only long shots on a fast track, no maiden races or two-year-olds, where the horse had already run in the money at least once. Then there was the angle of watching for sprinters entered in distance events until the bettors were scared off and the price was right. Frank bent his polished head to his work.

"Ai."

"Take it easy, Pop. You got lots of time."

The old man turned his face toward his roommate. "*Time* I got? I got to get out of here. I got to get back to the store. How could my wife stay in the store all day, all night? I got one girl, Shirley, in high school; she shouldn't have to miss school for the store, God forbid. I got to get out of here."

"Take it easy, Pop. You ain't going no place. With what you got you'll be lucky to get out of here by next year."

"Next *year?* I got to take a rest for a *year?*"

Vitiello laid down his notebook in irritation. "Listen, chum: you ain't in here for no ordinary rest. Don't let 'em crud ya up. Nobody gets in this joint without he's *got* it. It's hard enough to get in here even *when* you got it. Ya gotta be related to J. J. Hanlon or something to get in here if you ain't ready to drop dead. Now get hep, Pop. You better learn to take it—you got no place to leave it, see?"

The old man did not reply to this. He seemed to have trouble with his covers and kept straightening the edges of the sheet where it was, by regulations, folded four inches over the blankets. At last he got up, sighing, put his feet into his slippers, drew on his bathrobe painfully and padded out, his feet splayed, his shoulders stooped. Vitiello went back to his notebook. They gotta wise up sometime.

In the lavatory Moishe Goldfarb paused and leaned toward the mirror, looking at his face. It was the same face which had always looked back at him. It was not such an ugly face, it was not a handsome face, it was just a face. What else should a man see in a mirror? But there was something in the eyes that frightened him, and with a sickening, falling feeling in his stomach he realized that it was fear. His eyes knew before his brain would admit it. He was afraid. And now it was all getting clear like a bell. Clear. All that Hymie had said to Mamma. All the careful, veiled language. All the time banging on my teakettle with this business of take a rest, take a rest, take a rest. Cough I got. Thin I'm getting. As if I don't know I smoke too much cigars. As if a man, he gets old, he stays fat forever, yet? I got a right to lose a little weight. Ai! The truth! Hymie

and his *goyisher* smooth-talking. The truth! They couldn't tell Moishe Goldfarb the truth!

He stood, speaking to the mirror.

When the little one, Avram, gets a high fever and I come home from the store and Mamma is crying and Sylvia trying to make her stop crying . . . didn't I carry him myself to the hospital? Wasn't I a man and wasn't he my son and was I so afraid I could do nothing but cry? Didn't I stay in the store when I should be home sitting *shiva* with Mamma when he died, the little son? Wasn't I strong enough then to stand the truth?

The mirror blurred with a scalding rush of tears.

The old man hurried out, wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his robe. He turned up the corridor.

In the small room with a single bed, Ben Rosenbaum was writing in a notebook which said on the outside, "Composition."

"Rosenbaum! Rosenbaum! There's nobody to take care the store!"

Ben looked up, his lips tightening in annoyance, then forced a smile. In his hoarse, breathy voice he said, "We all go through that, Mr. Goldfarb. The best thing to do is not to fight it. Just be afraid for a while."

"Ai. Afraid-schmaid, I can't afford to be afraid. Rosenbaum, my boy, I got a business. My wife, she can't handle the business alone. I got one girl in school yet. She can't . . ."

Ben was slowly shaking his head from side to side. When the old man stopped for breath, Ben said, "They'll have to. They'll have to get along without you, somehow. The outsiders always do. Don't worry about them, Goldfarb. Whatever dangers there are for them, the dangers lie outside. For us . . ." He tapped the breast of his pajamas with the eraser of his pencil. "They'll make out. So the girl has to leave school. So your wife has to take in a partner. It will work out. Just sit and worry about it long enough and you'll stop worrying because the worry part of your brain will get tired."

The old man groped for a handkerchief, couldn't find one and Ben held out his box of tissues. Goldfarb snatched one, blew his nose thunderously and then started to cough. Ben closed his eyes. Goldfarb stopped coughing and wiped his eyes again on his sleeve. Ben had opened his eyes in time to catch him. "Uh-uh. Mustn't do that, Mr. Goldfarb. Use the tissues."

Moishe's shoulders sagged. "I got to get out."

"You'll die."

Goldfarb opened his eyes wider at this, regarding the young man in the bed with horror, his seamed face twisted. "I'll *die?*"

"You might. Now go back to bed. You don't have four

hours up a day like some of the others. You belong in bed."

Wing-footed, sagging, bent with the weight of troubles, debts and the instinct to fight, Goldfarb turned away. This was an enemy which could not be reached, could not be evaded, could not be planned against and hedged against like a season when business was terrible. Always before it was I could work a little harder, yet. A man works hard he don't have time to worry so much. Now—nothing could be gained by work. Nothing could be seized, wrenched out of the tough body of life and set aside for Mamma and the children. There was nothing. There was nothing save one thing—the thing which makes a Jew.

He had reached the door but he stopped and came back, leaning forward eagerly. "Listen, Rosenbaum. Today is Wednesday. On *shabbas* you'll have candles, and I'll say *kiddush*. My son-in-law, that Hymie, he gives me a little *menorah* and candles for it when I come in here. I got my *talith* and for you I got an extra *yarmelka*, you wouldn't have to wear a hat. It's good for a Jew to hear *kiddush* when he's in a strange place. These *goyim*, they can't stop me from saying *kiddush* on the Sabbath! They got for their prayers downstairs a church—I saw it when Hymie was talking to the big doctor. They got a church, so they can't stop a Jew saying *kiddush*. God shouldn't be able to get in, past all the cold *goyisher* hearts? On *shabbas*..."

Ben threw his pencil down on the blankets in irritation. "For God's sake, Goldfarb, get out of here and leave me alone. Say *kiddush* all you want to, but leave me alone. I want time, time, time! Don't you understand that? You've probably got enough calcified lesions in your lungs to choke a horse and one area of activity that's not even a cavity yet and you come deviling the life out of me about your store and your God."

"Rosenbaum, don't talk crazy. Wherever a Jew goes, God goes. God is good to a Jew..."

Ben winced. "Oh, for God's sake. What's God ever done for the Jew but give him a kick in the teeth? Who calls in the cops and has Jewish workers beaten up on picket lines? The boss—and if he's a Jew it doesn't make any difference. Which side is the God of Israel on—the Jewish worker's or the Jewish boss's?"

"Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum, keep quiet a little. You a young fellow. You ain't the first young fellow got radical ideas . . ."

It was his father all over again, only Goldfarb had fight, his father nothing but the Talmud. When the shop was moved over to this racket-ridden, plundered, open-shop town, the family moved, Mamma complaining and nagging for Papa to stand up for his rights. *Oder* they should start a little business, some-

thing clean like hardware, the fur shouldn't make his chest bad. And Papa had shrugged back into the Holy Writings, whistling and strangling with his asthma.

"Don't give me that Israel crap, Goldfarb. When a Jew gets the dough he turns around and pushes the faces of his co-religionists right into the dirt. God is good to a Jew! They said that when they saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time. And then they see Hester street and the ghetto falls in on them again. Don't hand me the God of Israel. Take a Jew out from under the hammer and he forgets all about Israel."

His brother Aaron—two years older, a hundred pounds heavier; and the piano lessons Mamma starved herself to give him when we were kids—he's the guy that plays the piano at the Rotary luncheon with his fat can filling the piano bench.

"Listen, Goldfarb—there's only one thing in this world that can help you or me or any of us, Jew or Gentile, and that is the unity of the working class . . ."

"*Mei' bub*" . . . the old man burst into Yiddish, chopping the air with his hand rapidly. "My boy, did God lead us from bondage, did He lead us from Egypt to abandon us in a wilderness? You are the first Jew, maybe, who has been tormented into denying God? Answer me. You will be the last, maybe? Answer me."

"I'll answer you," Ben said, his voice creaking with the effort, but speaking in English. "What's that old legend about a tribe that fought its way to independence thousands of years ago got to do with us? We're a mixture of everything the Mediterranean and the middle Europe countries could pound together. Get out of here, you and your 'chosen people.' Go beat your breast out in the can. Go ask God to reach inside your lungs and rip out what's eating you and heave it in the garbage can but *let me alone!*"

The old man stood dumb during the hoarse whispered tirade and in the fierce light of the boy's eyes he wilted.

He turned away again, hands clasped behind him, and headed for the corridor, shaking his head. "Ai," he muttered to himself, still shaking and clucking with his tongue. "Ai. The young men. Hebrew they wouldn't learn."

The office of Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone was a large room on the ground floor, situated so that tall windows gave on a circling driveway. In summer there was a round flower bed of canna lilies in the center of the drive. Now it was a mound of snow.

It was the only room in the building which had a carpet—

a deep, thick, luscious pile in browns and dark reds, its design suggestive of the cone pattern of a Kashmir shawl. The walls of the office were lined with book shelves; high in a niche on the right, as one faced the windows, was a marble bust of Robert Koch, discoverer of the tubercle bacillus. On the opposite side of the room in a niche between book shelves which was like a shrine hung an oil portrait in a heavy gold frame, illumined by a shaded, overhead lamp which cast its light on the canvas without reflection. The portrait was that of a large man with a bald forehead and a grizzled mustache; he was wearing a morning coat, gray striped trousers and in one hand carried a silk hat. Through the flattery of the portrait artist's technique shone two qualities: brutal good nature and a subtlety of mind which was unfair to other mortals in a man whose wrists were as thick as this man's undoubtedly were in reality. As a young doctor had once remarked, just before leaving the hospital's employ, the guy was a stuffed shirt—stuffed with brains—looking like a Goth who had bought his way into the Roman Senate. On a brass plate at the bottom of the frame were the words: "James Joseph Hanlon, founder and first Chairman of the Board." And in small, cursive script was this quotation: "It was a dream of mine for years, this noble building, yet there's no gratitude due me at all. It was the work of good neighbors. The only title I've ever had in all my life, the only one I've ever wanted, is 'Neighbor Jim.' "

Dr. Rathbone's desk was a sweep of glass-topped mahogany between the two great windows. On the wall behind it hung the only medical appliance visible in the room: a view box with a ground glass panel and metal clips at the top for examining X-ray films. On each side of the box was a framed water color signed in the corner WGR. One was a meticulous portrait of the old white church in Hancock, New Hampshire, against a sky of robin's egg blue; the other was less detailed, a picture of the hospital itself at sunset, rosy behind a jagged black silhouette in the foreground of chimney pots, roof cornices and clothes lines. As a Sunday painter Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone was gifted far above the average. The pictures were cool, fastidious in detail, products of the eye and the brain, without a trace of passion or of comment in them anywhere.

Dr. Rathbone himself was seated at the desk in a swivel chair upholstered in russet leather. When the door opened he glanced up from the chart board on his desk and saw old Abdullah standing before him in his tattered and patched bathrobe, brown feet overflowing their slippers. The toe of one slipper was worn through and Abdullah's toe nail peeked out.

"Sit down, please," Rathbone said with just the proper mixture of kindness and authority.

Abdullah sat, gazing through the windows at the snowy driveway, at the mound which in summer was a blaze of scarlet cannas. He moved his feet gently, feeling the carpet beneath thin soles, the warm, enfolding richness of it.

"I have good news for you," the doctor said abruptly, leaning back in his chair and fastening his attention on Abdullah's placid, dark, patient face, with its huge dreaming eyes, the eyes of an ox. "Sputum tests negative, fluoroscope examination negative, chest films negative, no signs of activity anywhere. Weight steady, blood pressure within normal limits, urinalysis negative for sugar loss. In other words, my friend, you will soon be leaving us."

He watched the broad, olive face, the ox-eyes, the sad, fat man's mouth. It was the face of a middle-aged child. "Social Service will find a position for you, of course. We look after our people." He smiled faintly. "I see by your record that you were formerly a cab driver. Needless to say, this is too strenuous an occupation for you in the future. Something much less active is indicated. A watchman's job, perhaps. Something like that. I'll speak to Mr. Hanlon, himself, if you wish. The city may have something . . ."

Abdullah's face was as blank as an old ivory billiard ball, liquid eyes apparently fixed on the view from the window but actually, Rathbone felt, seeing nothing, their gaze turned inward on whatever mysterious landscape the soul of Abdullah contained.

"I realize," the doctor went on, his glance penetrating, "that for a man who has spent many years in institutions the change to life outside will not be easy. However, you are fortunate in being one of those cases which respond to bed rest over a long period of time. You will keep in touch with the out-patient department and come to the clinic for a chest film once a month for six months. Then once every three months for a year. The cost of the films will be taken care of by the Hanlon Foundation. Do you understand?"

Abdullah nodded and pushed himself out of the leather chair. He said nothing but bowed toward the doctor and went out, placing his feet placidly as he walked, sliding them a little, savoring the carpet. The frosted glass door closed behind him and for a moment his broad shadow remained, then it slid away.

Rathbone gathered the chart sheets together, placed them in order under the metal clip of the board and picked up the telephone. "Will you ask Dr. Crane to step into my office, please, Miss Gates."

When a tall, slender shadow appeared on the frosted glass of the door Rathbone touched a button under the desk and

the door-latch clicked. The man who came in was tall and angular, with eyes of dark gray and sandy hair worn short in a crew cut. He moved with the coordination of a young man who has played a great deal of tennis, and on his face was the studious, habitual smile, faint and resolute, of a man who has played a great deal of bridge.

Don Crane had the self-assurance of a man who had worn his own dinner jacket to the high school senior prom and the buried strain of self-doubt that comes from a mother who headed civic committees. As Crane crossed the spongy carpet Rathbone was lighting a cigarette. He pushed the little mahogany humidor toward Don who took one. Rathbone held his lighter.

"I had Abdullah in just now and broke the bad news to him," the director said dryly.

"The old boy say anything?"

"Not a word. You know, Don, there's no reason why that man couldn't run a freight elevator or sit behind the counter in a cigar store. I took his case up with the board entirely on its merits—chest plates and all the rest of it. So . . . out he goes."

Crane felt the leather chair still warm under him from Abdullah's body. He crossed his long legs at the ankles. "I'll bet you," he said, informal but respectful, his gray eyes twinkling the proper amount of amusement, "that Abdullah doesn't stay out of hospital—out of some hospital—six months."

Rathbone took from the middle drawer of the desk a white pad of sketching paper and a gold pencil holding soft black lead. As he spoke he began to draw, not the uncertain scratches of the amateur but the sure, deft strokes of a vaudeville chalk-talk artist or an etcher. "He's a beautiful specimen—one might use him as a lecture demonstration. The perfect T.B. hobo. A chronic case—of malingering. You know, Don, it's really a tribute to man's ingenuity . . . the lengths to which they will go. I'm sure some of these fellows have read through much of the medical literature." The pencil worked leisurely and a drawing took shape. From where Don sat it looked like a monkey. "One reason why I kept Abdullah around this long was simply to watch him. I thought I might do a paper on malingering among tuberculosis patients someday." He tore off the top sheet of the pad and turned it upside down, then began to draw in other details. Don could see what it was now—a caricature of Abdullah in profile with great dark eyes. But the body had the curled form of a foetus. Now Rathbone was placing it in a uterus, seen in longitudinal section.

Crane smoked. "Could you ship him to Gull Island? They'd bounce him quickly enough from what I hear. Although I'd hate to see it happen to the old boy. He's an exotic note. When

he's gone we should get one of these Victorian paintings of a noble Bedouin to hang in the sunroom."

Rathbone smiled. "Gull Island? He hardly deserves that. That, my dear fellow, is Siberia. No, hardly Gull Island. There was one chap I was afraid I'd have to ship off there . . ." Rathbone laid down his pencil, drew open a file drawer at the side of the desk and took out an envelope of chest films. He selected one of these and slid it up under the clips of the view box, then threw on the switch. Cramped ribs encased a shadowy heart. And in both lungs the dark, piled clouds of the enemy.

Don Crane nodded. "Rosenbaum. But that plate is a year old?"

"Six months. He has left about thirty percent of his original lung area uninvolved. In one lung, mind you. He had cavities in both apexes when he was admitted. And even then he had to come back to the old home town for hospitalization." Rathbone turned off the light in the view box and put the film back in its envelope. "I just wanted to caution you to watch Abdullah, Don. This is getting us a little off the track. He may take his discharge like a man. Or he may think up something else which I would have a hard time explaining to the board. Weight, temperature, sputum test—that's all they go by. And while my opinion carries weight, naturally, they think in other terms."

"The psychic factor?" Crane asked, suddenly serious.

The director laughed outright, showing his strong, yellow teeth. "Hardly. Hardly. My dear fellow—they think in terms of votes and the good will of . . . well, let us say 'downtown.' Clear?"

Crane turned his head to observe the softly lighted oil painting of Hanlon under its little bracket lamp. In other words how many votes are tied in with patient A as compared with patient B? He uncrossed his legs and stubbed out the cigarette. "Certainly there was no . . . well, pressure in the case of Rosenbaum. And from what I hear he made so much trouble at first that you threatened him with transfer to Gull Island several times."

Rathbone frowned slightly, ripped off the second page of the pad on which he had been drawing sail boats and started afresh. "On the contrary, Don—while it wasn't a question of votes in his case—his brother is perfectly sound, albeit given to smoking cigars a trifle too large for his face—no, not votes but the nuisance value of gnats. The brethren of the Left are great senders of mail and telegrams; naturally they would hardly dare to picket the hospital, not in this town. But they can sting your ankles none the less. They are a curious

phenomenon, Don, but more in your province than mine. The psychic factor."

Crane looked at his watch unobtrusively, wondering when he could break away decently. The Chief seemed to be in one of his social, small talk moods. Finally he said, "Eternal rebel? It's usually a pretty clear Oedipal picture. Rebellion against the father—the capitalist. Embrace of the people—the mother image. Or so the professor's works would seem to indicate."

On the sketch pad a tiny figure had taken shape: a conventional cartoonist's figure of a tramp with unshaven jowls. He was holding a sign in one hand and Rathbone carefully lettered in the motto: "Down With The Ups."

"Oversimplified as usual, Don. As you know, my own belief is that the human mind is a mystery to everyone except its Creator. And the gentleman Mr. Milton describes, fanning the icy underworld with his bat wings." The little tramp suddenly sprouted bat wings.

"I've long ago given up trying to fathom young Rosenbaum," Rathbone went on. "He came in here, a ward of the city, accepting the care provided by the tax-payers, most of whom in one way or another belong to his precious proletariat. Within a week he was trying to organize the nurses and orderlies into a labor union."

"Nurses and orderlies in the same union?"

"Oh, yes. Our friends of the Left seldom allow fact to stand in the way of wish. And debate often is confused with action, for which I suppose we should be duly grateful." The smile was in the best possible taste. "Jim Hanlon tells an amusing story about their naïveté and their partiality to mistake the manifesto for the deed."

Crane stole another glance at his watch but the Chief seemed in no hurry to let him leave.

"Several years ago there was an old couple Jim wanted to take care of. For years they had been checkers for the street car company—watching conductors, and counting the number of fares registered, to find out who was slipping nickels into his own pocket. Then their eyesight started to fail and they complained about getting on and off street cars all day. They had nearly fifty votes in the family, so Jim put them to work checking radical activity—there was a little group of radicals, mostly of the 'chosen people' naturally, in the eighth ward. All went well and headquarters got an elaborate report every week from the old people, mostly about red propaganda among the unemployed. A sort of trade union of the out-of-work. Then the operatives were detected and exposed by the brethren and it seemed that all the fomenting of discord among the unemployed had been done by the old couple them-

selves. They felt that they had to earn their pay somehow by reporting what the radicals were doing. The radicals, to their mind, did nothing but talk. So the old people did something. Would that all civil servants were as conscientious."

Donald Crane laughed dutifully and took another cigarette from the box. "I wonder who Jim Hanlon has checking on me?" he said, twinkling. "Maybe Anne Gallagher checks on me. And Gaines, that unpleasant kid who is the orderly on Nine, maybe he checks on Gallagher. That would leave me to check Gaines, I suppose."

Rathbone cleared his throat and Don realized that he had taken the wrong tack; he had touched a sore nerve in the great man's system. "There's nothing like that in this institution, Don. I'm responsible to Hanlon and I alone. Don't forget, Don—I grew up with Jim Hanlon. His father used to work for mine, delivering coal."

As he spoke Rathbone tore off the sheet and crumpled the bat-winged tramp into a ball, dropping him in the waste basket. He began, slowly at first and then increasing in speed, to draw a pig. "While we're on the subject, Don, just let me say this much: if you know anyone who is tempted to mix his personal life with Jim Hanlon's, tell him, as a friend, that it is exceedingly unwise."

"I'm afraid I don't catch it, Chief."

Rathbone screwed out more lead from the pencil shaft and began to give the pig a rough, shaggy coat.

"Merely a blanket policy, Don. An axiom easy to forget and disastrous to disobey. Nothing personal, of course." He raised his face and smiled, thin-lipped, austere, lying.

At that moment young Crane's pulse jumped at the memory of sharp nails, enameled dark red, and the prick of them—possessive, primitive, demanding, exciting nails—dug into bare thighs. He stood up, looking at his wrist watch.

Rathbone erased a few strokes and gave the pig long, vicious tusks. As he ripped the sketch from the block Don caught one flash of it. The face of the boar was a subtle caricature of Neighbor Jim Hanlon's face. "Come upstairs for a few minutes, will you, Don?"

They left the office together and took the stairway, not bothering to wait for the elevator. On the second floor, Rathbone leading the way, they passed through the waiting room of the clinic, its benches empty now and peopled only by the ghostly residue of panic, despair, resignation and poverty which haunts a clinic after hours.

In the dark, lead-sheathed room, Dr. Rathbone took off his white coat, unbuttoned his vest and hung it carefully on a hanger. He stripped off his custom-made shirt and his under-

shirt. He was a muscular man with little fat, his chest sparsely covered with graying hair.

Doo stood ready with a chest plate holder on which he had taped lead numerals for the date and the initials W.G.R.

Rathbone turned, facing the upright table, his hands on his hips; he pressed against the chill surface, bringing his elbows forward.

There was a whirr and Don took down the plate holder and went into the developing room.

When he came out a few minutes later, bearing the wet film, Rathbone was dressed and waiting, his hands plunged into the pockets of his white laboratory coat. Don threw the switch of the view box and held the wet rectangle of film before it while the director bent close, searching the shadowy pattern of curving ribs and swelling heart.

"Fine, Don. Couldn't be better. Bring it up to my office when it's dry, like a good fellow." His face, in the bright glare of the overhead light, was austere, self-contained, Wilsonian, with a faint smile of triumph at the corners of the mouth. But Don noticed tiny beads of perspiration on Dr. Rathbone's forehead.

Inside the slender column, behind which the sun had slipped down once again, Abdullah stood, mute and wrapped in ancient habit. He prayed toward the darkening sky eastward where towers stood scarlet and purple with a flash of windows, angry gold.

Somewhere eastward, far off, immensely far and lost now but still there, lay narrow streets and at their ends the bare hills beyond; the comforting scream of men, the reek of burden beasts, the acrid smell of dung, clatter of pots as women cooked, the soft, cool dome of night, the first stars, the comfortable slap of slippers on paving stones, the scent of tobacco borne out on the night air, and all the sounds, the scents, the remembered bitter and honey-sweet recollection of childhood and early youth. The muezzin, a blind man, chosen for his blindness lest he look down into the courtyards of women, the harsh voice torn from the throat in that cry slanted at the heavens to fall in its curve to earth and the ears of men:

God is Great, God is Great. I bear witness that there is no God but God! I bear witness that Mohammed is the apostle of God!

Now of fine clay have we created man; then we placed him, a moist germ, in a safe abode; then made we the moist germ a clot of blood; then made the clotted blood into a piece of

flesh; then made the piece of flesh into bones; and we clothed the bones with flesh; then brought forth man of yet another make, blessed therefore be God, the most excellent of makers.

When he had finished his prayers, Abdullah remained by the sun room window, hearing far down the corridor a clatter of trays being stacked for supper.

Rathbone's ultimatum had shaken him momentarily. Yet there were always ways. Did they think a man could grow to fit this world of identical days, turned sheets, paper cups to spit in, thermometers, charts, no rugs, no flowers, no change —did they think a man could grow to fit this world as a sea-creature fits its shell, and then have the shell ripped off to leave him naked under the heavens again? Twenty years in these places, losing weight, gaining weight, temperature up, temperature down, coughing, not coughing, twenty years. And then return to the old things where there are no friends any longer and no trade that he can follow?

Twenty years. Time enough to beget a son, teach him, foster him, watch him grow, see him take a wife and make a grandchild, time to do all this outside; here a man did nothing at all. *By the noon-day brightness, and by the night when it darkeneth! Thy Lord hath not forsaken thee, neither hath he been displeased. . . .*

From somewhere down the corridor a man laughed. In here little jokes are laughed at. Everything is little here; everything is quiet except the heart. A man must laugh and grope for some peg on which to hang the laugh. Some men laugh without reason. Men cut masks from paper to hold over their faces, concealing their fear or their need for women or their desire for cash. How they are like the child, the little boy who takes a broom and straddles it, marches swaying about the room crying, "See—it's a camel. It's a camel with silver bells. He's going to spit on you if you don't get out of his way. Make way, make way!" And the father, watching, says, "Aye, a camel. Make sure you test his girths lest the load slip," saying in his heart, how art thou more beautiful than women, my son; my son, lovelier than green boughs. Yet both know that the camel is merely a broom. . . .

A scuff of slippers on linoleum made Ben look up. Washington Lee stood in the doorway, doing a soft-shoe dragging step. He put up his hands with a gentle, shadow boxing rhythm, weaving a little.

"Hi, Wash. You better not do any shadow boxing. Not in here."

"Yeah, man. I know. I know *all* of it. Guess I just got the habit." He stood with knees bent and in pantomime swung a

girl partner out and spun her back again, keeping time by a minute shuffle of his feet and dip with his knees. Suddenly he stopped, straightened and said to the empty air. "Go 'long, pigeon. Them cats been killing themselves. Dig me later." He turned, chuckling. "Man, sure gets lonesome in this place."

Ben said, "Yes, Wash. It sure does."

The Negro lad strode over to the window, humming, and looked across the courtyard at the other windows. They were a blank, empty row of rectangles, dark in the deep shadow of the court. "I wonder what I going to dream about, they put that thing over my nose and I start dreaming? I likely dream about women. If I start talking in my sleep, them nurses going to get a load of man talk. I s'pects I scandalize my name then. Be shame *on* me!"

With a gentle pad of slipper soles Jasper Stone came in from the hall, a book under his arm, the black cord of his pince nez swaying slightly with his step. He took off the glasses and put them in his pocket under the robe, and joined Lee at the window, looking up at the sky over the roof. " 'Red sun at morning, sailors take warning; red sun at night, sailors' delight,' " he quoted. "The morrow promises to be fair, my friends."

"In this place," came the soft voice of Abdullah from the door, "all days are like one day. In here, no rain, no snow, no winter, no spring. All days are one." He stood just inside the door, hands in the pockets of his robe, leaning against the wall. To Ben he seemed as if he had held that stance forever and for a sudden, dizzying flash time seemed to stand still—and Abdullah had stood there since all eternity.

"A subtle point, Abba Dabba," said Stone, nodding. "You are not the first philosopher to have pondered the problem when given sufficient leisure. But cab drivers are traditionally philosophical."

Abdullah turned his sad, liquid eyes to Wash Lee and explained; "I was cab driver once. I drove taxicab for ten years. Never had any accident. I was pretty good cab driver. Long time ago."

"That's something I never *could* do," Wash said after a silence, just to say something. "Scooting them things around and dodging them old ten-ton jobs. I'd have to wear rubber pants, same as a baby. I'd have to get a pair *custom* made."

The dark fat man shook his head slowly from side to side. "At the beginning I was scared like anybody. Then I was so scared one time I couldn't do anything. Couldn't take out the cab. I was young man. I stood still, thinking, there in the garage and the boss yelling at me. I think, what am I scared from? To die? To be smash up in the cab? Everybody going to die. And in the end man don't look so good, after he's dead a

little while. I got nothing to be scared from. Anything going to happen, it's going to happen. What we say in the old country, *maktoob*. That mean like something in a book—'it is written.' *Maktoob*."

"I know what you mean. Same as me sitting there, waiting for the bell. You ain't going to win. Or you is. Can't but two things happen."

"Jees, lookit. All we need now is a pool table. What a mob!" Frank Vitiello moved in, winking at Ben. "I'm just waiting for that night guy to come on. Boy, oh, boy—a nine-to-one shot. And baby's got two bucks on him. Eighteen bucks I'm in. Wait till Gaines comes on. I'll make a drop of a couple bucks to him for placing the bet. I'm in sixteen. Next time I bet a fin and we go to town. You watch—when I get out of this joint you won't catch me back in no barber shop. The hay burners are going to be coffee and cakes for papa."

Jasper Stone winked at Ben with the side of his face away from Vitiello. "Frank, my boy, the place for you to head for is the barber shop of a hotel catering to the sporting gentry. Disregard their tips, my boy, on the races. And hang on to their tips given in solid coin of the realm. Bank these. And in twenty years your gambler friends will be putting the bee on you for cigarette money. There is no such thing as a professional gambler. There are operators and there are thieves. But no professional gamblers."

"The hell there ain't, Judge. I known plenty of guys . . ." Vitiello smoothed back his hair with his left hand and wrenched his chin up, still fighting the tight collar that wasn't there. "You got to know the angles, Judge. You got to figure out which way the smart money is going to jump. Or you got to play percentages. I *seen* guys with a system start with one frogskin and roll it up. I seen it happen. Only you got to be an iron man. You got to stick with the system."

Jasper Stone sighed and settled himself in the metal chair at the foot of the bed. "A run of luck, Frank. A run of luck. The mutuels or the handbooks get it in the end, Frank. I hate to disillusion you, my boy. Perhaps I'd better stop talking."

"Naa. Go on, Judge. Talk all you want. Talk's the only thing a guy's got in this joint. Gab, gab, gab. Gab, gab, gab. It's a good thing I was a barber, I never get tired."

Wash said, leaning his wide shoulders against the window, "It's like the numbers. You can't *make* no money playing the numbers. You just *finds* money. Just like you walking down the street and you finds it. Seem like everybody in this world that's got a dollar, they got two fellows reaching for it."

Ben's eyes were brighter and there was a flush of life across his bony face. "Be careful, Wash. Somebody might think

you're criticizing the American way of life." His husky whisper was almost like the voice of a man who waits on the platform for a train, or plays bridge of an evening, or steps out in the lobby during intermission for a smoke.

"What I mean," the Negro lad went on warmly, feeling that here in the close little room, filled with living creatures who had proven themselves in the thousand little ways he watched for not to be a part of the Great White Fog, feeling that here he could for once, he could speak as a man to his brother men, without the screen, the filter, the sieve of caution held before the lips; here he spoke out boldly with his voice clear, no constriction of the throat at all, the words tumbling out as they would tumble out on a street corner or in the scrubbed, wood-polished, cramped flat of his mother, smelling of bug-spray. "What I mean, you got to have a *lot* of money. You got to have *real* money, 'fore you can keep it. You got to have so much money you don't do nothing but act spooky everytime you see a fellow coming—he likely shake you for a dime. That kind of money, you don't do nothing but set and watch it work for you. You set and watch it *create*, same as mosquitoes in a rain barrel."

"Try and get it," Ben said intensely, struggling to sit up farther against the pillows. "What Wash means is capital. It takes a hundred thousand. They talk about security. They mean robbery. The coupon clippers live by robbery . . ."

"Easy, my boy." Jasper Stone's face was serious now, even the worn lines of mockery around the eyes had changed. "Don't overexert yourself," he said, forcing the smile back. Then addressing them all, "Our Benjamin has put his finger on a sensitive nerve of the body politic, gentlemen. That point at which money, like the amoeba, reproduces itself. And what a will-o-the-wisp is that great dream—of getting such a sum which can be made to work for you . . ."

"Produces no value," Rosenbaum tore the words out. "You'd think any idiot could see it—value comes from labor."

"I'm not arguing with you, Benjamin," the Judge went on gently. "I . . . er . . . I know a thing or two about the acquisition of wealth without creating new values. But you interrupted me. I was about to say that this dream of making the crisp bills work for one is what lies under that strain of larceny which, so they say, is present in every man. For, mind you, this is the handle by which a thief grabs hold of the sucker. 'You can't cheat an honest man.' What a gem of truth lies in that proverb."

Ben's eyes had grown fierce, so dark and luminous that Stone had a swift flash of memory, spanning a lifetime—a young hawk which his brother had wounded with a rifle. It

struck at their fingers as they tried to lift it; its eyes were fierce as it lay dying. Softly he said, "Let me tell you a story. I once knew an ingenious character called the Morning Glory Kid; perhaps you have heard me mention him before. Well, I used to know this man; knew him well. He made between twenty and fifty thousand dollars a year for a few weeks' work. And the work he did was convincing some man who had larceny in his heart that the two of them were fleecing a third party. Now the Kid began life as a gentleman and then became an actor: a road company of a show called Morning Glory. The show stranded. His family had already disowned him. He was high and dry. Now he was a nice-looking chap in his youth, frank, open-faced and guileless—to look at. It was a natural for the con."

When the Judge told a long story he was seldom interrupted. Now Wash settled his lean hips against the window sill; Frank stopped wrenching up his chin and stood with his arms folded, his face expressionless but his intent eyes on the speaker. Abdullah still leaned against the wall, regarding the top button of Ben's pajamas. Ben himself lay back easily, warmed by the companionship, the presence of other living bodies, the sweet clash of opinion and the comfortable, remembered security of a small room, crowded.

"The Kid's first victim was an avaricious hotel owner. His first score was taken off by means of a con game built around some jewels belonging to the company's leading lady. Yes, she really had several valuable pieces. But she also had paste replicas. What the Kid pulled was actually only the old gold brick dodge, refurbished to fit the circumstances. But the conceited young ass thought he had invented it! Naturally there was no switch of valises involved. The jewels were dumped into one of the envelopes of the hotel, bearing a tiny ink smudge in one corner. There were, of course, two envelopes, both with identical ink smudges. But I digress."

Ben closed his eyes in content, tasting the warmth around him, savoring the story, appreciating the length to which Stone drew it in the telling, the leisurely talk of men who have little to talk about and all the time in the world. It was the talk of grandfathers on a park bench in the sun, the elaboration of detail, the by-paths of explanation, the colorful non sequiturs set in the tale for ornament. He had played on cracked asphalt pavement around the feet of old men who told stories at just such a pace, sitting in the sun by walls which kept off the spring wind.

". . . but it enabled the Kid and his fellow Thespians to go their separate ways by day coach. That one lesson in cupidity was enough for a youth whose family would have had

him become a banker. To him the bank's turnover was much too slow; he craved action. And if he had to use guile, if he had to become an actor, he preferred his profits large although the audience was small. In fact, he played all his life to an audience of one and his stage was a hotel lobby, the deck of a liner or a saloon with a stock ticker at the end of the bar."

"Them high-power guys really get the gravy," Frank Vitiello said grudgingly. "How about this guy? Did he ever really get it? All the way up to the top?"

"Ah, Frank, he did indeed. And his foot never slipped—he never stepped on the fly-paper even once; the heavy hand of the law never descended on his shoulder. For only in a city where 'the fix was in' would he deign to operate at all. He paid his way, did the Morning Glory Kid. And when the fix curdled, his grifting sense always warned him in time. On three occasions he dropped an elaborate scheme he had spent weeks in building, and scrammed, leaving the sucker puzzled and hurt that his new friend, with whom he was to make such a killing in some shady manner, had suddenly got the wind up his neck and bolted . . . or so the chump surmised. Yes, he had his share of grifting sense, had the Kid."

Stone took out his pince nez, but he did not put it on; he held it in his hand and gestured with it. "The Morning Glory Kid was one of those pioneers who discovered that it is possible to put the fix into a Federal judge. Fancy that! For him life was champagne suppers and silk underwear. Never in all his life did he bed down with a woman who was a fool. Women who were mad—a few. And women who were greedy. And wanton. And affectionate. And loyal. All kinds. But never a fool. He lived on the knife-edge of uncertainty and dined on pheasant *sous cloche*."

"What happened to this fellow in the end?" Abdullah's slow, purring voice asked from the wall beside the door. Dusk had sifted in: the room had grown quite dark.

Stone smiled his worn, seamy, ironic smile. "In the end? What would you expect? He was broke, at the end. And he met the fate of thieves. And saints. And kings. He died. The worms ate him."

Vitiello slicked back his hair angrily. "Jees, will you guys quit talking all the time about worms? What's all this got to do with playing the horses and coming out on top?"

"Just this." Stone stood up and carefully returned his pince nez to his pajama pocket. "The Kid never took a millionaire in his life. A millionaire is impossible to take. No, it is always the men who have twenty, fifty, a hundred thousand tucked away—they are the ones who go for the big con. And to get back to our original premise, so ably set forth by Brother Lee

and Brother Rosenbaum, the mainspring of their larceny, I truly believe, is a hidden lust for security in idleness—having enough to make the money work for them. You see, the Morning Glory Kid had no such ideal. He never saved. He spent. And he reaped a harvest of memories and that is all: a few laughs, a few recollections of narrow squeaks and hasty flights, and the remembered scent of perfume on stale air. That was all he got from a lifetime. No, Frank, my boy—I seldom give advice. But I have seen gamblers come and go. The answer seems to lie neither with the dream of security nor the sudden riches, gained by skating around a pot of gold on the thinnest of ice."

Vitiello's face was blank but the eyes showed disbelief. "I don't getcha. A guy's got something, he's going to work up flat feet standing around on the tile floor of a barber shop all his life?"

"Frank's right," said the rasping whisper from the bed. "The working class is right in the middle. You say, 'thin ice.' What kind of ice does the average guy skate on? These fellows that starve themselves, saving up for their old age. Depression, business cycle. Where does it go? They'll have to get out in their old age and fight for home relief, side by side with their children."

The light snapped on and Ben covered his eyes with his hand against the sudden glare. The others blinked.

Gaines had turned it on. "Hey, what's this, a convention? You guys hadn't ought to pile up in one room like this. Miss Corey's been out in the dame's can working over her hair for half an hour or she'd have chased you all out of here."

Frank Vitiello came forward eagerly. "Hi, pal. How about it? Do I know how to pick 'em or do I know how to pick 'em?"

The thin youth with the damp blond hair said quickly, "I don't get ya."

Vitiello came closer. "You heard me, baby. Come on. Give me that double saw! The horse ran in the money, all right. It came in first. By a length. Now let's have the double saw—twenty bucks, baby."

The pale eyes of the orderly put on a look of dismay. "Holy gee! Say, pal, I forgot. I forgot all about that bet . . ." He dug into the watch pocket of his white pants and pulled out two singles tightly folded. "Here y'are, pal. Hell, I'm sorry I forgot. Next time I'll get it down for ya . . ."

Vitiello stepped closer. "Oh. Ya forgot. Listen, punk, that's the same as booking the bet. Now let's have eighteen bucks."

Gaines held out the two dollars. "Go on, wise guy. Next time ya ask me to put down a bet for ya, ya gotta ask me right. Ya gotta ask me 'pretty please with sugar on it.' "

"You welshing rat." Frank's lips were skinned back from his teeth. He stepped in, gripping the orderly by the front of his white jacket.

"Hey, leggo me. You'll start hemorrhaging and they'll blame me. Leggo. I tell you, you'll start."

"You lousy, welshing rat!" Vitiello's open hand against Gaines' face cracked with an explosion which made Abdullah look up anxiously, made Ben catch his breath and smile, made Stone stand alert. Wash Lee glided forward. Vitiello was moving so fast it was hard to follow him, the orderly cringing and whining, covering up under the flail of the open hand. "Ya rat. Ya rat. If I had ya back in the neighborhood I'd cut your ears off."

When he felt Wash Lee's hand on his shoulder Frank turned, still snarling. "Stay out of it, kid."

"Why sho'. I ain't buying no part of nothing."

"Leave me handle him."

Gaines squealed and broke loose, sliding in behind Wash. The big Negro caught him in the crook of his right arm. "Ain't buying no part of it," he said, grinning. "I just want all the 'sputing come out right, nobody bleeding hisself to death."

Vitiello's face was hidden in the twilight. His voice was hoarse with fury. "Step out of it, kid. I said I'd handle him."

Gaines said, "Go on, tough guy. I ain't fighting with no lungers."

"I'll cave one of your lungs in, ya rat."

"Hold on, just a minute gentlemen." Stone's voice took control. "I think I can settle the disagreement. Frank here, is quite correct in saying that if a person agrees to put down a bet and forgets—it amounts to his making book himself in that amount at the current odds . . ."

"I ain't paying this guy no eighteen . . ."

"Let me finish, Mr. Gaines. I was about to say that a commissioner—which is your role in this transaction—is always paid a fair amount for his services . . ."

"I was going to drop the guy a couple bucks," Vitiello protested. "Only he had to go trying to tear it off."

Abdullah's voice sounded as quiet and solid as his body. "Why not ask Ben? Ben tell us what to do."

In the crowded room the lad in the bed was hardly more than a patch of dark hair against the pillows. When he smiled they warmed to it, seeing his face illumined. "Split it," he said hoarsely. "Nine bucks. That gives Eddie Gaines the benefit of the doubt."

"I know just what it feel like, forgetting that way," Lee said. "Fellow give me a dime to put on a number once. I stick the dime in my pocket and forget all about it. Then the num-

ber come out and I almost drop dead. Take me three weeks to get up forty bucks for him. But he was a regular sporting gentleman. He'd of done it for me. And I knowed this. So I just naturally had to find that forty."

Gaines shrugged his white jacket a couple of times until it settled back on his narrow shoulders. He dug into his hip pocket and fished out a wallet, taking a five dollar bill from it. "I was going to book the bet. Only this guy has got to start leaning on the muscle. I ain't going to put the slug on no patient."

"You come on down to the Acme Bowling Alley on my day off," Vitiello said, smoothing his hair. "You come on down."

"Yeah, sure. I'll come down."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen." Stone's voice was like a soothing ointment on the raw wound in the silence. "Gentlemen, let us abide by our court of arbitration." He nodded toward Ben, a slight mound under the blankets.

Gaines handed the five to Vitiello. "Okay, wise guy. Ya got four more coming."

"I got two more."

"Huh?"

"I don't care how cheap some guys are. I'm still making the drop. Get it? Ya booked the bet. If you're going to cut the odds on me," he turned half toward Ben, "because that's the way it adds up, it's okay. I don't put down no more bets witcha. There was a few bucks in it for ya. Only now it's washed up."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute." Gains had edged toward the door. "Ya got me wrong, guy. Ya shouldn't of jumped me. Let's call it thirteen bucks more I owe ya."

"Eleven. I still make the drop."

"Forget it, pal, this time. Next time ya can pay me a commission. Only it'll take me a while to get up the dough."

Vitiello relaxed. "It's oke by me, baby. I ain't likely to spend it in this joint. How many newspapers can a guy read? Know what I mean?"

When Gaines went out Wash Lee said to Ben, chuckling, "Some flies you gotta catch with molasses . . ."

"Shoo! Get out of here, you fellas." Adele Corey switched in with a rustle and grabbed Frank Vitiello by the elbow. "You get back in your own room, mister. And you, Lee. It's time for you to go upstairs . . ."

Wash's face grew solemn as if a hand had been drawn across it, wiping off gaiety. Then his smile flashed again and he held out his hand to Vitiello. "Gimme some skin, man. Wish me luck."

Frank took the hand and shook it sideways in a wide arc.

"Knock 'em dead, kid. We're all of us in your corner. It's a breeze, kid. You'll make it. It's a breeze."

He let his eyes travel from Adele Corey's tiny white shoes, up and up until he reached the artfully plucked brows. She turned him by his elbow and pushed gently at the small of his back. "Into bed with you, mister. Start working up an appetite." She turned around at the door and gestured to the others. "Scram, you boys. You let Benny have a little quiet."

"Quiet?" Ben Rosenbaum said. "How long will it take you to learn, Corey, that a Jew doesn't want quiet? Let them stay. Let them stay. Let them knock together and shoot sparks off into the night."

Jasper Stone glanced at his wrist watch. "Nearly time for our evening banquet, gentlemen."

Ben slowly turned on his side and stretched out his hand to Wash Lee. Wash's hand was warm, the palm smooth and hard and pink. "Wash—have you ever been in the Deep South?"

They parted hands and Wash pushed his fists into the pockets of his robe. His smile was now a little tight around his eyes. "No, *sir*. And I got no *inclination* to observe its *configuration*." He chuckled, more spontaneously. "I know what's good, son. And that ain't it. Ain't it for me."

"There's a storm coming up," Ben Rosenbaum said, hoarsely, sinking back farther under the blankets.

"I s'pects." Lee glanced toward the window. "Sky was pretty clear when the sun went down. But you can't ever tell."

"I don't mean that, Wash. I mean a different storm and a different sky. I mean the South, Wash. There's a storm coming up—a fiercer storm than has ever blown over this country yet. The land is charged with it. The bolt will strike. And clear air lies beyond it, when a rain of blood has swept away the villainies, the treacheries, the humiliations and the greed."

Lee looked down at his slippers. "I s'pects. Shore will be a mess. Well, I got to beat feet, son. You got a rabbit's foot? You give it a rub for me. So long, gents."

"Ah, until we meet again, Brother Lee. My best wishes to the winner and still champion . . ."

"You be okay, Lee. You are good strong boy."

Ben closed his eyes against the sight of the big lad going out the door. What has he got to worry about? He has a fighting chance, a good chance. What does he know of the cliff at the world's end and the abyss of stars? To live, even as a black man in the shadow of terror. Even as a ghetto Jew. But in the sunrise, the world will be washed clean. Children now born will see it before they die. The triumph of the golden ones, the builders, the fighters, the ones who know and dare to follow

where the truth leads. Titans will spring from the earth when the time of thunderbolts has come; when the clotted, mouldy, worm-cankered world crumbles beneath the golden fist of the future. And I shall belong to it, if only by a word remembered. I shall be there, in the hearts of a few, perhaps. A better dream than the grandfather beyond the stars. I reject Him. I despise Him. A pathetic lie. A grandfather with a beard like . . . like an *alter zeyde*. A myth. A plaster to cover but not heal the wounds of man.

Only the people are immortal. Only the love of the man for the girl, the mother for the son, the father for the family. Can they not recognize their own strength? Can they know it in time? Can they rip up the Lilliputian threads with the power of their limbs in time for their own salvation?

They can. They must. They will.

And hiding in a far, dark corner of his mind the old fear gnawed at the corners of the dream, saying through its teeth: "Will they? Will they?" Then down his face, now hardly more than a skull with nose and eyes and lips and large ears waxen white, slipped the hot, traitorous tears.

Ben opened his eyes. The others had gone, silently. In to their supper in the dining room. Sitting up at tables, close together in the strength that comes of being with other men. The surety of the crowded little room gone now, in the echoing emptiness of the wing, with the other men in having dinner. Rattle of dishes and metal pitchers from the hall outside as the serving wagon was pushed along. Gaines dishing it out; the day orderly must have paid him to come in early. The day orderly must have a date tonight. And outside they were dating, in the slick, corny, primary-color words of the advertisements for soap to keep people from smelling like people. Dating was going to a chop suey place for dinner and then movies or dancing or roller skating or if the girl's people were away, up to her house and dancing to the radio turned down soft until the boy and girl stopped dancing and found their arms so tight around each other that they could hardly breathe. That was the right way to struggle for breath and not this way. Dear God, not this way. . . .

"Trapped!"

The word was like the shot of a small caliber rifle bounding back from the walls of a shooting gallery. Ben looked up at Joe Kincaid in the doorway. The miner was holding his Bible bent double in one hooked hand. His eyes were not on Ben but were glaring into the far corner of the room as if it held a picture of Sheriff Greer, an election poster with Greer's picture on it, pinned to the wall.

"Trapped, by God! Trapped—same as a coon up a tree!"

His black eyes were tormented, his wide, thin-lipped mouth was drawn back in terror. Ben smiled unconsciously.

"We're trapped, all right, Joe," he whispered, the fury of the preacher kindling warmth inside his own sluggish nerves where the heart worked overtime and the tissues were burning away of their own heat. "The bosses are trapped in it too, Joe. There's only one way out . . ."

"Listen! Oh, brothers and sisters, listen to what I got to say!" Kincaid was talking not to Ben; he hardly knew Ben was there. But the emaciated boy in the bed understood the tune if not the words and the desperation of the preacher laid hold of him and found an answering vibration within him. Joe Kincaid was preaching at the world.

"Trapped, I say. The Old Scratch won it! You hear that? I had the light strike me and it's nothing but a shaft of darkness. The Lord of Hosts was beat! I can see it all now, clear as white mule in a mason jar and twice as powerful. Take a look at this world and what do you see?"

"Exploitation, Joe. Social production and private appropriation . . ."

"Whoring and abominations on every hand, by God. The Old Boy has got the upper hand . . ."

"What about the National Association of Manufacturers?"

"Why, they nailed the Carpenter once and He come back, His blessed hands a-dripping, try and save 'em. Wouldn't listen. The Old Boy was too strong for Him, and I can see it now, just the same as if it was writ on that wall there in letters of fire." His voice kept rising. Then it throttled the words in a long snarl of despair. He drew back his arm and sent the Bible fluttering and crashing into the corner of the room. Kincaid seized the black, spiky hair of his head in one hand and bent his face into the crook of his arms, his shoulders heaving as he forced the words out. "John the Revelator—sitting on that little pile of rocks. Writing about Babylon. Did he say more'n what he *wanted* to happen? Beat! Beat down, all of us. We been stick-beat by the Old Scratch, same as he beat down the Lord of Hosts and the Carpenter Himself. I can feel his wings spread over us all—everybody, in here and outside. Black wings, crawling with sin like vermin, same's a bat. We're nothing but possums in nail kegs, getting fattened up by the Old Boy."

Kincaid dropped on his knees, bowed his head and clamped his hands between his thighs, pressing them together in anguish. "Oh, Lord, I don't care how hard you hammer, only hammer some sense into my fool head. Send down as much darkness as I need, Lord. Looks like I need scaring good. Pick me up and shake me, Lord, but shake some sense into my fool head.

How could I doubt You, Lord, how could I think the Old Scratch could have won the fracas? Old Satan can't built nothing, Lord, nothing. He can't make one blade of grass come up. All he can do is tear down and blister and rot. Each of us, Lord, has got the Old Scratch in him, tearing at us, Lord. Keep whispering, Lord, keep whispering to us. Just keep whispering."

He stopped, wiped the tears from his eyes with his palms, and shook his head as if throwing off a nightmare. Then he stood up, walked over and picked up the Bible, smoothing out its leaves. He closed the book and stuck it gently under his arm. "Pretty near time for dinner. Say, I got to get in there. Miss Corey said they was going to have pork chops tonight."

When he had gone Ben felt as if he were lying in the one house left standing in a village which had been bombed to bits. His breath was short and he could feel the heat on his cheeks. It felt good and a little drunken. They knew what they were doing here, all right. Chasing out people, leaving the patient to rest, quiet and slower death. Oh, they knew how to drag it out with dullness or with things that kept you away from work and the notebook and the pencil and the last shred of life. What had made Kincaid pick on this room to blow up in? And why did the crazy miner, frightened out of his wits by Sheriff Greer and his goons, have to keep coming to a materialist with his troubles, his doubts, and all of his absurd, *muzhki* mythology? But the passion, the volcanic heat of the man, that torrent of militant energy which lay in the working class, diverted and wasted on their myth of a Redeemer when all the time their salvation lay in their own ranks, their own undiscovered strength, the secret in a single word, Unity . . . Will they learn it; will they discover it? Blind Samson pulled down the temple on his tormentors' heads . . . and again the hot, traitor-tears, the set lips, the spasm of impotent fury in the heart.

"Hello, Benny. How's tricks?"

Gallagher moved in, rustling, carrying her tumbler of thermometers, her TPR book and fountain pen. Ben opened his eyes and she saw the wet shine of tears on his face. She took his hand. "None of that, Benny. None of that."

He turned his face away. "What's it to you?"

"Benny—you'll only send your temperature up, getting panicky. Don't Ben. Try to keep it down. And try to eat. Eddie Gaines said you didn't eat a thing tonight. That's not the way."

"What's it to you?"

Silence while she looked down at him from the starched pillar of strength and health and eternal life—the years stretching ahead of her, an eternity. Sweet—smelling of soap and

starch, her gray eyes clear and steady, her strong, well-moulded face with a lingering band of summer freckles across the nose and cheek bones, her breasts hidden under the crisp uniform, her hair, which would be so wondrous if she let it loose —a soft, black cloud about her shoulders—caught up now severely under the white cap. Her voice, so clipped and businesslike, which could lilt and whisper of love if he were man enough to keep her standing in the vestibule of the house, whispering before saying good-night. If he were man enough to telephone her, and call again and again and finally get a yes out of her and have her meet him for dinner somewhere . . . if he were not nailed down to this hard mattress, the pillows of iron.

"You've got to keep fighting, Ben."

"Go on, Gallagher. Don't give me that pep talk."

"Ben."

He was looking up at her, searching her. She had put the tumbler and book down on the bed table and was standing near him. He could feel the touch of her thigh against the edge of the mattress, could feel the soft brush of linen against the mattress which bit into his bones. He slid his hand out, reached for hers and found it. She did not draw back. He had the cup of bitterness ready to drink if she drew back but she didn't draw back.

"Gallagher." His voice was a reedy whisper. "Gallagher . . . say your first name."

"Anne." Her hand tightened on his. "Please, Ben. Don't give up. Please don't."

Fire licked out from the blackness around his heart and warmed him.

"Do you really care what happens, Anne? Am I any more than Room 904 to you? Just a chart? Just pills before lights out? Just shot bags ready to pile on my chest in case I . . ."

"Quit it, Benny. Of course I care what happens to you, you dope. Now get in there and fight."

He shook his head, his lips pressed together in scorn at himself. "I'm not much, now, Gallagher. Not much to look at, anyhow."

"Quit it."

"Anne—you say you care what happens. Well, you care about all of them. All these guys. You're mamma to a whole floor full of lungers. Tell me—is the way you care about me . . . any different?"

She tried to draw her hand away but he held tight. In a very small, little-girl voice she said, "Maybe." She was winking rapidly. "Let's not go into that now, Benny." She stood

straighter, drawing her breath and said, "Okay, mister. Temperature . . ."

He struggled to sit up and she slid her starched arm under his shoulders.

"Anne—there's no time. No time for any courting. No time for gifts, and flowers, and evenings at the theater. There's no time for dates and dancing, Anne. No time for anything but love. For I shall love you, Anne . . ."

She shook her head, pressing her full, unpainted lips together. "Benny—that's nothing for you to be thinking about. Look, Benny—why don't you try thinking about . . ."

"Go on. Think about who?"

"Oh, never mind. Skip it, Benny. Let me get your pulse. Stop talking for a minute."

"No. Wait, Anne. Who should I think about?"

"Oh, just . . . Somebody. Let's not get in any fights now, Ben."

"No fights. You want me to lie here and think about God. He'll keep, Anne. I'd rather think about you."

"Don't you laugh at me, Ben Rosenbaum. You're in a spot where . . . where you're needing Him, Benny. I'm not kidding."

"I know you're not kidding. Only we talk different languages when we get on that subject."

"Benny—I can't let you lie here and starve to death, needing something and you too stubborn and pig-headed to reach out for it. Benny, listen to me—it's no use praying for miracles. But miracles happen. Just being alive . . . well, it's sort of a miracle. Don't you see it? I may be just a dumb Mick but I can see it and you always reading books, Benny, they're standing between you and the light."

"My lights burn at night. They burn in darkness. You . . . you coming in here. That's light enough for me."

She beat her fist irritably against the blankets. "You're the limit. Of all the stubborn, pig-headed kids . . ."

"Not that, Gallagher. Stubborn, yes. Pig-headed, no. A fine thing to call a Jew."

"Oh, Ben, *if you were only a good Jew!*" There were faint spots of color on her cheek bones now and the gray eyes were dark and angry. "Don't talk all that slush about love to me, Benny Rosenbaum. Here, take this thermometer. Now hold still while I get your pulse."

"Anne . . ."

"Miss Gallagher to you, Mister Rosenbaum."

"Miss Gallagher. Now we'll not talk about God any more, Miss Gallagher. I've got my own world-outlook. And where you have only hope I have certainty. I don't have to be afraid

you'll walk out on me because you'll walk out anyhow. You'll have to walk out. You have a whole floor full of boy friends, all of them needing to have thermometers shoved up 'em while you count their heart beats. But you can't tell me not to think, Miss Gallagher. I'll think about you as much as I like. You can't stop me. And what I'll think is this: you say you need a man's love like you need a hole in the head. But maybe you need a hole in the heart, Anne. To let the warmth in and get you unfrozen. I don't know what's frozen you—something has. I don't have time to find out; not now. But I shall love you whether you let me or not. I shall love you because you are life and the earth but more than that, because you are lovable. And I have love—I have all the love any man ever had in his whole lifetime, Anne. And I'm giving it to you. If your heart's frozen I want my love to settle around it and warm it. . . ."

His voice was a lower whisper than ever; he seemed to form the words with his lips only; the boy's eyes seemed to hold all his life. "I saw you crying once, Anne. And I wanted to catch your tears. I wanted to taste them. I wanted something of you inside me. . . ."

"Oh, Benny, for the love of God. . . ." She let her hand rest on his head for a moment and then gently touched his cheek, smoothing the sharp cheek bone with her thumb. "I never heard anything . . . like you . . . for getting at me. . . ."

From the door came a shuffle of feet. Anne Gallagher picked up the thermometer, stuck it in the tube of vaseline, and handed it to Ben, its tip tufted with gray.

When she looked up in irritation she saw that the man in the doorway was Washington Lee.

"Lee? I thought you were upstairs. What in the world . . . ?"

"I know, Miss Gallagher. I'm on my way."

"Well, get along with you. I'm busy." She grasped Ben's wrist with her large, steady fingers, and fixed her eyes on the second hand of her wrist watch.

"Yes'm, I'm going." Wash looked once at Ben, who closed his eyes. Then the big lad settled the towel closer around his neck with both hands. "Miss Gallagher . . ."

"What *is* it, Lee? How can I take pulses . . . ?"

"Miss Gallagher . . . pray for me."

Thursday

WHEN WASHINGTON LEE AWOKE a strange nurse was spattering water into a stainless steel wash pan. "Good morning. Now turn over, please. I've got to shave you."

"*Shave* me?"

"Your back and shoulder."

"Lady, I got no hair on my back."

"All right. But you get shaved anyhow."

Wash obediently turned over on his face.

The top floor was quiet and seemed to glitter more than other floors. All the rooms were alike wherever you went in this place but the room where they had put him to bed last night seemed strange and chilly. Beyond the window a red sun rising threw the towers of the city into black silhouette.

Hunger gnawed at Wash's innards. Last night when he asked for a glass of milk they gave him a couple of pills instead and while he was sitting up, trying to read the boxing column in the paper against the creeping drowsiness he fell asleep. Still feeling a little groggy. Oh, man, could I use a plate of ham and eggs. I could eat a whole dozen and a slab of ham a inch thick. I'll make it *two* dozen—wishing don't cost nothing.

It was an unusual hour for Dr. Donald Crane to pay him a visit and when Ben found the tall, tanned resident with the crew haircut standing beside him he smiled out of gratitude for this change of routine. He said, "Hello, Don."

"Hi, Ben."

Of all the white-clad host bearing authority, Don Crane was the nearest thing to a human being. Except Gallagher. Ben had a wrench of fear that Don was there on his own account; that he had passed over into that group where doctors came "observing" at all hours. But the resident's first words chased the fear back into the dark corners again.

"Say, Ben—you know Wash Lee pretty well, don't you?"

"Sure. As well as a white can get to know a Negro. There's always the barrier."

"Of course. I mean, Ben—he seems to take his thoracoplasty in his stride. I've seen a lot of cases before operations and I've never seen one show so little anxiety. Or maybe I just don't know colored people."

Ben said in his husky whisper: "He's a fighter, Don. He's got the strength of the working-class behind him. They go under the hammer when they're kids. Either they smash or they turn into steel."

"He has a certain naïveté, too. It helps. Well, I just wanted to get your opinion on what is holding the boy up. These cool lads are deceptive. And the morale of the patient is so important." He lowered his voice a little. "I wouldn't say this to any of the Big Boy's pipelines, Ben, but I think that a certain eminent chest surgeon disregards the psychic factor entirely. He sees nothing but the physical problem. It's carpentry. To him the psychosomatic approach is on a par with astrology or finding water with a witch hazel twig."

"Wash isn't liable to panic," Ben said doggedly. "I thought you said shock doesn't depend on morale entirely."

"Certainly not. Not entirely. I just wanted to check up. After all, Ben, you have a much better chance to get to know these fellows than I have. I have to go around looking wise and reading charts and talking Latin as if I knew something. You know, Ben—just between ourselves—none of us with the letters after our names really know anything. That's heresy. There was an old timer who always ended his notes, 'I dressed his wounds and God healed him.' Or maybe you would say the collective will of the working-class did it."

Ben wasn't listening. He said, "There's one thing, Don—Wash will find himself helpless up there under that sterile sheet, in a room full of whites. And there are always legends among Negro people that a Negro in a white hospital is simply a subject for vivisection. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Thought of it? I've seen it happen, Ben. And I couldn't do anything about it."

"Go fight City Hall, eh?"

"You said it, brother. 'Go fight City Hall.' " He looked at his watch, put it back in the watch pocket of his white trousers and edged toward the door. "I'll have to get up there, Benny. I'll see you later."

"You still think all of us are here because we want to be, Don?"

Crane paused. "I never said that, Ben. What I said was that *many* of the patients would *seem* to have contracted tubercular lesions in response to an *intolerable* situation. Something had to give somewhere. And with a history of respiratory diseases . . ."

Ben shook his head savagely. "Nuts. This thing is a working-class disease. My mother wore herself out scrubbing the inside of our flat. But you should have seen the hallways. I had every reason to want to stay out of here. I had a trade that

I liked. A job in a good union shop. I had a girl. I had a room full of books and a rack full of pipes. But I'm here."

When Crane smiled he reminded Ben of the hero of a Western movie. "All right, Ben. That's what you know of it—consciously. How about the subconscious? Maybe you really wanted to get some of your own back . . . maybe your unconscious demanded support from a social order which you believe has systematically exploited and robbed you. Could be?" Ben's eyes had grown hot and Crane hurried on, "You mentioned a girl. I think I remember her—she used to come every visitor's day."

Ben's mouth twitched and Don Crane knew he had said the wrong thing again.

"That must have been the first six months I was in here," Ben said softly. "Then she got a job in summer stock. Up in Maine. Fellow in the same company—she was working with him all summer. Going swimming after the show, nights."

"I'm sorry, Ben." Oh, good Lord, that's the wrong thing to say, too. But Ben wanted to worry the sore tooth.

"They were married when the season was over. I heard they have a kid now." He looked up and found on Don Crane's face the rugged, sweet sympathy that passes between men. It was the love of warriors, uncontaminated by all the Freudian bourgeois overemphasis.

Don Crane said, "I remember her quite well. Didn't she have a part on Broadway once?"

"She carried a spear. Cora was her name, Cora Van Ingen."

"Sure. As a matter of fact she had several lines. A very beautiful girl." He did not know how to stop this. Would it bolster the boy's ego to be reminded that the girl was beautiful, helping him to remember that it had all been his once? It was so hard to know what to say to a patient like Ben Rosenbaum. At last, just to say something: "Well, let's continue this in our next. Feminine psychology is an interesting field, I guess. That is—applied psychology."

Ben said, "Nuts. They're no different from men, Don. The economic and cultural factors are different, that's the only thing. As far as sex goes I think they're just the same. I mean, they react the same. I mean . . . aah, hell, skip it."

"Equality of interest. But not of performance." Crane blushed, felt himself blushing and this made it worse. He hurried on, "After all, Benny, when men get to using sex as a barrier against anxiety—well, there's a limit. But with women, great God, they . . . I mean, there's no limit. No limit physically, that is."

"Wouldn't know. That kind never appealed to me."

Don had reached the door again and came back impatient

to be gone about his business but unable to break off the talk. "It's an instructive type. If you're interested in the neurotic picture."

"I never liked Bohemian behavior. And this neurotic picture is nothing but insecurity in childhood. Under the system the worker can have no security."

Crane felt for his watch again but did not take it from his pocket. He spoke hurriedly. "But, Ben, the greatest numbers of neurotics are in the middle class. . . ."

"The hell they are, Don. That kind just have the dough to come running to fancy doctors and paying them to listen to their phoney troubles."

"Well, maybe. But maybe they have genuine difficulties. Look here, Ben, there are genuine problems aside from the economic problems."

"They all stem from it, don't they?"

"No, they don't. Now look, Ben, this is something I happen to know a little about. When I got through my internship it was a toss-up whether I'd go in for psychiatry or chest work. I finally decided on the chest because psychiatry seemed to be such an uncertain and unscientific thing. There was nothing there you could see or measure or treat scientifically. But I do know something of the literature."

Ben swallowed, his Adam's apple leaping in the scrawny, white throat. "Never mind all these imaginary ills, Don. I mean the middle class with its little mole-hill sufferings. I've read a little, too. What do you suppose Freud would have found if he had been treating good, working-class people? He'd have found maladjustments due to fear—not fear of castration, but fear of starvation. Do you know what it's like in a worker's home when the father gets laid off his job? Freud would have had a different theory: what did he know of working-class homes where the mother and the father and a dozen kids sleep in one room? That's where you get your neurosis in the toiling masses. That's where you get incest relationships —where the whole family has to crowd into one bed to keep warm. You get boys hating their fathers because their fathers are tormented by anxiety and take it out on the mother and the kids when they get home. Freud saw one little corner of the picture and he spun out all his ridiculous theories from that one corner."

"That may very well be, Ben. But you can't deny that everybody has sex difficulties, even if they aren't backed up by poverty. It's . . . well, it's just there. That's all there is to it."

Ben had warmed up and now took the argument firmly between his teeth. "When I mentioned Bohemian behavior I

covered that whole degenerate middle-class pattern of behavior..."

"Oh, nonsense, Ben. Now, don't tell me you never went to bed with a girl you were not married to."

"Marriage is mutual consent."

"The hell it is, Ben. Good God, if mutual consent is all you need then I'm a Mormon."

"You're a Bohemian."

"Now, look here, Ben—you radicals are mighty careless the way you heave names around. Don't tell me radicals don't roll in the hay when they get a chance."

The lad's lips tightened. "They can get into trouble doing it. It isn't a question of filling out a lot of legal forms. It's a question of respect and working together on a comradely basis. This hopping into bed with every girl who has hot pants —that's a lot of bourgeois decadence."

"It's a damned sight more cosmic than bourgeois."

"It isn't proletarian ethics."

Don Crane's face grew darker, this time in anger. "Ben, Ben, don't give me that. Proletarian ethics? Have you ever hung around one of these corner beer joints where the proletariat spends its Saturday nights? Half of them end up outside against the wall."

"The hell they do. What you're talking about is the *lumpen* proletariat. The scum. The real working-man or girl is decent and conservative."

Don seized the word. "So now you're conservative. Shame on you, Ben."

"Certainly. There's nothing radical about dirty behavior. That's for the bourgeoisie and their stooges. And the underworld."

"Sounds like your grandfather talking, Ben. The Mosaic code and all that."

"The hell it is. You read Lenin's interview with the German woman leader, Clara Zetkin. It's in a pamphlet. I'll get you a copy."

"Don't bother, Ben. I get the idea. One woman at a time. And not against the wall of a beer joint."

"Not against the wall of superstition held up by saints' images either."

"Aha, religion comes into it, Ben. Mind you, I have an open mind. I always thought that the saint's image was necessary—well, I mean, you look at these old women who go into the churches. They're strictly peasants. They get things by pictures and ceremonies. And right there you can see where all of us get our ethics from, whether you believe in religious explanations or not. As for me, I have an open mind. I don't

have sufficient data to make any formal conclusion. But certainly the cultural pattern has been set by religion. For example—can you give me any valid reason *why* I shouldn't take some beer joint girl out and stand her up against a wall? Other than that the people I grew up with didn't act that way? Or at least, showed a little bit of reserve and good taste?"

Ben's eyes glowed with the Maccabean light of battle. "Because it's against the best interests of the species."

Don Crane frowned. "Baloney! It's in the interest of the species to have more of them. That's all."

"More of them, certainly. With the best possible conditions for growth and progress."

"But Ben, how do you *know* what's good for the species? What you're saying is the most naïve sort of idealism."

"It's dynamic materialism."

"It's what *you think* is best for mankind, Ben. Not what the species thinks is best for itself. The species can't think collectively."

"One sixth of the earth's surface already . . ."

"Is already taking orders from a little group of bosses at the top."

"That's what you get from your liberal press. Nuts. It moves as a unit, a great collective outpouring of mass energy and intellect . . ."

". . . which you learned from your radical press. How do you *know?* Have you ever been there? I have an open mind. I don't say that socialism is not inevitable . . . sometime. Even here. I think it unlikely that our present system will collapse within our time . . ."

". . . you mean you don't *want* it to collapse within our time. Spoken like a true liberal, Crane."

"I'm damned if that has anything to do with it, Rosenbaum. I've told you, I don't view the idea of eventual socialism with horror."

"But you align yourself with the reactionary elements when the crisis comes."

"God damn it, the crisis hasn't come! How can you say what I'll do when . . ."

"Dr. Crane—you are wanted in surgery." Gallagher stood at the door, erect, cool, with only faint circles under her eyes showing fatigue. In the pale light from the window, where the scarlet dawn flooded down, reflected from the top reaches of white concrete far above them, she seemed as changeless and as ageless as time itself.

Crane smiled at her and swallowed. "I just stopped by to check something with Rosenbaum, Miss Gallagher. Something

which might have bearing on Lee's tendency to post-operative shock."

Gallagher nodded. "They're holding the wire, Dr. Crane."

Crane turned to follow her, paused at the door, turned back and elegantly raised his thumb to his nose. Ben summoned his breath and let out a faint razzberry through tongue under teeth. He felt swell. He felt alive. A good discussion, a good battle. Marx, when asked suddenly, "What is?" had replied, "Struggle."

The operation room was green. The walls were of sea-green tile, the floor of darker green cement. Stainless steel buckets for waste caught the green radiance and dutifully shimmered green and in the center of the room, under a tilted bowl which shed a brilliant, shadowless white light from its many-lensed eyes, the operating table stood, narrow, waiting, sheathed in a sterile sheet of green.

When Wash was wheeled in he said, "Man, I going to have to *swim* out of here."

A tall figure wearing a shapeless green cap and mask and a green gown said with the voice of Dr. Donald Crane, "Hi, Wash. How're you feeling, big fella?"

"That you, Dr. Crane? Look like you joined the Ku Klux. Why, man, I feel finest kind. Hungry. Man, I could use pork chops."

"You'll get them, Wash. All you can eat. After we get through. Now you let me turn you over, I've got to scrub you."

Washington Lee's back was like an acre of velvety, chocolate-colored skin. Starting at the base of the small, beautifully balanced skull, the trapezius muscle sloped down at a sharp angle to the shoulder. Crane took the lad's arm and moved it by the elbow, watching the great latissimus dorsi muscle flange out like a wing, the serratus magnus like the fingers of a hand, clutching the ribs. What immortal hand or eye dare frame that fearful symmetry....

Wiping the young Negro's back with iodine-drenched gauze, Don felt a mighty harmony singing beneath his fingers. The perfection of musculature was like the emergence of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Fifth. Don smiled to himself. What kind of approach was this to surgery? Rathbone said the best background for surgery was carpentry.

Dr. Immanuel Goetz, the anaesthetist, was a squat, silent, intent young man. He wheeled over a rack of tanks and gauges. Wash turned his questioning face, now shining with vaseline, toward the strange doctor who said, "Okay, fella. Just breathe slow and easy." He pressed a glass cone, its edges rubber-padded, over Wash's nose and mouth.

"You bet. Here goes nothing."

A hiss of valves opened, a strange chemical odor. Blood pressure cuff tight on his arm which was held above his head by the small, soft and reassuring hand of a strange nurse, swathed in green. The needle of a saline drip unit, taped into the vein at the bend of his arm, throbbed.

It's just like waiting for the bell, Wash kept telling himself. Just like I was rubbing my feet on the resin.

And then truth fought with will and truth won and he knew that it was not like waiting for the bell. There was no give and take about this: it was all take. He moaned and Dr. Goetz said placidly, "Hold it, fella." But the moan was not a direct expression of fear. It was a protest at a new and shameful emotion which had taken hold of him, which was wrapping him tighter and tighter with its web as a spider sews up a blue-tailed fly. The emotion was fear. Washington Lee could never remember having felt panic before.

Great God a'mighty! Lord, you better let this here sparrow roost right on your finger, Lord. Lord, I'm scared now. You better stand close, Lord. You better stand close.

But what I saying? Don't the Lord know what I need? Ain't he done the planning and fixing? Lord, whichever way you wants it to come out, I try to fight it that way. I going to do my best. Least, I going try to do it. Ain't never going to ask you to throw that old towel in, Lord, but if you wants to stop the fight, you go right ahead and throw her in . . . but what I saying? This ain't no fight. This here's a hospital. . . .

. . . *hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is* . . .

Time was whirling past him faster and faster; it was moving in a vast column like a cyclone; a storm of time which caught him and spun him crazily. Light broke in singing waves over his head and bored into the center of it, white hot and painless yet agonizingly bright. The world melted, formed again, took a thousand shapes, leaping and straining against the bondage of matter and then they broke and reformed into a wheel, a wheel as wide as the heavens, spinning in both directions at once. *"Ezekiel saw the wheel, 'Way up in the middle of the air . . ."*

"He's under, doctor." Goetz nodded to Don Crane and then turned back to his gauges and the rolling paper ribbon which recorded, by two jagged ink lines, Washington Lee's blood-pressure and respiration.

Don Crane stripped off his rubber gloves which had come into contact with Wash's unsterile back. He dropped them in a receptacle and from the glove can took out a fresh pack, opened

it and dusted his hands with talcum from the package. He drew on the sterile gloves.

A tall figure with an arrogant back-thrust of shoulders entered from the wash room, capped and masked in green. A strip of adhesive tape across the top edge of his mask under his eyes guarded against the fogging of his eyeglasses by his breath and around his head, below the edges of the shapeless cotton cap, were wound several thicknesses of gauze bandage to absorb perspiration. Behind rimless glasses the cool, self-possessed eyes of Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone surveyed the room. At the gown table he gave his hands a rinse in alcohol and dried them on a sterile towel handed him by the nurse. From a metal drum he picked a gown, unfolded it and worked his arms into the sleeves. The unsterile nurse reached in, standing behind the great man, and pulled the sleeves up until Rathbone's hands appeared. He stood silent while she tied the tapes and then took a glove pack from the can. The rubber stretched transparent with a waxy yellow shine over his coal-heaver's hands.

Rathbone approached the operating table, flicking up the cuff of his glove and saying brightly, "Good morning. Good morning, everybody. By the way, Miss Emmett—how's your dad?"

Mary Emmett, the instrument nurse, was a large girl, almost as tall as Rathbone. Her voice, from behind her mask, said, "He's better, thanks, doctor. It's just sort of a chronic bronchitis. He'll be seventy-four his next birthday."

"Seventy-four, eh? Grand old fellow, Larry Emmett. I've known him for years. Be sure to bring him in when he's better, Miss Emmett. We'll take a chest plate just to make sure. And if he complains about people fussing over him tell him Neighbor Jim wants him to take care of himself. He'll come then." A lift at the eye-corners told them that Dr. Rathbone was smiling and the other eyes, between caps and masks, all smiled in unison.

Taking a sterile towel from Emmett he wrapped his gloved hands in it and crossed the room to a portable view box which stood a few feet to one side of the operating table, holding a chest plate of Washington Lee. He studied the rib structure for several seconds and then turned back, discarding the towel and taking his place at the table on the opposite side from Don Crane.

"All right, Miss Emmett."

She handed him a scalpel.

"Wait a minute. Goetz—" he said to the anaesthetist, "suppose you turn him just a trifle more toward Crane."

Dr. Goetz reached under the sheet, gripped Wash's shoulder and moved it an inch.

"Fine. Perfect. Now just see that he stays there." To Don he said, "We want to keep the scapula well out of our way at all times—right?"

He bent forward, pressing his left hand against the upper corner of the patch of skin, darkened with iodine, which lay among green layers of sterile sheets and towels. Beyond the shield of cloth which fenced off the area under operation, Wash Lee's head lay motionless, a dark blob at the top of the table.

Rathbone rested his thumb and middle finger in a delicate arc against the skin, tightening it, then set the point of the scalpel against the mahogany surface and with one slow sweeping stroke, drew a scarlet line straight for a few centimeters, parallel to the spine, and then curving into a parabola toward the lower ribs. With a sponge of gauze he quickly cleaned the incision of blood and then began to work his way deliberately through the yellow fatty tissue overlying the muscle. A severed artery sent a protesting little jet of blood over the sleeve of his gown. Don Crane was ready with a clamp, handed to him by Mary Emmett.

As the opening deepened, a forest of clamps grew, lying side by side against the green curve which was Wash Lee. Rathbone laid his scalpel in a basin held by Emmett and from her other hand took a glass tube of sterile cotton thread. As Don held the clamps perpendicular, one after another, Rathbone looped thread around each, slid it down, drew the knot tight and snipped off the ends with a pair of scissors, tying off blood vessels. The clamps clattered into a tray behind Don as he removed them.

"There are certain advantages, from a pedagogical viewpoint, in having a patient with a thorax the size of this big darkie's," Rathbone said. "If we had a little, narrow-chested Jew tailor. . . ."

Don's eyebrows drew together and he slid his glance to the head of the table but Dr. Immanuel Goetz seemed totally absorbed in his unfolding graph. With one hand this descendant of Bedouin warriors and prophets of Sinai thunder held the glass cone in place over the patient's nose and mouth. With his other hand he fed a trifle more cyclopropane into the mixture of gases serving Wash Lee for air. Below the anaesthetic carriage hung a bag of black rubber like a partially inflated football bladder. It swelled and shrank, swelled and shrank, acting out, in reverse, the work of the Negro boy's lungs.

". . . the actual carpentry might be a little more delicate. But, strangely enough, the chances for a successful recovery would be increased," Rathbone continued urbanely, lifting a fold of muscle tissue with a pair of mouse-tooth forceps and working

his way under it with deliberate, sketching strokes of the scalpel.

Gradually a white membrane, the fascia of the latissimus dorsi muscle, was cleared of scarlet tissue. Rathbone slit it and then called for clips as Don sponged the incision white again where it had flooded scarlet.

With the little spiky fingers of the clips Rathbone attached towels to the edges of the wound and then folded back towels, clips and flesh. All that was visible now of that once promising heavyweight, Washington Lincoln Lee, was a scarlet-and-white gash in a green surface, a gash in which the ribs slowly rose and fell, reminding the watchers that this isolated ellipse was a window, giving on the interior of a live thing.

"Now then, Don," Rathbone said, straightening up to rest his back and arms for a moment and pointing with his gloved finger, "Which rib is that?"

Don Crane, holding a retractor like a steel hand, to keep the incision wide open, shook his head. "Haven't the vaguest idea, doctor. I'd guess the fifth, offhand. Which one is it?"

Rathbone smiled, his eye-corners raising slightly. "I would say the fifth, too, Don. But the point is, I don't know. Not without counting. And, following Lilienthal's order, we will take the third rib first. Now, if you will give me a little more room . . . that's the idea, Don, hold the retractor just as if you were hoeing potatoes. . . ." He slid his gloved hand in under the muscle, closing his eyes to increase the sensitivity of touch. When he drew his hand out he said, "We were off by a rib. It's the fourth. And here," he tapped another rib with his stiffened forefinger and it gave a hollow sound like someone knocking on an empty cigar box, "here is the one which interests us."

Emmett handed him a gleaming tool shaped like a miniature wrecking bar. With one curved and sharpened chisel end Rathbone began to scrape the periosteal membrane from the rib surface. When he had finished scraping it from above and below he laid the tool in the basin held by Emmett and from her other hand took what looked like a pair of giant wire cutters. Holding the handles upright he inserted the jaws carefully, raised his elbows and drove the handles together with a quick, decisive crack which cut the rib neatly off near the vertebra. Emmett held out a cutter of different shape which he inserted under the half-severed rib, slid it along the length of bone and then cracked again and handed the cutter back to the attentive Mary Emmett, who again held a stainless steel basin. Rathbone lifted out the severed rib section with forceps and dropped it into the basin.

Clang.

"One down, six to go, Don. Now, how would you like to

step around here—I'll hold the retractor—and try your hand at the periosteum? You'll find . . ."

"Respiration slowing, Dr. Rathbone." Dr. Goetz, watching the zig-zag line on his graph, opened the oxygen valve a little wider.

"You may have to give him a little adrenalin," Rathbone said casually. He leaned over, watching the wavering graph line, the slow swelling and contracting of the rubber bag. "I don't think he'll need it, though. He's picking up nicely." To Don Crane he said, "I'll stay with it this time, Don. We shall have to work a little faster."

He drew his scalpel along the surface of the second rib, then with the curved chisel began scraping the membrane free. He slid a polished steel hook under the rib to loosen it and again attacked the periosteum, this time from the under side.

One by one the ribs were stripped naked and white to the shadowless light above. They were cracked by the giant wire-cutters, lifted out and dropped into the stainless steel basin while Don Crane, moving busily with gauze sponges held at the end of forceps, kept the gash free of the oozing scarlet.

The basin clanged seven times before Rathbone called for a drain, laid the rubber-skinned gauze thread in place along the wound and began to sew the muscle tissue together with careful, steady stitches.

Don Crane got a flash of recollection, senseless and intruding—a memory out of the deep past—of an old, gnarled man in a Vermont farmhouse, hand-sewing the covers on baseballs to make a few cents cash during the winter.

At last Rathbone stopped sewing and began to cover the curved wound with squares of gauze and adhesive tape. He stood back, stripping off his gloves. "There you are, Don. There's your thoracoplasty, signed, sealed and delivered. Step into my office when you are through here and we'll fight the battle all over again verbally. Good morning, everybody."

"Good morning, Dr. Rathbone."

"Good morning, Dr. Rathbone. . . ."

The great man passed out through the door into the washroom, held open for him by the unsterile nurse.

Don Crane saw Wash safely on his way downstairs and then returned to the locker room where he stripped off his mask and cap, untied the cord of the gown and peeled it off. His cotton undershirt was stuck to his ribs with sweat.

He took a towel from his locker and stepped in under a shower, letting the water jet alternately hot and cold over him, modifying it to a comfortable body temperature and then lowering it to a bracing coolness before he turned it off, ducked out and began towelling briskly.

To Rathbone it might be carpentry. But however hard Don tried, that gaping ellipse in the sheets was still part of a man; it was part of Washington Lee. It reached into the future, pulling Lee out of shape, wrenching his life away from the dream of heroism, setting him, in grimy sweat-shirt and frayed trousers, to massaging the legs of some other up-and-coming fighter sitting with great arms spread-eagled along the ropes, waiting beneath the lights, in the dark and howling arena of battle. It seemed to be a tuck taken in a man's life. And far ahead there lay, in the pattern of time's tapestry, a Wash Lee selling all late, sport, racing papers, to the crowd filing out, babbling of triumph and defeat of other men. Wash would be bent and crumpled on that side. And his life in macrocosm would take a similar twist....

Crane knocked at the frosted glass door of the office and the buzzer sounded after a few seconds' pause. He opened the door. Dr. Rathbone was sitting with his hands clasped behind his head, his feet propped on one of the side drawers of the desk which he had pulled out for that purpose. There was a faint perfume of Scotch whiskey on the air.

Don sat down in the visitor's chair and shook a cigarette out of his pack, putting it in his mouth slowly and lighting it with a match. Rathbone, usually so punctilious with his flat gold lighter, kept his hands behind his head and for a time neither man spoke. At last the director said, making conversation, "The big thing, of course, is to stay away from the pleura all you can. And watch for shock symptoms. It's a dramatic operation; an intern's delight. Delicate it is not." His voice had an abstracted quality as if half of his mind were far off, working at something else.

"Lee was certainly in excellent general condition," Crane said.

"Excellent. Excellent. That is why I held out in the staff conferences for taking the full quota of ribs at one time. You never can tell when one of these dark boys is going to go hysterical on you. And if we took three ribs now and he knew that in a month he would have to face up to the whole business again...."

The whirr of the telephone interrupted him. He picked it up and held it to his ear for a moment. Then he put it back in the cradle saying, "Right away."

Rathbone stood up quickly, all his consciousness gathered again into one steady, penetrating shaft. He said over his shoulder as he headed for the door, "Lee has gone into shock. Corey can't find any radial pulse."

Through the dimly lighted corridor an orderly and a stranger, a burly man in faded denim pants and khaki shirt, wheeled a stretcher, sheet-covered. From where he stood in the sunroom, watching the harbor, Abdullah heard a wheel creak and turned his head.

The morning was overcast; the red light of dawn had given way to a gray burden. Ben Rosenbaum lay daydreaming, bringing back the light of other mornings; sunlight slanting over the Square, filtering through the great elm in the northwest corner. The spring of a lifetime, breathing life from the sparkling pavement and the passing, familiar faces. Artists hanging pictures on walls and fence railings, getting ready for the outdoor show.

He thought of Cora, slender and tawny, with a beauty of motion which was more than half art, a girl who had studied walking and voice and who wore her honey-colored hair long and simply tied with a bit of black velvet ribbon. A girl who could wear slacks and a denim shirt and scarlet sandals and bring with her the pulse of life; youth finding the beauty of the world in the spring of the year.

His hip joint pained him, boring into the mattress, and he turned, slowly and carefully, to his other side and saw Abdullah standing, sad-eyed, beside his bed. He was holding on his fat, brown palm, the pot of ivy. "I think this leaf—the little fellow—I think he grow a little. Since yesterday. What do you think?"

Ben nodded. Today Abdullah's eyes were even sadder than usual. With the finger of his other hand he caressed the ivy leaves, gently as a breath. "I think you're right, Abba Dabba. It's growing."

The fat man pursed his lips and stood looking past Ben into the corner of the room. Jasper Stone, cool, pearly-white, black-ribboned, book under his arm, appeared beside Abdullah and the fat man turned to him, meeting his gaze and imploring. Stone nodded his head an eighth of an inch and said to Ben, "Aha, Abdullah, the persistent horticulturist, displays his secret sin. '. . . the barren staff the pilgrim bore Bloomed in the great Pope's sight . . .' And how are you this fine morning, Benjamin? I thought I heard you coughing a little during the night."

"Just once," Ben said. "But it only takes once."

Stone's old face crinkled, the laughter lines around his eyes deepened but seemed to hold sadness where yesterday there had been only detachment, philosophic calm, and a vast, humorous doubt of everything.

"Why, bless God, brothers, I tell you I can *feel* it a-stalking . . ." Joe Kincaid joined them and stopped halfway in the room,

met by the cautioning stares of Stone and Abdullah. He paused, and then finished thickly, "Howdy, Ben. Feeling all right?"

The lad nodded. Then he said, "Go ahead and tell me, you guys. What is it?"

Abdullah sighed and said, "Is nothing for you to worry, Ben. Is nothing for you."

Stone said, "As a matter of fact, my dear boy, our round of days has not been broken by any particularly welcome event. No, we sleep, we wake, we eat, we write letters. And some of us, whose brains are not completely petrified by the routine, even have been known to write verse. What are you working on, now, Ben?"

"I made up a gospel song once," Kincaid said. "I could pick most any tune on a guitar, only after I started preaching I never picked nothing but gospel tunes. Time was I could pick *One-Eyed Reilly* and *Coon Can Corn;* I could pick *Sourwood Mountain* pretty as you please. Never had no dances 'thout I was there, a-picking and a-hollering. . . ."

Ben twisted his lips once in disgust as weakness. "Go on, you guys. Say it. What's eating you? What is it? I wish to God you guys would quit trying to soften up things for me. I'm not afraid of facts. Now spit it out."

They fell silent. Abdullah, hearing footsteps outside, carefully lowered the ivy into the pocket of his robe. Stone strode to the door and Kincaid raked his hand through his hair; the black spikes stuck out more jaggedly than ever. Silence. Ben could hear the faint rustle of his own breathing.

"Rosenbaum! Rosenbaum!" It was old man Goldfarb, hurrying in on his splay feet with quick, anguished steps. "Rosenbaum! It's dead the *schwarzer!* the prize fighter, he's dead! Rosenbaum, what's this with a 'rib section?' "

Ben fought down irritation and took breath. "Take it easy, Mr. Goldfarb. It's nobody fault." He searched the faces of the others, Kincaid tormented by his inner conflicts, Stone humorous and sad, Abdullah resigned.

"Is true," Abdullah said at last. "Wash Lee—gone." He moved one fat brown hand in a lateral sweep like the blade of a scythe.

Ben was recovering from the cold shudder that news of death brings. Now it was being followed by a wild, irrational spurt of elation. It went against the grain but it couldn't be controlled. Why? Why was it? As if the darkness, the emptiness, the great Nothing should be less lonely? That into Nothing something should go before—friends there where there was nothing? And swiftly, cutting him like a blade of grass stripped through the hand, came back the memory of Cora and the warmth of her slender, long-fingered hand slipped inside his

shirt, caressing him. His arms were around her; they lay on the studio couch and beyond the window was the plane tree of the courtyard, new green there in the lost spring when Cora's mouth was the gateway to the future, her kiss the opening of heavenly doors.

"Brother Lee cashed in his chips about ten minutes after he came down from Operating," Stone said casually. "I found out from Corey, after a little cozening. A rare case, apparently; something to do with the thymus gland of the chest. I shall have to look it up. Apparently no one can predict it, but such cases are very susceptible to shock, and morale matters little. Well, gentlemen, our one-man roster of patriots has left us. His full name was Washington Lincoln Lee. . . ."

It had happened to Wash! With the shoulders, the springy walk, the pile-driver punch, the heart of a fighter. It had happened to a man who could count, when half conscious, down on one knee, and rise at the count of nine to face the glare, the screaming darkness beyond it, the murderous hail of fists taped to the hardness of concrete in their thin gloves. It had happened to a man able to stand up under that battering, wiping the blood from his eyes on the other man's shoulder in the clinches; weaving, covering, shooting out his left automatically, tightening his belly against the ram of rights crashing in. It had happened to Wash.

I couldn't do it. I couldn't face that naked explosion of force, ever. Not ever. And all of his muscle, built up through so many hours of toil, of punishment in spite of the leather head-guard; all the steady, patient hammering at the door of the future with his fists. All nothing . . . all ashes . . . all meat for the incinerator or bait for worms, puzzled by the taste of embalming fluid. . . .

"Rosenbaum, it happens in here all the time like this?"

Turning his face toward the source of the frantic voice, Ben said, hardly bothering to focus his eyes, "It doesn't happen all the time. The guy just passed out from shock. It happens sometimes. Not all the time. Understand? Don't worry—it won't happen to you."

"*Nu*, so you're a doctor already, Rosenbaum? Suppose it's got to have a rib section somebody else . . . what's this rib section?"

The youth tightened his lips and then said, "Listen, Goldfarb—there are three things they can do for you in here. The first is to stick you in bed and leave you there until you get better. Like Abba Dabba here. The next thing is pneumothorax, where they pump a bubble of air in your lung with a needle every week and that collapses the part of the lung where the bugs are working and they get discouraged and quit . . . you

hope. And when that doesn't work they saw out part of the ribs, the whole chest caves in on that side for good, and the bugs give up and quit. Or so the experts hope. Now do you get it?"

The old man was shaking his head. "But Rosenbaum, the big *schwarzer*, he's dead already."

"Got to take your chances in here, Mr. Goldfarb. Now you had better go back to bed and quit running around. Stay in bed, Goldfarb. Get it? Bed. Lie down, keep quiet. Do nothing. Rest. Get it?"

The distraught man quivered as if he had been hit by a stream of icy water. "Doctors! A fortune their fathers pay, they should study medicine. Now they tell Goldfarb all he should do is stay in bed. From this they make a living. *Ai.*"

He slapped away out into the corridor and Abdullah followed him, as if to make certain that he really returned to bed. Kincaid, sucking his teeth, said, "Guess I'll get along. Time for coffee and eggs."

Stone said softly, "We conspired against you, Benjamin. We voted to have our guardian angel, Gallagher, tell you the news."

"Why Gallagher?" Ben's eyebrows drew together.

Stone smiled. " 'Pale, beyond porch and portal, Crowned with calm leaves, she stands . . .' It seemed a good idea at the time, Ben. Death before breakfast is always disturbing. And our Gallagher has a way with her. She has probably knelt before so many statues of the Virgin that she has come to resemble her in more ways than one. Yes, my boy, if I were the Holy Ghost I could find no better candidate than our Gallagher. Although perhaps, with the proper coaching, she might play the role of her namesake, the grandmother of the gifted carpenter, St. Anne." He had rambled on, obviously thinking behind his eyes in a different mood and then suddenly he said, "Gallagher would know how, that's all. But now you know. So our little plan gangs a-gley. Eat an extra egg for Washington Lee, my boy."

Ben lay alone in the room, letting the faces mingle in their common expression of melancholy and then the face of Goldfarb broke through, clear in recollection, and Ben was reminded of his own father's face, with the ten elders standing about the room, when his father's father was dead and they were saying the *kaddish.*

Y'he sh'lomo rabo minsh' mayo v'chayim. . . .

. . . May peace everlasting be granted unto all souls who have been called back to their Maker. May we fulfill in peace the number of years allotted to us on earth. . . .

Yes, it should have been Gallagher. The Judge always knew.

He knew all the answers except one and didn't that one have to be known with the heart? Wasn't its knowledge kindled between the hammer and the anvil, red hot? And Gallagher's ignorance, for all its painted saints, was ignorance of the brain only for hadn't she said once that what nurses needed more than anything else was a good strong union only what could you do with the sneaky ones who would run and tattle to the boss and what with Neighbor Jim Hanlon down at the Power House what good would come of it; go fight City Hall.

Beauty and death, the one negating the other . . . and he remembered the touch of fabric; remembered the feel of the smooth, faded India print of the studio couch cover, smelling faintly of spilled ash trays and city dust. He remembered the tawny cloud of Cora's hair around her head where she had spread it, theatrically, knowing it would give him delight.

Time, time, time, and the rush of the years. Yet she was no more past now than she had been then, slipping back into her clothes. Beauty negates death, and death claims beauty and so on forever. But wasn't it worth dying, just to remember Cora? Just to remember the proud toss of her head the first time she undressed before him; for she was proud that she was doing it for him; she was proud of the look in his eyes, mirroring her own beauty maybe. But there was something else. Great God, there was something else, for it had been real between them, there in the spring of the year with the plane tree's leaves flickering shadow on the window blind in the morning. The room came back to him; her room and the distant sounds of the city and the faint song of water from the kitchen faucet dripping. He had showed her how to put in a new washer; he had bought the wrench in the hardware store on the avenue when he was with her.

Scraps of memory filled in; little odd pieces came back and the picture flowed together more solidly, the snippets of memory fitting together and there she was again and the softness of her palms holding his face again. It was as if he had built her inside him; built her of molecules drawn together by the singing energy of matter itself; she was there. So clear was she that he felt again the smoothness, the warmth of her breath against his cheek. She lived again under his lips in memory and when he was gone part of her would die—part of her past which was especially his, part of her life which belonged to him no matter how long she lived now, nor with what man she lived; even if she forgot him entirely, part of her would die when he died.

And the useless tears at news that she had married the boy she had mentioned in her letters that summer. Why should Cora link herself to death?

There in the past was the marble Arch and the scarlet tulips lifting their heads in defiance of death on the first of May. There had been cool winter still in the air but the sun full of summer promise.

We bought vegetables from the carts on West Fourth Street, Cora going ahead and I following, watching her in her long stride, and loving her when she turned her head to me, saying something about what we would have for dinner, or how beautiful a child was, playing under the wheels of a push-cart. Or suddenly an idea she had or a rekindled hope for summer theater jobs or who was casting, looking back over her shoulder to find my eyes upon her and telling me with the lift of her mouth that she preferred me above all others.

She had chosen him to love, there in the spring, when they visited a garden hemmed in by houses, the garden of a church with the crocuses golden. Her eyes reflected his desire of her; gave it back in her desire. There in the spring sunshine, passing the Italian pastry shop where the good brioches were, and the shop with the hanging cheeses and the radio repair place, on toward the great brown church rising, forbidding and scowling, facing the avenue, holding its garish images of a smirking virgin and a man with red-enamel blood cascading from his hands. The death worshippers, the leeches, the extortioners of masses for the dead!

Life was what he had possessed then—in Cora's tingling walk, and the low-pitched excitement of her voice. It was enough to have known it at all. Ever. Anywhere.

The thread of dream broke on the realization that someone was in the room with him.

It was Abdullah. Instead of the ivy he now carried a round waxed-cardboard carton with a label stuck on it. "I think that rib business no good," he said, his great eyes expressionless once more. "Best to just stay quiet; keep quiet, inside, outside. Quiet."

"Yes," Ben whispered. "Sometimes it works."

"Sometime." Abdullah had moved around the bed to the table where there was another carton. Its label said, "Rosenbaum. Rm. 904 72 hr. sputum."

From his robe pocket Abdullah drew a wooden tongue depressor. Lowering his voice he asked, "You don't mind, Ben? Just a little?"

Ben Rosenbaum smiled crookedly. "Go ahead, Abba Dabba. Take as much as you want. *Sholem aleichem!*"

With the flat bit of wood Abdullah scraped part of the contents of Ben's carton into his own, stirring it around thoroughly. Then he replaced both covers and dropped his own carton into the pocket of his robe.

At the door he turned and smiled his faint, ghostly smile. *"Aleikoom salaam!"*

In the dining room the clatter of spoons and the clink of coffee mugs was as cheerful as ever; here Wash Lee's death did not seem to penetrate, for the patients of West Nine knew nothing about it and the patients down at the other end of East Nine had not known Wash; they used a different lavatory and sunroom and were not touched by the death. They lived in another country and when the inhabitants of the north end of the wing met them they nodded but seldom spoke for there was nothing to talk about to strangers.

Frank Vitiello's first morning in the dining room was an adventure to him as it always was to someone who has been eating alone in bed for months or years. He jerked up his chin automatically and went on spooning in oatmeal.

"Jees, this is the nuts. Eating at a table. Jees, that eating in bed was getting me. All we need here is a floor show." He sat in the chair which the morning before had held Wash Lee. Frank ran his spoon around the bowl, chasing the last of the oatmeal and then said to Nellie Kazimierzska, who was collecting empty bowls and passing out full ones; "Twice for me, pigeon. Just put it on my tab."

He ran his glance with formal insolence up and down Nellie's body and she looked formal reproach at him, sidelong, out of her gray eyes as she had seen girls look in the movies.

"Okay, big shot. If you keep on you're going to need a foundation garment."

Frank's face softened into the nearest thing to a smile which he would allow his face to wear in the presence of a girl. "Wait'll I put on that next hunnert pounds, pigeon," he said, trying to make his high-pitched voice sound husky. "I'll get a foundation garment all right. But not for me. I'll take you and get ya fitted for a custom-made set of falsies."

Nellie squealed and set another bowl of oatmeal before him, the fullest bowl on her tray. "Listen, Mister Vitiello, when it comes to falsies, I'll have to beg to be excused. I do not indulge."

"G'wan. One of these days I'm gonna fin' out." He smoothed down his hair, which needed no smoothing, and wrenched up his chin, which needed no wrenching, since he was not wearing a tight collar but pajamas under a robe.

"No kidding," he turned back to his table mates, "this is the nuts. Too bad about the dark boy. He was okay. I seen him fight once. He was okay." Frank doused more sugar on his

oatmeal and dug into it with his spoon. "Well, the bigger they come the harder they fall, huh? But he was okay."

Kincaid had fished his toothpick from his pocket and was chewing it, scowling through the top of the table as if it were transparent and the earth beneath it were transparent and he could look down straight into the lowest depths of the Bad Place.

"Brother," he said, when Vitiello had stopped speaking to eat, "there warn't a soul in this outfit didn't feel them dark wings this morning. I felt 'em same's a partridge's wings when he comes a-booming up out of the grass. I felt 'em a-fannin' my face, ice cold."

Frank smoothed down his hair and jerked his chin. "Jees, quit it, can't ye? Can't you let a guy eat?"

"That food you're a-shoveling in now, brother, goes towards feeding nothing but the dust. You're just a-shoveling in more dust and ashes on top of it. Dust and ashes; all of a man that ain't the breath of the Lord God is dust. Don't make no difference what you do in this world, you're just a-treadin' that same old path that leadeth to the worms."

"Hey, will you quit talking about worms while a guy's eating? Ain't I got enough to worry about—the heavyweight boy dying and all—without you talking about worms?"

Kincaid turned his stark, tormented face to Stone who sat across from him. "Judge—sometimes I think I'd rather be down a mine night and day both than sitting around here. I'd sooner. Why every day's Sunday in here. It ain't natural." He turned up his hands and examined his palms. "Look at 'em," he said between his teeth, shifting the toothpick to the side of his mouth with his tongue. "Look at them hands. Softer'n a baby's backside. Time was I could swing that little old pick all day long, 'thout getting tired. Laying in there on my side, swinging 'er. All day. Thinking about my sermon for Sunday in the bargain. I had my hands in condition. Now look at 'em. Softer'n that mush."

Abba Dabba held his cup up for more coffee and Stone pushed the sugar and cream pitcher toward him but he shook his head.

"Come, come, Elder," said the Judge, his expression of crafty benevolence deepening, "I appreciate our leisure. Before this I was always on the go, transacting my business in club cars, hotel lobbies, cafés. I . . . ah . . . sold many different commodities. But always in a friendly, informal way. And champagne was my most potent sales argument. But now, I have no fear of ulcers. No more brandies for Jasper Stone. No more whiskey sours for breakfast. I shall probably reach the century mark if I stay here and obey Abba Dabba's injunctions to quietism. Unless, of course, King Rathbone decides to send

me from his court, a knight errant." Stone slid his glance toward Abba Dabba but the fat man's face was as blank as the face of a doll. "No," Stone continued, addressing the table at large, "here I lead a virtuous life. No more chasing nymphs with ice cubes, no more Welsh rabbits at dawn. No girls who know the value of a compliment. Or a diamond. Here I am a teetotaller. Here I am chaste. Here I am not tempted to sin in any way. To be tubercular and to be a Christian are much the same thing, eh?"

He waited for the blast from Kincaid and it came.

"Brother," Kincaid said softly, his hot, black eyes snapping, "you ain't fooling anybody—laughing, joking. You fellows ain't fooling anybody. You've felt them dark wings brush by you, same as me. And you allow you ain't tempted to sin in this place. Why, brother, you can't shut out sin, same as you shut out germs or dust. You got it a-growing inside you, same's the tee-berculosis. Never mind not drinking and not whoring. Them ain't the worst things in the sight of God. No, sir."

Stone had rolled a paper napkin into the shape of a cigarette and held it between his fingers. "Come, come, Elder. Don't leave us in suspense. You are liberal in your views on drinking, fornication and . . . ah . . . did you say snuff dipping?"

"Bless God, yes. Them's nothing but head-lice sins."

"Ah. Reassuring, Elder. Well, now, what would you say was the worst? I knew a horse trainer once who carried on a clandestine affair with a Shetland pony. . . ."

"Pride, by God!" Kincaid's open hand struck the table a blow that made Vitiello jump, Abdullah raise his eyes, and Stone smile more deeply, half-lowering his heavy eyelids. "Pride that goeth before a fall. *'Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.'* Obadiah, one and four. I tell you, brother, lust ain't as displeasin' in the sight of the Lord as pride. That's the one, you want to nail its hide to the barn door. And the minute you think you got it skinned—in it comes through some teeny little chink and it's at you again. Lord, don't I know it? I used to preach and preach and have 'em a jumpin'. And then I says to myself one day, 'You blame fool. Are you preaching to the greater glory of God or to the greater glory of Joe Kincaid?' And bless God, brother, there I was. Caught in the snare of pride, same's a grasshopper in a spider web. Sewed up in it, 'round and 'round, with old Satan ready to come a-waltzing out and start sucking out my soul, same's a grasshopper."

He crumpled his paper napkin into a wad and began to knead it between his fingers. "Oh, there's more to it than that, brother. More to it than that. What's piling up riches but pride?

Can't a man wear but one suit of clothes. I seen in a magazine some fellow in the moving pictures got eighty-five suits of clothes. Pride. Just so's he can see some fellow walking down the street and say to himself, 'I got more'n what you've got.' Pride." He snapped his head left and right, staring at the men beside him, Abdullah sitting placid and unmoving, his eyes on the table, Vitiello eating. Then he looked back at the Judge. "What's trying to outsmart somebody else but pride? The blessed Carpenter never said a single word, defending a rich man. Never said it. It's all on the other side. The Carpenter sure nailed it down fast when He said a rich man would have one hell of a time getting into the Kingdom. No sir, the Carpenter was poor and he preached to the poor and whenever you see some high-toned bishop or other a-riding in a big limousine you can bet there ain't enough of the Carpenter in that buzzard's heart to put in a gnat's eye. Why you take a look at these churches: gold and silver fixings and stained glass windows, cost a fortune. Ain't a bit of the Nazarene in any of 'em. They'd do better to sell all them play-pretties and give the money to the poor." Suddenly his voice cracked and he bowed his head, his shoulders slumping. "Lord God, what good would it do? Just a drop in the bucket. Same as when kids are hungry and you find a dollar laying on the ground. Feeds 'em for a day, hominy and fatback. Then what? You'd have to keep finding that old dollar every day."

"G'wan, you talk like Benny," Vitiello said. "I don't go for that red talk. Guys that don't like it in this country ought to go to Russia."

Kincaid's eyes fastened on his table mate for a blazing instant and then he dropped his hands, lying limp, palms up, before him on the table, their fingers curled when at rest from long years of being clenched on a miner's pick. "Brother—if my roof leaks I aim to get a tin can and flatten 'er out and fix it. I don't figure on moving in with my neighbor. But, Lord God—I've got so I don't care whether the roof leaks or not. I just as soon lay on the ground and waller in it, same's a hog. Time was, when I was preaching, I had the notion of the New Jerusalem, that it was a-coming right here if enough sinners would open their hearts to Jesus. Now I don't know nothing; can't see a inch in front of my face. I'm down a mine and the lamp's fell off'n my cap and been tromped on. Dark. Lord God, darkness like soot up a chimbley. 'Thout form and void. Darkness on the face of the deep."

He lurched to his feet, overturning his chair. Nellie ran over and picked it up for him, saying, "Don't you pick it up, mister. You know you boys ain't supposed to lift anything."

Kincaid looked at her, blank-faced, as if she had spoken in

a foreign language. Then he ran one hand over his face and drew it away from his mouth with the gesture of a man who has run into a mass of cobwebs.

He strode out of the room and Stone watched him go. "Elder Kincaid seems to have been mightily shaken up by the departure of our late companion Washington Lee," he said to Abdullah. "Brother Kincaid had better take it easy. He's liable to open up his cavity. And then the joys of the brush arbor and the coal mine will know him no more."

Stone pushed back his chair, looking down at his place at the table. Where his bowl had been empty there was now a bowl full of oatmeal, the milk covering it blue around the edges. He glanced at Abdullah, who had an empty bowl, and the fat man lowered one olive-tinted eyelid in an enormous wink.

"No sugar, no cream, no ambrosia with lumps in it? What is this, my friend? Could it be that the prexy has threatened you with expulsion from our noble alma mater?"

Vitiello said, "Jees, but you sure sling a load of double talk. Let me know when to listen."

Abdullah sighed and pushed back his chair, his eyes on the uneaten oatmeal wistful and, to Stone who knew him, a little frightened.

It was a room on the fourth floor, where the nurses lived, and because dust was not the constant enemy here, as it was on other floors, the room had venetian blinds. They were pulled shut, throwing the room into comfortable twilight, save for one slit of bright winter's day where the window was raised. Cold air sighed through it, stirring a soft strand of black hair which had been left out when the mass of hair was tightly braided for bed.

The arm outside the blankets wore gray flannel. Anne Gallagher lay on her side, one palm under her cheek, her lips parted, her breathing deep and steady. Above the bed hung a small crucifix. On the low bed table of maple Gallagher's wrist watch lay ticking beside the telephone and with it lay a book bound in black leather, a gold cross on the cover, containing devotions for every day in the year.

From the maple bureau a photograph gazed into the room, a thin little girl in her confirmation veil, a child with great, wary eyes, who might have been Gallagher herself when she was little and spindly. At the bottom of the picture was written painfully, "To Aunt Annie with loads of hugs, Peggy."

Anne Gallagher slept softly with the limp surrender of a child who had said its prayers. Once her lips closed; she swal-

lowed; the corners of her mouth drew into a faint smile as she dreamed, moved her hand, which was outside the covers, up farther to the pillow beside her face, then slowly down until her forearm, in its flannel night-gown sleeve, rested across her breast. In the depths of sleep she felt the pressure against the nipple; her dreams shifted their channel to follow that slow, sweet pressure, a touch which gave birth to dream. . . .

There were animals in it, slow-moving sweet beasts who lifted gentle eyes from their stalls, star-reflecting eyes there in the cool night wind blowing without and the rafters above them transparent to let through the starlight and the robe was gem-encrusted; the shawl over her head was worked in cloth-of-gold with the sweet lavender in it, sweet lavender from old trunks, from old boxes opened . . . the baby was a font of light with the darling hands of him patting the purple silk, his little mouth seeking and blessed was the fruit of her womb with the light shining from around his head and the starlight in it and all but his eyes were too large, too large entirely and there was pain in them fit to break her heart and him her own, with no man in it at all, just her own, searching with the wee mouth and his hands opening and shutting, but thin, thin to break her heart, as he lay along her arm . . . and now his mouth finding her breast and the life going into him and his great dark eyes closed so he could be intent on it, his hand like a pink speck against the whiteness of her breast, only now the hand was white too, white as wax and the smell of candle wick in it as at a wake . . . lulla, lullay, thou tiny little boy, lulla, lullay, lullay; to feel thee suck doth soothe my great annoy. lulla, lullay, lullay and old blind Morrison, the fiddler, in the Christmas corner of the kitchen with the kettle singing grandmother's voice in the cold wind what time it is, oh, plenty of time and not forget to stir up Eddie Gaines to put the shot bags and blocks for the bed in the closet near Benny's room tonight. . . .

In the darkness the fluoroscope screen cast its green radiance over the face of young Dr. Donald Crane who sat before it, buried in lead-lined apron and thick gloves. There came the voice of Dr. Rathbone, standing behind him. "Notice the line of the fluid level—diagnostic of a cavity filled with exudate. . . ."

The old man, standing behind the screen with his hands on his hips, elbows bent forward, coughed, turning his head aside. Dr. Rathbone's cool, precise voice continued in the lurid light.

The voice had its origins in the intricate mesh of nerves running to Dr. Rathbone's vocal chords, tongue, lips and jaw. The voice was projected by a column of air, impelled by his broad

diaphragm, and the vibrations and changes of this column of air were controlled from deep in the convolutions of his brain under its well-formed skull and thin covering of iron-gray hair. They were directed by mysterious impulses—unknown, undiscovered, lurking in mystery. Only a tiny portion of the vast ferment of action within that gray mass of tissue ever came past the window of the doctor's consciousness. Most of it remained hidden—combining, re-combining, mounting and falling, sending out shoots of energy along strange paths, turning and tumbling over stored images, ready to form, unite, combine, burst into view before the window of consciousness and drop from sight again, there to stretch searching tendrils toward other thoughts, as the unseen, unknown frequencies of nothing joined similar and different patterns of invisibility. And in one corner, or one layer; in one plane, or one wavelength band; in one channel or one twist of energy conduits, words ran together and imprinted material swept past another invisible window with sound made visible and words formed, unknown to Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone:

man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery he cometh up and is cut down like a flower he fleeth as it were a shadow and never continueth in one stay in the midst of life we are in death of whom may we seek for succor but thee oh lord who for our sins are justly displeased . . . unto almighty god we commend the soul of our brother departed and we commit his body to the ground earth to earth ashes to ashes dust to dust in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life . . .

The old man behind the screen coughed again, and said under his breath, "Ai." The smooth table of plastic behind him was cold where it touched his bare back, and made him wince. Moishe Goldfarb coughed again, turning his head farther to one side as he had been scolded into remembering to do. In the forefront of his mind there was only the chill of the perpendicular table against his back and the chill of the screen sliding up and down and across his chest, touching it here, there. He wondered how long they would keep him standing like this in the dark without his pajama coat.

Below the window of his mind, out of sight and continuing on its way unchecked, a ceremony was in progress. There, in a smart gray snap-brim hat, was the young man, young Rosenbaum, and beside him, looking as pretty as a girl in the moving pictures, was Moishe's daughter Shirley in her wedding dress and Rosenbaum an established man in the fur trade, doing let-out work and getting good money. A little radical in the head—what could you expect, a young man? So wait till they

got a whole houseful children yet, so it won't be so radical the ideas gradually. A smart boy like Benny. So it's all a dream he's thin like a double zero knitting needle; it's all a dream he tells Moishe Goldfarb he should *geh in drerd;* it's a dream, come out of sickness, that away from God he turns his face . . . a dream. . . .

Don Crane snapped off the fluoroscope and pulled the screen away from the old man's chest. "All right, Mr. Goldfarb. Back to bed now. We have to take a peek inside you every week. Better tie your robe tight; it's a little chilly out in the hall."

The next patient was a big, red-faced man, a former member of Jim Hanlon's police department. He stood at attention behind the screen and said, "You see any stray bullets in there, doc, don't mind 'em; I get used to carrying them things around."

Rathbone's gloved hand indicated a stark, black button of shadow under the left armpit. "There, Don, is a miracle. You noticed the scar in front, on the mid-clavicular line, about four centimeters below the nipple? Well, that bullet struck at an angle and plowed around the rib to its present position on the mid-axillary line. Reminds you of these stories out of the war—bullet stopped by a Bible. Or a deck of cards. The bullet is sealed off by fibrotic tissue. He can wear it for the rest of his life." The last words were tinged with an irony so subtle that Don only recognized it when the director's hand pointed again. "This has no connection with the bullet wound, naturally. At the level of the second rib there is a large amphor shelling out with bronchogenic spread, through the middle and lower lung fields."

The policeman's lung had a ragged hole in it. The hole produced a cheese-like crumble of broken-down tissue which spilled over into the left lung. Where the tubercle bacilli landed they settled, flourished, reproduced, living off the country and despoiling it like intrepid and rapacious pioneers. Quick fortune had deflected a steel-jacketed bullet; slow doom had waited and triumphed.

Crane leaned forward, trying to pour his attention into reading that inscription in shadowy hieroglyph.

And unsuspected, behind his field of attention, moved stealthily another shadow shape, a dark brother: a child in a flannel sleeping suit, waking to darkness and the empty terror of night. "Mommy! Mommy! I'm calling you, Mommy!" No one came; shut doors, darkness, and the shadows holding terror, the sweet presence lost. Then a step, a rattle, a shaft of light, light catching the dark face and white frilly cap, the black dress, white apron and the voice of Myra, "You hush up, child. Ain't got enough to do, making all them sandwiches,

'thout traipsing way up here, you yelling thisaway? Your mother downstairs with the ladies and gentlemen. Now you hush up. Don't let me hear no more ructions out of you." The crack of light narrowing, squeezing shut on the living; darkness thundering back, door catch and footsteps on matting and loneliness and darkness and the chaos of a world unborn.

In the sunroom Jasper Stone laid down his cards. "Three daughters of joy, Elder. Too bad. But such is fate." He drew the chips toward him.

Kincaid said, "Got nothing to beat three queens. I was just bluffing. Two measly little old pair. Not wuth the powder and shot to blow 'em to hell." His great, gnarled hands picked up the cards slowly and he rapped the deck against the table to even the edges.

Stone threw a white chip into the center of the table. His mind, from old habit, held itself in readiness for the minute clues thrown out by the other players as they picked up their new hands. There was a change in the respiration, a subtle tightening of muscles, a slant of shoulders, a move toward the table or away from it a fraction of a millimeter, too small for the conscious mind to notice it at all. But the mind sees everything, forgets nothing . . .

. . . his brother whispered to him, "Want to see something?" "Sure. What?" "Come on." They started for the carriage house, passing O'Brien, the coachman, who was whistling, "Come all ye, an' why d'ye wait? The fiddler's down from Dublin town, the gardener will open the gate, so early in the morning . . ." They passed through the open doors and back to the box stall at the end of the stable, the stall which was empty save for an old blanket. Bess, the Irish setter bitch, lay on the blanket, panting heavily, her tongue lolling, her eyes distant. Two damp, horrible little objects lay beside her, their legs spraddled, pink feet splayed out. "Now watch it," said his brother. "Here comes another one." Bess whimpered, struggled to her feet, straining. Then from between her thighs popped a blind, damp, shapeless head. It oozed into the air and Bess slumped down, panting and then strained again and it slipped out onto the blanket, moist and foul and trailing a scarlet string behind it and Bess turned and licked it, taking the cord in her mouth. This was the great mystery, this was the way of it. And looking at his brother's blond head, his clear eyes and the freckles on his forehead, he wondered if his brother had slipped out as damp, as helpless, and as much like a drowned mouse. Mystery parted. The veil of the temple tore and the light struck through him, chilling him and then flooding him with fever heat. . . .

Joe Kincaid waited until the five cards were down, then picked them up, scowling. He continued to scowl but now he seemed to be looking through the cards, through the table, through the floor, through the earth, past matter, into another plane of life. His fellow players waited for him but Kincaid was silent and his frown deepened. Suddenly his hand, holding the cards, flew open, the pasteboard scattering to the table and some on the floor. Then he clenched his hand and hammered the table top, making the chips leap crazily.

"Hey, what's eating you, big boy?" Vitiello looked up warily. Kincaid shook his head, then ran his other hand over his eyes, wiping away thought. "Nothing. Just saw something inside my head. Nothing to it. Don't matter."

Fantasy, uncalled for, unbidden, unwanted, had stretched a picture beneath his inner eye. In a gray light, light before a summer storm, old Sheriff Greer stood before a slim youth in overalls. "Turn around. Face the wall." He turned and Greer's hand planted itself at the back of the boy's head and pushed. The lad threw up his hands against the wall to shield himself but Greer's weight was behind the hand and when the youth fell, his head was twisted so that Kincaid could see his face. The face was the face of Ben Rosenbaum, the eyes hot and rebellious and undefeated, staring through the raw flesh and the running blood. Kincaid's hand held a short-barreled thirty-eight and now he squeezed. The air jolted with it; sound blasting his ears like the crack of doom and Greer's broad belly dented as if struck by a baseball. Greer lifted and thrown back, his jowls flapping; Greer landing, his belly popping out again and blood with it. Kincaid's finger squeezing out another shot, hammering the hulk of Greer in dream until the heap of flesh began to lengthen and darken, the skin paled, the hair sprouted from the bald scalp spiky black and Joe Kincaid saw, conjured up in the dream, his own sprawled image, riddled and gouting death, built of the stuff of dreams, of wish and of fear. . . .

Ben slept; sleep of weakness, close to waking, half rest, half labor. Sounds came faint: an orderly wheeling something past the open door; far down in the courtyard cans being loaded into a garbage wagon; farther beyond the hum of trolley wheels, and the groan of the car; auto horns; and faint and farther still, the mournful blast of whistles in the bay. The sounds mingled and then dropped away as Ben lay on the edge of sleep, balanced, faintly aware, dreaming.

There was a name he was trying to remember, a word which sang to him through centuries of dust, wriggling through pages of vast parchment, a golden word—four letters—which was

the heart of everything. The letters wheeled, burst, forming shapes which flowed together, making the world. They were a cloud, twisting, taking solid form, flying together, as the force grew solid, and the form leaped into being, a tree with spreading boughs. The letters poured out endlessly their golden rain of power; it settled like mist and rippled into a stream, chattering past under the lacy shadows of the tree. A golden bird alighted on a bough, flicked its tail, uttered four notes and dropped from the branch, spreading its wings to catch the air. And the bird was built of the four letters of the mighty Name. And the air in which it skimmed, mounted with beating of sweet wings, was itself descending from the Name and returning thence into the Name again, forever, and forever. . . .

Abdullah sighed, picked up his cards, laid part of his hand down and said, "You give me three this time."

Behind the window of his soul were only green leaves and the song of water. Only green leaves and water like the laughter of a child.

When Frank Vitiello was awakened by the clink of eggnog glasses he sat up, rubbing his eyes and shuddering. Adele Corey said pertly, "Here you are, mister. It really ought to have some dark Jamaica rum in it. But you'll just have to get along without the accessories."

Frank said, "Yeah, sister. Set it down."

He was shaking his head, throwing off the effects of a dream. Jeez, that was some dream.

Sunlight had been in it; pale sunlight, streaming through uncurtained windows. There was a couch, as big as a pool table, kind of couch you see dames lying on in the movies, getting phone calls. They can't show 'em in bed with guys so they show 'em telephoning. Well, anyhow there's this couch and who do you think's lying on it? Nellie Kazimierzska.

So Nellie is lying there and all of a sudden there I am, getting ready to give her the business and I notice something funny about the dame. She feels all hard and smooth like an egg, and cold, like you just took it outa the ice box, you're going to cook it. So she's laying there and I feel her hard and smooth and then she starts cracking. Jees! I can feel her cracking like a shell. Then she starts cracking all over and her face cracks and falls in and there I'm holding a skeleton with the shell falling off it. Jees, laying around in this dump is enough to give you the creeps without you got to go having dreams. . . .

He drank the sweetened egg and milk and slipped on his robe. Then he went to the mirror, pulled out his pocket comb and arranged his hair. He made his bed, smoothing out the

wrinkles, stood back and looked at it to see if it would pass inspection if the Battleaxe should come around, and set off for the sunroom.

The room was empty; the others were not up yet. Nellie was wiping the worrying chairs with a damp cloth.

"Hi, wolf bait. When we gonna snap up to the Alhambra and chase them other alligators back to the bush leagues?"

Nellie bestowed on him her smile calculated to hold the faintest suspicion of promise, while maintaining an aloof disregard for the importunities of an eager beaver type man. "Well, now, Mister Vitiello, I'll have to consult my engagement book to see when I have an evening when I might be free."

"An' if you can't be free, be reasonable."

Nellie clucked with her tongue. "Honest, you ought to get some new material. My grandpop knocked the cradle over groaning at that one."

She wrung out the cloth into a bucket of water smelling of disinfectant and dried her hands on her apron. "Now, Mister Vitiello, if you will kindly excuse me, I have a heavy date with a mop."

He stood in front of her, between her and the door, and she moved forward a pace, carrying the bucket. Frank stood straight, watching her, his eyes lowered to the hemispheres revealed by the tight blue uniform. "Mop, huh? You oughta get a job with the stock exchange. Ya'd clean up."

Nellie set down her bucket and said, "Please permit me to pass, Mister Vitiello. You'll pardon me for pointing, but you are obstructing traffic." Her eyes were on his face, and a dark, intent, angular, neat face it was; a face which held no confusion, no veiled purpose, no enigmas.

She moved closer. Frank reached around her waist and pulled loose the bow knot of her apron.

"Honestly—if you ain't the limit," she said, clucking with her tongue. "Don't look now, but your uncouth manners are showing."

She re-tied the apron and while her hands were behind her back Frank slid his arms around her and seized her wrists. Nellie squealed but not loud enough for anyone in the corridor to hear her. She struggled but not hard enough. Frank drew her to him until they were pressed close and Nellie turned her face away, twisting her hips in an apparent struggle to get free but actually worming her way tighter to him. He let go of her wrists and cupped her buttocks with his open hands, pulling tight. She pushed against him saying thickly, "Uh-uh. Hey, you big goon, let go of me, suppose somebody was to come in . . ."

He did not kiss her. He drew her to him, rubbing his cheek

fiercely against her ear. Then his hand slid in and unfastened the top button of her uniform.

Nellie's voice was a frantic whisper. "Frank . . . for God's sake, honey, I got to keep this job. Frank . . ."

He seized her by the shoulders, sinking his fingers in until she said, "Oh." Then he held one arm a prisoner between them, slid his hand around her and gripped her other arm at the elbow and slipped his free hand into her bosom. The strap of her slip broke and then he found her breast and gripped it and Nellie closed her eyes, her breath coming hard, her teeth biting her lower lip. The nipple stood out hard and eager under his fingers.

Then, quickly, she tore his hand free and spun toward the windows, fastening the button. She stood for a moment, looking out, and then undid the button, found the ends of the strap and tied them, looking back over her shoulder at the doorway. She put her hands to her hair, under its tight-fitting net, and finally, after giving a formal tug at her dress to straighten it she turned back.

Frank moved slowly toward the window. "Look, pigeon. I'm due for a day off next month. The fifteenth of the month. It's a Saturday. How about it?"

Nellie's color was high, and her eyes were bright. "Jeepers. I don't know."

"I was just jiving—about the Alhambra. Jees, I ain't nuts. I ain't doing no rug cutting. Not any more for a while. Look—how about something to eat, it'll have to be lunch. I got to get back for the eight o'clock temperature. We'll have lunch some place and then go to the movies. On the level, kid."

Nellie bent and slowly picked up her bucket. "Jeepers, Frank. I ain't supposed . . ."

"Aaa, nuts to that, babe. Look—I gotta see you. Outside this dump. Jees, I bet you're slick when you get set to step out, evenings. How about it, pigeon? I gotta."

"Yeah. I guess so. That is," Nellie rallied and moved with great dignity toward the arched doorway, carrying the bucket as if it were a model's varnished hatbox. She felt Frank's eyes hot upon her and she moved her hips, not too obviously, but in a refined manner. Then she turned her head, looking at him over her shoulder, her glance sidelong, holding a hint of promise. "Well, Mister Vitiello, thanks for the kind invitation. It might just transpire that I have a free afternoon."

"Swell, pigeon. It's a date, then."

"Well, we'll see."

"Nuts. It's a date, pigeon."

Frank smoothed down his hair, jerked up his chin, and watched her saunter down the corridor. "Well, anyhow," he

said to himself, "I got a feel. Jees, what a pair of headlights."

Nellie's thoughts, as she walked toward the service closet where the sink was, were a sweet confusion of desire and alarm. I'll have to find out from Miss Corey if he's a positive. But on second hand it wouldn't be such a brainy idea to ask Miss Corey after all. You never could trust a girl who takes presents from men, that is, presents for real, like money; and everybody said Miss Corey was going to get a fur coat. Better ask Miss Gallagher sometime. Miss Gallagher would bawl you out but she never sang on anybody, that's what they said.

Frank stood by the window, looking out blankly at the snow-covered roof-tops. He had planned spending the precious day with some of the old mob, maybe getting in a few games of pool and putting down a couple of bets. But the chance of having a date with a chick like that, Jees. She liked it, getting felt up all right. Jees. And Louis Lombardi had a room with a door on the outside so the landlady couldn't put in no beef. Jees.

A voice purred softly. "You see in Benny's room? Is pigeon in window sill."

Frank turned to Abba Dabba and jerked his chin up. "What's that? On the window sill? Jees, what's she gonna do, jump off? Where? Who? What's it . . . ?"

Abdullah nodded. "Is true. Is bird on window sill. I put out little piece bread. So Benny can watch. I think maybe this bird, she come back tomorrow, we put out bread, huh?"

Frank jerked his chin up and followed Abdullah's placid stride to Room 904. Kincaid's spiky black head and Jasper Stone's pearl-white head were side by side at the window, bent to something on the sill.

Benny was on one elbow. He whispered, "Come on, guys, get out of the way. I want to see it." They parted and when Vitiello drew near he stood behind Stone, looking over his shoulder.

It was a pigeon, a real one all right, its coral-pink feet leaving little wedge-shaped tracks in the snow. Half of a hard roll had been crumpled on the sill and the bird pecked at it, its blue and gray plumage so soft, so exquisitely moulded, that Frank longed to catch it. Not since he was a kid had he felt the warm, nestling loveliness of a pigeon's breast beneath the hand.

"Boy, oh, boy, she's a beauty," he whispered. "A Boston Blue. Ya know what? I'll get my brother-in-law to bring us some cracked corn. That's what they go for. I used to have pigeons. Back in the neighborhood. When I was a kid. Jees, we gotta cultivate this character. Maybe we can tame her to come

every day. Only bread ain't enough. Ya gotta have cracked corn. My brother-in-law . . ."

"Hey gents—Halligan!" Nellie popped her head in the door and ducked out again.

Abba Dabba sighed. "Miss Halligan don't like feeding the birds. She say they sit on window sill, make dirt. No feeding birds on window sill. Is too bad." He sat, lowering himself into the metal chair which stood by the wall near the light switch, his fat brown hands palm up in his lap, knees spread, head bent, waiting for the descent of the Battleaxe.

Jasper Stone strode to the door. He stepped out, glanced down the hall with the look of an old eagle, and then came back. "She's in our room," he said. "Abba Dabba—you get over by the window. You're the broadest. You, Elder, stand beside him. Frank—over here by me. Benny, you just sit tight and let me handle this. We may be able to leave our feathered friend in peace."

Tall, spare, iron-gray, her face like that of a sharp, suspicious old ewe, Battleaxe Halligan stood in the doorway. "Good afternoon, all," twitching up the corners of her gray lips in the official smile. "Now you boys know you mustn't crowd into Mr. Rosenbaum's room this way. That is absolutely against the rules. . . ."

"I invited them, Miss Halligan," Benny said wearily.

"Well, that's against the rules too, Mr. Rosenbaum. Come now boys. Back to your own rooms. Shoo, now."

Frank walked out and stood just beyond the door in the corridor, wrenching his chin up. Abba Dabba and Kincaid remained on the window sill, sitting stiffly and looking guilty. Halligan sniffed. She started toward the window. Ben frowned.

"Oh, I say, Miss Halligan . . ." Stone spoke apologetically.

"Yes?"

"Just a little . . . idea. Which occurred to me while I was making my bed just now."

"Yes?" Miss Halligan did not encourage too much conversation with patients.

Stone seemed suddenly bent with age, benevolent, twenty years older, pathetic, a little senile. "Just an old recollection of mine. You know, I lived for many years in hotels. I used to . . . ah . . . travel. I knew the managers and all that sort of thing. Just a little suggestion. . . ."

"And *what*, Mr. Stone, are you talking about?"

Stone, bumbling, well-intentioned grandfather, smiled his blessing on the Battleaxe. "I realize how a person of your wide experience in managing an institution of this size must receive every day a host of impractical suggestions—all of them made with the best of intentions, naturally. But sugges-

tions which you are in a position to know are impractical. Yet a thought occurred to me. I shall pass it along to you for what it is worth. . . ."

Halligan was edging toward the door. "Yes, Mr. Stone. You have a suggestion. What is it, please?"

"This friend of mine—the hotel manager—had been an engineer. A chemical engineer, I believe, before he was in the hotel business. . . ."

"Please come to the point, Mr. Stone. I have a very strict schedule."

"Exactly. Exactly, Miss Halligan. I understand." His smile, beneath the pearly-white, rigid waves of his hair, was so benevolent as to be almost saintly. "Well, this engineer set about to discover how he could cut linen costs. He started with sheets. Why—he asked himself—do all the sheets wear out at the bottoms first?"

Stone had moved casually toward the door and now stood facing Miss Halligan. Her back was to the window where, beyond Abba Dabba's bulk, the pigeon pecked on unsuspecting.

"Yes. They do," Halligan assented. "Well?"

"Ah, yes. They do. But why? And here his engineering mind came into play. He decided that this extra wear was caused by . . ." Stone lowered his voice intently, his face solemn, deadly serious, "by toe-nail friction."

Halligan's gray lips tightened but Stone hurried on, "It seemed fantastic. But it was true. And do you know how he overcame this apparently insurmountable obstacle? He ordered sheets made to specification. He had the hems, top and bottom, made *identically the same width.* Then the maids, changing sheets, would not always place the same end at the bottom. You see the point, Miss Halligan? First one way, then the other. And by this simple expedient he reduced the cost of sheets by exactly forty percent. Later, this idea of his was taken over by a manufacturer who specialized in hotel equipment." Stone's face was sober, wonder-filled at the ingenuity of it all. "They picked it up and used it as a selling point. One of the biggest sheet houses in America."

Halligan nodded, twitched her lip corners. "Well, I'll see that your suggestion is forwarded to the purchasing department. Good afternoon, all. Remember—back to your own rooms, now. No crowding together like this. Good day."

Another up-twitch of gray lips and the spare menace was gone.

Frank Vitiello popped in, his face dark with holding back a laugh. He stamped his foot twice against the floor and then fell back against the wall, struggling to keep his laughter silent

until Halligan was out of ear-shot. Finally he said, "Oh, brother. Can you shovel it! Jees!"

Ben's grin was wide and his eyes had softened and for a moment he had forgotten the clock and the calendar and the class struggle and was merry. Kincaid's mouth relaxed, Abdullah's eyes had lost their sadness and his cupid's bow lips were smiling their faint, ghostly smile.

Stone's grandfatherly stoop straightened. His seamed face took on its accustomed wary fortitude at whatever life might hurl at him. The pigeon, safe for today at least, pecked and worried at an unusually large crumb.

"Halligan will remember that," Stone said softly. "She will indeed mention it to the purchasing agent. Her idea. After doing a little snooping and checking herself first. And the strange part of it all is this—that it is a true story. She *could* save on sheets by having equal hems. Nothing like the truth when you're in a tight squeak, gentlemen. In this world it is seldom necessary to tell a lie. The truth suffices, nine times out of ten. *If* . . . you select from the vast bin of truths the significant grains. How well our princes and prelates know this bit of hidden wisdom, my friends. How well they know. They know."

While Jasper Stone watched, Dr. Rathborne drew a chest film from the clips of the view box behind his desk, laid it down and picked up another. He slid it under the clips and with the tip of his gold pencil indicated a cloudy area. "Here you are six months later, Mr. Stone. The area of activity has not increased. Actually—and I have measured it carefully—there is a very slight degree of calcification here. And possibly here. But otherwise there is very little change."

Stone, his pince nez in place, regarded the pointing pencil gravely and nodded. He coughed gently and said, "I appreciate being taken into your confidence, doctor. I realize that few patients are so honored and I fully understand why."

"Do you?" Rathbone turned and regarded him closely as silence grew in the room.

Jasper Stone's face took on a look of even deeper benignity. "Two reasons, doctor. First—my age, book-worm habits, and general pack-rat collection of knowledge includes a few rags and tags of medical lore. That is to say, I can read my own chart and understand it fully."

Rathbone's thin lips tightened and Stone went on placidly, "And second, there is my old acquaintance with a certain noted

public figure. Although I must confess our dealings were mostly of a business nature."

Rathbone's long, pale, austere face took on a tinge of color. "Mr. Stone, the administration of this institution is my job. I took this job with the understanding that I was to have full control of policy and that my medical decisions were to be subject to a board chosen by me and approved by the city health administration. Any personal contacts a patient may have..."

"Are never entered on paper," Stone finished for him. And then, as the color mounted on Rathbone's face, he went on in mellow tones, "Come, come, doctor. I was not born yesterday, to coin a phrase. How well I know the ins and outs of a city administration. And, I may add, the quiet, determined way in which so many men in positions of trust fight out their battles unnoticed and unrewarded; the secret struggles for better water, better police equipment, better . . . ah . . . health facilities. Such men are caught between the power house and the deep blue sea of their own consciences. I think you know the situation, doctor. Forgive me if I am flippant about our leading citizen. It is an old man's privilege, doctor. But, then, my hobby is philosophy. A flippant field at best."

Rathbone's face had paled and now he sketched slowly on the block of drawing paper before him.

"Mr. Hanlon had a message for you the last time I saw him," the director said dryly. "He said, and these were his exact words: 'Tell Stone to give my best to the Morning Glory Kid and ask him when the Kid will take off another score.' Those were the words, Mr. Stone. I do not pretend to make any sense of them. Neighbor Jim has a most annoying habit of speaking in riddles and his own brand of hog Latin."

Stone nodded. "To me, Dr. Rathbone, the message is crystal clear. Thank you. You may tell Neighbor Jim that I shall pass it along. It . . . it is an exceedingly interesting message, believe me."

Rathbone laid down his pencil and turned back to the X-ray film in the view box. "To return to our muttons, Mr. Stone: what is indicated here is pneumothorax. When you were admitted there were active lesions in both lungs and this treatment was obviously out of the question. But in view of the fact that in four years there has been absolutely no sign of activity in the left lung, pneumothorax is a definite possibility. I hinted as much in our last talk and was glad that you took so cooperative a stand. Artificial pneumothorax is one of the great advances of medicine in the last half century. Thousands of individuals now occupy jobs, are able to be self-supporting, live with their families..."

"Not for me, doctor."

Rathbone stopped his pencil, leaving it poised on the paper, and looked up quickly, moving only his eyes. "You mean you're *afraid* of pneumo? Why, my dear man. . . ."

Stone shook his head until the black cord of his pince nez swayed gaily. "Afraid? I'd hardly be as emotional as that, doctor. Certain . . . ah . . . considerations. Entirely of a personal nature. . . ."

Rathbone threw down his pencil in what was for him a dangerous show of irritation. He sat back, the swivel chair creaking faintly, and looked at Stone frostily through his rimless glasses.

The old man uncrossed his legs, carefully drew his pajama trousers up a half an inch, and recrossed his legs the other way. "Selfish of me perhaps, doctor. Selfish. But I have neither chick nor child. No little mouths crying for bread, doctor. No wife being driven to distraction by the taunts of in-laws while hubby cools his heels in this splendid temple of rest at the taxpayers' expense. No, Dr. Rathbone, my direct pipeline to the Archangel Michael tells me to shun the air bubble. Ah, lean upon it lightly, for who knows from what once lovely lip it springs unseen. Specifically, I have known patients on whom it didn't work. I am willing to let time work for me, doctor. Time, the great healer, the great mystery, the hidden dimension. . . ."

Watching him, Rathbone had a strange, uncalled for thought knock at the gates of consciousness. He regarded the smiling, dry, crafty old face across the desk and thought to himself that had Jasper Stone been one of the passengers of the Titanic he would have looked out upon the night, the sickening slant of the deck beneath him, the clutch of black waves, with just such a sere, crafty smile. Stone would neither have sung *Abide With Me* nor whistled *Alexander's Ragtime Band.* He would have watched and smiled.

And Stone, watching the great man while he spoke, thought his own thoughts. And agile thoughts they were, twisting and feeling over the situation like the antennae of an insect. Pride in his own fulfillment of his own standards, he thought. Pride is the Achilles heel of our Rathbone. He has no temptation toward easy money. And does not this confuse and puzzle James Joseph Hanlon no end? It must, certainly, for whereby can Hanlon grasp this man who has no handle such as Hanlon knows? Nor could this Wilsonian iceberg be thawed out along the lines of thwarted aggression. He could not be baited by some loud-mouthed boor in checked suit and diamond ring; he would not itch to teach the rotter a lesson and thus be

drawn into the "big duke" wherein the cold deck performs its time-honored function.

Unbidden, unwanted, interrupting his flow of unspoken words and his contrapuntal weaving of thought, as much a nuisance in memory as she grew to be in real life, came back to him the sharp image of a woman named Gloria and the perfection of breasts which she revealed, leaning forward to have her cigarette lighted. Ah, me, never, never, never was there a sucker who could resist that furtive peek. I would explain the cold deck switch to him ahead of time and he would watch the cards like a cat at a mouse hole. Until Gloria was out of matches and leaned forward. Ah, me, it was long ago and in another country. And besides, the wench is fat.

Snapping back suddenly to the carpeted, book-lined office, Stone heard his own voice saying, ". . . no, doctor, I shall wait. I shall wait until that Science, in capital letters—so dear to the Sunday supplement readers—until it produces a tablet to be taken like aspirin. A tablet which will end all tubercular woes forever. Leaving a man free to die of cancer if he wishes or blow his brains out in stock market crashes."

Rathbone was not amused. "You know, Stone, we may be nearer to it than you think. Let me tell you a true case."

Stone leaned back and listened with his head tilted slightly as if taking in the words of an oracle. He was thinking of Hanlon, the power. Ah, the clink of lucre against his "tin mittens" is sweet to Neighbor Jim. And now he is restless for the Morning Glory Kid to bring his clients into Hanlonville for trimming, eh? Eh? Dream on my precious Jason, bringing back the golden fleece of votes by the aid of your red-clawed Medea. Dream on. The Morning Glory Kid has taken off his last score, barring most grievous accident.

Rathbone tore the page from his drawing pad, crumpled it, dropped it into the basket and began sketching afresh while he spoke. Swiftly, under his pencil, the shape of a human heart took form.

"When I was in medical school," Rathbone said, "I knew two people. Young chap my own age and a girl, another student. Sweethearts since high school; all of that sort of thing. Planned to marry after interning. Then they found that the girl was suffering from an incurable condition which could lead only to a life of misery and possibly death."

Meticulously he sketched in the great blood vessels leading to and from the heart.

"The young fellow was quite shaken by this diagnosis. Both were, naturally. To the young the function of reproduction is always camouflaged. Great passion, undying love. All that sort of thing. They'd read Stephen Phillips' *Paola and Francesca.*

Or possibly *Romeo and Juliet*. Anyhow they began to think in terms of double suicide."

Stone let his bushy white eyebrows lift. Rathbone glanced up, smiled his chill, wintry smile, and returned to his drawing. "Suicide, of course, is beyond the Christian sphere of thought." The doctor smiled smugly at his anatomical drawing of a heart and continued, "I could not advise them in Christian terms, for they were atheists. They came to me because I was ahead of them in school and at the time was interested in toxicology. Why they confided in me I never knew for sure. Possibly wanted to be talked out of it. Or so I have always believed. Because any medical student can get his hands on enough barbiturates to kill himself. So I reasoned with them—much as I reason with patients here regarding pneumothorax . . ." He shot Stone a cool glance but the old man seemed so entranced in the story as not to notice the personal implication. "They listened to reason. Since they did not believe they had immortal souls I could only appeal to their dignity. I won out. They didn't do it. And it took a certain degree of courage, for no one is more frightened of illness than a medical student." He uncapped the eraser of his pencil, rubbed out a portion of the heart, and began redrawing it, in longitudinal section, auricles and ventricles. He paused while he drew in carefully the valves, then went on, "Somehow they found enough courage, although the resource of prayer was unavailable to them; I suppose they pooled their courage and came up with one full-sized amount which upheld them both."

"Ah. And then, doctor?"

Rathbone had paused once more, to indicate the flow of blood through the heart by a series of minute arrows.

He sees the cosmos as a problem of anatomy, Stone thought. Sin is infection. The Devil's imps are bacteria. Rathbone is the doctor. Science is God. And the Apostles' Creed, the communion cup, the wafer, are the trappings of custom, needing no thought, no emotional flicker in the breast. All is cut open and laid out on the slab for our Rathbone. And in the end he will attain his reward in heaven, along with a few saints from other denominations. And, of course, his own family. Pride, there it is. He could be taken through his pride.

And like an old fire horse hearing the bell, Jasper Stone's instincts pranced and shivered, quietly, deep within him. In a flick of time he could see the whole exciting chase and capture unrolled: the chance encounter on golf links or yacht club deck; the skillfully planted news of real estate options to be taken up in time; the ignorant Irish contractor, red-faced and truculent (Barney Magill could have played it to perfection). Ah, then, the finagle to secure the options, the profit to go to a

personal contribution on Rathbone's part of a research laboratory in connection with the hospital? Something like that. The dangling hook. The mutual investment. The liquidation of the old, gilt-edged, two-percent stocks or whatever, lifted from the grave clothes of their safe-deposit tomb. Ah, then, the sudden break in the plot structure, the stupid Irishman's cupidity. Raising of more capital. His own contribution of a boodle made up with bank wrappers and genuine notes on either side, the centers formed of newspaper clipped to size. Verily, verily, they can have their *ovis poli*, their bighorn sheep, their shy *okapi* of the African waste. Give me, as big game, the self-righteous man of affairs, the pillar of the church, the hard-headed, proud, dangerous quarry, hard to hook, hard to play, almost impossible to "cool out" afterwards. And yet . . . it can be done.

All this went through Jasper Stone's mind between one of Rathbone's carefully selected words and the one which followed it, as he retold the story of the desperate children, nameless now but panic-stricken then, in the long ago years when only a girl who was strong-minded dared to study medicine. . . .

When Jasper Stone entered Benny's room, the boy had let the notebook fall shut to the bed beside him. He kept the pencil in his fist, loosely. Beyond the window the other wall of the court was dimming with the shadows of afternoon. Stone seated himself sideways in the metal chair, leaning one arm on the back of it, and spoke in low tones, re-telling the story.

He ended it, ". . . and so, according to the gospel of Rathbone, Science came to their aid in the nick of time with insulin. For the girl was a diabetic."

Ben nodded and said hoarsely, "It's a good story. Interesting, if true."

"Oh, I have no doubt as to its truth," Stone assured him, his eyes crinkling. "Truth is one of the good doctor's most prized possessions. To tell a lie the great man must first tinker with his own perceptions of the truth, I imagine. However, I pass the little parable along for what it is worth. I myself would not be too surprised if something of the sort were not worked out for us. In time."

Benny shut his eyes and his face twisted for a moment. Then as the breath came clearer he relaxed and looked at Stone again. "Time is the joker. Even if they get some kind of pills. No good. Not now."

"Ah, yes, my boy—you have the courage of the materialist, all right. Quite so. I . . . I just thought it might be interesting to speculate that generations to come may not be so devoted

to hard mattresses and eggnogs as the one into which we have been born."

If a man worships money, give him a sniff of it and you can have him. And this youth who worshipped a dream, whose golden calf was a golden future for all those too timid, too stupid, or too human, simply, to get any gold out of the wolf's teeth today—give him a new dream to paste in his album of dreams. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands in sleep . . . Dreaming, the lad lay on a mattress composed of atoms: term beloved by ignorance which must catalogue and count the labial scales of dragons seen in evening mist. Atoms composed of minute charges of electricity—the name another dream, another rubber stamp of ignorance pressed on the surface of mystery, only. Whirling worlds of nothing; energy—again the unproved quantity. X equals y, y equals x, and if the blind shall lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch. Atoms, electrons, energy, matter, force, direction, space, time, matter, life . . . The pundits are jugglers tossing imaginary globes. Oh, gray, rabbinical beards; oh, flashing Phi Beta Kappa keys; smooth voices across the gleaming glassware between the naked shoulders of women; starched shirtfronts gleaming, headpiece filled with straw. Their words dropping from the veils of Maya to where the cricket sings. . . .

Benny was whispering. "Pills aren't the answer, Judge."

Stone smiled, flashing expensive teeth. "I think I know what you are about to say: that the social order, by being set aright, will make such a magic unnecessary. Am I correct?"

The youth nodded and gripped the pencil tighter. "Yeah, Judge. You 'got right.' "

"You know, Benjamin," Stone said, rising and pacing to the window, where he stood looking down nine stories to the cement courtyard. "I asked the great man what happened to this young couple after the U. S. Cavalry had arrived and routed the war-bonneted Sioux—so to speak. What do you think happened to them?"

"Got married. Raised kids. Voted Republican."

"As to how they voted the tale sayeth not. But they put off having children for several years: 'until they got established in their profession.' But before they considered they were well enough established, lo and behold, does not the boy fall under the gentle spell of his secretary's sleek calves? And does not the wife react to this even as the longshoreman's wife has been known to react? Recriminations, argument in the night, separate bedrooms, bang. Divorce. Even as less courageous mortals." He turned, crafty, dry, his white hair lying in its rigid, pearly waves. "Comedy or tragedy? Who can label it? They

strut and fret their hour upon the stage, and then are heard no more. If memory serves."

Beyond the window came a faint cry of the wind, like the sound of a whiskbroom swept over silk. A speck of white was driven past the window; the light dimmed as a cloud covered the pale, unseen sun.

Stone mused upon the story Rathbone told. And its pair of ill-starred lovers became more real to him, took shape, their earnest young heads close together in the summer dusk. The young, even with heads crammed with anatomy, can make silence speak. They stand in the shadow of honeysuckle or wisteria on a million porches, saying good-night by silence. Their virginal intercourse—kisses with closed lips. Their hands touching mean more than the perspiring grind of later years; much more. And then the middle era of chase and capture, and the high words of stolen times in strange hotels. Surely there is more to Woman than this struggle, this sham battle, this world well lost for so pitiful a fold of mucous membrane and muscle. Was this the space that launched a thousand ships and burned. . . .

"Tell me some more stories," Benny said.

Stone turned from the window. "Ah, I fear I was woolgathering, my boy. Wool from the giant sheep of the Cyclops called the sun. Cloud vaporings of the mind, my boy. An old man's privilege, a young man's vice. Stories? They're hard to think of, Benjamin. I am no writer. I am no adapter of the world's endless melodies. The real ones end on a minor note, Ben. Unfinished, like the old ballads our Gallagher whistles through the winter's dark when the floor is sleeping and she thinks none can hear her at her charting."

Outside the wind swept past, chill and shrill. Stone shivered a little and plunged his hands deeper into his pockets. "At least, Benny, we do not have the elements to fight. It's been a hard winter. God help the poor bindle stiff on a night like this."

"I'd swap with him," Benny said, his eyes shining. "I'd rather be in a box car. Or nursing a fire in a gully beside the tracks."

It was the old note that fear struck and its vibration sent Stone off purposively in another direction. "I say, my word-weaving friend, have you ever considered how little we know of our world?" He reached out and gripped the foot of the bed between finger and thumb. "Solid? That's what we think. Solar systems confined in every speck of dust. Only of course, here in Halligan Hall, there is no dust. Every speck of iron, let us say. Whirling hosts of little worlds. Professor Einstein, before you were born, my boy, demolished the 'matter' of Aristotle. It looks suspiciously as if what we know as matter is nothing but force. And force is nothing but mystery. In other words, my

boy, you are lying at ease upon a downy couch of nothing."

Ben tightened his mouth as he tried to turn over. "I wish my hip bones knew it." He lay on his side, gazing at the fading light of the window. "That hyped-up physics is a lot of bourgeois crap," he said at last, wearily. "It doesn't matter whether the bed is made of matter or force acting like matter. What counts is who made the bed—who dug the iron, who smelted it, who stamped it. And what did he get paid for doing it? Without the guy in overalls it would still be in the ground. And all those guys that made the bed got paid only enough to keep them alive. All right, so one of 'em made enough to send his kid through college. So the kid can support him when he's old and broke. Never mind all this crap about matter and space. Labor built the world. And all it's gotten for it is enough food to keep it alive. You'd think some of your philosophers would worry about that, for a change."

The long speech had exhausted him. His mouth twitched in disgust at his own weakness and Stone read the expression. "Easy, Ben. Take it easy, soldier. I follow you. I, too, have wrestled with the theory of surplus value. And it has won. I agree. I admit it. Profit is robbery. Profit on the labor of others is theft. Proved. Granted." He watched the boy's wasted face for some sign of interest, some clue that Ben was rising to the bait again, that in the sweet air of disputation he might manage to pump enough adrenalin through his body to lift his spirit out of its ruck of shadow. "But there is always this question," the old man went on challengingly. "Why should I not put my money in stock and live on the profits wrung from the toiling masses? Why? That question is the real stumper. One can search the canons of revolutionary thought in vain for the answer."

Ben looked up at him, shaking his head slowly. "You aren't that kind of a guy, Judge."

Stone pursed his lips. "Ah, but perhaps I am."

"Then what are you doing in here as a free patient?"

"Touché! What indeed? But leaving aside personalities, Benjamin, can you tell me why I *ought* not to live by clipping coupons? *Ought* is the word of mystery, my boy. Why not hunt out the hidden thievery in the human soul and culture it, nurture it, watch it bloom to garish splendor in the amber light of the cocktail lounge? And why did the Morning Glory Kid, who once took off a single score of half a million, why did he fling away his end of the score with such abandon down through the years? Why did he not buy annuities or government bonds and spend his days quietly pursuing even more elusive quarries than the larceny in the human soul? He might have had a villa in Santa Barbara, for instance, and there kept

his books, as I keep a few out in the locker. There might he have lived in peace, having packed the racket in. And there might he have died full of years and honors. But no—champagne suppers for him, and money thrown away. He would give diamonds to a woman whom he could have had for a kind word at the right time and in the right place. It burned holes in his grouch bag, did the scratch he lifted from the suckers. And in the end there was left to him nothing but a question mark and a ragbag of memories."

Stone's voice flowed effortlessly, melodiously, with no groping, no hesitancy, no self-doubt before a phrase. Now he stopped, and when Ben opened his eyes again, he found the old man looking at him curiously. "That is the enigma of ethics, my boy. Your subsistence-level longshoreman, even broke and in want in his old age—is he not richer than a man who has made millions and is just as old, just as broke? This is the riddle I have set myself to solve, Benny. If you, in your study of the Marxist classics, have found the answer, I should love to hear it. But mind you, it must be the McCoy—no assumption of the point to be proved, no argument in a circle, no *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, no emotional *non sequitur*. . . ."

Ben tightened his mouth. "Shorter working day. That's where ethics begin. Man's mastery of nature and the productive forces; that's where it's going. 'Freedom' is the word, Judge. Man grows towards freedom. What stands in the way of his getting there is wrong. Anything that holds up progress is wrong. It's as simple as that." He turned, slowly and painfully, so that he lay on his left side, looking past Stone through the door that led to the corridor.

The old man watched him, getting his own thoughts in order, perhaps. Finally he said, "Progress is a noble word, Benjamin. But does it not mean something different for each of us? Is not your philosophy the yearning of the aching arches and the attentive ear listening for the quitting whistle? Suppose your proletarian becomes a foreman. Has he achieved progress because he can now sit down when his feet are tired? Does not the owner of the shop, driving off in his convertible to play golf, feel himself hemmed in and thwarted on every hand? Is not this a rat race in which Man is yearning for the limitless freedom of heaven itself?"

The boy looked up at him, hot-eyed. "Greatest good for the greatest number. Never mind the boss playing golf."

"Never mind him. Very well. Take it this way—progress is the growth toward freedom."

"Sure. That's it."

"Aha. And freedom is the unhampered ability to grow, to progress?"

"Sure."

Stone pursed his lips and whistled a low, minor note. "Ah, my Benjamin. It is the circular argument again—that Ouroboros serpent with his tail in his mouth. Progress toward freedom; freedom to progress toward freedom to progress . . . a tower of Babel spiraling its helix of mortal stone toward heaven. And toward the confusion of tongues. Before human frailty can reach such a height of selfless abandon to the future it will wreck itself . . ."

Ben Rosenbaum pushed himself erect, his shoulders quivering with the effort. "That's the stuff they've been handing us for a thousand years," he said, forcing his voice out of its whisper. "Well, man can do it. He's on his way. The old, rotten fortress of private enterprise is cracking. It's falling under its own weight. It needs a push—and not too big a push, at the right time. Then from its ruins. . . ."

He stopped, fighting for breath. Stone waited patiently for him to finish the sentence, but Ben lifted his bony face, his eyes closed, his nostrils white. The old man saw that the youth was struggling to breathe. Then the cough started, muffled and gentle at first.

Stone paced quickly around the bed, took up the 72 hour sputum carton, twisted off the lid and held it for Benny, sliding his arm around the youth's shoulders. Benny coughed, spat, and struggled for breath to cough again. He drew in air, fighting it past the strangling slime within him, blew it out in wrenching coughs, and spat again. The contents of the cardboard carton showed pink streaks. At last he sat up straight, breathing, his eyes moist, and nodded. Stone replaced the carton.

"Don't bother with debate, my boy," he said dryly. "I know you enjoy a good joust. But better keep it for the notebook. Eh?"

Ben said, whispering, "I'll keep it. Only don't stop arguing with me, Judge. An argument . . . hell, it's the only time you're alive in this place."

Stone lifted his wrist and looked at his watch. "Almost time for our evening repast. How goes the work, Benjamin? Any more lines you would care to show me? Don't think that I am hurrying you, my boy. But perhaps . . ."

Ben lay back and smiled, bitter and tender at the same time, pointing with his finger to the drawer of the bed table. Stone opened it, took out the Composition notebook and handed it to Ben who found the place. Stone settled his pince nez on his nose, sat down again in the metal chair, and turned the notebook toward the light where in the lad's jagged handwriting verses slanted down the page:

Minutes count no more. Still,
count them you must.
Watch how the bony lust to live
kills other lust.

You rise before the sun
opens his smouldering eye;
the years whip past you, but the hours
run softly by.

A mercury thread in glass
lies silver, narrow;
daylight, starlight, watch it creep
to pass the arrow.

Down through the winter night
snow falls, branches fill.
See its round breast at daybreak,
white on the sill.

Daytime, nighttime, with no song or sound
through twisting glass
you watch the star-wheel of the sky
around the Pole Star pass.

Sweet air, sucked greedily at birth, again
becomes a wraith.
Now the slow lift of ribs unwinds
a skein of death.

Stop the brain's pacing. No prayers, no
mourning mumblers.
Stop pacing room and hall.
Listen. In the time-lock on your lungs
the tumblers fall.

Stone took off his glasses and let the notebook close gently. Silently he sat in the silent room and to what avail was the pious parable of the great Rathbone now? Where do they all fit in, my own magpie assembly of deep inferences, cunning paradoxes, speculations on the plunge of unknown objects through four-dimensional space which we, blind moles of three dimensions, see as growth and decay? I have carved out detachment as a prisoner cuts a monkey from a peach pit: patience against the stubborn material of the world's image. Ah well, the boy may soon learn the secret of matter. Like stepping across the threshold into a lighted room, perhaps? A drop of

rain meeting mother ocean? Rebirth in other assemblage of atoms, whatever they are? A round of rebirths, like dew into the air of morning, cloudshapes, thunder, rain and earth again?

And what could all these legends avail now?

The Judge placed his pince nez carefully in his pocket. "Beautifully written, my boy," he said slowly, getting up and sliding the notebook back into the drawer. "Beautifully written."

Beyond the window the wind had risen to a shriek like a violin's E string, bowed by a fiddler in a fury. And flecks of snow with it.

Jasper Stone cast one glance at the window and tightened the cord of his robe, shivering a little at the sound. "Ah, Ben. The owl for all his feathers is a-cold. At least we have a cozy burrow; we do not, like the hare, limp trembling through the frozen grass."

The wind found a new angle of the wall and screamed in triumph. Stone reached down and gave Ben's hand a reassuring squeeze. "Listen to that outside, my friend. As Krazy Kat would say, 'The Wind Witches of Wunanji brew a brave breeze.' "

At the desk in the center of the floor, facing the elevators, Adele Corey sat with a ledger open before her, reading the day report to Gallagher. Anne Gallagher stood, half sitting, half leaning, against the desk, her arms folded, her eyes fixed calmly on the stainless steel door to the utility room behind Corey. Through the diamond-shaped glass window in the door she could see the day orderly moving back and forth, tidying up the trays.

"That new man, Goldfarb, his temp is up two degrees," Corey finished. "He's the excitable type and he won't stay in bed. Maybe he'll behave better for you. I couldn't get it into his head he can't run around all the time." She closed the book and leaned back, stretching; then she clasped her tiny hands behind her head and stretched some more, twisting her head left and right. "Glory be, you know, Anne, if I wasn't saving up for a down payment on a car I'd quit this and try to get a job as an airline hostess. Only I'm scared to death of flying. But those girls meet all kinds of really worthwhile people. . . ."

Gallagher, watching Corey's face as she stretched, saw it suddenly tighten at the sound of the elevator door sliding open behind her. A radiant smile tilted Corey's tinted mouth; then it vanished and was replaced by a look of adoration carefully tailored to seem as if it were drawn from her against her will.

"Good evening, Dr. Crane," Corey said, bustling a little.

Don Crane said, coming up to the other side of the desk, "Good evening Miss Corey. Miss Gallagher."

Gallagher nodded but said nothing.

"You're lucky, Dr. Crane," Corey went on, lowering her voice in an attempt to make it sound like the voice of a girl who has gone to a fashionable school. "I mean you're fortunate to be 'living in.' I'm afraid I should have brought my skis. How does it look outside now?"

Crane, his eyes on Gallagher said, "Search me. I haven't bothered to look out all day. Too busy."

Gallagher had not met his eyes and now she turned her face away, picked up the ledger and took out her fountain pen, writing the date in red ink at the top of a new page.

Crane asked, "How's the old fellow, Goldfarb?"

"Oh, that man!" Corey protested. "Look, doctor, you have such winning ways of making friends and influencing people —you might convince him that he has to stay in bed."

"I can try. How's Rosenbaum?"

At the mention of the name Gallagher's fountain pen stopped and made a blot of scarlet. She picked up the blotter and touched its corner to the drop.

"Rosenbaum is the same, doctor. No change. His temp is a little higher than yesterday but the other fellows will persist in crowding in and talking to him and he will argue with them, politics and stuff; you know how he is."

Crane smiled; brown, lithe, friendly, poised, disturbing to both girls. He said, "I'll stop in for a moment and see the boys." As he walked down the hall, swinging his arms easily, the girls followed him with their eyes. When he had turned the corner, Corey said in an excited whisper, "That's my idea of something gorgeous. Well . . ." she sighed enviously, a sigh faintly perfumed by mouth-wash, "some girl with a lot of mink and a Cadillac all her own will grab him. They always do."

Anne slowly screwed the cap back on her pen. "I don't think Don Crane cares much about money."

"Oh, *Anne!* Who ever heard of a doctor who didn't need money? When a boy starts to specialize, either he borrows it from a rich uncle or he marries it. Don't be naïve."

"All right, all right. Now let's have the key. Does the count check?"

"It checks." Corey took out a key fastened to a metal tag stamped "Narcotics Box" and dropped it into the pocket of Gallagher's uniform. Then she stood up. "Okay, Irish," smoothing her uniform, "it's all yours. Have a *good time.*"

The undertone made Gallagher frown.

Adele Corey giggled. "Aw, Irish, you kid too easy. I mean . . . well, now you've got both of 'em all to yourself. . . ."

The tall girl drew in one side of her mouth, her cheek dimpling. "Get along with you, Corey. Start putting on your eyeshadow or whatever you call it. Go on with you now."

Corey chirruped defiantly and walked toward the elevators. Then she pivoted about and came back to the desk where Gallagher was sitting. "I'm sorry, Irish. I didn't mean to be bitchy. But honest—" her almond-shaped face was serious as she looked down at Anne. "You can kid yourself, Anne, but I can see it all plain as daylight." She took a deep breath, came closer, lowered her voice and clenched her hands as if gathering her courage. "Honest, Anne—what I mean is . . . oh, hell, Anne—you could take Don away from that cheap tramp with one flick of an eyelash. Maybe you don't know it, but I do. No, don't say anything, let me finish and then I'll go. You take for instance two weeks ago—the time you had bronchitis—wasn't Don Crane asking about you every hour on the hour? And you have to get yourself all gooey about a boy who hasn't enough space in his lungs to keep a cat alive and a Jew boy and a radical in the bargain."

Beneath Gallagher's hot, gray stare Corey wilted; if there had not been the desk between them she would have stepped back a pace. Her rush of indignation stopped and she finished more softly, "Honestly, Anne, you could be such a dreamboat if you only took a little trouble. Look at you—no lipstick."

Gallagher had opened the ledger again and now had the doctors' order book beside it. She seemed to have forgotten Corey. But the day nurse had one last bolt to fire and she shot it now, in a furious whisper.

"Anne—you can make believe you don't hear me if you want to, but you are listening to me all right and I'm going to give you fair warning and then I won't ever say anything about it again, ever. If you don't want Don Crane I'm going after him with everything I've got. I'm not going to let that tramp ruin him and make him . . . make him . . . make him unhappy. No fellow gets away from a whore like that one without some decent girl to pry him loose from her. I'd rather have a guy like Don Crane than a millionaire and I just this minute realized it. Maybe I'm soft in the head, but that's the truth. So there."

Gallagher heard the elevator button rap sharply three times, heard the motor high up the shaft drone, heard the cables click, heard the door open and close and then there was only the distant hum of men's voices, muffled by walls and distance, and the howl of the winter wind.

The wind dropped into a sullen moan, leaped up again screaming, and died to a whisper. Where the windows were raised the snow whirled in and wind tore at the edges of sheets and blankets drawn up. In the cold air men coughed, cursed, turned over; or waking, drew numb hands under the blankets' warmth again. Night and the wind.

At the desk in the center of the floor, that part forming the cross-bar of the H, Anne Gallagher sat with a white wool sweater over her uniform; an old warm sweater which she had worn as captain of the high-school girls' hockey team. With her pen containing red ink she was transferring Dr. Donald Crane's special orders for the night to the individual charts of the patients. Beside her, under the desk lamp, Abdullah's pot of ivy drank in life with its leaves.

The ninth floor had settled down.

Behind Gallagher light in the utility room gleamed through the diamond-shaped window; before her the bronze elevator doors stood ready to erupt Miss Halligan, Dr. Rathbone or some other upholder of discipline and authority, a prospect which bothered Gallagher not at all. She could look them straight in the eye. She owed no one in the world a favor, a dollar, or an ounce more respect than he earned. And Battle-axe Halligan, probing for gossip and news of misdeeds, never got more than, "I'm sure I wouldn't know, Miss Halligan." And that shut her up.

Elevator cables whirred and then a crack of light widened as the door slid open. Gallagher's pulse quickened in spite of the determined pressure of her lips together. Don Crane stepped out and the bronze slab closed behind him.

When Gallagher was face to face with Don Crane she could not tell whether his face was handsome or ugly; it was such a queer mixture of both. In her high-school days there had been a little group of girls: some of them so pretty they made her feel like an awful lump beside them, some who were friendly and tried to draw her out and acted perfectly swell; yet about them hung an odor of corruption. After games they would leave all their clothes in the locker room if the coach wasn't there and race into the shower stalls naked. There was one girl named Elise Cameron who didn't even run; she sauntered in, elaborately casual. Some of them used perfume and lipstick that made their mouths look bloody. And some were simply scrubbed and brushed until they glistened. And some were languid and some danced everywhere instead of walking. Yet all seemed to have in their veins a fluid like the water in which roses have stood too long—something foul, yet with a ghost of sweetness in it, mocking it. These were the girls whis-

pered about with malice or envied; mostly envied. By the others. But not by Gallagher.

When she thought back to them she remembered Elise Cameron more than any other and there was sadness in the memory. Elise had within her a deeper sin than any Gallagher had known herself; Gallagher had envious thoughts and uncharitable thoughts; moments of pride in her own purity; she had used curse words, even if not out loud or where others could hear her. Once she had even schemed to hurt another girl with a hockey stick and make it seem like an accident; she had repented in time to hold back so that it wasn't a mortal sin but she did penance for the scheming just the same. All of these were familiar, household sins that anybody could commit. But Elise had a twisted grip on the world. She seemed to take a perverse pleasure in it, like a bad little boy eating dirt because he would get whipped for it if his mother found out. When Elise was nominated for president of the senior class Gallagher weighed her own vote for a long time. Elise had once taken her part against all the other girls. But Gallagher had voted against her just the same. A kind heart was not enough; and bravery was not enough; and a generous purse was not enough; and school loyalty was not enough and beauty was worthless and a shameful thing if you used it to stand between you and His blessed will. And Elise, she felt without putting it into words, had turned her face away from His light and left the path that leads to His arms. She had prayed for Elise; but she hadn't voted for her.

And the way she had felt, trying to act friendly to Elise Cameron with her thrilling, breathless voice and her lovely, long, sin-familiar legs, that was the way she felt in the presence of Dr. Donald Crane.

He came over and said quietly, "How goes everything, Gallagher? All serene?"

"Everything quiet, Dr. Crane." Anne bent to her charting and Crane stood by the desk, leaning against it, his brown hands clasped against the white duck trousers, watching her as she worked. At last she finished the chart and slid it back in the rubber-tired chart carriage beside her. She glanced up at him, gray-eyed, inquiring, ignorant of how much like music was the line of her throat and her firm chin in the reflected glow of the desk lamp.

"Anne—how about going to a play with me Tuesday evening? I know it's your night off. And I have tickets. Would you like to?"

Gallagher's pulse leaped again and she stopped breathing for a moment. Then she put the cap on her fountain pen and laid it down deliberately, fighting for time. She drew another

chart from the rack and smoothed the page of the order book. Then she took up the fountain pen and held it between her fingers, twisting it. "No. I'm afraid I can't."

Crane grinned down at her. "Please. Try to make it, Anne. Do you realize that the only time I've ever seen you out of uniform was that afternoon I met you on the street, ages ago, and we had sodas? I've wanted to ask you so many times. But something always came up. There's a lot of stuff I want to ask you—how the patients really feel about things. What their problems are. Stuff like that."

Gallagher forced herself to look into his eyes. Then she said, her voice trembling so little that even she hardly noticed it, "You're a fibber, Don Crane. You've been stood up. Now tell the truth."

He nodded, grinning wider. "Sure. That's right. I've had those tickets two months, Anne. And plans have changed. And of all the girls in this place I might have asked, I wanted you to go with me. So I'm asking you."

"I can't go."

Crane sat easily on the edge of the desk, clasping his knee, and looked at her until she felt the warmth spreading up her neck and into her cheeks. That long, quiet stare was a disturbing thing to a girl's defenses. Anne felt as if he were peeling off her shell, as he would peel a hard-boiled egg.

At last he said softly, still looking at her, "Tell me, why not . . . Anne?"

She took breath, her nostrils whitening at the edges. "Because, Don, I don't want to be going out with you, that's all."

"That's no reason."

"It's my reason."

"But I want to know why."

"You know why."

He shook his head, frowning and smiling together. "Feminine logic—too feminine for me, Anne. Don't you think that you owe me an explanation at least? My pride and all-that-sort-of-thing, what?" imitating an English accent.

Again she smoothed down the crease in the center of the order book and pressed her lips together. "Don, you're asking for it."

"All right, I'm asking for it, whatever it is."

"Don—in the first place I'm not running around with my tongue hanging out, trying to catch a husband. I know what's good for me. If the other girls think I'm crazy I'm sure it doesn't cost me any sleep what they're thinking. Do you get that?"

"I get it. Fine, I haven't asked you to marry me. I've never asked anybody to marry me yet. Never been able to. I'm still

paying for the last year of medical school—that was when my dad died and everything went blooey. I just asked you to go to a show. Now what's it all about? Tell papa."

Gallagher stopped him with a warning finger and turned her face aside to listen. Someone was coughing. "That's old Mr. Goldfarb," she said, "I was afraid it might be Benny." She pushed back her chair and stood up, her eyes coming to a level with his own. "Excuse me."

She walked, swinging her arms like a boy, her stride starting at the hip, not the fragile, mincing-from-the-knee walk of so many women, Don thought, watching her move down the hall.

Gallagher turned right and went into Room 908. "Mr. Goldfarb," she whispered, "are you all right?"

"Ai. All right? I'm coughing. You got maybe some cough drops?"

"They wouldn't be any good, Mr. Goldfarb. You've had some codein—the little white pills. Would you like me to crank your bed up a little?"

She cranked and the old man's head was lifted higher. Gallagher tucked the covers around him and said, "Good night."

She left him muttering, "First I got to stay in bed all day. Now I got to sit up all night . . ."

Crane was still by the desk, pretending to read a chart in case anyone came and wondered what brought him to the floor at this hour. The chart was labeled, *Rosenbaum, Benjamin.*

Gallagher sat down and then turned the tiny flower pot, so that the ivy leaves, partially in shadow, could have their ration of light.

"Anne," Don Crane said, speaking almost in a whisper. "I can understand a girl not wanting to go out with some of these wolves. But honestly, Anne—I'm no pool hall character. No zoot suit, Anne. Strictly a square from Delaware."

She leaned forward, her elbows on the desk, her hands clasped on the chart before her. "You don't have to stand on a corner and whistle to be a wolf, Don. All men are either wolves or little boys crying for mamma. Well . . . you asked for it."

He leaned down and laid his hand, warm and muscular, on her clasped hands and shook them gently back and forth. "Now come on, Anne—what's the matter with me?"

She kept her eyes lowered and did not draw her hands away but said breathlessly, "Take your hand off, Don."

He took it off and laid it palm down on the desk, leaning on it.

"You've been at me all this time and me trying to keep my temper," she began hurriedly. "Well, I give up. To me, you're

just as sick as Goldfarb or Benny or any of them in there, Don. Just as sick. And what's the matter with you is contagious."

Crane slid off the desk, his face dark with anger. Then he sensed that he had leaped to the wrong conclusion and that she was talking about something else. The Wassermann reaction didn't enter her thoughts.

"I wasn't going to say anything because I don't like to talk this way. Only you wouldn't rest until you'd deviled me into telling you how you look to me. You can scrub and scrub until you've used up all the green soap in this place and you'll never be able to scrub that woman off you. . . ."

His mouth tightened but she rushed on, partly in anger, partly in fear of what he would say next, and partly out of something she didn't know herself but which bubbled up from deep inside her.

"I can understand a resident not being able to support a wife. And I can understand a girl who was crazy about him giving in to him. And the Lord knows it's sorry enough to be in a fix like that. But you've deliberately gone and crawled into a sewer. What you are doing with that woman is a sin and every time you see her you get deeper into it because a sin grows with the repeating of it. You act as if this is the only life you're ever going to have and it doesn't matter what you do with it. Well, that's not the way I feel. I know different. And I don't want any part of the other thing. Is that clear?"

Don Crane, who had retreated before this attack, rallied his defenses. He folded his arms easily and would have lit a cigarette if it had not been against the rules. His smile was clear, tolerant, poised and superior.

"Well, well. You sound like you have a pipeline to God, Anne."

She went back to her charting, but he noticed that her hand was trembling until the pen actually touched the paper.

He said, trying to sound casual, "I'm sorry if Dame Rumor has got her hooks into me, Anne. I'm sorry if I am the sort of guy you don't care to be seen with in public. The single standard is hard on the men, Miss Gallagher." He moved closer by an inch. "Look, Anne—I'd like for you to see the play anyhow." From the hip pocket of his white ducks he drew a wallet, took out two pink theater tickets, and laid them on the desk beside her. "Take one of the girls, Anne. No hard feelings?"

Without raising her head she picked up the oblongs of cardboard, placed them together evenly, and tore them in half. She dropped the pieces into the wastebasket under the desk and turned a page in the order book.

Crane laughed softly, since there was nothing else for him to do. He strolled over, with elaborate casualness, to the elevators

and rapped the button marked "Down" lightly with his fist. The elevator seemed to take an eternity to get to the ninth floor. Crane stepped in and just before the door closed he got one last sweeping picture of the darkened corridor, the glow of the lamp, green splash of tiny leaves, and the straight, white-capped image of Gallagher, glowing in the lamp shine. Then the slab of bronze cut it off and the hum of cables and motor far above drew him down into the lower regions again.

All the way down in the elevator Dr. Crane kept tapping its metal wall with his fist, his soul screwed up in a grimace of irritation, his face outwardly stony. The elevator operator let him off at his floor, "Good night, doctor," and the door rolled shut on him as Crane walked quickly toward his room.

He took off his white jacket, unbuttoned the collar of his half-sleeve tunic, slipped off his shoes and lay down on the bed. Picking up a book he had borrowed from the patients' lending library, he found his place in it and started to read:

"... friends of mine, who were close to the White House, told me over lunch at the Press Club that the President's policy regarding the much-criticized embargo, for all his confident assurance of watchful waiting at the press conferences, was actually tinctured by...."

Don closed the book with an irritated crack and slung it into the rack below the bed table.

Sin.

The word repelled him as no odor of decomposing organic matter could have done. It was in a spirit of a hairbrush laid unjustly to the buttocks, a word which bore with it the stench of witches burning in Salem or heretics howling in the flames of night, persecuted by foreigners in mitres. All the dry-voiced, mealy-mouthed, falsely hollow sermons of innumerable dull Sundays of childhood swarmed around him and somewhere in it was rebellion at cartoon images of Old Man Prohibition with black crepe around his plug hat.

She said you were sick. The poor, sex-starved, repressed, girdle-wearing . . . she probably takes a bath with her panties on for fear of the All Seeing Eye.

She said you were sick.

Well.

Are you?

But the damn viewpoint is medieval. This is, after all, gentlemen, the twentieth century. Man, by his own resourcefulness, his own genius at subduing the raw forces of nature, has girdled the earth. His wings cleave the stratosphere. He has taken a lump of copper and a handful of silicon and sent his words out beyond the stars. He is heading into such an era of plenty, of security for all...

Oho, is he?

And do you really find that woman so enchanting afterward, when you are washing hurriedly in her green and old-rose bathroom? Crane, Crane, Crane, Donald Crane, what of the night? Do you feel any closer to that thing in Beethoven's Fifth when you are stepping out of your pants and wondering if your legs look funny in garters? She asks nothing of you but performance, with her lips drawn back over her teeth.

Sick, are you? Sick at heart? You are. You are. You are.

He got up and felt savagely in the pocket of his jacket where it hung in the closet, looking for cigarettes. There was only one left in the pack and he lit it and lay down on the bed again. But he was too tense to lie still. He got up and began pacing the narrow area between the foot of the bed and the dresser, watching himself in the mirror as he turned, pacing and smoking. He stopped and looked at the mirror-man, tall, familiar, urbane, the sort of man who could wear a crew-cut without looking like a sophomore. He smoked, watching his hand lift to his face, partially hide his mouth; he watched the smoke jet out again from the lips of Dr. Donald Crane, chest specialist. And the memory of her teeth came back to him, the gentle, wicked bites, which sent his blood hammering.

He opened the closet door again, ran his hand over the books neatly stacked in one corner of the shelf, drew out one, and then lay down on the bed, propping himself on an elbow, looking exactly like an undergraduate preparing for a stiff quiz in the morning.

"... such a striving for power, expressed in terms of sexual conquest, leads us back to the dynamic of the neurosis, an attempt to reinforce the ego by demonstrating the superiority of the self over the sexual partner while, at the same time, insisting on complete freedom, denying the partner the right of an exercise of power in his turn, and in the end resulting in increased frustration in a cyclical pattern. . . ."

The book slid away and jolted to the floor as he stretched out, reached for the switch of the lamp and snapped off the light. The mystery of motivations would have to wait: Gallagher and her corny saints, Cassie Lockhart with her sudden switches of mood, her imperial demands, her little-girl routines of being sorry, all mystery and if only you could peel back the skull and look inside, seeing the thoughts all neatly laid out like ribs in their membranous sheaths. The vast, vague, maddening area of thought, of will, of instincts, all undefined, all unexplored, all waiting to trap the unwary or nail the innocent victim to the cross . . . no more cigarettes and too lazy to get up and go down for any . . . Rathbone's gloved hand sweeping down Wash Lee's back in its assured parabola ending in de-

feat, ending in the morgue ice-box, a million penny cups of cheap ice cream Wash must have eaten as a brown, bare-legged kid, vaulting fences with the stolen apple firmly in mouth, and all to end in the refrigerator tray, sheet-covered and who would send a wreath: manager? handler? sparring partner? the darkie reverend in gold-rimmed glasses and the squalling of mother, brothers and sisters in the bare little church like the time Myra had taken him to her sister's funeral . . . flowers over the grave or a pot of ivy . . . like the pot of ivy the old faker leaves under Gallagher's lamp . . . lamp throwing her face into cameo light lost now in the night-dark, the soft breasts covered with starched linen, the large, warm, white hands busy with others now in the night. . . . Gallagher gone and sleep settling down like warm snow . . . *Doan you le' me hear no mo' ructions outa you, chile. Yo' mother downstairs wid de ladies 'n' genmen. . . .*

A whirr snapped him out of sleep. He took the telephone from its cradle and drew it under the blankets with him, saying brightly into it, "Dr. Crane speaking."

"I have a call for you, doctor. The lady will not give her name. She says it is important."

"Put her on, Miss Kennedy." Don grimaced under the hood of blankets and sheet, waiting for the click. The line cleared and he knew that Kennedy on the switchboard had thrown her key and was not listening. The voice was low-pitched.

"Don?"

"Don—I'm over in the Tavern. I've got to see you."

He felt his mouth tightening and at the same time something leaped near his diaphragm. "I . . . I'm pretty well beat. Tough day. Won't it keep . . . ?" He started to say her name and caught himself.

"Don—listen to me. Would I come out on a night like this; would I call you from a bar if it would keep? No, lover, it won't keep. It won't keep at all. I've got to see you . . ."

"Not in the Tavern, lady."

"Well, all right. The car is over in the space by the hospital. Come down."

"Right, lady."

"You won't be sorry." The line went dead.

As Don pulled on his galoshes and stuffed his white duck trousers into them he shook his head twice to clear it of sleep. If it had been an emergency—a patient hemorrhaging—he would have snapped awake like a cat. Now fatigue kept its hold on him, and when he took his overcoat from the closet it slipped out of his hand and he picked it from the floor irri-

tably and struggled into it. Beyond the window a demented wind wailed of the world's wrong.

Why couldn't she stay where she belonged, house-coated and snug, in the room with the Rousseau prints, the gleaming copper pots of ivy and fern, watched by the little ceramic horses on the mantlepiece over asbestos logs? She had a portable typewriter enameled ivy green and had matched her drapes to it. The rubber keys of the typewriter were chewed by her long nails. She had mermaids and mermen cavorting in a bawdy panorama around the bathroom wall; she had two thousand books, a car with a license number so low that traffic cops dared not give her a ticket; she had one tired, sleepy, confused resident physician who was now commanded to get out of bed and wade through snow drifts for her. She was Cassie Lockhart.

Don took the stairs. In the lobby he said through the glass wicket to Kennedy at the switchboard. "I'm going to duck over to the Tavern for a few minutes. There's a bunch of crazy kids I went to school with over there. If I don't have a quick one with them they'll pester me to death. Be right back."

Kennedy said, "Have one for me, doctor," and turned again to her movie magazine.

The inner doors of the vestibule swung behind him. Snow had sifted under the outer doors and the blast which met him made him button the overcoat. He leaned against the outer door and got it open. Over and around him raged the wind, sleet stinging his face, wind catching him and nearly spinning him around as he stood on the hospital steps.

Below him, in the parking space to the left of the drive, the headlights of a car winked on and off, as if a sleeping dragon had opened its eyes and closed them again against the driving storm.

He battled the wind, circled the white mound of the flower bed, and fought his way to a long-hooded, low car, wearing a white mantle of snow. Snow had sifted over the hood and filled the valleys between the mudguards and the body; it banked slanting on the windshield. Now two black arcs widened as the windshield wipers swept back and forth twice. The door swung open and Don Crane slid inside, blinking snow from his eyelashes.

The car was warm, the motor purring, the heater humming faintly. A spicy scent of carnations enfolded him; the hands which slid up to take his face between them were soft and cold and then long thumb-nails dented his cheek bones, pressing in mock punishment and her mouth was on him, her breath warm against his cheek, her tongue sweet and wanton.

She clung until his hands, sliding beneath the fur coat,

gripped her waist, then she took her mouth away, leaving his face between her palms, and said, "Don't bruise me, lover. He'll see the marks."

In the green glow of the speedometer dial Don Crane looked at her. She wore harlequin glasses with heavy black rims. Her lower lip sparkled, catching a gleam from a street lamp softened by the driving snow. Now she slid her hands away and slowly took off the glasses, folded them and slipped them into the side pocket of the car door.

"I had to see you, Don. I spent all morning working on his speech for the banquet tonight. And all afternoon beating it into his head and making sure he could pronounce all the words. Then all of a sudden there was a large, Hanlon-shaped hole in the air. He went away mumbling his speech while I was in the bathroom. I could have killed him. Anyhow he's safely tucked away behind a speaker's table and will stay there until the wee hours. We have plenty of time. . . ."

Her hands rested on the steering wheel and she stepped on the clutch pedal. Don said, "No, Cassie." He reached for her hands, took them from the wheel and held them.

"But Don, it's so comfortable there: I have a lovely house—when it has you in it. If you come I'll promise not to keep you too long, darling. Nothing elaborate for now, darling. We'll let the wind scream its head off. We'll be casual. Really, Don, you have no idea how casual I can be."

"Cassie—I can't go over there tonight. I tell you I'm worn out."

"Of course, darling. Let me fix it. You just lie still and make like King Solomon. . . ."

"No, Cassie."

She turned and stared at him in the soft light cast up from the snow outside. Then she touched his chin with the sharp tip of her finger. "Don't tell me my lambie-pie has been tumbling some nurse across one of those horrid leather tables? Tell me, did she put her heels in those metal things . . . ?"

"Cassie, don't try to revive me by making me mad. My adrenals have knocked off for the night. If I'd been servicing a nurse I'd tell you. You're not the clinging vine type who doesn't want to be told. You're realistic enough to take it, but there's nothing to tell. Just, I'm dead beat."

She slapped him.

His skin tightened under the blow, for she had slapped him as hard as she could. He sat very straight, looking at her, breathing hard.

"Well?" Her eyes in the half light were smiling. "Aren't you going to do something to me?"

"What am I supposed to do, Cassie?"

She laughed, too musically. "Oh, lambie-pie, you should see what the Great Coal Heaver does when I slap *him*."

Crane swallowed. "I'm afraid you can't expect me to behave like a coal heaver."

"Of course not. I just wanted to see *what* you would do. And I found out. You do nothing. How typical of you, my pet. Thank God *I* never went to one of the better schools. Honestly, Don . . ." she clasped her hands behind her head and stretched, then wriggled her arms from the mink sleeves. The coat parted. She was wearing a black dress of some clinging wool material with long sleeves and high neck; it was fastened at the throat with a brooch made from an antique locket set with seed pearls. Moving with intimate deliberation, Cassie unfastened the brooch and the dress fell open halfway to her waist. Beneath it her skin seemed as white as the snowbanks outside.

Cassie took his hand in both of hers, kissed its palm, and brought it to her breast.

Don groaned. "Cassie—I tell you I'm so tired I could drop dead. And suppose someone were to come looking for me and find us?"

"In this blizzard? Relax, darling. I thought I might have trouble prying you away from your precious hospital. Why do you suppose I didn't wear slacks on a night like this? Why? Why? My God, why did I ever have to take a *gentleman* into my bed in the first place? Listen to me, laddy: I lost my virginity on a table in the morgue of a newspaper. A table full of splinters. If I could take a chance in a place like that . . ."

Good Lord, how can I ever untangle my life from this thing? Don prayed to the emptiness of winter night. She's like an uncalcified lesion, draining my strength. Don't I have enough death around me all day, all night, not to know better? Because she is death. She is disaster. And I've crawled into this perfumed coffin all by myself—it's a coffin with a sleek satin lining, warm from the bodies of other men. And what a Snow White it holds—white as snow, red as blood, black as ebony. Only getting a bit battered around the edges. . . .

She walked her fingers across the upholstery toward his knee and when they touched him a scalding wave of need washed over him; he felt himself sliding over into the land of unreason. The perfumed coffin gaped for him again, and for a moment he was too shaken, too gripped by desire for her even to move. He sat and stared agonizingly at her lips, feeling her sharp claws digging into his thigh.

Cassie Lockhart watched his face, waiting for him to crumble, waiting for him to lunge toward her awkwardly, needing to be guided. She could not hear the blood roaring in his ears,

could not feel the nerves charging tissue with force. All she saw was a man who seemed unable to move.

She snatched her hand from him, her eyes wide and slanting, her lips drawn back from her teeth.

"Get out of here!" she whispered savagely.

"Cassie!" Don tried to slide his arm around her but she fought free of him.

"I've taken all the humiliation from you I intend to take," she went on in the same crazed whisper. "Oh, yes, you're very tender and sympathetic and all full of cute, boyish, appealing tricks when *you* want it. But when I humble myself and come begging to you . . . oh, no. Not then. Then you're 'tired.' Then you're timid. Then you're all ethical and righteous. I can beat my brains out, writing a speech for that out-sized coal heaver and he runs out on me while I'm in the bathroom getting fixed. Oh, fine, fine. And I'd like to get my claws on whatever idiot it was who invented cold showers. I've taken three sleeping pills and I've had my clothes off and on three times tonight, trying to sleep and then deciding to go out. That apartment is enough to drive me mad on a night like this. And I come all the way out here and find a . . . a zombie. You . . . you ought to be down in that morgue, where you hide your mistakes, with a tag tied to your thumb."

Within Don Crane an abscess broke. He felt a great crescendo of triumph like the Ode to Joy. It sang through him and he leaned his head against the glass window of the car and grinned.

It put the devil in her. "Listen to me, Doctor Cheshire-Cat Crane! If you think you can deliberately humiliate me in this town and get away with it. . . ."

"Take it easy, Cassie." Between him and the frantic woman there had slipped a benign daemon, starched, cool, sweet and disapproving. The ghost of Gallagher.

Cassie Lockhart thrust her arms back into the sleeves of her coat so violently that a seam ripped. "Very well, Don. Very well. Have you, by any chance, seen Jim's new chauffeur? Jim found him in a reform school. Jim plans to raise him for a bodyguard. Eighteen years old. Brainless and exquisite, with shoulders. Right this minute he is probably wasting his time reading a newspaper and keeping Jim's car warmed up while the great man is spouting the words I crammed into his head." She turned her face away, drew the harlequin glasses from the door pocket, opened them and put them on with a vicious snap. Then she looked at him, elfin-eyed with the black glitter of the frames; she stared as if seeing him for the first time. "You—what are you doing here? Get out of my car! Get

out! Go stumble back into your corpse factory! Shrivel. Rot. Die. Fail apart. See if I care!"

Don twisted the door handle, bent his head against the spear-thrust of wind, called out, "Good-bye, Cassie," and plowed up the driveway. Around him, with a singing of invisible strings, a shout of trumpets, rolled on the tearing symphony of the storm.

From the vestibule he saw the headlights leap on, the car lurch forward, its wheels spin for an instant in the loose drifted snow. Then it bounded toward the gate, brushing one of the concrete pillars as it swerved out of sight, its tail-lights scarlet eyes in the dark.

When Don stepped into the lobby Kennedy heard his footfall and said, "Miss Gallagher wants you, doctor. She's had the orderly phoning down every forty-five seconds."

"Who is it?"

"Nine-oh-four. Rosenbaum."

When she had finished the last chart Anne put away her fountain pen and sat looking at her white, familiar hands on the green desk blotter before her. A quick warmth took hold of her, a melting feeling like she felt when she used to work on Maternity and when she picked up one of the little squirts—a baby whose chart was marked TLC: Tender Love and Care. It was such a sweet thing to find on a chart. And how long a time it had taken them to learn that it was a part of special treatment and an important part. Some babies who weren't doing at all well on any formula would come around fine if they were picked up and cuddled, the little pink fellows, with hands like tiny starfish.

She slid open one of the lower drawers and took out her purse to read the letter she had received from her Peg that afternoon. The handwriting was huge and sprawling:

Dearest Aunt Annie:

Mom says I must write to you and tell you how much I like the pinfors. I wearing one of them now I mean I was wearing one before I got fixed for bed. Mom says to tell you Daddy is feeling pretty good and he has been able to work all week pretty good. She says to tell you what would we do without your Aunt Annie and that is what I say too. I guess that is all for now.

With load of hugs and kisses,

Peggy.

P.S. Sister Catherine let me hem a altar cloth. She said

it looked like it was sewed on a macheen the little stitches. More hugs. X X X X X X X X

Gallagher had an impulse to rub the pink note paper against her cheek. Instead she folded it and slid it crisply back into the envelope. Then she saw that the little ivory case had come open in her purse, the rosary was down at the bottom, lying among the hairpins and odd pennies. She took it out, cradled it in her palm for a moment until the little silver cross and its precious burden were warm from her hand and then put it back in the case and fastened the catch. Her watch told her that it was time for another trip around the floor.

In the sunroom Eddie Gaines was curled up on a worrying chair, snoring. She fought down the impulse to shake him until his rat-teeth rattled but then she would have him whining or arguing. She could wake him later. She turned into Room 906.

It was dark and silent, the wind's breath through the crack of open window was arctic. Abdullah was a motionless mound. Kincaid had his arms bent over his head as if to ward off a blow. When she stopped by the bed of Jasper Stone the old man woke suddenly, smiled up at her in the darkness and whispered sibilantly without his teeth, "Aha, Gallagher—you gather us under your wings as a hen gathereth her chicks. . . ."

"Shhh! Go to sleep, Judge."

"To hear is to obey, *effendi.*" He turned over and drew the blankets farther up toward his chin.

In 908 Vitiello was breathing deeply and evenly. Old Goldfarb's breath was heavy. His hands, where they lay on the blanket, were tight clenched, even in sleep. He inhaled quickly, held it and then expelled the air with a sound which even in sleep was like a lament. "*Ai.*"

She had saved Benny for last.

The dim lights of the corridor made his room a block of darkness seen through the open door. As she stopped in the doorway there was a golden flash from the bed and then deep darkness without a sound. Gallagher moved in noiselessly.

"Benny—give me that flashlight. And the notebook, too. How many times . . . ?"

The whisper from the bed said, "Nix. I'm being difficult again."

Oh, what good did it do to keep him from the things he wanted, and they were so few he could have now. Aloud she said, "Benny, you know the rules. You don't want to get me into trouble."

The gentle scrape of his hair on the pillow told her that he was shaking his head. Her eyes grew accustomed to the dark. "I'd ditch it if anybody came around, Anne. Besides, Gaines

is snoring outside. The others are all busy or asleep. I could hear the elevator door. . . ."

She felt for the flashlight. "I've got to take it, Ben. You'll wear yourself out, writing in that notebook all the time when you should be sleeping."

When she found the flashlight his hand, hot and bony, was gripping it. "Let go, Benny."

"Not me," said the whisper. "You let go, Anne. You know what I mean."

"Oh, Benny, what are you talking about now?"

"Love."

She stood, erect and still, in the darkness, feeling her breath coming quick, feeling the blood rushing to cover her face. She was grateful for the dark.

"Anne—this is the way we should always be. With you, the dark is nice. With you here. We can tell each other things in darkness."

Her voice seemed strangled. "I've got nothing to tell you, Benny Rosenbaum, except to give me that light and go to sleep."

He held on to it tighter. "You have a story to tell me, Anne. There are a lot of things you might tell me. But there is one that beats all the rest. It's something from a long time ago. When you were a kid. Something hurt you. Now tell me what it was."

Tears were blinding her. She was glad it was dark.

Ben let go the flashlight and Gallagher took it and felt for the drawer of the bed table and put it inside. Then, without knowing that she did it, she felt for his hand again and found it, hot, wasted, eager. It laced its bony fingers with her own fingers there where none could see them.

"Think back, Anne. You're a little kid. What was it that frightened you the most? Was it something a boy did . . ."

"Benny, stop it! There was nothing about boys. . . ."

But still she did not draw away her hand.

"Wait a minute—you're a little girl. You wake up at night, frightened." Her hand gripped him. "That's it—you wake up. Maybe you get out of bed and run into your mother's room. Or did they sleep in the same room with you?"

"Benny . . . for God's sake, will you stop it! There's nothing. . . ."

"Oh, but there is, Anne. I thought maybe something had happened in an empty schoolroom. Or a basement. Or a vacant lot. That's where it usually happens. But this was your mother, right? What happened? He was hurting her?"

Gallagher did a strange thing. She dropped to her knees by the bed and pressed her cheek against the back of Ben's hand. "Benny. Oh, Benny. it's like you're my own. . . ." She wanted to say "baby" but could not.

"I'm your man," he whispered. "Son. Lover. Husband. All three. A man's all three. When he's loved, Anne." He felt the tears on his hand and wanted to touch them, salty, with his tongue. Her other arm reached across him and smoothed the blanket over his sharp hip.

"Benny. Oh. darling, don't die."

"Tell me you love me."

"Yes. Yes, Benny. I love you. I do. Don't die."

"Now tell me . . . the other thing. Take a deep breath, and swallow, and tell me what it was that froze you inside."

She stood up, dropping his hand, and ripped a tissue from the box on the bed table, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose effectively. She crumpled the tissue and dropped it into the paper bag in its holder at the head of the bed.

"Benny, I can't tell you. You're right, there was something, but there's no use. . . ."

The silence grew between them and with a sickening twist of fear Benny wondered if the moment had slipped away. Despair fought its way up inside him. He let out a single sob of weakness and defeat. Then the shafts of unseen light broke through; the life force of the world, the dynamo flash of life returning. He pushed himself up on his elbows, fighting the weight of the blankets, got one hand under him and pushed the weight of his body farther up. He slid his left hand up and hooked it over her shoulder, gripping the soft wool of her sweater. Then his cheek was against wool, soft, rounded, the heaven he had fought his way to reach. Beneath it he heard the faint, rushing beat of her heart.

Her arms slid around him, her hand pressing his head closer to her breast. "Benny, look at me holding you this way. It's as if I'd wanted you for a baby, and you a man."

"Hold me, Anne."

"Oh, you're a dear one, Ben. Ben, darling."

"Now tell me about it. Whisper."

She sank her lips to the top of his head and kissed. Whispering, she said, "It's all true, about when I was a kid and all. I saw something horrid. With Dad and Ma. And try as I may I can never forget it."

"Don't forget. Tell somebody. Tell me because I love you."

"He was good to me, many ways, my dad was. But there was always this between him and me. There was a fellow named Johnny Devlin and he was dead; they were holding a wake for him and Dad came home from the wake and he wanted to play the piano and sing. He started and he woke us all up, Ma and me and the boys: they were little fellows then. And I went out on the landing to see what was happening. Ma was downstairs in her night gown. Benny, let me go. . . ."

He held tight. "Tell me."

She swallowed, wet her lips and drew breath.

"It was when one of the notes of the piano got stuck and he got a hatchet from down cellar and started chopping at the piano and when Ma tried to take the hatchet away from him he hit her in the face; he cut her lip. And she grabbed up a toy fire engine; it was one the boys had when they were little, and she started for him with it and was going to make him drop the hatchet. She was real thin and he was husky but he was really afraid of Ma when she was mad. And he grabbed her by the front of her night gown. . . ."

Ben's weight rested on her left arm. Her right hand was pressed into his hair. "Go on, Anne," he said, his voice muffled by the sweater. "Every bit. Give it to me, darling."

Gallagher rushed on in a whisper, "He tore the nightie off Ma and I had never seen her . . . that way before. I was so ashamed I wanted to run back to bed. But I was so scared I couldn't move. I was cold but I couldn't move. He grabbed for the fire engine but she kept striking at him. . . ."

Under his ear the thudding beat of her heart quickened.

"Oh, I can't say it, Benny. I've never talked this way. But he . . . he . . . he took hold of one of her nipples and began twisting it . . ." Their arms tightened. "She cried out and dropped the fire engine and he grabbed her by the hair, bending her head back and . . . he kissed her, sucking the blood from her mouth where he'd cut it, oh, my God, I wanted to kill him, I wanted to kill him but that wasn't all that happened for right after, oh, my God, it was on the rug it happened, oh let go of me, Benny, let me go, let me go."

He lifted her face. "That's it, Anne. Now kiss me. The ghosts are dead."

He slipped his hand up farther and pressed her face down to his. Splashing warm, a drop of something met his mouth, salty to the tongue. The next moment he had found her lips. There he rested, not trying to enter them, resting on their warm sweetness as a spent swimmer turns and floats, his breath warm against her cheek.

Then he snapped his face down and she gripped him tighter, holding his head tighter, and her lips on his hair, the hair which would never stay parted. The sharp bones of his shoulders hurt her heart and the ridge of his skull in back, so bony, so wasted, so overpowering and sweet and her own where her hand touched it.

A shudder went through him and he seemed to leap against her.

Gallagher, still holding her arm under his shoulders, took his hand from behind her head and held him away, looking

down into his face in the dim light. Then she went rigid, for the front of her white sweater looked as though it had been splashed with ink. Benny. *Benny!*

She lowered him to the bed, turning him on his side, and flew to the wall switch. Blinking in the sudden brightness, she saw that the stain on her sweater was brilliant scarlet froth. And in the doorway stood a white-clad figure, peering in. Eddie Gaines.

Gallagher spun on him. "Shot bags and blocks, Eddie. Get going."

In the bed Ben Rosenbaum lay on his side. The pillow and the top edge of the blanket were spattered scarlet. He reached out a hand, groping for the sputum cup but Gallagher said, "Lie still, Ben. *Lie still.* In here." She handed him a wad of tissues and turning toward the door ran through it. She turned the corner, steadying herself by her hand on the corridor wall. She saw Eddie Gaines standing in the door of the closet, his arms full of shot bags and two wooden chocks for the bed legs under an elbow. "Step on it, Gaines."

In the utility room she whipped the key to the narcotics box from the pocket of her uniform, laid it on top of the box, picked up a pack of matches, lit the spirit lamp, moved its blue flame under the spoon on its bracket, drew the ground glass stopper from the bottle of sterile water, poured a spoonful corked the bottle and set it back in the tray. Then she unlocked the narcotics box, picked out a vial labeled Codein Phosphate ½ gr., unscrewed the plastic cap. She picked up a hypodermic syringe with forceps, fitted on a needle, shook one of the white tablets into the syringe and pushed in the plunger, capped the alcohol lamp and through the needle of the hypodermic sucked up a cubic centimeter of water from the spoon. Then she locked the narcotics box, put the key in her pocket, and ran back down the hall, shaking the syringe to dissolve the tablet.

Ben was lying on his back, his face waxen white, his lips and chin smeared with blood. When she came in he opened his eyes and smiled up at her. Then he held the scarlet wad of tissue to his mouth again. She stripped back his sleeve, gave his arm a quick dab of alcohol with the bit of cotton she carried, slid the needle home and pressed the plunger. She laid the syringe on the bed table and behind her heard the patter of Gaines' feet.

Gallagher stepped to the foot of the bed and gripped the railing, raising the bed a foot from the floor. "Chocks first, Eddie." He slid them under and Gallagher lowered the bed. "Dump the shot bags. Get the blankets."

Gaines scurried off.

Gallagher placed one of the square, flat bags on Benny's

left side, just below his collar bone. One she put farther down on the rib case. One on his hip in the angle of the groin, one on the other side.

Gaines came in with an armload of blankets. "Spread them," she said, cool and starched with the scarlet splash on her sweater forgotten. They spread them over the boy whose eyes were closed again.

"Now call Dr. Crane," Gallagher said, her voice low so as not to disturb the other patients. Gaines hurried off toward the desk and the telephone.

Gallagher swept back into the utility room, turned on the hot water in the stainless steel sink, seized a rubber bottle from the pile on the shelf, filled it, stoppered it, tightened the stopper, held it against her forearm to test it, did the same for two more. Her feet against the corridor linoleum made no sound but the starched uniform rustled as she ran.

Benny's lips were gray. She cleaned them with tissues while she felt for his hand under the blankets where hot water bottles now lay against his sides. The shot bag on his chest barely lifted and fell. She found his wrist and held it, feeling for the pulse. Benny opened his eyes.

Gallagher said, "I'm here, Benny. Don't talk now. Wait. Don't be afraid. I'm here."

He smiled, gray lips drawn back, and his eyes looked past her. "Anne . . ."

"Don't talk, darling. Anne's here. Just be still."

"Anne . . . *God is good to a Jew.*" The smile was tender and mocking all together as the pulse stopped under her fingers.

Friday

"WHAT IS IT, ANNE—hemorrhage?"

There was snow on the shoulders of Don's brown overcoat and snowflakes in his hair.

"When you couldn't be located I gave Benny an injection of adrenalin myself. His radial pulse had stopped."

"Any reaction?"

"No pulse." She stood up, shivering a little. Anne was no longer wearing the sweater, Don noticed.

He walked beside her to Room 904. The door was closed. When she pushed it open light flooded the corridor. Don shut the door behind him.

Rosenbaum was a wax image. He seemed to have sunk into the mattress, to make no mound under the blankets at all. It was as if a wax mask lay on the pillow with no body under it.

Crane's stethoscope, held against the wasted chest, was silent. He folded it up and slipped it back into his pocket. "Benny's gone all right."

Gaines was hovering at the door. Gallagher turned and said, "Clean up, Eddie. And don't forget to put a mask on."

"Swell chance of me forgetting. Jees, what a mess! Why don't they put rubber sheets under these guys, they got a chance of conking out any minute?"

Gallagher said, "Get busy." Her voice was like a folded belt laid to the backside. Gaines held her eye for one rebellious moment and then wilted.

When Gallagher and Don Crane returned to the desk they heard Gaines cursing under his breath, running water into a wash pan in the closet.

Anne sat down and moving briskly, more briskly than usual, she opened one of the lower desk drawers and from a folder drew out a collection of forms held together by a paper clip. One was a notification of death to the police department whose duty it was to notify the next of kin. She paused at the second card, which was for the chaplain. But Rabbi Stern would want to know anyhow. And one for the information desk. Who would call to inquire for Benny? Not anybody. There had been a girl once, Cora something. But that was a long time ago. No, Benny was all their own. I knew it was coming; I knew it was just weeks, maybe a couple of months. And now that it's

here, it doesn't make any sense at all. And these cards don't tell anything about him. Benjamin Rosenbaum: that could be anybody. Date of birth. Place of birth. Day and hour of death. What has all this to do with Benny; what have all the sheets on his chart board to do with Benny? Queen of the most Holy Rosary, pray for us. . . .

Gallagher shivered and remembered her sweater, now rolled up and stuck out of sight in the utility room. Don Crane's voice brought her back and she found that she had just been sitting there, dumb, staring at the cards on the desk as if she didn't know what to do with them.

"How'd you give him the adrenalin, Anne? Subcutaneous? And how much?"

She shook her head and heard her own voice say, not apologizing, not asking Don for anything, "I used an intravenous needle. Right into the heart. One c.c., one-to-a-thousand."

Crane was writing in the order book. "We just want to keep the record straight." He looked down at her and said, "Anne—you're shivering. Where's your sweater?"

She was still gazing at the cards before her, all her briskness gone. "It's inside. It's all stained. It's . . . I can't wear it any more."

Don put down the book and gazed at her but she made no move to fill in the cards or do anything at all. She was staring at her hands. Finally she said dully, "Eddie Gaines was standing in the doorway when Benny started to hemorrhage."

She seemed to have shed ten years of life, to be terribly young, terribly vulnerable, all her swift courage and precision gone. It was as if something had broken. "He must have seen us. Yes, I guess he did see us."

"Anne, what's it all about? I don't get it."

Without looking at him she said, "I brought on the hemorrhage by kissing him. He wanted to kiss me and I let him. I let him kiss me and then he started. And it got on my sweater and Gaines was there all the time; or anyhow he was there when I turned on the light. If I hadn't let him kiss me . . ."

Crane leaned over her. "Anne—nothing mattered with Benny. It was over for him, months ago. Rathbone gave him six weeks almost a year ago. You know all this. There's no reason for you to . . ."

"I would do it again, no matter who would see me. I would do it with Eddie Gaines or anybody there . . ."

"Anne—look, why don't you get Clara Hopkins to take over here for a while? Why don't you go down to your room? If you want a little sedation. . . ."

"I think I kissed him not because he wanted something like it before he died. I think I kissed him because I wanted to. . . ."

"Best reason in the world, Anne. Now don't worry. . . ."

"I think they knew I loved him. . . ."

"Listen, Anne—I loved him myself. Everybody loved him. He was a crazy kid but he had something. Everybody felt it. Now call up Hoppie. . . ."

"They'll all know it happened from my kissing him. They'll all know. I shan't care if they know, at all."

Don Crane was halfway down the corridor as she spoke. He rounded the corner and pushed open the door. Eddie Gaines, in gown and mask, had stripped the bed of top sheet and blankets, bundling them into a laundry bag stenciled, "For Sterilizer." On the bed lay the skeleton of a man thinly clad in skin. Eddie was washing up.

When he saw Crane he said, "What can I do for ya, doctor?"

Don closed the door. "Miss Gallagher was with the patient when the hemorrhage started?"

Gaines' eyes above the mask were wary. "Yeah. I guess."

"Where were you, Gaines, when this happened?"

"I . . . I was out in the sunroom. What's wrong, doctor?"

"Nothing. I just want to find out if anything induced the hemorrhage. That is, if any unusual activity on the part of the patient was a contributing factor."

The moist eyes, peering over the rectangle of gauze, widened in innocence. "Naa, doctor. I guess the kid just started hemorrhaging. You know how they do, when they're as bad as him. Miss Gallagher, she found him when she was making a trip around and I seen the light go on and there he was and she told me to get the shot bags. . . ."

"Thanks, Gaines." Don met the watery gray glance with his own, smiled a little, nodded and stepped out. Behind him he heard the youth whisper under the gauze mask, "What kind of a guy do they think I am? A rat?"

Back at the desk Don said, "Gaines is okay, Anne. Lied like a gentleman—probably for the first time in his life."

She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Forms to fill out, and Benny to help tie up in a sheet. Not Benny. Nothing but a few bones and waxy skin, now. There was nothing there of Benny. Benny had gone away. But wasn't it a sign that he had been taken right at the moment when I felt . . . My God, I offer Thee all the Masses which are being celebrated today throughout the whole world, for sinners who are in their agony and who must die this day. May the precious blood of Jesus, their Redeemer, obtain mercy . . . Oh, I let him say those things to me; not because I let him say them but because in my heart I wanted him sinfully and it wasn't love at all, at all; or anyhow it wasn't love like I feel for Peggy and how else could I really feel about Benny, and him ready to die

any minute . . . we beg of Thee, O Lord, to help the souls now suffering in purgatory, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood . . . and if it was a sin, loving him that way . . . or was it? because we couldn't really sin or at least not much. But didn't God make a difference when there was love in it and wasn't love, real love, the enemy of sin, even if it was mixed up with the other? Bless me, Father, for I have sinned . . . there was this boy, a patient, and he was Jewish, only he wasn't a real Jew he was an atheist and I let him kiss me . . . only wasn't it like on the babies' charts, Tender Love and Care. . . ?

She came back to the desk, the blotter, the printed forms. Crane had gone. Gallagher set her lips firmly and attacked the first card but it blurred before her eyes against the dull green of the blotter and she laid down the pen. She picked up the telephone. "Get me Miss Hopkins, please." And when she heard Hoppie's voice, she said, "This is Anne, Hoppie. Look—could you come up?"

"I'm on my way, cookie. Dr. Crane just called me."

It wasn't really a church because they held Protestant services in it, too, and on Wednesday nights they had movies. But it was dark and there was nobody in it at this hour, certainly, and there was no telephone to ring; the place was comforting in the memory of Masses which had been said there, like saying Mass on a battlefield.

There was light behind a stained glass window and it burned all night, giving light enough for her to see the aisles and the seats. She wished it were a church with the Stations of the Cross . . . O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance . . . and wasn't the Way of the Cross in everyone's heart, to be found there when you couldn't be in Church? And wasn't it the way to be sorry and to find your way back, thinking of Our Lord's sufferings and trying to show Him that His sufferings were not in vain?

With the remembered scene of Pilate washing his hands, guilt and grief and a deep, unnamed sorrow rose to choke her. And Pilate knowing all the time that He was innocent, and too cowardly . . . but am I ashamed to go right to Dr. Rathbone and tell him about Benny and what I did and isn't this a sin and one more for Him to carry and to suffer. . . ?

And Jesus carrying his cross . . . haven't I forgotten time and time again to ask Him to help me bear. . . ?

Jesus falls for the first time . . . and men striking Him with rods. His Precious Blood shed for me . . . red froth all down the front of my sweater, if this were Church I could really make the Way and isn't it sin to be so all mixed up . . . I keep wanting to think of Benny and to pray for Don Crane when I should be praying for all the poor children over in Europe. . . .

At the Fourth Station His Blessed Mother in her affliction . . .

Overpowering will and purpose, exploding within her, came the knife-sharp recollection of Ben; his life seemed to lie stretched before her like the pattern woven into a carpet. When he denied God was it not a denial of pagan abominations which he mistook? And did not our Lord and Savior Jesus hold within His infinite love the power to bring light to the searching heart and wasn't Benny's life a search, even in all the dark directions it took and all the rebellious words? Would not God, gathering a lamb to His bosom, smile at the desperate kicks of its tiny hooves? And had not Ben, groping by the light reflected from His face, overcome selfishness and meanness and cruelty in doing what he thought was the work of salvation for others, forgetting himself?

Then the old terror at the groping hands of man, and all the old sweetness at the soft touch of the hands like tiny starfish melted together within her, the strength turned outward to crack the lips of evil and all the sweetness turned in, copying itself over in its own image within herself by love in the way that God had built the world.

Prayer now was wordless and without images, needing none and resembling music; it was a silent music rising along the shafts of inner light to the throne of God. Ben's essence was in it, carried by her own love; little creatures of God were in it, to be drawn from her own body to His greater glory; Don Crane was in it as hope that he would find his way back into the light, not for her, not for anyone except himself and his own bright life, which lay in him as a seed in the ground. Even Eddie Gaines was there, a soft note of gratitude in the thunderous chord of prayer.

Gallagher did not hear the chapel door open, for it was opened very softly.

In the widening wedge of light, Don saw her kneeling there and silently slid into the pew beside her. He was afraid of startling her and yet he knew that he would not. When Anne raised her head it was as if she had been expecting him, saying only his name, "Don." He gathered her to him and knew that she would cry.

When she sat up at last he kept his arms around her and her hands rested on his shoulders; in the dim light from the stained

glass they looked at each other and were beautiful, finding no words and needing none. Time passed by them, for they had stepped out of the stream of time; it rushed over their heads with a mighty beating of wings, carrying other mortals toward destruction of the body but for an instant they hovered motionless, unmoved by it, sustained by the flooding life around them, feeling its force flow out of them and join in a single torrent against the sweep of time and death.

When they kissed it was with new lips and the old world fell away from them with all its sins and fears.

At last Don whispered, astonished and stricken with awe and kindled with joy, "Anne—Anne! Gosh, Anne . . . this is love."

She nodded, smiling a little and whispered back, "I guess. Only it's . . . it's all different."

"Me, too. It's . . . it's all different." For a time they could not speak or move; their eyes began to smart for they could not close them, even to blink. Then she let out her breath and let her head find his shoulder and his hands gripped her gently, holding her there and loving her.

"It's all over . . . with Cassie," he said absently, as if it had happened a long time ago.

"I know."

"You knew it was going to happen?"

"I don't know. I prayed for you, Don. I wanted you to . . . whatever would make you happy."

His arms tightened about her. "I know, darling. I felt you. I mean, I felt you were there. I mean, when I broke off with her, you were there helping."

"Don't you think God was there?" Her voice seemed almost sleepy with content.

Don's mind awoke in a flash of perception and it was filled with answers and explanations which could never have come to him at any other time, he felt sure. For the gears of thought seemed to mesh and the world and its multitude of conflicts seemed suddenly to sing in harmony. Purpose became manifest, what was a cloud became a sword; what was mist became rivers shining. The old stories turned from empty husks to heads of precious grain, nodding to the everlasting Yes.

And with this came freedom; freedom to be tired, to sleep without clenched hands or dreams of blood and the awful closing of doors upon the dark. Anne was rooted inside him now and when he took his arms from around her she straightened her winged cap and stood up, her eyes in the dim light filled with the promise of generations. He took her hand and they came near to the door and then he kissed her again and it was as if she had often been kissed before; as if they had

stepped back into the stream of time again and as if they had been together always.

Her lips beneath his own were burning and suddenly Dr. Donald Crane slipped his fingers over her pulse.

Her hand was against the door, about to open it, but he held her back. "Anne! Your temperature is up."

"Maybe. It's . . . it's all that's happened."

"I don't think so."

"It'll be down tomorrow, Don."

"I wonder."

He stood beside her, medical, young, thorough, and frightened. She squeezed his hand. "Don't worry about me so, darling. I run a temp every time something happens. It's . . ."

"Anne—come up and let me look at you under the screen."

In the empty, chill hours before daylight Miss Kennedy sat before her switchboard, deep in the story of a sultry star and her adopted children. The pictures showed her posing before a "jungle gym" erected for the tots in the backyard of her Beverly Hills home, complete with real palmetto trees at the corners and two goggle-eyed toy monkeys, kissing. Miss Kennedy tugged at her foundation garment where it cut her a little under one arm. She sighed, looking at the woman in the picture, so wonderfully slim.

A card fell on the magazine before her.

Don Crane said, "You're not likely to get any inquiries, Miss Kennedy. Merely a matter of form." He sounded so tired, as if he was ready to drop. She turned to the "R" section of her revolving index and slipped from it a celluloid strip bearing the name *Rosenbaum.*

"And, Miss Kennedy—"

"Yes, doctor?"

"You can take Miss Gallagher off the nurses' roster. She will be on the patients' list until further notice. Just observation, of course."

Kennedy said, "Oh." And then, "All right, Dr. Crane. I'll leave a note for the day operator. I guess the regular card will come through tomorrow."

"Right. Thanks. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dr. Crane."

Glory be! Anne Gallagher. The picture of the movie star lost its glamor and Miss Kennedy quickly turned the page. Those Hollywood girls! No wonder they drop out of sight when they are big stars and people standing in line all over the country to see them. Glory be! She drew open the desk drawer be-

side her, took out a chocolate bar, half eaten and rewrapped carefully by force of will. It tasted heavenly, having the sanctions of omens behind it. But Anne Gallagher! Thank God for her being a nurse, with regular check-ups; they had caught it in time and it might be only a little while, like a year or so, before she would be all right again. But Gallagher! And her the picture of health and all, a fine, strapping girl.

Don went through the inner doors and stood in the icy vestibule, looking out into the night. Across the white-banked flower bed, through the tall gate posts, street lamps recorded, by their increased brightness, that the snow had stopped. A scarlet neon sign advertising beer winked off. The Tavern was closing. He turned back, felt the warmth of the building enfolding him again. It was like that old cure for insomnia—you get out of bed and lie on the cold floor until you shiver once and then you crawl back into bed and are so glad for the warmth that you fall asleep. So many ways of beating the game symptomatically; and so much wisdom buried in the old, fantastic remedies. Like the heart-balm tea, containing a dozen different herbs, among them foxgloves: digitalis. And Cassie, sick, sick unto spiritual death, clawing herself to pieces; that sickening lust-with-pity he had felt for her once. Where had it gone? And if he could not help her, then leave her. But where had the strength come from? Not from fear of being found out. Not from lust after Anne, God knows. Riddle of the human spirit; the kindergarten squabbles over the arrangement of blocks as to which is the "right" way; the practitioners of surgery with their feuds—Freudian against Horneyite against Jungian. There was a story, remembered from the second grade reader, something about blind men trying to find out about an elephant. . . .

Before the frosted glass panel of the director's office he paused. The room was glowing softly with light; not the harsh, overhead light that the cleaning women would use. It was unusual for the chief to return at such an hour and Don, in spite of fatigue which was like a millstone bearing down on him, was overcome with curiosity and a faint trace of alarm. Anyhow, he had a good excuse to crash in for a minute—Rosenbaum's death. He knocked, the respectful two taps of a social call.

"Come in, Don."

Rathbone had recognized his shadow against the ground glass. The door latch clicked and he went in.

Tall, arrogant of shoulder, like a black-and-white illustration on a magazine page, Rathbone stood behind his desk in white tie and tail coat. There are not many men who can wear

one of those outfits today without looking ridiculous, Do mused, but the Big Boy is one of them.

"Come in, come in, Don. I stopped by on my way home t . . . to check a couple of details." Rathbone threw the switc on the view box behind him and the specter of his own thoraci cavity, as recorded on film, dropped into darkness.

"It was quite an affair," the director said, sitting down behin the desk and moving his sketch pad closer to him. "Quite a evening. The Hanlon was in rare form. I have never heard hin more eloquent on the subject of what we have all done for th voters of our city."

Don dropped into the visitors' chair and took a cigarett from the humidor box which was pushed toward him. Rath bone held his lighter and after Don had inhaled and leane back the director continued to stare at the orange flame as i expecting something else. Finally he snapped it out and put i back in his pocket. "My own remarks," he went on, taking hi gold sketching pencil from the center drawer of the desk, "were aimed at a defense of the hospital's budget. Neighbor Jim i all set to build a ball park as a municipal project. If we left i to the boys at the club our patients would have turkey dinner at Christmas and beans the rest of the year." Beneath his pencil a form appeared, rounded, curved and to Don Crane, upside down. "I stressed our hopes for *extending* our facilities. The farther I run, after all, toward the enemy's goal posts, the farther they'll have to carry the ball *back*. Eh?" He bent to his sketch, rubbing out a portion where a curling line doubled back over itself. It was the tail of an animal, Don saw. Dr. Rathbone was drawing a pig.

"I was tempted, in presenting the need for an extension of tubercular care, to cite that precious contradiction our young friend Rosenbaum is always harping on: *nobody can get in until he is too far gone to cure*. It's a *lie*, Don. Now you take that boy's case—if he hadn't been so intent on becoming a second Lenin and a second Shelley rolled into one, he would have slept nights instead of running around to his inflammatory meetings or whatever those people do. Then hurrying off the next morning, with two hours' sleep, to bend over his furs all day. The boy is still fighting the Czar and doesn't know it. He was an outpatient at first. He was warned. He is . . . he is . . ."

"He is dead, doctor."

Rathbone's pencil stopped. He looked up at Don Crane, his gray eyes slightly bloodshot. His under lip was moist; suddenly the lines about his mouth went flaccid, as if wires which kept them taut had slackened. Rathbone threw down his pencil and drew out the side drawer of the desk. From it he lifted a bottle of Scotch and a water tumbler. He poured the tumbler

half full and sat gazing at it, as if he were alone in the room. Don coughed and uncrossed his legs and Rathbone swiveled around toward him, noticed him, fished out another tumbler and growled, "Sorry, Don. Help yourself." He pushed the bottle across the desk.

Don poured himself a portion equal to Rathbone's and corked the bottle. The liquor was smooth and comforting as it stung his tongue, warming him and somehow bringing the two men together on equal terms. Rathbone sat, rotating the liquid in his glass, lost in thought, his face haggard and flushed. He belched once and then said, his words blurring a trifle at the edges,

"I envy them—the zealots, the cranks, the one-idea boys, the fanatics and the fools. Rosenbaum's approach is so devilishly simple, Don. So *simple*. So black-and-white, so *cartoon-simple*. The boy has never come to grips in all his life with anything less tangible than a dyed muskrat!" The director's voice had dropped to a hoarse, intense whisper, his words carefully articulated. He was making an effort to clip the ends of the words, giving the final consonants their full value by force of will. "Damn and blast, Don, that rib section I did on the big darkie was good carpentry. *Good carpentry*. I had to make the decision whether to take him in stages; let him heal up part way and then go through it all over again in a month, stealing a couple of ribs now, a couple more then . . ."

"I understand, Chief. You remember, we were discussing it this afternoon. . . ." Don was suddenly bold and equal and outspoken and it was too soon for the liquor to have done it. What had come over him? And what decision was looming ahead; something he had already decided in his subconscious? But what? And how dangerous would it be?

"I judged the darkie to be a healthy animal. So healthy he could stand it if we grabbed all the ribs at once. Well, I was wrong. Why, I'll wager, Don, that in all his tea-pot tempest of a life, that young fellow Rosenbaum has never faced up to a decision like *that*." He drank the last of the Scotch in his tumbler, reached for the bottle, uncorked it, poured half as much, drank it, poured the same amount and corked the bottle.

"And *another thing*," he said, leaning his elbows on the desk, his hands linked around the tumbler, "that is so annoying about these brethren of the Left—their colossal ignorance of *statecraft*. Don—just as sure as God made little green apples, *somebody* has to rule!"

"I suppose so. Somebody always does."

"Exactly. Exactly. In the name of all that's holy . . . why I could tell you things . . . if I wanted to tell tales out of school . . . about this town that would make your hair stand on end.

Necessary! Jim Hanlon knows what he's doing, Don. *Democracy!* Has it ever been tried? You can have a good oligarchy or a bad oligarchy. But you'll have the Power House in spite of all. In spite of all your fine phrases. 'Neighbor Jim Hanlon!' Know where that fine phrase came from? The Lockhart woman made it up. Planted it with newspaper fellows. Editorial writers, all that sort of thing, picking it up. Jim pulled wires, schemed, did all manner of things. Until the voters finally got it rammed into their silly heads. You know, Don, this institution of ours . . . great thing for the vote. Tuberculosis hospital. Great thing . . . Irish vote . . . colored vote . . . great thing. And what am *I* doing here? Am *I* here drawing a *pension?* Why don't I heave this job right into Jim's lap, let him get some ward-heeler to handle it if he can! Why do *I* sit here, doing paper work and pulling wires, when I could go across the river and do *real surgery?* Why? You want to know *why*, Don? Because I'm the bung in this barrel. If I wasn't here . . . well, it would all run out. And you'd have a chromium-plated boarding house, that's what you'd have. And if a patient cured up . . . it would be nothing but the grace of God. If there is any such thing."

He focused his eyes on Don Crane's face, seeing it drawn, worn out and now troubled. Rathbone hurried on.

"Yes, you heard me, Don. I said if there *is* any such thing. Mind you, I'm not denying the First Cause. But it moves in a mysterious way, its blunders to perform. Beyond good and evil . . . great thrust of cosmic energy, rolling on its way. Oh, I spin my prayer-wheel of a Sunday like all the rest. And I sit there and listen to Allan Gilchrist, that's our rector, shooting up his little rubber-tipped arrows of prayer at the sun. Cosmic energy, Don. All else . . . folklore. But I'm not an atheist. Far from it. Now you take this little Jew, Rosenbaum. He's . . . he's . . ."

"He's dead, doctor."

Rathbone straightened by a mighty effort of will and said in his normal, clipped voice, "Hemorrhage? When did this happen?"

"Just before midnight."

"Did he receive any emergency treatment?"

"Yes. Miss Gallagher was with him and she sent for me. Codein. Adrenalin after the pulse stopped. No reaction. Well, we've expected it any day, I guess."

Rathbone sagged. A film covered his eyes and he sank back against the leather upholstery of his chair. The fact had finally registered and there was silence for the span of several breaths. Then, cradling his tumbler affectionately in his hand, Rathbone poured himself another drink and corked the bottle;

he set it slowly back,—shut the desk drawer, and turned his massive head, glistening now with sweat on forehead and upper lip. "Dr. Crane, Dr. Crane," he said thickly, "what is this you tell me?" He smiled painfully, with the grimace of a man having a gas-cramp in the guts. "So the little fire-brand has flickered out at last! Eh?" He propped his forehead on his hand, looking down at the drawing of a pig as if trying to focus his eyes on it. Finally he said, "Terminal. Terminal. We might just as well have shipped him to Gull Island years ago." He took down his hand and raised his face to Crane, arching his eyebrows with elaborate effort. "Dr. Crane—you have a privilege which has been granted to no man in the history of this great institution. You now observe a phenomenon often whispered about behind closed doors but never observed on these premises until now. Donald, my dear chap, Dr. Wallace Gail Rathbone is as drunk as a den full of skunks. *Around the ragged rock the rugged ruffian ran.* The empirical method, you see. Consistent to the last. Donald Crane, Donald Crane—I pour a libation down my own esophagus. To our departed guest. *Ave hostis, atque vale.* He was . . . he was a game little . . ."

Rathbone lurched to his feet. He took off his glasses carefully and laid them on the desk, plunged his hands deep into the pockets of his evening trousers, and let his head droop, studying the picture of a hog on the sketch pad. Then he drew out one hand, picked up the pad and sent it fluttering toward the oil portrait of James J. Hanlon. It crashed against the little bracket lamp and the light went out.

"Mr. Toastmaster," he said holding his chin high. "Fellow neighbors of the Neighborly City Across the Bay. I happen to be in charge of one of the greatest institutions in our fair city, second only to the city morgue. Through our portals pass the most beautiful colonies of tubercle bacilli in the world. We have no room in our ranks for slackers, gentlemen; those with pinpoint lesions and doubtful loyalty to death. What we want are genuine, red-blooded, *American* cavities. As I gaze upon this sea of smiling faces I am reminded of a story. It seems that there were two Irishmen, one was named Hanlon and one was named Satan. And as Hanlon was starting up the ladder with a hod full of coal on his shoulder, who should he see but Satan looking over the edge of the scaffolding down at him. 'Faith, now,' says Hanlon, 'an' phwat do you be doing up here, me bhye? An' it's down below I thought ye was afther shtayin', turnin' the Prattistants over so they could cook even on the other side, savin' yer Riverence.' And what Satan answered does not concern us here this evening, gentlemen, since the vote is not in yet, the vote is not counted. In fact there is not a single ballot box in the river yet. But I see that my time has

grown short; as short, in fact, as a tapeworm whittled down to its head but where the head is, there the segments will soon be also. Let us pray God, gentlemen, that no crack-brained do-gooder down in Washington ever finds a vermifuge capable of reaching high enough in this colon of the universe called the Neighborly City to extirpate our head. For our head is hooked into the intestinal wall of the body politic with hooks of purest gold. Neighbor Jim Hanlon—I pause for the well-earned smashing of palms together, the clink of your tin mittens, gentlemen—Neighbor Jim Hanlon, a man who needs no introduction. Except into the ranks of the higher anthropoids. He is a man who will go down in legend, gentlemen. He will go down in legend as not having been born like other men . . . ah, no, my friends. He leaped full-panoplied from a crib-house madame's brow; say parlor house if you will, it cannot diminish his glory. His voice is as the whirlwind, issuing from a typewriter lubricated with lactic acid jelly. Oh, I say to you, friends and neighbors, that it is a rare privilege to work with such a man . . . a man who got his bloody head beat off by your speaker in the alley behind the old coal yard there many years ago and thereby started a beautiful friendship. And on the wings of this friendship the last scion of the Rathbones rose to eminence; where across the river I would be but one chest surgeon among many, here I maintain family tradition by being a big frog . . . in a very small cesspool. Surgery is one of the noblest works of man; and I . . . a humble practitioner of the ancient art, am still able to thread a needle behind my back. Perhaps I shall put this trick to some advantage before I die—perhaps I shall use it to sew a scarlet letter to the seat of my pants and be done with it . . . but in closing, gentlemen, let me remind you that when I step into the voting booth and stand alone with God and my conscience in that holy of holies of our democracy—*I have never pulled a lever in twenty years!*"

The whir of the telephone cut him off. Don Crane sat tense, motionless, crawling with alarm, with humiliation by empathy, not daring to get up and leave, not daring to speak, wondering what on earth to do in the face of this torrent of pent-up rage. The telephone solved it for him.

Rathbone scowled at the instrument, then sat down heavily, drew a deep, labored breath, swallowed, pulled his eyebrows into a frown and said into the telephone, "Dr. Rathbone speaking."

The voice on the other end of the wire was heavy, hoarse, and loud. So loud that it crackled through the earpiece with a tinny rattle of the diaphragm and barked through the dead silence of the room to where Don Crane sat, trying not to hear it but unable to move.

"Hey, Wally! That you, old pal? This Jim. Look, pal . . . you drunk?"

Rathbone's face, flushed, sweaty, and desperate, began to slip back again into the icy mask of self-control. His free hand tightened into a fist on the desk top. Into the telephone he said briskly, "Yes, Jim. Frankly, the answer is yes."

"Just thought I'd call you up, pal. Have a little chat."

"Yes, Jim. Are you still at the club?"

Across the sleeping city, snow-capped, ice-bound, dark save for street lamps forlorn; across the chill waste of darkened windows and white roof tops; along twisted strands of copper; through conduits beneath the concrete; up and inside of buildings; spraying forth into jacks; traveling through metal plugs fitted in, came the voice of Hanlon, Neighbor Jim, staunch in friendship, deadly in battle. The Power.

"Just sitting here in the club, Wally. Just thinking 'bout old times. We been through awful lot, Wally. Ain't we? Huh?"

"Right, Jim."

"Now look—I'm drunk. You're drunk. What say you come over here an' we talk a while. See daylight in. What say?"

Perspiration was running down Dr. Rathbone's face in tiny rivulets now, in spite of the creeping cold of the office. It dripped from his chin, making black discs on the blotter. He seemed to be marshaling every ounce of energy left in him in an attempt to sound sober, to keep his voice from failing, to say the right thing, the thing necessary, the Terrible Imperative.

"Listen, Jim," he said. Then he swallowed and his lips drew back from his large, yellow teeth. He seemed to gag and Don Crane leaned forward, expecting him to vomit. "Jim . . . I'm glad you called. Any time, old fellow. Yes. Any time. Now why don't you go home? Or is it your chauffeur's night off?"

It was the end of consciousness. Rathbone's last ounce of strength had gone into it. He laid the telephone down gently, as if it would break, put his forearm on the edge of the desk, and placed his head upon it. His eyes closed, his breath came slowly, in soft, sucking rhythm. Dr. Rathbone was out.

Crane jumped from his chair, hurried around the desk and picked up the telephone which was still whirring and rattling. A dozen lies came to mind and were rejected. Or should he say nothing, not try to cover up for the chief; just hang up? Automatically he put the telephone to his ear. The voice continued.

". . . hell, no, it ain't *that* kid's night off. Not by a damsite, Wally. He's . . . he's right on the job." Hanlon's laughter was hoarse, rasping and flavored with whiskey. Don felt his scalp crawl. Then suddenly it all stopped meaning anything to

him; he was cool and detached and watching it all run past him, as if he were watching an operation.

"Oho, no," the voice grated on, "that kid's earning his pay, all right. All right. Say, Wally—what kind of doctors you got in that joint of yours, Wally? I put Cassie at the same table with that boy of yours, time we had the hospital dinner, remember?" Don closed his eyes and kept the telephone in place, holding it with both hands. "Why that was only six months back, Wally. An' he couldn't take it. Why, when I was his age. . . . eh, eh, Wally?" He wheezed, drawing breath. "S'all right, Wally, I'll go home. Soon's the kid and Cassie get through. They're still in the back seat. Say, Wally, wasn't that a honey of a speech, tonight? She's a good girl, Wally. Got to keep her in the organization. Somehow."

Don laid the telephone down in its cradle. He was wide awake, with the trembling, crystal clarity of exhaustion. He walked quickly across the carpet, past the darkened portrait in its heavy frame, past the blind marble eyes of Robert Koch from the niche over the books; he opened the door, set the latch so that it did not lock behind him, and let the door close softly on the director. He should give him an injection of thiamin, call a cab, do many things.

But he did nothing. He rang for the elevator. He got in and got off at his floor. He went to his room and found the light still burning, the textbook still sprawled open on the floor beside the bed. As he passed the mirror he saw that he was still wearing his overcoat and now he took it off and flung it at the chair. It missed and crumpled to the floor but he didn't go after it. He pulled off his shoes without untying them, wriggled out of his jacket, lifted his feet from the floor and snapped off the light.

The last thing he saw before the dark settled around him was his own hand, familiar, brown, well-shaped, turning off the lamp. And then it came to him how that hand would look, bloated and cracked, the hand of a body found floating in the marshes at the edge of the town. It would all have been engineered. But no—not that way. That was for chiselers and welshing bookies and informers seen coming out of the Federal Building. Not for Dr. Donald Crane. Oh, no. He would not have dropped from sight like one of the hustlers or one of the club-house boys who got tangled up in a rape case or something else too hot to square with higher courts. No, Dr. Donald Crane would have fallen on the ice and split his skull against a curb . . . or he would have stepped off a curb in front of a taxi as the light changed. Hanlon never did anything sloppy. No, the grave among the marsh grasses was not for him. Hanlon would have taken care of him some other way,

but it would have been the same death the others got. And it had not fallen. . . .

The breathless, stolen moments in her car; the furtive visits to her apartment; their precautions, their vigilance, their timing . . . all comedy, all a peep-show like a green youth in a Paris bawdy house, paying for the privilege of being spied upon by impotent old men. Hanlon, the Power, had pulled the threads and Cassie and Don had jerked, danced, embraced, parted, walking with the absurd, high-kneed gait of marionettes, thread-moved. Hanlon had given him to her as you would give any hysterical patient a sedative. Hanlon had planted her in him as you would plant a colony of bacteria in a dish of agar jelly. . . .

And with the breaking of his pride, Don Crane smiled and drew the blankets up farther over his face. Dr. Donald Crane, the eminent chest specialist . . . well, he was dead now, that one. General practice, here we come.

He slipped into sleep for an instant, then jumped back, settled down again and felt sleep coming. Idly he thought of peace and a dining room table and boxes of feathers and hooks, gut and thread. Tying trout flies on a winter's evening . . . "I'll bet Anne catches trout with worms," he whispered to the blankets. "Well, she'll learn."

When the light snapped on Jasper Stone reached for the tumbler on his bed table, secured his dentures, and slipped them into place. Then he sat up, shielding his eyes against the light with his hand and said, "Ah, Gallagher, what of the night? No births, no deaths, no cablegrams from Singapore?"

The voice which answered him was not Gallagher's. It was the voice of the night relief nurse, Clara Hopkins.

"Miss Gallagher left early, Mr. Stone. So you'll just have to get along with me. Just tough luck."

Hopkins was a square, brown, friendly creature, firm but restful. Stone smiled at her with the muscles of his face. Then his mind began to examine the question: Why had Gallagher gone? Some crisis in the family? But that would be unlike our Anne; she would hurry to her own kin after she went off duty. Something in the picture didn't ring quite true. Reaching for his robe on the chair beside him, he said darkly, "I've been expecting something like this, Miss Hopkins."

Hoppie was tapping the pillow beside Kincaid's ear. She frowned a little. "Why, Mr. Stone—don't tell me *you* could guess it, if the staff . . ."

Stone swung his feet down to the floor and inserted them in

slippers. He said casually, "Well, after all, Miss Hopkins, I have nothing to do but watch the world and put two and two together."

Hoppie took the bait. "But she hasn't looked flushed. Her temperature isn't that high. . . ."

The old man's face drew into its mask of crafty wisdom. "I have been . . . ah . . . worried about her, Miss Hopkins. Yes indeed. She seemed a bit . . . ah . . . fatigued. Nothing obvious, of course. And in the morning . . . her hand, taking the pulse. Warm, you know. I trust that the fluoroscope shows nothing alarming."

Hopkins left Joe Kincaid sitting up, rubbing his fists into his eyes. She said confidentially, coming closer to Stone, "Isn't anything official, Mr. Stone, so don't say anything about it around to the other fellows. Dr. Crane said there might be a little infiltration. . . ."

"She's entered as a patient?"

"Just for observation. You'll most likely have her back in a week. Probably nothing to it. We just have to be extra careful, and I know Miss Gallagher wasn't very careful always to wear a mask around advanced cases. Why, Mr. Rosenbaum was always reminding her. . . ."

Stone paused for a second, the silk cord of his robe in his hands. Then he pulled it tight with a decisive jerk. Hoppie's use of the past tense struck through the chilly silence of the floor like the crash of a shot in an attic.

His old face tightened, its smile faint and habitual. "He was . . . he was quite a chap, was our Rosenbaum."

But Hopkins was not to be trapped again. She closed her mouth firmly and walked out and down the corridor, saying nothing.

Stone, pacing deliberately, turned down the hall toward the sunroom. By Room 904 he paused. The door was open. By the faint half-light of dawn in the courtyard beyond the windows he saw that the bed was empty, freshly made. Its pale green spread lay without a wrinkle, corners tucked under, bottom fold at an angle of forty-five degrees. The blankets were folded in a pile at the foot. At the end of the bed the metal holder for waste tissues was empty of its brown paper bag. The floor shone from recent mopping. The room was vacant and sterile, without soul.

Jasper Stone looked back over his shoulder, saw that no one else was in the corridor, and then entered the room where emptiness lay like a weight on the air. There was silence now where a drum had rolled; there was a hollow of sky where a mountain peak had stood. He slid open the drawer of the bed table. The contents were undisturbed. In a quick surge of

hope Stone wondered if Benny might not have been switched to another floor for treatment, or X-rays, or special examination. But the past tense used by Clara Hopkins in speaking of him fell on hope and flattened it. So. They had not got around to packing up Benny's things, that was all. And the notebook, the precious notebook. He had promised Ben. Stone drew it out and slid it under his robe, tightening the cord against its square, hard, flat, cold finality.

Then he went to the door and took a casual look outside. Abdullah stood there, his arms folded. Down the corridor a red shaft of sun was striking through the east windows of the sunroom.

The fat man said in his purring whisper, "This morning I see Gaines and a fellow from downstairs. They wheel out somebody covered up with sheet." Abdullah sighed, shifting his arms. "That kid last a long time, I think. Was April, I think, when they take him out of our room. They think he was going to die then, put him in separate room. But he fool them. He was a tough kid. He last a long time."

"He did, indeed." Stone pressed his lips together. In the pink light from the end of the hall the pearly waves of his hair picked up the dawn like snow on mountain tops. "Well . . . we expected it. But it's . . . it's hard to realize. . . ."

Abdullah nodded, eyes mournful. "Is expected for everybody. Some now, some a long time from now. Is no difference. Everybody."

"True. True."

"The way I think, Judge—every one more day is like Christmas present. . . ."

A click of slipper heels made them turn. Frank Vitiello joined them, one hand smoothing his shiny hair. "Hey, guys, what's the idea, blocking traffic? What's going on here—a guy get hit by a truck or something? Or maybe it's a bunch of guys hoisting a safe. . . ." At the open door he stopped, looking in, and his face hardened. Hot-eyed, stony mouthed, he wrenched his chin up automatically. "Jees!"

Stone and Abdullah stood frozen.

Frank walked slowly into the room, his shoulders high, his hands in the pockets of his robe. He stood for a moment, looking down at the immaculate bed, and then said thickly, without lifting his eyes, "Jees! This fixes it. This settles it. This makes it a hundred percent. Oh, Jesus, now it's perfect!"

He twisted furiously toward the window and stared out across the court, hunching his shoulders. Then he tore his hand from his pocket and slammed it flat against the window pane, growling, "Scram, ya punk." From the snowy sill outside came a startled whirr of wings.

The pigeon had returned, hoping for breakfast crumbs.

Pressing his forehead against the glass, Frank watched it fly up and out of the courtyard, up into the cold air of daybreak. He said sullenly after it, "There's nobody home. Ya get it? Nobody home." And with this he spun around and plunged out, down the hall toward his own room.

Still Abdullah and Stone tarried by the open door. There was the morning ritual to be gone through; beds to make, teeth to brush; wait for breakfast, wait for mail, wait for rounds. But now they simply waited.

A frantic slap of slippers and the old man was upon them, bathrobe flapping open, his coarse gray hair rumpled with sleep, his eyes indignant, fearful and insistent.

"Rosenbaum! Rosenbaum! It ain't true. . . . *Ai!*"

The silence hit him, the waiting men and the empty bed. His Adam's apple jumped once in the corded throat and he seized Jasper Stone by the lapel, shaking it. "Where's Rosenbaum? What's happened, the boy?"

The Judge shook his head, looking to Abdullah who folded his arms patiently.

Goldfarb dropped the lapel, caught his own robe to him and held it, his shoulders sagging with one more crushing invisible burden. "The boy . . . I didn't find out the father's place, where it was, yet . . . the home town. It could be I'm a relative." The stillness was broken by the sound of a wash pan being filled from a tap down the hall. Goldfarb grimaced with the look of a man having a wound probed. "You sure?"

Stone nodded.

The old man shook his head, saying under his breath, "*Ai. Ai. Ai.*" Then, aloud, "But I had a question I wanted to find out. . . ."

Their faces said, "Too late. Too late."

"*Ai.*" He set off down the hall, laboring, wing-footed, seeming to carry a pack-load of griefs and injuries on his back.

Watching him go Jasper Stone said dryly, "Well, Brother Goldfarb will stay in bed now, Abba Dabba."

"I think he stay, now."

The building awoke, its history minutely recorded in red ink on the night report pages of ledgers. Far and faint from the courtyard below came a tinkling crash: cases of empty milk bottles being loaded on a truck; there was the muffled clang of the laundry chute's metal door on the floor above. Count the tablets and the vials in the narcotics box; count the hypos; count thermometers; medications to be given before breakfast as indicated in doctor's order book; enter on night report, enter on chart; temperature, pulse, respiration. Hum of water

pipes filling wash basins; clang of bed table drawers. And through the jagged skyline of great Babylon across the bay peered the winter's sun once more; gulls pivoted and river slipped to ocean, winking in gelid ripples under the morning light.

In the sunroom, after breakfast, Abba Dabba waited at the card table for Stone and when the Judge appeared, bringing the box of chips and the cards, they sat without words, waiting for the others. An orderly brought in the morning newspapers and dropped Stone's copy on the table before him but the paper remained unopened. Stone pushed it aside and shuffled the cards. At last he laid out a row of seven face down, then six on top of them, and one face up.

"Where is all the other fellow?" Abdullah asked finally.

Stone shook his head, the black cord of his pince nez swaying. "I dare say they are about their own business, such as it is, Abba Dabba. We may lack a quorum with which to do business today." He gazed at the solitaire layout for a moment more and then quietly gathered up the cards and began to run them over, turning them all face down. "I fear our friends are in no mood for the joys of poker this morning, Abba Dabba. Yea, faileth now even dream the dreamer, and the lute the lutanist. . . . However, I shall scout around."

In 908 Goldfarb lay in bed, his face turned to the wall. In the other bed Frank Vitiello was sitting propped up. The shelf of the bed table was raised before him and on it rested a black plastic bowl with a familiar pattern of alternate red and black spokes inside it; a miniature roulette wheel.

Jasper Stone said, "Well, well, well. Do you intend to bank this layout, my friend?"

Vitiello did not look up. "Naa." He spun the wheel and threw in an ivory ball the size of a pea. When it came to rest on number thirteen he jotted the figure down in a notebook. "I sent away for this baby. It just come in the mail. I got a couple ideas. Ya gotta get along three-handed today, Judge. I got to figure something out."

"Interesting, Frank. May I inquire the object of your research?"

"Yeah, sure. I figure you can work it red and black, odd or even, any even-money bet. Only first I got to find out how she runs. I got to keep a record. A thousand spins. Maybe ten thousand. I got lots of time."

Stone sighed. "How many have gone before you down that same primrose path, Frank! I've seen them at Monte Carlo and at Nice. I've seen them in Reno. And always the zero breaks the system. That and the double zero."

Frank Vitiello looked up at last. "I don't getcha."

"The house numbers, my boy. Your wheel has no house numbers—the places where the ivory ball drops with the crash of doom as the croupier sweeps the board with his little rake. Figure it out—a big wheel has thirty-six numbered pockets and two house numbers. This gives the operator nearly five percent steady income. Why I saw a wheel once in San Francisco—this was in the old days—that had four house numbers: zero, double zero, eagle and double eagle. And the wheel was gaffed in the bargain. Now, your wheel has no house numbers. It is for a friendly hour, my boy."

Vitiello's face was drawn and desperate. "Look here, Judge—I can still get a idea what kind of runs one of these things takes on the red and black, can't I?"

"You will find runs of ten, eleven, sometimes twelve, on one color," Stone said pleasantly. "Now if your plan is to increase your bets. . . ."

Frank jerked his chin and threw Stone an angry glance. Without speaking he went back to his tiny wheel of fortune. He spun the wheel, threw in the ball. It bounded and skipped, settled at last into number thirty-two. Frank seized his pencil and scrawled the number in his notebook and spun again.

Stone turned away. Across the room old Goldfarb lay with his eyes closed. He had rolled over on his back. Under one arm lay folded a Yiddish newspaper, its headlines sweeping and dotted with the ancient holy script. As Stone moved toward the door he saw something glisten on the old man's temple.

In their own room, 906, Joe Kincaid had drawn a metal chair over to the window. He sat with his Bible in his lap, one gnarled hand hooked over its cover. His elbow rested on the inch-wide window sill, his hand twisted in his black thatch of hair. He was gazing through the window at the chill morning light over the harbor.

"Come, come, Elder. Perhaps a little poker—a few friendly hands—will raise our spirits."

Kincaid turned his hot, black eyes to Stone. "I ain't much in the mood, Judge. I . . . I got something to study out by myself."

The old man nodded. "This sort of thing makes me feel rather like an iron duck in a shooting gallery myself, Elder. That is, the lad's death. . . ."

Kincaid's mouth twisted and he gripped a handful of hair. "Ain't only him. I got news from down home. My sister, Dorcas, she sent me a letter."

"Bad news, Elder?"

"Same kind of news as ever. Ain't nothing but bad news

ever come out of that God-forsaken, sorry place. Why I wished I was back there so hard it beats me. Ain't nothing down there but misery and abomination." He reached into the pocket of his robe and took out a letter, handing it up to Stone. "Here, you can see what it say. Go on, Judge, you read it. Give you some idea."

The letter was in pencil on lined paper, written in a round, careful, childish hand.

Dear Joe,

Just a few lines to let you know we are keeping well as can be considering. Hope you are the same. Everything is just about like always, everybody talking union but scared to do anything. We read in the papers about don't you worry I can take care of myself. Just you take strikes and all about John L. Lewis and how he is out to wreck the country but Ma says if she was to read about the Second Coming in a newspaper she wouldnt believe it until she heard the Trumpet blowing. I thought I had me a beau but I guess not. He was a mighty fine boy not like *you know who* but mighty nice. Sometimes I think Ill die an old maid before I'd marry any boy after knowing *him*. I could just die thinking about him and how he was never really a beau at all I just loved him most to death and him too busy running around to pay any mind to me at all. But I guess the Good Lord knows what hes doing because if I ever had been *courted* by him I could never marry anybody else *ever*. I never could. And I never even touched him once until he was lying there the way you fetched him in. This sure is some winter Joe. Cousin Jen and her man were here last week for a visit and Cousin Ed he fixed the chimney pretty good. Least I dont think its going to fall down just yet but it might another winter and we wish you were here to be with us for Xmas but I guess it is not to be. There is not much news just old folks dying and new babies but I guess you don't care about who has a baby. I would want to know but men are different. Young Dan Greer, old man Greers son finally come to court but he was let go. Of course. Every fellow on the jury scared to death to do anything but let him go. This was for that rumpus the railroad kicked up last summer about Dan sitting out by Mills Creek where the railroad tracks go over and shooting at fellows riding the rods with his 22 rifle. He come near hitting a breakman a couple of times and the railroad had him arrested. They didnt care about fellows riding under the cars only if Dan hit one and he fell out it might make the car jump off the track everybody said. Dan

did hit one poor hobo fellow and they found him dead at the division point but couldn't proove it on Dan. But I thought you might like to know the news. Dan was celebrating around here last week and the night before last I saw him coming out of Harlows place and he saw me but he was likered up pretty high and I outrun him easy. So it easy Joe and dont do anything crazy like trying to come home. We all think of you often and you are in my prayers every night. I pray for you to get better and have sense to stay way. Ella Mae I guess you remember her has been pestering me again but I always tell her Im saving that for my true love or else hard times and they are not hard enough yet. Thats what I tell her and I mean it to. If it hadnt been for *you know who* I might have done it lots of times but thinking about him makes it seem like a mighty sinful thing to do somehow. A lot of girls catch themselves husbands doing it but then again lots of them dont. So dont you worry about me any Joe. Ma sends her love and says to read Job 24 and then Psalm 6. She says she cant hardly read any other chapters for reading those and for you to read them and get them by heart for her sake. Well I have no more paper so will close.

Your loving little sister,
Dorcas

Only not so little any more.

Stone folded the letter and handed it back to Kincaid. "You have a level-headed little sister. Elder."

Kincaid felt the letter with his fingers as if it were fine fabric; then he crushed it savagely and turned back toward the window, holding the Bible on his lap with his fist.

In the locker room Jasper Stone put the chips and cards back on the shelf. Books were stacked in the narrow locker; the pile reached up, crowding a dark overcoat and a suit which hung there, pressed, spotless, ready for a wearer. Stone ran his hand over the cloth of the suit's sleeve as if saying good-bye to it. At least in Halligan Hall there were no moths to worry about. He surveyed the books, tilting his head to one side. Down near the bottom of the pile he found Carlyle's French Revolution and started to tease it out, holding the other books steady, but then he thought better of it and pushed it back. "Ah, old heaven-shaker," he said aloud, "thunder away quietly inside the covers." The craggy Scot was silent now, locked in print until a hand opened him and light brought

the chain of black marks to the mind. Let his thunder be quiet on this day; quiet as the skeletons with severed necks in the secret soil of France.

Stone reached for another book and his hand paused on the book's spine. Ouspensky? Not today, not today, professor. No Hermetic symbols, no dythrambs on the ancient, hidden wisdom today; no fourth dimensional analogies, no pyramids, no yoga, no Sphinx riddles today.

Thomas à Kempis? Slumber on, brother of the stout, gentle heart.

Aquinas? Ah, now you know the angels face to face, perhaps. But not today.

No innkeepers, no salty wisdom, Sancho Panza.

Lie still, Adam Smith, and let your hated opera singers take their rest as well.

At last he pulled a book from the stack and stood turning its pages under the dim locker bulb. "Job, Job, Job—where are you, old Bedouin? Hurler of the eternal question: why the staphylococcus falls upon the just and the unjust alike. Here you are: And now, chapter twenty-four?"

Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days? Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof . . . they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way; the poor of the earth hide themselves together . . . they cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold . . . they pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor . . . the murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadows of death: if one know them they are in the terrors of the shadow of death . . . Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree. . . .

Stone closed the book gently and put it back in the upright metal coffin on top of its fellows. "The worm shall feed sweetly on us all, I fear. On the righteous and the wicked alike." Then as he closed the locker door his lips compressed with determination. "It hides somewhere," he said to the green metal door. "A tantalizing equation. I shall solve for X as long as the breath lasts. And perhaps I shall not find it until

I reach the ice-box down below, the tag on my wrist reading 'Jasper Stone.' But here, at least, a man has time to think. Fear no more the heat o' the law nor the furious sucker's rages . . . Thou thy final mark hast clipped, Home art gone and ta'en thy wages: Hustling lads and girls all must, as hymn-book weepers come to dust. X, X, X the unknown—so close you seem at times like this that I might meet you around any corner of the hall." And then the ghostly image split in two and one said, "I am Anne Gallagher. We shall not meet again."

And the other, with shadowy face, said, "I am X. And I am with you always."

Through the morning the quiet, oiled, rubber-tired, sterile microcosm wheeled on its way. Ten stories down the furnaces opened their Moloch mouths and were fed. Steam hissed in sterlizer tanks; it poured through giant kettledrums, setting to boil an acre of little peas, dumped can by two-gallon can into the cookers; steam and acrid chemical smell haunted the laundry, where feces, urine, blood and spilled tomato soup dissolved from sheets made white as snow again. And the timekeeper's sister-in-law phoned, gasping over the wire that his brother had broken the Pledge again and, crazy drunk, had knocked down Father Walsh who had come to see why the children were not at school, and couldn't he do something, in the name of God. . . .

Rest period came at last after a lunch eaten in silence and when Jasper Stone tried to settle down in bed the pillows seemed unusually hard. Twice he slipped out to the bathroom, looked at himself in the mirrors over the wash basins, searched his seamed, familiar face as if there might be a hidden word there formed by the fine wrinkles, found nothing, straightened up, drew the cord of his robe tighter and went back to bed. He lay listening in the hush of the building around him, hearing the soft rush of his own heart beating. He tried the mental gymnastic of focusing consciousness to a blazing point but could not hold it. Images of Ben came pressing in until the stage of the mind was filled with Ben. And towards him came the ghost of Anne Gallagher; and Stone, in a flash of intuition, saw them in each other's arms, Ben a lover, Anne cradling him in her arms like a child. If they had really kissed, Ben's blood pressure might easily have shot up to the point where naked arteries in his lungs would burst. . . .

Stone struggled into his robe for a third time and, making sure no one saw him go, entered the locker room and opened the green metal door without a sound. On top of the piled books was a hard-covered notebook labeled "Composition." For the second time that day he hid it under his robe and stole back

to bed, his keen old ears tuned for the approach of rubber-soled feet. In bed he opened the book, holding it ready to slip under the covers, since reading at rest period was against the rules.

There were poems he had seen before, some of them copied over in ink for greater legibility. Twenty-five poems: all that was left of him. And then the jagged writing stopped. But the last poem was a new one which Jasper Stone had never read before. It was written in pale pencil lines and with few corrections or changes. Had Ben written it last night, before the deluge of his own blood drowned him? Stone cautiously set his pince nez on his nose.

THIS I KNOW

There were the pavements, warmed by April light
and walls where old men droned and drowsed the hours,
sitting on boxes; skull-capped, bearded, fragile,
their dreams a web of candle light and Succoth bowers.

There were the curses, every one a kiss,
dropped by a mother stirring a broth of air.
A woman, fleeing from a city's burning
curses the same: "A lion should eat you, would I care?"

There were my father's hands with mangled nails,
Scarred from old cuts and bruises; hideous hands
that held me fiercely. His was the pride of men
whose love is all their legacy. His shadow stands

between me and the easy, groveling style
of the knee-benders, smiling, honey-eyed.
I come from stony ground. Where olives grew
and cedars flourished, the axe rang and the rivers died.

Her temple is laid waste; Israel is fallen.
Fallen are her cedars, dust holes are her springs.
I have seen Babylon sell her men for silver,
her gold menorah melted into harlots' rings.

What's Israel to me or I to Israel
that I should weep for her and her lost ark?
I have drunk others' thirst, eaten their hunger,
kissed with their pleading tongues by doorways in the dark.

I am a child of man, nourished with anger.
But fades now the smoke of war with evening mist.

Night is for bride and bridegroom. We are the purpose,
quickening the world as blood stirs in your blue-veined wrist.

To sleep beside you! To wake softly, searching
the sky of time, finding the faithful red
flame-pillar ever marching; lands where the lash moulders,
chains rust, rope rots, youth marries, all are fed.

If I must worship, let it be the life
beating beneath your breast

It was unfinished.

Then, over Jasper Stone's shoulder, in the quiet of East Nine at rest period, loomed the cloudy face of X, its sweet breath healing the stench of decay, of smoke from factory stacks, of burned cordite on the century's torn battlefields. It was the breath of morning over new earth, a remembered fragrance come again; come again when it had seemed lost among a wilderness of odors: ink of banknotes, imported perfume, stale whiskey and in late years the dust of books.

"Benny didn't come in first," Stone whispered to himself, "but he certainly ran in the money. And he was carrying a great deal of weight."

When a clink of eggnog glasses signaled the end of rest period, Jasper Stone put away the notebook, remade his bed and sat in the metal chair beside it, reading in an afternoon paper the account of a double suicide—young lovers; they died by gas and later an explosion wrecked the tenement building and killed four children and an old man quietly dying of cancer in his bed.

Adele Corey swept through East Nine, her neatly penciled brows frowning watchfully as she searched for wrinkles in bed spreads or any other crime which might bring down on her the Sinai thunderbolt of authority.

In his chair by the next bed Abdullah sat with rounded shoulders, fat brown hands palm up in his lap in an attitude of resignation, waiting.

A creak of wheels from the chart carriage outside, click of charts being withdrawn, and then the great man was there with Miss Corey a respectful two paces to the rear and left. Rathbone smiled his cool, Wilsonian smile. "Good afternoon, everybody." He was wearing glasses with dark reddish-amber lenses. The sort of glasses, Stone recalled, which enable one to read faint green markings, on red-backed playing cards. But these lenses would also conceal the redness of the wearer's eyes. Rathbone kept his hands in the pockets of his immacu-

late laboratory coat. His face was greenish white, his voice flat, the hearty ring sounding decidedly sour.

He had Abdullah's robe and pajama coat off now and was listening at the sagging brown chest with a stethoscope. But the great man's mind did not seem to be entirely on his work as Abdullah obediently counted one, two, three, four, coughed when directed, breathed in and out, keeping his face always turned away from Rathbone. Finally the director said mechanically, "Fine, fine. Now you may get dressed." As he folded up the stethoscope Stone noticed that the big, white hands were trembling.

Rathbone said to Abdullah, "Afraid you'll be with us a little longer. A number of points to be checked, just to be on the safe side. I'm sure you will not object to your stay with us being prolonged."

Abdullah sighed, tying his robe cord. "Is good to be careful. Keep quiet. Rest." *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.* . . . "I keep quiet, all the time."

"Umm. Yes, I'm sure you do," said Rathbone coolly. "No possible, probable shadow of doubt."

He nodded to the others and sailed out, shoulders held back arrogantly but today, it seemed, by a tremendous effort of will. Dr. Rathbone was a badly hung-over man.

Stone crept to the door and listened as Rathbone and Corey whispered together out in the corridor. He caught the tag end of a sentence uttered by the doctor, ". . . positive on the seventy-two hour. He could have stolen enough sputum to give us a positive. You're sure he hasn't been rubbing his thermometer against the sheet to bring it up?"

Corey said something Stone couldn't catch. Then Rathbone again, frigidly, "Well, watch him. He might not be malingering after all. He's so typical of an old fibrotic process that I use his plates as the basis of a lecture. Fibro-calcific lesions in both apexes. . . ."

They passed out of earshot and Stone turned back to his room mate. "Congratulations, Abba Dabba. I was afraid, when I saw you eating nothing, to bring your weight down, that we were really going to lose you this time." He lowered his voice. "I presume you borrowed a little sputum from our Benjamin . . . ?"

Abdullah closed his heavy-lidded eyes; the gesture was more affirmative than if he had nodded.

"The temperature angle intrigues me, Abba Dabba. I have noticed that Gallagher stands by your bed while you have the thermometer in your . . . in your possession, let us say. No chance to raise it by friction. Tell me, old friend . . ."

Abdullah padded softly to the door, looked out in both di-

rections, then went back to his bed table and opened the drawer. It contained a pad of paper, a fountain pen and a book in Arabic; nothing more. The book, Stone surmised, was one which the Archangel Gabriel had dictated to Mohammed, or so that worthy claimed.

Abdullah stood with his bulk between the table drawer and the door. He removed the cap of the pen, laid it down and unscrewed the tip holding the nib. There was no rubber ink sack inside. Instead, Stone saw an inch of clinical thermometer before Abdullah screwed the point back on and closed the drawer.

Stone smiled beatifically. "Aha, the switch! An ancient principle, my friend. Still good. Basis of the gold brick, the green goods, all the hoary old dodges. And here it serves to keep you by our side. But tell me—do you really believe Anne Gallagher never suspected that the thermometer you handed back to her was not the same one she had given you . . . ?"

Abdullah shrugged. "Could be she know. She say nothing. She was good girl, Miss Gallagher. She never sing on anybody."

Stone mused on in silent satisfaction, smiling to himself. Then he said, "One thing more, Abba Dabba—what would you do if they discovered what your dry fountain pen holds? If they 'rumbled your gaff,' so to speak?"

The fat man sat down, pulling a loose thread from the cuff of his robe. "I don't worry. I am old timer in hospital."

Stone pressed on, "But they count thermometers every night. How would you steal another one . . . ?"

Abba Dabba shook his head. "I have other one. Is hidden in the book." He tilted his head toward the bed table drawer. "In my country we say, 'All good, all truth, all safety—is in Al Koran.' Is true for me, too." And his sad, fat man's face glowed with the faintest suggestion of a smile.

Across the room Joe Kincaid muttered, staring out at the city, "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

Stone got up and beckoned. "Come, my old camel driver friend from the streets of Babylon-over-the-way. Let us celebrate the goodness of Allah by a few hands of stud."

Abdullah let his ox eyes dwell for an instant on Kincaid where he stood, hands braced against the window frames. "I think maybe I play a little two-handed stud, Judge. I feel like play some cards now."

Nellie Kazimierzska was mopping the sunroom when they came in. She mopped with an intent, abstracted air and when she saw Stone she smiled mechanically but said nothing.

"How are you today, Miss Kazimierzska?"

"The name is still Nellie, Judge." But she rose to the bait no more than this.

Stone tried again. "Much goes on in our noble institution which does not appear on the surface, eh, Nellie? Eh?"

She straightened up, resting her hands on the mop handle. "Gee, Judge, you ain't kidding. Honestly, there's more things happen around here. It's the limit."

"So I understand," Jasper Stone said, shaking the cards from their case and giving them an accurate riffle. "I dare say there will be some changes. Now that Miss Gallagher. . . ." He left it hanging in air and this time Nellie responded hearteningly.

"Gee, *yeah*, Judge. And that ain't the half of it. . . ."

Stone raised his eyes, crafty, all-knowing, calm, and smiled at the girl, first paying her the accustomed tribute of a glance at the twin sources of her self confidence. "Last night was fraught with drama," he went on in a confidential tone, fishing. "Today we feel its effects. Much has changed. . . ." He shuffled the cards again as Abdullah patiently stacked chips.

Nellie took a deep breath, lifting her breasts reassuringly, and said in a whisper, 'Miss Kennedy *saw* them. I mean, together."

Stone's mind did a quick survey of the ground floor plan, saw the information window where the switchboard stood, the hall leading past it, the doors of the chapel at the end . . . that would be it. Gallagher. Last night. And who else but the engaging resident, Dr. Donald Crane? Who else indeed? "They would make a handsome couple," he said almost without moving his lips.

Nellie stood dreaming, her cheek against one hand which was braced on the mop handle. "Gee, yeah. Miss Kennedy said they come out of the chapel and he had his arm around her. Gee, she's a swell girl. Miss Kennedy said she'll be all right in a year at the most."

"I hope so," said the Judge, offering the cards to Abdullah for cutting. "And Dr. Crane . . . what about him?"

Nellie's smile told him that he had hit it. "He's swell, too. Golly, ain't it funny? What I heard, she wouldn't even look at Dr. Crane. And then last night, after Benny . . . well, she sort of all caved in, I guess. It's like a fella and a girl have been going out a long time, only she keeps teasing. And then the fella blows his top and boffs her a couple and everything is swell and they get married. It happens lots of times. Well," she plunged the mop into gray water, stepped on the foot treadle which clamped ringer jaws on it, and drew it out, smooth, flattened, eager for its job of absorption again. "Well,

you gentlemen want to get on with your game and with me it's business before pleasure."

She finished the last corner and picked up the bucket. " 'Bye, now. Don't take any wooden nickels."

Stone followed her with his eyes as she walked down the hall toward the sink closet. "Lovely animal," he said quietly to Abdullah who had raised the corner of his hole card and let it fall again and was now regarding the table top patiently. "Fearfully and wonderfully made—to produce others of her kind. I trust her fertility does not waste its fragrance on the desert air of beer joint and tourist cabin too long."

Frank was on his way back from the desk in the middle of the floor where he had gone hoping to sneak a look at his chart. Corey had chased him. Now he stopped by the open door of the sink closet and said to Nellie, "Hi ya, babe?"

"I'm in the pink of condition, Mister Vitiello. I hope it is mutual."

"Yeah, babe. I'm doing okay." There was a pause; neither knew how to fill it. Frank ran his hand up and down the edge of the door. Finally he said, "Look, babe—about that date. Maybe . . . maybe it ain't such a hot idea. I mean . . . I mean maybe we better wait a while. I don't want to take no chances. . . ."

Nellie's eyes had grown brighter. She set the bucket on the edge of the sink and tipped it angrily, letting gray water splash out and gurgle down the drain. "I'm sure it is highly immaterial to me one way or the other."

Vitiello wrenched at the non-existent tight collar. "Don't get me wrong, pigeon. You send me. But look, babe—I ain't no iron man. . . ." His voice fell and the mask of poolroom convention fell away. The tone of his next words made the girl's eyes suddenly go moist until she blinked. He said, "I get scared, pigeon. I mean, the kid putting his checks back in the rack last night. You know—Rosenbaum. Maybe this date . . . maybe we better wait a while, that's all. Look. . . ." He stepped closer to her and reached past her to turn off the faucet which she had opened to wash the last of the mop water from the sink. "Turn off that thing so we can hear if anybody comes," he said commandingly. "Look, pigeon—I made up my mind. They tried pneumo on me once and I could feel them adhesions ripping loose and . . ." he dropped his eyes and Nellie waited, her stolid face expressionless, her red hands tight on the bucket's rim. "I got the golden rod up my back, kid. I never sounded off like this before . . . why should I go blowing the whistle on myself? You know what I mean. Only . . . I

didn't want ya to think I don't go for you. I didn't want ya to think that, babe."

Nellie nodded. "I wouldn't have thought that, Frankie. Gee, Frank, I know you got to be careful. It ain't like a fellow I'd meet outside some place. . . ."

Vitiello swallowed, his dark eyes suddenly fierce. "But I changed my mind. I'm going to tell the Big Shot I want to try pneumo again." She started to say something but he cut her off. "I'll go screwy sitting around this joint. And with pneumo it's better than even money. Jees, kid, it's a good seven-to-three chance. That's a nice price. And what have I got to lose even if it don't work? I got nothing to lose. But if it works then we're set, baby. Only it'll take a little time. So I thought on my day off. . . ."

She nodded. The color mounted to her face. "Yeah. I guess. We hadn't better, Frankie." Then an idea came to her and she said hurriedly, "Unless you'd like to come up to the house and take pot luck. It's Polish cooking."

He smiled with one side of his mouth. "Say . . . that ain't a bad idea. That ain't a bad idea, any of it. Say, babe, ya got it."

"It's a date, Frankie—and after, we got some good records. But no dancing. That's a rule we'll make."

"That's it, kid. We'll take it easy. We'll sit on the sofa and just listen."

"It's my duty to warn you that we'll be chaperoned," she said, smiling at him sidelong from the corners of her eyes. "I got three kid sisters. Boy, can they chaperone!"

His hand had reached for her but now it rested on her shoulder. He bent and kissed the nape of her neck and then ducked away. As he paced lightly back to Room 908 his pulse was quick but it beat to a different rhythm. Them Polacks eat fine. And with Nellie . . . it would be swell. Even if her old lady is one of the kind that starts winking and kidding and all that routine. They say with Polacks the guy has to get up the full amount for the ring.

Nellie stowed away bucket and mop, rinsed and dried her hands and hurried in to the serving pantry. I'll tell Mama I want to cook it all by myself and then we can sort of spring it on him after dinner if everything turns out good. She began to think of recipes and as she filled the last saltcellar she settled on *bitki*. Italian people don't use sour cream in gravy but if I didn't tell him what it was at first . . . yes, it would be *bitki*. And *kasha* steamed in a frying pan with butter. . . .

The sky had darkened again to sullen shadow; down the current toward the harbor mouth crept the ice, dirty gray, crusted and forbidding. Tugs plowed through it, their whistles sending

up white puffs long before the sound reached through cold air and glass to where men sat waiting; waiting for time to slide over their heads, for lesions to calcify, for pneumo to take effect, for thoracoplasty to be advised; waiting for mail, waiting for visitors, waiting for supper, waiting for night. Light dropped from the sky behind the slim shaft which was the hospital; the fabulous city across the water caught its last rays, windows gleamed angry red and lights lay scattered among the cliffs and turrets like diamonds sprinkled. Abdullah turned his face toward the sky of the east.

In Room 908 Moishe Goldfarb, who had lain quiet all day, looked at a cheap watch in his bed table drawer, slid from the bed, painfully drew on his robe and tied the cord. From the locker room he brought a book in the ancient, curled language, a seven-branched candlestick so small that the candles were the kind used on birthday cakes. He had a fringed shawl of white silk and a black skull cap. With deliberation he set his *menorah* on the bed table and lit the candles, turning his back on Frank Vitiello who had stopped tabulating his roulette wheel and was filing his finger nails.

Goldfarb put on the *yarmelka* and drew the *talith* around his neck.

To die alone, in a strange *goyisher* place, the boy. But could their women behind desks with all the cards to fill out, and the doctors with their listening-tubes, could they keep out God? Does not God go where a Jew goes? And the boy with no father, with no uncles. Ten from the congregation should be here, a *minyan*, to stand against the wall and the mirrors covered for *shiva*. But the holy words of *kaddish* should not be denied the boy, here in the *goyisher* place where he died. That *kaddish* brought down from heaven by angels who taught it to men. It is the golden chain, binding heaven and earth; it binds the living together, it forms a bridge into the mysterious world of the dead of which we know nothing. It is the prayer of the bereaved who hold, living in their hearts, the spirits of the dead, until that day of the coming of His kingdom on earth, when sorrow shall be routed by the winds of morning, when tyranny shall crack and fall thundering in shards to the ground when the eternal peace of His children shall spread over the earth like the golden shadow of His hand . . . *yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'merabo, b'ol'mo di-v'ro chir'use. . . .*

The sound of Frank Vitiello getting out of bed made the old man glance over his shoulder, his face twisted in annoyance. Then he turned back to the world which compassed him about in a charmed circle of Israel.

From outside came the sound of the locker room door

opening, closing, opening, closing. A click of slippers and Vitiello climbed back into bed. Again Goldfarb turned. Vitiello was wearing a hat—broad brimmed, narrow of band, a sharp number which called for padded shoulders and narrow cuffs on the pants. He said huskily, "Okay, pop. Let 'er go."

Supper had come and been eaten. It was a trifle brighter than lunch had been and Stone, now brushing his dentures at the wash bowl in Room 906, meditated on the speed with which death was forgotten by those who lived so close to the dying.

Eddie Gaines stuck his head in the door. "Hey Judge, where's ya pal? The guy that's always beatin' ya over the head with the Bible?"

"Joe? Did you seek him outside in the can?" Stone whisled, letting water run over his upper plate.

"Not yet. I got a little something for him. Something he wanted me to get for him." Gaines pulled back his coat and Stone saw the neck of a pint whiskey bottle peeping over the edge of the white duck trousers.

The old man snapped his teeth back into place. "Our Joseph should be outside, Eddie. He has a habit of praying out there in the bath cubicle. Poor devil, it's the nearest he can come to a wilderness in this pavilion where privacy is only a memory."

"Well, if he's praying I don't want to bust in on him. He might start hollering."

Stone reached out, lifted the pint from Gaines' trousers, and stowed it away in Kincaid's bed table drawer behind the shaving soap and a bundle of letters.

Gaines lingered and Jasper Stone, watching the pale eyes, the slack mouth and the greenish, protruding teeth, felt a new note vibrating in the orderly's system.

"East Nine seems a bit empty this evening, Eddie," he said experimentally.

Gaines said, "Yeah—the screwball kid. I didn't have no time last night to think about it. Boy, they ran me ragged, cleaning up the kid. And Hopkins—she took over from Gallagher—she had me on the jump every minute until quitting time this morning. Jees, with that dame you can't get away with nothing." Still he stayed as if expecting something and for a moment Stone wondered if the pint were paid for. Then Gaines said, "Yeah, it's empty all right. Me and the kid, we was great pals."

When Don Crane paid his final visit to the ninth floor he found the sunroom deserted except for Jasper Stone who was

playing solitaire at the card table, turning the cards over one by one, his little finger crooked like a faro dealer's. "Why, good evening, Dr. Crane."

"Hi, Judge. How goes it?"

"Excellently, doctor." He indicated the row of cards before him. "It is my own invention, called Mechanic's Canfield. The idea being to see how many times in a row I can come out by stacking the deck on the pick-up and giving it three perfect riffle shuffles and a cut. It injects an element of skill into the game."

Don folded his arms, brown and muscular in their half-sleeves, and leaned against the window sill.

"How much infiltration did you find in Anne Gallagher?" Stone went on, entering figures on a score pad at his elbow and picking up the cards with apparent carelessness.

Crane shifted his position a little. "She has an early minimal lesion above the second rib on the right side."

Stone shuffled, letting the cards fall delicately one upon another. "Then bed rest should do it?"

"Can't prophesy. There are too many other factors. . . ."

"Such as the psychogenic element?" Stone raised his crafty old face with its slightly mocking smile to the younger man.

"Sure. You can't tell. Benny ought to have been dead six months ago. What kept him going all this time?"

"Faith."

Crane said, "Hardly. Now Anne Gallagher. . . ."

"Come, come, my boy—there are all kinds of faith. All kinds. Now you take young Vitiello—he has faith in magic. He's trying to beat a roulette wheel by a system."

"Anyhow it keeps him quiet. You know, Judge, I think they're on the wrong track in this place. Look at all the dough they spent on stainless steel garbage pails. And nothing on psychotherapy. No occupational stuff, no nothing."

"We find our own, Don. We find our own. Abba Dabba has horticulture, on a small scale. And with our Gallagher I have a notion it will be prayer."

Crane nodded, his face sober. "She's a religious girl, all right. I don't know. It's like believing in voodoo. If you believe in it a witch doctor can pray you to death. Well, with Anne it's the other way around."

Stone squared up the deck and gave it a neat cut. "And do you know something, Donald? I have a feeling that you are quite ready to fall into step beside our Anne. I'm afraid you have a dangerous heresy, Dr. Crane—an open mind. Very dangerous to one of your profession. You'll never be a big shot that way, Don, my boy."

"Who wants to be a big shot, Judge? They can have it!"

The sudden vehemence made Stone pause in laying out the cards. "No, Donald, you are too honest. Leave that to Rathbone, my boy. You have the gift of seeing farther through a millstone than most. But why talk about abstractions? Let us talk about something handsome and exciting. In other words, let us talk about Gallagher. She has a fey power over us all, Donald. White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony. Awaiting only the kiss of a prince to release her from suspended animation. We all played the part of dwarfs around her. But . . ." his old, mellow, practiced voice dropped into a dramatic whisper. "You kissed her. You brought her alive."

Crane unfolded his arms and began to rub his palms together. "I don't get any credit there, Judge."

"Ah! So it *was* Benny's last act!"

"Say—who told *you?*"

"You did, just now, Donald. God bless him. He was such a failure as an atheist. For he had love." Crane seemed unwilling or unable to speak and Stone pattered on, "Faith he had, in abundance. He had faith in a non-existent future for his hypothetical grandchildren. But it upheld him. This golden city that our Benjamin saw in his dreams—other prophets have seen it. Under other names it has arisen in the hearts of many. But it is built from love. How poverty-stricken is our English tongue in words for love, Donald. Anne's Gaelic forebears, with their twenty-four synonyms for 'darling' would have the advantage over us." Stone rested his elbows on the table and let his old eyes look out the arched doorway and up the long, dimly lighted corridor. "There is the love a man has for the children of a woman he desires. And the love a woman has for a man she has had casually years before and finds still presentable. It is like a rebirth of herself; part of her, raised Lazarus-like from the tomb, eh? Oh, Don, I have thought about love a great deal down through the years. . . ."

He swept up the cards, shuffled again and ran through the deck face up, throwing out the four aces.

"There is the love which transcends a head full of bobby pins and a face shining with cold cream at eventide."

He squared up the deck, slid the aces into it, one after another, and shuffled.

"And the love an old man can feel for a girl seen running toward a rural mail box, her apron billowing; seen from the club car of a train. He prays then—that she will find the letter she is waiting for. She will read it, leaning on the box; or with bowed head, intent, as she walks step by step toward the house. . . ."

Stone lifted a packet from the deck and threw it face up. He had cut to the ace of diamonds.

"And then there is the love which comes in voices over lake water with the moon rising, giant and golden, in the summer of youth. . . ."

He cut another section from the deck and revealed the ace of spades.

"There are as many loves as there are men, Donald. As many as the days of a man's life. And our Benjamin had his share; more than most, more than most. . . ."

He cut to the ace of clubs.

"I've come to the conclusion, Don, that love, in its manifold moods and tenses, is not a thing, not an emotion, not an electric current. . . ."

At the fourth cut he turned up the ace of hearts and gathered the cards together once more, cutting the deck again and again with one hand.

"No. I have decided—about five minutes before you showed up, as a matter of fact—that love is a *direction* in which we travel. I may have mentioned to you before some of the analogies used to demonstrate how blind we are in the face of a fourth dimension. Suppose that we human creatures are merely cross sections, seen in that dimension we call time; cross sections of creatures whose lives are interwoven, tangled together in God-only-knows what wonderful pattern! So that when man and woman mate and produce offspring, they have literally become 'one flesh,' even as scripture would have it—the child being a continuum of both bodies, branching into life and interweaving with the pattern! And to be even three dimensional, one must be traveling in the Love Direction. I'm sure I make myself clear. But consider this—we speak of chess 'men' and 'men' they are, after a fashion—little, stylized men. A king, his queen, his knights. And in chess there are the little pawns, advancing as infantrymen to defend their king and queen, surely out of love, Donald. But lower it a dimension and we have—checkers! Flat. Two dimensional. And that is how I see this turbulent world of the flesh today, Donald, my boy. A ghastly checker game of the flat man—the red against the black. . . ."

When he stopped his reverie-out-loud Jasper Stone knew that Crane had not been listening. He snapped his face up toward the young doctor and asked with the privileged impertinence of age: "Have you asked her to marry you?"

Crane shook his head slowly. "Didn't get that far." Then he said decisively, "I'm clearing out of here, Judge."

"Psychiatry?"

"General practice."

"Fired?"

"Quit. The way I see it, Judge, the whole picture is what's

important. Not just the chest. I don't think you can lick tuberculosis or anything else without treating the whole organism, including the mind and the environment. How many fellows, for instance, develop infiltration just to get away from a wife who is nagging the life out of them? All that sort of thing."

Stone pushed back his chair and turned, resting one arm on the back of it. "Don—take an old traveling man's advice. Go to a small town. Ride out the gossip and the sharp-shooting of the first years. Settle into that town. Take Gallagher with you, if she'll go. Here. . . ." He drew back the left sleeve of his robe and unbuckled his wrist watch, a flat gold disc the size of a silver dollar, with many dials and four hands. "Here, Don. You can use a stop watch in your business."

"Wait a minute, Judge. No wedding presents before I've even asked the gal. . . ."

"I insist, my boy. For hereby be it known—Jasper Stone has not only called a truce with time—he has won the battle."

"But, Judge—this thing is worth money."

"Not to me, Donald, not to me. I've held that watch on my last racehorse. How many of them are 'morning glories,' Don—fleet as the wind at dawn, when they flash by you at the workout. Then in the afternoon, when post time comes, the real test—then they drag in half an hour late. Morning glories, my boy. Even as men with bright promise in the early years and sorry endings; their age as dry as a gardenia pressed between the pages of a dictionary. Even as my erstwhile friend with the ironic monicker: the Morning Glory Kid."

"Well—thanks a million, Judge."

"Don't mention it. Think of me when you use it to time your sun lamp on some old farmer's rheumatic knee."

He watched Crane's lithe figure stride down the corridor and turn out of sight. Just as well he did not listen too intently to my ramblings. For Dr. Donald Crane has great decisions to make; great decisions has Dr. Donald Crane. Why clutter him up with hindsight and an old man's shoddy wisdom? Let him gain his own wisdom as to the purpose and direction of Life—that mysterious carbon compound so determinedly reproducing itself. Let him learn from the wail in the dark, the night air icy about his ankles, as he paces the floor, comforting the tiny gas-afflicted stomach against his shoulder, his pajamas perfumed with sour milk. Let Don gain wisdom from the swarming gnat stings of circumstance. There is something in that boy that holds a hint of promise—he may find the way, the hidden element, the X which makes it all add up. *For strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. . . .*

"By God," said Jasper Stone, leaping from crag to crag of his own mental landscape. "By God!"

In Room 906 Wash Lee's bed was still vacant. The two men were conscious of it, the bulk missing from it and the brown, close-cropped head which had rested there for so many months. The deep, rumbling chuckle with which Wash had greeted each new day.

Abdullah opened the drawer of his bed table, rattled something, closed the drawer and put something under his pillows. Then he took off his robe and climbed into bed, reminding Stone of a brown, lethargic cherub in patched pajamas donated by social service. Abdullah sat in bed, not leaning against the pillows, his fat hands spread before him on the green blankets. He was waiting for evening temps under Miss Hopkins' sharp eyes.

Stone folded his robe carefully over the chair and stepped out of his slippers. He got in bed, pulling the blankets carefully over his knees and tucking them in at the sides, suddenly remembering out of nowhere the feel of a steamer rug, the whip of wind and the taste of bouillon, passed around by the steward. He composed his mind which had been grappling for the name of a woman known long ago; a woman whose corset left little ridges over her ribs; she had a nasty little dog who stood on his hind legs, peering into the bunk and yapping. No matter. It was long ago. Again he composed his mind and let it hang suspended behind his eyes. It was restful, this suspension of memory, of wonder, of the thirst for knowledge. . . .

Kincaid appeared silently at the door.

He stood, his hands hooked on each side of the sill, glaring in at the windows which reflected the overhead light and the interior of the room; they were mirrors until the light went out and the night took East Nine under its wings. Kincaid stood so long without moving that Stone's thoughts snapped back to the room and the staring man and Abdullah pursed his lips a little, fearing a violation of his peace.

It came.

"Brothers—we set around this place, figuring we're the most misery-hounded cusses on earth. It ain't so. I say unto you, brothers, this place ain't no different from the whole cussed world. All of us, inside and out—sin-rotted and festerin' in meanness, and that's a fact. Brothers, I been wrassling with doubt and despair so long it's a wonder I ain't pulled all my hair out in chunks and that's the gospel truth. I been praying that our lately departed brother, Benny Rosenbaum, could see the light, same's Paul seen it on the road to D'mascus. . . ."

From the pocket of Kincaid's robe the neck of a pint whis-

key bottle slanted; the air around him carried a reek of cheap rye.

"Why, bless God, brothers, while I was a-praying for the blessed light to strike that boy, it come to me that Benny *had* the blessed Grace, 'thout knowing it. I seen that boy lifted up to heaven just as clear as I see you a-sitting here now. I seen it. Oh, brothers, I seen it. And I been struggling alone through that valley of dry bones all this time, doubt and despair, and all I had to do was lift up my eyes and see it there, a-blazin' right straight ahead. Oh, brothers, there's a power fit to shake this old world till its teeth rattle; shake some sense into it. It's been a-shaking me and if it can shake sense into my fool head it can do it to anybody, bless God. Anybody.

"Oh, Lord, brothers—a-kneeling out there in the bathroom just now I seen a light burst forth and I heard a voice a-whispering out'n the center of the light. 'Joseph,' He says, 'ain't I told you I'd be with you always? Didn't I come back from the dead just to show sinners what the Lord God was a-fixing up for them as was willing to wrassle down their sin and retch up their hands and take the blessed Grace that's free to all just for the askin'? Oh, ye of little faith,' He says, 'you poor yellow-bellied fool of a sinner, stewin' and shakin', thinking that Old Man Greer and his boys could kill a man. Ain't I made the world out of nothing and set the stars in their courses? Don't I watch every sparrow's fall and know when one of them little fellows been shot? Don't I mark it all down and won't Old Man Greer and his deputies have to answer for it?' Oh, bless God, brothers, I heard it. I heard it. I heard it. Plain as I could hear you all a-talking to me right here and now."

He had moved into the room and now stood glaring at the windows, his arms rigid at his sides. He closed his eyes and turned his face up toward the ceiling light. Tears were running down the furrows of his cheeks. His voice was a harsh whisper, torn out of him by some terrible necessity. He swallowed hard and went on.

"I seen the angels a-sailing up and down on the rays of His blessed Grace to the Throne. I seen 'em."

At the doorway a starched, square, competent and prosaic figure suddenly appeared: Clara Hopkins, an embodiment of all that was feminine and practical in a world where old men shall dream dreams and young men shall see visions. Jasper Stone caught her eye, shook his head and laid a finger to his lips. Hoppie stood silent and disapproving, watching the gaunt evangelist.

Kincaid drew a deep breath, let it burst out in an explosive "Hah!" He opened his eyes and went on rapidly, "Brothers, we had in this place Benjamin Rosenbaum, a boy that didn't be-

lieve in God, leastways he said he didn't: just because the sin and corruption of all their churches and synagogues had turned his face away from his Maker. Now, that boy had all kinds of book education and there he was, a fish trying to argue and dispute the other fish that there warn't no such thing as water. And here I was, worried that the boy was heading for hell, same's I figured I was myself. And then the blessed Grace descended on me and I seen that boy take his place among the heavenly host sooner'n any of us. And do you want to know why? I'll tell you why, bless God. Because he was filled right up to the brim and running over with the Holy Ghost, that's why. I tell you, brothers, that boy would stand up again' Rathbone or any of the other politicians 'round here and rip into 'em same's a little old bear dog, going for a bear. And he done it for the sake of Man—for the folks that have to labor and sweat all their lives and end up: nothing to show for it. Why that boy never got nothing for himself. All he ever got was being jailed and beat up by Hanlon's gun thugs and mind you, he never took a shot at one of 'em in all his life: beat him just the same. Oh, brothers, our Lord and Saviour sure hit the nail on the head where he says, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' Ain't it clear? Ain't it clear? Benny kep' on a-fighting; knock him down, bounce right up. And the only blessed thing that boy was fighting for was Man: 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.' Why, brothers, the blessed Lord Himself come down among men and put on flesh to put down the mighty from their seats, to exalt them of low degree, to fill the hungry with good things and to send the rich empty away. Don't make no difference if Benny thought he was a atheist; the Lord God is going to understand, sure's you're born. The Lord God is even this minute taking that boy to his breast like a lamb in his bosom. 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' "

Clara Hopkins stood as if petrified; her face had taken on a deeper color; she had let her hands slide into the pockets of her uniform and now she seemed rooted to the floor, fascinated by the torrent of words pouring out of the brush arbor preacher who looked like young Lincoln, slightly mad.

Kincaid's voice rose. "Why, brothers, I can see the Lord God a-stretching out His hand and laying it on that boy's head right this minute in Paradise. I can see it. Bless God, I can see it." He stopped, gulped air and smashed his palms together, locking his fingers and swaying his shoulders with the power bursting inside him. "Nobody never give that boy nothing in

this world! Never taught him nothing. Never sat down with him quiet and told him the Good News out of Nazareth. That boy had to go on his way in darkness when it come to knowing the Messiah had come. But then, bless God, the Lord let His light shine down and Benny seen the way, even if it was through a glass darkly. He seen how none of us poor sinners can whip sin with his belly empty. Why, I'm telling you, brothers, down there in Macklin County there was hard times—you'd see girls, little kids no more'n seven or eight, nothing on but a little old flour-sack dress, come a-begging you to take 'em out in the bushes for part of your lunch. . . ."

Hopkins, from her vantage point in the doorway, sucked in her breath and her hand snapped up to her mouth.

"Benny, he heard the crying of the children. Brothers, I tell you there ain't a sound in the world can make a man shooting-mad like that one. Well, he heard it. That boy was never down a mine shaft in his life but he knew what it's like being a miner and children hungry, mine shut down.

"I tell you, brothers, that boy had more of the Lord God in his little finger than that Dr. Rathbone's got in his whole blame carcase!"

Jasper Stone said softly, "Amen."

The word set off an explosion, the sentences tumbling out of Kincaid like coal down a chute. "Oh, glory, glory! Everybody picking and puling at Benny, telling him, 'Why don't you go to Russia?' All a-pointing their fingers at the mote in his eye with the beams a-hanging out'n their own eyes a yard. I tell you, brothers, here's two sides of the earth, both of 'em so sunk in sin and wallowin' in self-righteousness and pride and ignorance and abomination that it's a wonder the blessed Lord don't retch right down and smear 'em into nothing, same's you'd mash ants on a molasses jug. Here I been a praying for the Lord of Hosts to unloose his thunder and mow down these here towers of Babel we been a-buildin' in our self-will and our vanity and our blindness. And the harder I prayed the deeper I sunk in sin because, bless God, brothers, that ain't the way. That ain't it. The Lord's got his own time fixed to blast all this wickedness to Kingdom Come, ain't up to me or anybody to go a-joggin' him and a-naggin' him. Can't any of us tell but what the blessed Grace might strike 'em yet, just in time. Oh, I'm telling you, brothers that when she falls . . ." he stretched out a big-jointed forefinger, pointing to the invisible city beyond the mirror-windows, "when she falls, mighty will be the fall thereof. And right at that minute some fella'll look up, and see one of them buildings a-busting loose at the seams and a-falling directly on him, and he can say in his heart, 'Oh, Lord, I'm sorry I went a-runnin' to the foreman, a-

tattlin' on so-and-so and got him fired,' and blam! Saved. Mashed flatter'n a pancake in this world but safe in His bosom fore evermore."

Kincaid stopped; his head dropped forward, chin on his chest, and he spread his work-twisted hands awkwardly. His voice sank to a whisper. "Ain't no sense in you believing or disbelieving me. I ain't nobody. I ain't nothing. I ain't nothing but one of these here loudspeakers. It's the Lord God that's doing the broadcasting; what I'm a-telling you don't come out of my brains because I ain't got any. It's the word of the Lord God, near as I can tell it, swamped with cussedness and vanity and sin the way I am; way we all is, I reckon."

He lifted his head and went on in a conversational tone which grew in volume again slowly until the room was ringing with it: "I sure de-railed a long time back there and it weren't till Benny's dying that I got back on the track. Here I was, right in amongst all them Scribes and Pharisees; Old Man Know-it-all Kincaid. And that was where I lost Jesus. I kep' on, a-readin' and a-readin' the Testament over and over and I might just as well have been a-readin' the label off'n a can for all the good it done me. Why, brothers, you can't find Jesus in no book, even the blessed Gospel, 'thout you got a little of Jesus in your heart, and that's a fact. Why, down home there was a fellow learned the whole Testament by heart: say it backwards and forwards. He got so, you say something to him and he wouldn't answer you 'cept in some text or other, show off how much he'd learnt. Well there come a big revival meeting and this elder, he got up there, and he started preaching and he preached three-four hours, sweat a-pourin' off him. And when he got done, bless God, if he don't run off behind a laurel bush with one of the girls. But that ain't the point. Point is that he got that girl in the family way and he lit out and we never did see hide nor hair of him again. Well, the time come when this girl felt her pains a-grippin' her and she run most a mile down the road to my Ma's house and there she fell down on the front porch, a-calling for Ma, and we run out. I'm telling you, brothers, we just barely got her inside and me holding the lamp. And there, by God, she give birth and when Ma held up the baby in the lamp shine, so's she could see it, bless God if I didn't see the light of the Lord Jesus a-shinin' on that girl's face. Oh, glory, glory, glory, I seen it. I seen it. And here I been a-quiverin' and a-quakin', thinking Old Man Greer and his boys could kill a man. I'm telling you a man is a creature of God and he's going to live in God and death ain't nothing but a new set of clothes.

"Bless God, brothers, it was Benny showed me the way back to Christ Jesus, 'thout knowing he done it. Down there's Mack-

lin County, sorry and miserable place. Well, by God's Grace, I seen what I got to do. I'm a-goin' to quit laying around here. I'm a-going to quit hiding out from Old Man Greer and his gun-toting deputies. I got the Good News to preach and I got union to talk and no deputy and no gunslinging polecat is a-goin' to stop me. How's the New Jerusalem ever going to get here 'less we help fetch it? How's the Gospel going to get told 'thout we help tell it? How we going to love our neighbors if we're too scared to fight for 'em? Can't no man hold fast to his faith nor his hope nor enough charity to warm a gnat's heart, if his belly's empty and his children crying and one little fella dead, account his mother's milk all dried up. Bless God, brothers, I'm lighting out of here for God's way and I could of laid around here and rotted if it hadn't been for the blessed Grace and Benny shaming me into it—he lay there dying and he was more alive than me. I tell you, I'm heading back to Macklin County with my Bible in one pocket and a little old short-barreled thirty-eight in the other, only I don't aim to cut loose with it first, they got to start it. I'm a-going, brothers, I'm a-going. I'm fixing to sign out tomorrow. This time tomorrow night I'll be aboard some old freight train, heading home. There ain't no thirty-eight cattridge made can kill Joe Kincaid if the blessed Lord wants him to live forever. Amen."

Silence swept around them. Kincaid sank into the metal chair at the foot of his bed and the look of peace on his face reminded Stone of the death mask of Lincoln.

Miss Hopkins, coming in with a faint rustle, said softly, "I'll have to ask you to give me that bottle, Mr. Kincaid. You know, it's against the rules. . . ."

Joe shook his head once, blinked, and smiled at her. "Why, sure. You can have it, m'am." When he held out the bottle they could see that only a scant inch was gone from it. "I didn't take more'n two-three swallows, m'am. Why, bless God, I don't need no drinking whiskey—I got the light of the Lord God a-shinin' in my heart!"

Sleep, darkness and the night wind's whispering breath.

Abdullah stirred and sat up. He threw back the blankets, stood up into his slippers, drew on his robe and padded furtively out into the corridor.

Stone heard the locker room door open softly and close and then in the vast quiet of the building he could make out the crunkle of a locker door. There was the soft slap of Abdullah's slippers and then a murmur of voices out by the desk.

Time passed without any tick of clocks; it moved in measured gusts of winter wind. At last, when Abdullah did not return, Stone got up, put on his robe and slipped his dentures

from their tumbler of water. When he came to the bend in the corridor he peeped around it and saw Clara Hopkins push back her chair and go into the utility room. Under the desk lamp was a tiny splash of green.

Stone paced swiftly down to the sunroom and there, before a window raised a quarter of an inch, sat Abdullah; his pipe was going and he was jetting smoke out into the night.

"Miss Hopkins—she is all right," he said in a voice like the whisper of shoes on deep carpet. "She keep the ivy all right . . . under the lamp."

Stone shivered once and Abdullah softly raised the window, knocked out his pipe on the sill and closed the sash. They sat in darkness; the windows began to mist over as heat rose from the steam pipes running beneath them. While the rest of East Nine was given over to frigid wind the sunroom held its steam-heated warmth.

Beyond the glass, sliding up the sky eastward, past the right angles of set-backs and the spires of skyscrapers, rose a sliver of silver; the new moon.

"A clear, cold night," Stone said softly. "And there she climbs again. How oft hereafter, rising, shall she look, through this same pest-house after me in vain . . . ? The wash of uneventful years sweeps over us again, Abba Dabba. Do you remember the old hospital at Laurell Hill—before Neighbor Jim built this one with the help of Federal funds and then took the credit . . . ? There at Laurell Hill we had no Benjamin to stir us up. How many years did we pass there, Abdullah, with poker by day and by night the courtship races of rats in the walls?"

"Was a good many years, Judge."

"We hadn't been over here very long when Benny was admitted. What a prickly little hedgehog he was, when he was still ambulant. He mellowed as his time grew short."

"He was a good kid."

"He was. And disturbing, vastly disturbing to Rathbone the Magnificent—for the doctor had great possessions. For years the great man had gone on smugly confident in his grasp of truth: the Episcopal Church, the Republican Party, the friendship of Neighbor Jim Hanlon, the skill of his own hands. And then little Benny Bombshell bursts in his face. Ninety pounds of bones and defiance in a bed—and he shook the great man. For Benny was his conscience, gnawing at his certainties down through the years."

"I think truth different for everybody."

"Aha, there we have it, my old friend. I wonder, sometimes, which of us comes closest to it—Ben with his economic law, you with your trust, I with my question mark, or old Goldfarb

with his tears. I love the search; Goldfarb loves the seed of his loins. Benny loved life itself and the wonders of the earth and Man. For beneath all his righteous angers there was love."

Abdullah looked at his companion in the half-light and saw, instead of the sere, crafty, faro dealer's face something else; the face of a man who comforts a son for the loss of a grandson. It was a strange face for Jasper Stone to wear, but this night was different from other nights.

Stone spoke again, his voice muted now, wondering. "Water spiders. That's what we are, Abdullah. Doom reaches out of nowhere—a great, shining, speckled monster called a trout grabs one of us and plop! Gone. Where has the poor pond-skimmer gone? His companions search their two-dimensional world in vain. Terror, mystery, hurly-burly. And some of the skimmers, perhaps, may stop skating back and forth long enough to meditate on their world and deduce—another dimension?"

Abdullah bowed his head. "To God all times, all places—one. God sees yesterday, today, tomorrow, all like threads in a carpet. Like threads in a loom, weaving all the time, threads. To God all time is like one time; no yesterday dead, no tomorrow not born." He nodded toward the distant river and went on placidly, "There is big ship coming in."

"Ah, yes," said Stone. "One of the floating Babylons. I used to work the tubs, Abdullah. I've played my way around the world. Poker *can* be beautiful."

"How you come here, Judge?" the fat man asked gently. "All these years we play poker—first at Laurell Hill and then here—I never ask you this. How you find out first you got sickness in the chest?"

Stone turned his chair and sat leaning on the card table in the darkness, looking out at the night and the pin-point lights of the city. "Poetic justice, Abba Dabba. There was a doctor not averse to turning a fast buck. What better way to approach him than for a physical check-up? When I stepped behind his fluoroscope I was sizing up my man, wondering what key would unlock the larceny in his heart. And then he told me."

"That was the end of the Morning Glory Kid, eh?"

"That was the end of him. The man who slid out from behind that screen was Jasper Stone. I'd used so many phoney names I'd almost forgotten the right one."

Abdullah sighed and snapped a loose thread from the cuff of his ragged bathrobe. "I think that change everybody—first time they find out. I was cab driver once. Never have accident. Sometimes a fellow don't want to pay, we have little argument. I was afraid of nobody that time. Get job, lose job, get other

job. Go out with girls, too. Every night. You meet plenty girls, driving cab. Was a long time ago."

"Long ago as yesterday, Abdullah. How many books have I read through all those yesterdays? I've lost count, Abdullah, I've lost count. I've hunted for the truth in the vast galleries of human thought. I've sifted the dry dust of the Kabalah: analogy and correspondence and the magic of *Yod He Vau He*, the name of God not to be spoken aloud. I have sought some grain of gold in the symbols of Hermes Trismegistos, the Thrice-Greatest; I have found Truth's faint track in the pages of the alchemists and their Great Work. For me, I fear the truth was never the truth unless no one else knew it."

"All truth is God," Abdullah murmured patiently. "Everything else is a lie."

"I agree, my friend. The hidden wisdom is hidden right enough—like a letter on a mantelpiece. I racked my brains solving the world equation for the unknown—the baffling enigmatic element, X. And I have found it at last: X as in Xmas. Faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. It seems embarrassingly evident that it's the old-time religion and it's good enough for me. Awkward, my friend, awkward. But the old library stiff finally learned." Stone fell silent and Abdullah could hear his slow breathing.

"I think Miss Gallagher, she learn something too."

"What she learned was Charity. For how can a woman love if she cannot forgive men their violence? And how can a man love if he cannot forgive a woman her power to make him surrender his he-goat privilege of the herd? Ah, my friend, time was, I would have wanted that girl. . . ."

The fat man grunted sympathetically in the faint glow of the sickle moon.

"Yes . . ." Stone went on, musing, "Time was, the lovely strapping wench with her teeth clenched on a 'No' would have sharpened my appetite. And the Morning Glory Kid would have set about worming his way beneath her chaste skirts and plucking her virginity like a brass ring from a merry-go-round. I grow old, I grow old, Abdullah. I shall wear the bottoms of my grave-clothes rolled. They're all daughters to Jasper Stone now. I can love them, appetite dying in the corruptible flesh, and wish them well. And I love Gallagher. I pray that she may beat down our old thief who steals the breath; and that her body may achieve its immortality without benefit of pessary, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven . . . according to Gallagher. Even in a world with too many mouths to feed; where even the weariest top-soil winds somewhere safe to sea. And who is to say she is wrong, any more than you are wrong, old sinner, with your gospel of quietism, your stolen sputum and your

switched thermometers? We are blind men, arguing the shape of an elephant."

"I know that story," Abdullah nodded. "I hear an old man tell that story when I was little kid."

"And Brother Benjamin—so lately removed from our monastic order—I have his book of devotions in my locker outside; his precious notebook of poems, some of which are good, and all written to the greater glory of God . . . as Benny saw Him. I know a publisher: I'll pass them along. Who can tell? Our Ben may live again, beneath the monotype operator's stern, union-bound hand."

Again the dry, defensive humor fell away from Jasper Stone. Over the distant murmur of the city, the sigh of the river gliding seaward, rose the old man's voice. "Blind men and the elephant, Abdullah. Kincaid, breathing threatenings and slaughter against the abominations of the modern Babylon . . . as seen from Macklin County, and Benny . . . Ben, our mascot . . . tagging sin as surplus value. He was a child, Abdullah, fed into the burning breast of Moloch. He defied the rabbis and clutched his atheist manifesto to his breast, all ignorant that between its lines there lay the dead Man who will not rot. . . ."

In the piled masonry across the water rows of lights leaped on where floors had been dark; the scrubwomen had arrived to set in order the littered chaos of empty offices and get them ready for the surge of morning, the scurry of humanity which would fill them again.

"There it stands," Stone said, so low that Abdullah leaned closer to catch the words. "Kincaid's Babylon; Benny's husk concealing golden grain. I wonder, Abdullah, if the ants in that glittering anthill will ever really learn from the ant, consider her ways and be wise. Will they ever take Benny's theory of the value as the flint, Kincaid's mighty Gospel as the steel, for tinder the corrupt and holy heart of man—and light again the dying fires of this old planet? For it is dying, Abdullah. For want of love and love of life, for want of virtue in the sword arm it is dying. Will the toilers and spinners, the diggers of coal and the diggers in other men's pockets ever strike that fire again after all these years? They have precious little time, Abdullah. I have an uncanny feeling that 'the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.' It just might happen, you know, before their map-marking, speech-making, power-swollen princes destroy them all."

Stone got slowly to his feet, turning up the collar of his robe against the falling temperature of the room. He stood so long in silence that when he spoke again Abdullah raised his dark ox eyes questioningly. "There was a hammer beating in Gali-

lee, Abdullah, two thousand years ago. And it's beating still. I've chased elusive Truth through Kant's wilderness of words. I, too, have read the Angry Manifesto. But under it all, that hammer is knocking at the stubborn heart of man. It is the hammer of the Carpenter; rabbi of Nazareth; prophet of the New Jerusalem; Jesus the Christ."

Abdullah shrugged. "He was God's prophet. Is true. You think all these fellows going to blow up the world? Could happen. I wait and see." Stretching out his fat forefinger he traced on the steamy window a word in Arabic, a looping word with dots above it and below it, a word like a scimitar, dripping blood, or a scythe blade, gathering grain at harvest time.

"Maktoob."