

other one in a hurry so he could catch his log-book up to date. Someone would be sniffing through it very soon--maybe as soon as this afternoon.

"Is anybody there?" Franklin's voice boomed.

"Listen up!" Pulaski replied. His voice was loud, exasperated.

"We got a problem here, Babycakes, and your security guard is ~~up~~ (somewhere) jerking off!"

"If it's the connection, call back," Franklin said. There was a click...and then the steady burr of an open line.

"Holy shit, the phones are screwed up, too," Tom blurted--and for the first time he felt something pierce his confusion and harried annoyance at being late. He found nothing welcome about the new emotion.

It was fear.

3

Jo Page saw Pamela Andeyric standing by herself at the entrance to the mail alcove and went over to join her. Pamela was some fifteen years older than Jo, a sweet-faced, almost pretty single woman who ran her own small accounting business in Hadley, the suburban town just to the west of Squirrel Hill.

A year before, Jo had posted a small notice on the bulletin board in this same alcove, asking if there were tenants who would be interested in forming a Bible study group. She had put her telephone number on the bottom of the card. Only Pamela had responded.

The question of Jo's church affiliation had come up almost at once--Pamela was a Baptist, although not of the hard-shelled kind. Still, she was taken aback to find out that Jo did not attend church...not ~~a~~ church ^{at all.} ~~at all.~~

"Well, you've got to have a church, Jo," Pamela had said in

her shy, correct-me-if-I'm-wrong voice (and it was only later that Jo had discovered how misleading that voice was, because no one could correct Pamela Andeyric--what few ideas she had were set in solid cement). "You can't get any guidance without a church--no wonder you want to start a Bible study group."

Jo explained--or tried to--her own belief that illumination came from God, not man, and that what ministers did, more often than not, was to ram their own interpretation of scripture down the throats of their congregation...that seeing a pastor or a preacher standing up in a church was an open invitation not to think. She told Pamela that didn't mean she believed a person had to be or should be utterly solitary about praising God or trying to understand Him--after all, Jesus had said that where two or three of you are gathered together, there ~~there~~ ^{He would} be also. But she didn't believe that meant a whole congregation, where a person would be scared to death to stand up and say, 'But have you thought of it this way?'

Pamela had nodded all through this, seeming to indicate both sympathy with Jo's views and understanding of them...and then she had said: "But none of us can really understand the Bible alone, can we, Jo? You've got to have a church."

Jo began to realize then that it just wasn't going to work, although it took another two months for her to acknowledge the utterly closed mind that lay behind the correct-me-if-I'm-wrong voice. But she did not see Pamela as a bad person (she did not, in fact, believe anyone to be a really bad person), and the two of them had kept up a pleasant enough acquaintan^{re}ship...although Pamela, convinced of Jo's essential eccentricity (the inarguable eccentricity of a person who wanted to study the Bible but who didn't have a church), would always maintain a certain careful distance

from the younger woman, ~~and that moment~~ ^{for her part, remained} and Jo, equally convinced that Pamela Andeyric's response to Jesus Himself, had Jesus happened to live in the Tennis Club Apartments, would have been ~~similar to Pamela's response to Jesus~~ ^{what do you mean,} you want me to take up my cross and follow You? Mr. Christ, you obviously need a church-- ~~and so~~ Jo kept her own distance. The two of them had studied scripture together three or four times, but Pamela's predictable response to any real problem with the passage under study was, "Let's call Reverend Tom, Jo! Let's!" Reverend Tom was Thomas Bertty, Pamela's pastor at The First Baptist Church of Squirrel Hill. This response eventually became so irritating to Jo that she went back to her former solitary meditations. Irritation and worship seemed to be mutually exclusive.

"What's happened?" she asked Pamela now. This was so totally unexpected that she even entertained the notion--for a moment, at least--that she had overslept the alarm and this was a dream.

"No one exactly knows, dear," Pamela said in her breathy little or-so-I-think-but-what-do-I-know voice. Her constant use of dear, dear one, or sweetheart was another source of irritation to Jo. She knew how poorly she was doing with her feelings when it came to Pamela, and she supposed she would have to pray tonight for more understanding and greater grace--grace, of course, because her irritation with Pamela was a sign of pride in herself, and pride, of course, was the greatest curse of the Godly.

"Is it something in the parking lot? A burst water-main or--"

"The doors ~~don't~~ ^{don't} open," ~~and~~ ^{and} Pamela said, and offered Jo a vague, meaningless smile which did not touch her eyes--Jo noticed that Pamela's eyes looked nervous, almost scared. She had seen that look in the woman's eyes sometimes when they had touched on a ~~particularly~~ sensitive point in the few Biblical studies

they had had together--the question of the virgin birth, for instance. At such moments Pamela would suggest in a slightly shriller voice than usual that they call "Reverend Tom."

Something is bothering her, Jo thought, and looked away from Pamela, who was holding her purse almost up to breast-level, as one might hold a very small shield, and at the others. It's bothering a lot of them. What--

Then she glanced outside, out into the wavering, watery light of the waxing day, and she felt ~~what~~ her insides go cold and numb. Her fingers and toes momentarily lost all sense of feeling, and for a horrifying space of time--perhaps only a second or two; however long it was, it seemed much longer in her mind--she was afraid she was going to wet herself. ~~what~~ ~~what~~ ~~what~~

She had never seen daylight of that particular sick quality; had never, in fact, seen an artificial light which was like it, although she would later tell Tom Hill that it was a bit like the only light that had hung in the attic of the house she had lived in as a little girl--it had been a weak, bare bulb, surely no more than sixty watts, probably more like forty. It had been filthy and cobwebby, its sullen yellow glow like the rheumy eye of a very old man...an evil old man, more likely than not.

Unknowing, her thought was Dennis Pulaski's thought: Not right, it's not right...

"Doors won't open, isn't that just the silliest thing you ever heard?" Pamela Andeyric said in a falsely chatty voice, and followed it with a jagged ~~burst~~ of laughter that put a chill up Jo's spine. "We'll all be late for work, I imagine--it's just very annoying, don't you think, Jo?"

"Yes," Jo said, hearing her own voice as from far away. "Very annoying. They'll have it fixed in a minute, Pam."

"Of course they will," Pamela said in that same chatty, almost hysterical voice. "But in the meantime it's such a bother to be stuck in the lobby, isn't it? At least I think so."

"Yes, of course it is," Jo said, automatically making her voice low and comforting. Some of them see it--see it consciously--and some of them don't, at least not yet. But they all feel it--it's on their faces, in their voices...they are like birds before a cyclone, or sheep before an earthquake...what is this?

And suddenly, filling her with a terrible, unreasoning horror, she heard a voice in her mind, seeming to answer her question, a dreadful voice screaming into the early darkness of a dreadful afternoon: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

A shudder that seemed to run deeper than the bone--miles deeper--worked through her, and one of her hands went to her mouth. Beside her, pallid Pamela Andeyric offered some new comment--Jo, looking at that weird, almost yellow light, heard the sounds but could make no sense of them--and then that jagged giggle again, laughter like a spray of broken glass, dancing quickly on the edge of hysteria.

The light, Jo thought witlessly. Something wrong with the light.

4

"The phones aren't screwed up," Rinaldi said to Tom, looking at him with that careful expressionlessness that Tom always took (as much as he tried not to) for veiled contempt. "It's just that the conference phone your friend wanted me to use is screwed up."

He's not my friend, Tom thought, but did not say.

"Is that what it is," Pulaski said.

Rinaldi didn't answer. He took the phone out of the amplifier cradle, pressed down the cut-off buttons, and then dialed again. The phone rang only once this time. Franklin had been sitting

right there by the phone, waiting for him to call back, as he should have been doing. But he never varied from the drill so much as a millimeter, a fact which Rinaldi appreciated.

"Security Systems, Inc. You have dialed our emergency number. Please identify yourself both by name and code number and then state the nature of your problem. This is Bo Franklin speaking."

"Rinaldi, at the Tennis Club, 1400 Mall Road in Squirrel Hill. The code number--"

"Come on, buddy," Franklin's voice rode over him, "shit or get off the pot, what do you say?"

"Hello!" Rinaldi said, raising his voice again. He looked at Pulaski--Pulaski's bland, set face. He didn't want Pulaski hearing this, didn't want Pulaski knowing that he had been right and he, Rinaldi, had been wrong, and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it. "Hello, Franklin! Do you hear me? This is--"

"If you feel like asking somebody if he's got Prince Albert in a can, kid," Franklin's voice said, "you better hang up and call someone else, quick. Because I can put a tracer on this line."

"Hello, we got a bad connection!" Rinaldi shouted. He knew the back of his neck was turning red and he knew Pulaski was seeing that, too, and just ~~that~~ knowledge ~~made his neck~~ made his neck grow a little hotter. This was one cruddy way to start a day, you better believe it. "I'll call you--"

Click. Franklin at Security Systems had hung up, but that was one thing Rinaldi didn't have to give Pulaski the satisfaction of knowing, and he finished into the dial-tone without so much as breaking his stride.

"--back in a couple of minutes!"

He hung up.

"Nope, the phones aren't screwed up at all," Pulaski said.

"Are they, Babycakes?"

"This one's screwed up," Rinaldi said, "but that's all we know right now." ←

He stood up, his face impassive. "I'll call from my place and take care of it. Phone there's fine. I used it, ^{late} last night ~~and I used it~~ ^{a pizza} to order ~~the pizza~~. You guys go on back down."

"I think we'll hang with you," Pulaski said. He offered an economical, spitless smile that Tom found a little frightening. "Right, Hill?"

"Mr. Pulaski, I've got my job to do," Rinaldi said. "Don't make it difficult for me. I want to ascertain the nature of this problem as quickly as I--"

"So do we," Pulaski said. The smile vanished. "And I'll tell you something--this thing smells worse to me every minute...I mean, every fucking minute. I'm not joking, and I'm not some woman screaming my head off just to hear my own soprano. Things are not right here, and every new thing that isn't right gives me a worse feeling."

"Pulaski, I'm sure there's nothing--" Tom noticed Rinaldi had dropped the Mr., and he guessed Pulaski had, too. Not that it would matter to him.

"There's plenty, and you know it," Pulaski said quietly. "It's all glass down there. If those outer doors were chained shut, we'd see the chains...and there'd be some give. So what did? ~~somebody~~ somebody stick them shut with Krazy Glue?"

"Pulaski, you're--"

"Where's your guard? What about the fire door? And then, when the phone only works one-way, you say it's nothing, go down in the lobby, cool it out, Pulaski. Well, maybe I don't want you disappearing, ^{on me} the way Bamford did."

Rinaldi's eyes flickered uncertainly--just for a second, but Tom saw it. He thought Pulaski had seen it too, and he understood suddenly that the two of them had been sparring exactly as boxers spar, feeling each other out, looking for weaknesses. Pulaski had slipped inside Rinaldi's guard first. With that same intuition Tom knew that Pulaski ^{probably} didn't think Rinaldi was ^{really} going to disappear; he simply wanted to keep the play in front of him and make sure that Rinaldi couldn't decide to bend the facts ^{if bending them suited him.} And Pulaski had planted a seed of doubt in Rinaldi's mind: Whoever got Bamford may still be hanging around, Babycakes... ~~and~~ you may be next.

Tom's estimation of Pulaski went up several ~~notches~~ notches.

"What do you say, Hill?" Pulaski said, not taking his eyes from Rinaldi. "Don't you think we ought to hang with Mr. Rinaldi, here? If his phone don't work, we can try mine or yours."

"Yes," Tom said. He had begun to feel like Alice, tumbling slowly end over end down the rabbit-hole. "Why don't we just hang in with you for awhile, Mr. Rinaldi?"

Rinaldi turned and looked at Tom, and although the super's face was as expressionless as always, Tom had a pretty good idea he had not made a friend.

5

By 6:25 A.M., the lobby was beginning to feel uncomfortably crowded to Jo. She recognized the fact that it was not really the number of people that gave it that feeling ~~men and women~~ Although there were now over thirty ~~men and women~~ standing around in aimless little groups, making forced we're-together-on-this-bus-so-let's-make-the-best-of-it conversation with tenants to whom they had only nodded or grunted hello ~~the~~ previously, the lobby was big enough to hold half again that number before people started to actually get crowded together. No, it was something else that gave it that

feeling of incipient claustrophobia--it was a mental crowdedness, a ~~fast-~~ ^{fast-} growing feeling of uneasiness. She had seen several men go down the stairs to the walkway, most of them in pairs, and then come back up a minute or two later, and she knew they had gone down to try the fire door for themselves. And she also knew that most of the people who lived at the Tennis Club Apartments were nine-to-fivers who were just now rising, and that soon the lobby would be a good deal more crowded.

Pamela's third high-pitched giggle, more like broken glass than ever, was as much as she could stand. With a murmured promise to be back in a minute, Jo crossed the lobby and went out into the foyer. Someone had used a statistics textbook to chock the lobby-foyer door open, and there were half a dozen people standing at the glass to the right of the outer door, looking out. One of them glanced briefly at Jo with large, slightly shocked wall-eyes that were almost as disturbing as Pamela's giggle. Jo tried to smile at the man. He did not speak or smile back. He only looked outside again. No one in the foyer was speaking--no one at all.

They know, she thought. They know how wrong it is.

Daylight is always indefinable--any painter would say so--and so the wrongness of this daylight, although not subtle, was impossible to define. Everything about it was a painful contradiction. ~~And~~ ^{It} itched at the mind.

The light which had first struck her as watery and wavery still struck her so, but how could that be? It was strong enough, and it did not exactly waver or pulse. It was not really yellow, as she had first thought, but it was. She looked at the sky and tried to tell her that it was simply overcast, a humid early morning summer sky, but it was like no overcast she had ever seen. Smog? she wondered feebly, but knew it wasn't.

The cars in the parking lot stood out like pop-ups in a child's activity book. They looked so real that they somehow went too far and seemed false. They reminded her of certain paintings she had seen that were so unnaturally exact and realistic that they seemed like photographs. None of them cast a shadow, and she supposed that added to the feeling of unreality. Did things usually cast shadows at this hour? She couldn't remember.

The leaves on the trees at the edge of the greenbelt had that same ~~grotesque~~ grotesque clarity. None of them moved. None of them cast any shadows.

"No traffic on 481," someone said suddenly in a breathless, punched-in-the-stomach way. "That's impossible."

"There's traffic there, same as always," someone else contradicted immediately.

Jo looked in that direction and felt a sickening sort of vertigo seize her. The road was utterly empty, ~~all~~ all four lanes of it. Or so she thought...but when she blinked, she saw cars and trucks waiting at the light by the McDonalds. She blinked again and they were gone. A third blink (no, not a blink, not this time--this time she quite deliberately squeezed her eyes shut) and they were back. This time ~~they~~ ^{they} stayed.

She felt her heart squeeze up into her throat and lodge there, like a warm ball of rags. Her hands met in front of her and squeezed so tightly that her knuckles cracked, and she found herself trying to pray.

Rinaldi opened the door to his apartment and let them in--grudgingly. The apartment was just as eerily sterile as Tom remembered, as if it was still a demo job for prospective tenants to be walked through, as much movie set as apartment.

Rinaldi glanced at them and then seemed to dismiss them. As he sat down in one of the chairs across from the TV and picked up the phone, Tom had a feeling that something was missing--in a moment it came to him. The Muzak. There was no Muzak in here, but it felt as impersonal and as sterile as the hallway. It was impossible to believe that a real man lived here.

He glanced at Pulaski. ~~was~~ Pulaski was watching Rinaldi, his eyes narrowed. But no; it wasn't really the super he was watching at all, Tom realized. Pulaski's eyes weren't on Rinaldi's face. They were on the telephone. He had even shifted away from Tom so he would have a better angle, and Tom realized what Pulaski was doing--watching the man touch the buttons. He had perhaps memorized the number of Security Systems, Inc., and was now making sure that Rinaldi, freed of the amplifier device, wasn't dialing a ringer--the weather, Dial-A-Prayer, something like that.

Rinaldi finished, and listened.

"Did he dial the real thing?" Tom murmured, looking at Pulaski from the corners of his eyes.

Pulaski glanced at him, a little surprised. "Pretty sure he did." Pulaski also spoke in a murmur.

Rinaldi listened and then began again. Tennis Club Apartments, Mall Road, Squirrel Hill, code number 1424. The problem--

Rinaldi ceased. Seemed to listen. Hung up.

"Sure it's not all of them, Babycakes?"

Rinaldi looked at him patiently. "^{Now I} think it probably is, ~~it is~~ Probably is. Every phone in the place goes out on a single cable. Obviously there's something wrong with that. Or maybe it's been tampered with."

"Mind if I try?"

"Go ahead," Rinaldi said.

He stood up, but Pulaski ignored the chair and simply scooped up the phone. It looked small in his big, blocky hand. He put the receiver between his ear and one football tackle's shoulder and pushed buttons with his free hand.

"It's not the phone cable from this building," he said to Rinaldi. "I don't know if you know that or not, Babycakes, but probably you do. If there's a phone problem, it's at your security outfit. Because--"

He broke off, listened briefly.

"Renfrew!" He said. "This is Pulaski! You hearing me?"

A pause. Tom felt himself tensing up, and was aware that the headache was thickening around his temples, ^{agitating,} starting to throb. He thought he understood what Pulaski was getting at, and suddenly he wanted nothing more in the world than to hear Pulaski say: Yeah, okay...no, nothing important. Little trouble here, no big deal. I'll see you. Bye. No...amend that. I'll see you, Babycakes. Yeah. The thought should have raised a smile, but Tom found that his smiler was temporarily out of order.

"Renfrew!" Pulaski yelled--it was a bull-throated cry, loud and vital and a little scary, as if he believed he could get through by lungpower alone. "Answer up if you hear me! Renfrew! Ren--"

Pulaski fell silent. For a moment his broad, large-pored face seemed oddly contemplative, almost gentle. He hung up the phone and replaced it.

"Babycakes," he said to Rinaldi, speaking very quietly, "you got trouble right here in River City. Bad trouble, I think."

"It's the phone cable," Rinaldi said. "Someone has been doing some pretty inventive vandalism, that's all. The guy who writes on doors, probably."

"What do you think, Hill?"

Tom felt that odd down-the-rabbit-hole feeling again, as if he were tumbling in a dream, dissassociated from reality. But his voice was even enough.

"If the cable was cut, we couldn't call out," he said. "There's a deal you can get from the phone company, I think--like if you just have a summer place, or something--where you can arrange to have service where you can call out but nobody can call in... or maybe it's that people can call in but you can't call out. I forget which it is, but it's essentially one-way service."

Pulaski was nodding, absurdly like a teacher who has called upon a well-prepared student. Rinaldi's dark eyes watched him, unblinking, from their pouched sockets.

"Anyway, it doesn't matter which ~~way~~ ^{here} it is," Tom said, "because it doesn't apply ~~the same way~~ ^{here}. Either way, you can talk and receive once the connection is made. I never heard of a situation like this, where you can hear the guy on the other end but he can't hear you."

"That happens all the time," Rinaldi said.

"It happens once in awhile," Pulaski said, "and when it does, you just dial the number again. And it usually only happens somewhere out in the boonies, where they got the Del Monte Tin Can Phone Company instead of Ma Bell. And even there it doesn't happen every time you dial."

Pulaski cradled the phone again and pushed 0.

"Hello, operator?" He said after a moment. "Are you hearing me?" He paused. "Are you hearing me?" He paused again. "Are you getting anything, op--"

He looked at Rinaldi.

"She hung up," Pulaski said. He held the phone out to Tom. "Your turn, Babycakes. Let's run this fucker into the ground."

Tom crossed Rinaldi's barren living room and took the phone. Although he felt calm enough--there was only the headache, and that feeling of disassociation--he sat down in the chair heavily, as if his legs were in danger of giving out. He dialed the station quickly.

It rang twice and then a woman's voice, professionally sultry, said: "WKMT, home of Barney Miller every night at five...how may I help you?"

"This is Tom, Beverly," he said. In his mind he saw Beverly McAllister, who was actually in her mid-fifties and fat, and the very concreteness of her image--right down to the bright plastic ^{red barrettes} barettes in her graying hair (probably ~~and~~)--made it hard for him to believe she wouldn't respond. "Tommy Hill. I want you to tell Dave--"

"WKMT," Beverly said. "Hello, please."

"It's Tom Hill!" He said, raising his voice. "Beverly, we're having some phone trouble here! If you hear me--"

"Sir, if you have a bad connection, would you please redial--"

"--at all, would you please tell--"

"--at your..."

And then, suddenly, something happened to Beverly's voice that was so unnatural, so comically horrifying, that Tom could only hold the phone, his mouth dropping open. Even as a laugh lodged in his throat he could feel the hair ^{standing up} ~~on his~~ on the nape of his neck, and sweat suddenly rising humidly all over his body.

--convenience was the final word Tom could make out, and yes, that made sense; would you please redial at your convenience. But her voice suddenly began to rise, to speed up. Convenience was understandable, although it sounded like one of those chip-munk ~~and~~ novelty records. Whatever followed accelerated so rapidly

that it became insectile, unintelligible. Tom would later tell Pulaski and Rinaldi that it was like the sound of a reel-to-reel tape speeding up to fast forward--finally just a gibberish of sound with no human element in it at all. And it was like that, but what he could never put across to them or anyone else was that it also wasn't like that, like something that had been done by a machine. The hideous thing was that it was somehow organic, as if on the other end of the line, in the WKMT reception area with its bright red walls and its burnt orange carpet, Beverly herself was speeding up ~~in some~~ ^{in some} terrible but actual way.

It ended with a click so loud and somehow so final that Tom jerked the ~~instrument~~ ^{instrument} away from his ear. Then there was nothing--no dial tone, no sirenlike wail, ~~as a~~ ^{Just a} dead blank.

Tom hung it up slowly.

7

"The cars are there. The cars are there. The cars are there."

Jo looked to her left, at the line of people standing at the foyer windows, absurdly like a bunch of sidewalk superintendents idling away a few minutes by watching some building construction. The speaker was a young man with very black hair and a face whose handsomeness was somehow standardized and anonymous--his looks made Jo think first of the second or third male leads on the soap operas, and then of singles bars. He was wearing a courdurey sport coat and designer jeans. His eyes were wide, his face ~~was~~ ^{was} frozen as he chanted this litany over and over. No one else seemed to hear him at all; they were lost in their own contemplation of an ordinary morning scene that had somehow gone haywire.

"The cars are there. The cars are there."

Will you be quiet, please? Jo thought, and decided she would say these words aloud, in a polite but firm tone. The man's unknowing chant, like a pagan prayer, was worse than Pamela's giggle. She didn't think she could stand it for long.

As she opened her mouth to speak, the young man fell silent. His lips still made the shape of the words, but the sound of them had mercifully stopped. Jo looked out through the glass again.

The cars were there, just as the young man ~~had~~ ^{insisted.} As were the trucks--she saw a bright yellow Ryder van, a pick-up with ornamental chrome straight-pipes, and a semi with a giant tissue box painted on the side. She could clearly read the slogan KLEENEX SOFTENS THE BLOW written beneath it. She saw an old Chevvy with a dented-in side, and a custom van waiting in the turn-lane, its signal flashing, to cross traffic into the McDonald's parking lot.

She saw all these things with perfect clarity, and yet her mind was telling her they were a mirage, as unreal as the quicksilver pools you saw near the horizon on a stretch of summer-bright highway. That light, that yellow-but-not-yellow light, that light that was both clear and yet somehow as woozy as an old drunk's eye, was in between.

Jo watched the traffic light cycle from green to red. She saw the green turn-arrow come on. She watched the custom van begin its turn, saw that it had an out-of-state plate on the front and ^{saw that there were two} bikes strapped on the _{JA} top.

It got halfway across the far two lanes of 481 and then it disappeared.

All the traffic disappeared.

The young man cried out--a sharp, yipping sound like an animal that has just had its foot ripped off in a trap.

Jo squeezed her eyes shut so tightly that red sparks exploded in the darkness she had made for herself, and then she opened them again.

~~This time the~~ ^{Stayed} ~~the~~ traffic ~~was still~~ _{JA} gone.

McDonald's was still there, its golden arches clear against the sky. The Arby's beyond it was there, and she could see the Bonanza Steak-Pit sign, although not the building itself. On the far side of 481, Cantrell's Chevrolet was still there, flanked by Mallway Sports and Donahue's Irish

Pub ("Beer, Wine, and Steaks As You Like Them").

But the traffic was gone. Route 481 stood empty.

She looked to the right, where the turnpike overpass crossed 481, and saw no cars up there, either. That warm ball of rags was back in ~~my~~ her throat.

"The cars are ^{THERE} ~~there~~!" The young man in the corduroy sport-coat screamed, and his scream fell into perfect silence; all conversation in the lobby had stopped when he made that little yipping sound.

He backed away from the window, smacked into the window behind him, turned fumblingly, and shambled out of the foyer. Some of the people lined up at the glass turned to watch him go, their expressions drugged and incurious. Others did not even turn.

Jo watched him go up the three steps into the lobby proper, stumbling at the top as if expecting a fourth and almost falling. No one put out a hand to steady him, although there were people close by.

"The cars are there," he said almost conversationally to a thickset elderly woman. She stepped back from him quickly as if he carried some kind of contagion. The young man stood before her, his mouth working, a lick of hair lying on his forehead.

"Get away," the thickset woman hissed at him.

Beyond them Jo saw Pamela Andeyric standing by the entrance to the mail alcove, one hand at her throat, her face white. Her eyes are eating up her face, Jo thought, and shuddered.

"There," the young man said, and then walked past her, looking at no one. He pushed the UP button between the two elevators. A moment or two later one of the elevator doors opened, spilling out another three or four wary, puzzled people. The young man brushed past them.

"There," he reiterated as the elevator door slid closed--a perfectly timed exit line.

Utter silence in the lobby.

"What is this? Candid Camera?" One of the new arrivals said in a voice that was almost serious.

Jo looked at her watch. It was 6:46.

8

"All right," Pulaski said into the silence that had spun out for almost a minute after Tom had finished his halting recital of what had happened--in that minute Rinaldi had tried the phone and had gotten nothing at all.

"All right, fine." ←

Pulaski spoke with a kind of finality and started toward the door.

"What?" Tom said.

"I know what to do," Pulaski said. "This has gone far enough."

"No," Rinaldi said, as if he had read Pulaski's mind.

"Yeah," Pulaski said without turning, and was gone.

Tom looked back at Rinaldi. Rinaldi returned his gaze calmly, and with Pulaski gone, Tom found himself unable to face it with much equanimity. What could you say to that sallow, expressionless face and those pouched, watchful eyes? Who do you like in the National League East, Rinaldi? No.

"I'm going back down," Tom said.

"Fine," Rinaldi said gently, and Tom felt a hot flash of guilt, as if everything were somehow his fault, and Rinaldi knew it.

"Okay," Tom said lamely.

Rinaldi said nothing--only looked at him.

Tom Hill fled.

9

Pulaski took an empty elevator car up to the fourth floor, walked stolidly down the hall to his apartment, and let himself in.

The place gave the simultaneous impression of being cluttery and astringently neat. Framed pictures, almost all of them black and white photographs, hung everywhere, but the small dinette table was utterly bare

except for salt and pepper shakers on a Tupperware lazy susan. The book-cases against the left-hand living room wall were so trim they were almost curt--plain planks, ~~which had been~~ sealed to prevent warping but not varnished, laid across four ascending pairs of glass blocks. Every working surface in the small kitchen was bare and astringently clean, but once again, too much wall-space had been utilized--it was hard to imagine what Denny Pulaski kept in his lower drawers. There were two mounted knife-racks, a spice-and-herb shelf (much more modest than Tom Hill's), four clusters of measuring utensils, a bulletin board covered with recipes (most of them for dishes of the "plain but filling" variety), a Playboy calender hung--with either knowing irony or an indifference so great it was nearly bizarre--below a small pewter crucifix. There were ^{three of the four} more framed photos on / bedroom walls, but the queen-sized double was made up in the plain style which the Army teaches. Not even the bright red coverlet could disguise the Army background of its owner. The fourth bedroom wall--all of it--was covered with Armstrong pegboard. Guns were mounted on this, dozens of them. There were shotguns, rifles of both light and heavy calibers, an incredible profusion of well-made handguns in calibers raging from .18 to .408 (the .408 was a custom-made gun mounted on an oversized Ruger frame; the barrel looked as big as a radiator hose and it shot bullets as big as doorknobs), and three machine-guns--an antique Thompson, a very modern Uzi, and a Schmeisser machine-pistol with a wire stock. All three of these guns were legal because the barrels had been filled--what Pulaski had not bothered to tell anyone was that if you pointed the machine-guns' barrels at the floor and slammed the heel of your hand hard against the stocks, they coughed the plugs right out. ^{About} ~~Some things~~ ^{it was} ~~some~~ ^{to keep a fetching silence.} better ~~the more~~

He glanced at his wall of guns as he came into the bedroom, then went to the closet. He opened the louvered doors, brushed back the clothes on their hangers, and then knealt down.

He moved aside his footgear--four pairs of black shoes identical to the ones he was wearing, and two pairs of plain white sneakers--and looked into the closet's back right corner. There was a tennis racket here, a basketball, a scuffed football that needed either air or throwing out--probably the latter. He brushed these aside, gripped the baseball bat, and brought it out.

Although it was one of the oldest items in his apartment--some of the pictures on the walls were older, but that was about all--Pulaski bore it no sentimental attachment. It was not like a book, which could make you think--unless it was written by an asshole; it was not like a picture that you could look at and remember old times.

Pulaski had been in the NRA since his fifteenth birthday, and he remembered a guy--back in 1948 or '9, this had been--who had stood up at a meeting and read a poem. Pulaski even remembered the name. "Ode to a Gun," the guy had called it, and it had started off "To the rest of the world, you're 'just a gun,'/But to me you're the one I depend upon." It had gone on in this vein for some twenty verses and twenty minutes, and Pulaski remembered being mildly amazed at the way the rest of the guys--most of whom had probably been shooting either spitballs or beavers when their English teachers read poetry in class--remained utterly silent, their faces conveying an awe usually reserved for works of art like Rembrandt's "Night-Watch" or Michelangelo's "Pieta." When the guy was done doing just about everything but jerking off over his gun, the guys had applauded until their hands nearly fell off. Pulaski hadn't been able to believe it, and for a moment he had considered standing up on the bar and saying, Don't any of you guys remember the Army, for Chrissake? "This is my rifle, this is my gun, This is for shooting, this is for fun"? What the fuck you guys clapping for? This guy don't want to kill a deer with his gun, he wants to go down on it.

Of course he had said no such thing, but he had run into the attitude since then, and it never ceased to amaze him and disgust him. A gun was a tool,

no different from a screwdriver or a pipewrench or an electric can-opener. What you did with tools was to keep them clean, keep them protected, keep them ready, so that when you needed them you had them. What you didn't do was fall in love with them.

Pulaski felt exactly that way about the old ~~bat~~ ^{Hillridge Braddy which} he brought out from the back of the closet. It was a dark brown color which was now unfashionable, just as a modern ball-player would have found it unfashionably heavy. It was a {Ted Williams} model, purchased in a year when no one attending a major league baseball game had ever seen a black face on the diamond. And he had not purchased it for playing baseball. If he had done so, he might have felt some of the sentimental feelings toward it which he sometimes felt toward his pictures, when he was sitting in his living room and looking at them after the third beer. But baseball had been the furthest thing from his mind when he bought the bat. He had ^{just} been thinking about getting the best tool for the job he had in mind, and that was all.

In late November of 1953, less than six months after he and Smitty had gone into business together, Pulaski was robbed by a couple of niggers. In those days Yell For A Yellow had been three people--Pulaski, Smitty, and Smitty's wife Denise, who manned the telephone and the taxi radio. Both Pulaski and Smitty drove twelve hours a day in the same cab, six days a week. In their first year of business they had put a quarter of a million miles on a Checker they had bought used to begin with.

Pulaski had been working the night shift that week--seven to seven. He had seen the nigger standing at the corner of Estate Street and a street which had gone by the odd name of Furniture Row--both of them were gone now, along with the rest of the old city ghetto, Fultonville, gone in the wake of a late-sixties abortion called urban renewal. Ordinarily he would not have picked up a Fultonville nigger, especially not at night, but this night had been brutally cold, a strong north wind making the 15° temperatures seem even colder. The streets had been as empty as bowling alleys, and Pulaski

hadn't turned fifteen dollars all night. Besides, the nigger was well-dressed. Pulaski's personal belief was that a well-dressed city nigger was probably a pimp, but pimps had been known to tip. So he had pulled over.

The nigger had opened the front passenger door and had pushed a service-issue .45 into Pulaski's face. "Doan wanna take yo hans off the wheel, ~~nah~~^{ofay}," the nigger said, and giggled. "Doan wanna do that."

It was the giggle that convinced Pulaski he didn't want to do that--the giggle and the nigger's bloodshot, jittery eyes. The nigger was certainly on something, some upper, and Pulaski knew if he moved, the nigger would kill him.

"Ronnie!" The nigger called, and a second nigger had come out of the shadows. Ronnie was wearing a cap, what looked to be a high school warmup jacket, and a scared look. He opened the back door of the taxi, looked around, blowing nervously on his hands, and said: "Eddie, I b'leeve--"

"Get in, nigguh!" Eddie hissed. "Tole you not to use mah name!"

"You used mine," Ronnie whined, but he got in.

~~Ronnie~~ Eddie switched the .45 from one hand to the other and Pulaski thought: They're going to kill me now for sure. Just because I know their fucking first names.

"Now you doan wanna think about no Lone Ranger bootsheet, ofay," Eddie said, getting into the cab. "Mah frien in the back, he got him a gun, too. He blow you down, mah good man, he blow you raht the fuck down." And Eddie giggled again, switching the .45 from one hand to the other, as if it was hot. "Drive," he said.

Pulaski drove. The nigger named Eddie took the fifteen dollars in his money-box on the seat and then demanded his wallet. He stripped the six dollars in there, exclaiming angrily over the small size of the take while Ronnie whined nervously from the back seat, voicing his belief that there was a cop behind every set of headlights.

They drove. It seemed to Pulaski that they drove for hours through the windy, deserted, bitterly cold streets of the lower city--in reality it had probably been no more than twenty minutes, but time changed in a situation like that, just as it changed in battle.

The wind blew hard enough to make the overhead traffic lights dance sinuously on their cables, hard enough sometimes to rock the cab on its springs. Eddie muttered and cursed, switching his gun from hand to hand, and every time that Ronnie whined he was sure that was a cop, man, sure of it, Eddie grew more nervous and Pulaski grew more sure he was going to be killed. Near the end he had even resigned himself to it, hoping only that he wouldn't be shot in the head and live, like some of the guys he had seen in Seoul, nothing but ~~vegetables~~. And then Eddie had told him to stop in the middle of a deserted block of warehouses.

Here, Pulaski remembered thinking. Right here is where they are going to punch me out.

And then they were gone, gone so fast that Pulaski couldn't believe it--they had been only ~~two~~ ~~pair~~ two pair of footfalls beating a fast rattaplan on the sidewalk. ~~Then~~ The wind gusted, rocking the Checker on its beaten-up springs again, and when it died, the footfalls were gone, too.

Pulaski had driven six blocks and then he had pulled over, opened the door, and vomited his supper into the street. He leaned out like a guy checking on his left rear tire, his eyes shut, smelling his vomit, tasting it in his throat, shuddering.

He had gotten the baseball bat the next day.

He got it for a very specific reason. He got it because the image of the robbery he lived with was the second nigger, Ronnie, standing for a moment at the back ~~of~~ ~~a~~ door of the cab, blowing on his hands. Mah friend in the back, he got a gun, too. Eddie had said, but if Ronnie had had one, it hadn't been in his hand then. And when Eddie got into the front seat, switching the ~~gun~~ ~~xxxx~~ .45 nervously from hand to hand, Pulaski

could have taken ^{him} ~~the guy~~ with the baseball bat, he could have split ^{him} ~~the~~ ^{if so,} ~~guy's~~ head wide open. Maybe the other one had had a gun, but ^{if so,} it had been under his jacket. ~~And by the time he pulled it,~~ And by the time he pulled it, Pulaski could have been out of the cab. His cardinal sin was that he hadn't been prepared, hadn't been ready. He understood that he could be robbed another five times, hell, another fifty, and never encounter a similar situation where use of such a weapon--such a tool--would be feasible. But there was always that one chance...and it was a sin not to be ready.

The bat was a short one--a kid's bat, really, only twenty-four inches long. It leaned comfortably against the seat, three inches from his hand, its handle ~~a~~ friction-taped for a surer grip and for camoflaue purposes as well.

Then, in 1957, it had happened again. This time the robber had been white, in his mid-twenties. It turned out that he was a sometime jazz trumpet player and a fulltime junky with a record as long as his horn. He had gotten into the front of the taxi--by '57 both Pulaski and Smitty were only driving when one of their regulars called in sick late or didn't show up at all--and he had taken his eyes off Pulaski and lowered the gun to grab the cash-box. That had been a warm spring night, shirtsleeve weather, but Pulaski felt a chilly winter wind and could see the traffic-lights dancing on their cables even though they had been replaced by more modern lights on upright poles the year before.

He grabbed the baseball bat and struck with an uncanny speed in a man who was so big. ~~XXXX~~ When the bat connected with the junkie trumpet-player's head there was a dull, authoritative thud, like a punter kicking a football. The junkie didn't wake up for four days, and Pulaski heard he didn't walk right for six weeks. Pulaski didn't lose any sleep over it.

And here was the bat. It had time-travelled through the years with him, moving from place to place with him, largely forgotten but ~~XXXXXX~~ never thrown out, because it was a good tool, and when you needed a tool you wanted it near to your hand. He knew that life was a process of

learning lessons and then relearning them, and he believed that most people were the sorry creatures ~~that~~ they were because they had to re-learn so goddam many. Having the tool you needed when you needed it was a lesson he had learned from his father as a kid, and he had relearned it from a nigger named Ronnie on a cold night in 1953. Twice was enough.

He stood up with the short bat in his hand and thudded it ~~into~~ into his left ⁽¹⁰⁻⁴⁰⁻¹⁹⁵³⁾ palm. Then he nodded and left the apartment.

10

Tom sensed the change in the lobby as soon as he stepped off the elevator. It wasn't just that there were more people; it was the feel of the ~~place~~ ^{people}--a kind of emotional gradient. He thought that things had changed from a feeling of Huh? to one of Oh no.

He looked toward the foyer, saw the people lined up there, looking out, and started in that direction. Something had happened, and whatever it was apparently wasn't good. Still, he was not prepared for what happened next.

A middle-aged man stepped away from the window, turned, and hurried out of the lobby, holding one hand cupped over his mouth as if he might throw up. Is it another tornado? went through Tom's mind, as if time had grown limber and doubled back on itself--he had seen that face again and again in the wake of the tornado. Wide eyes, white skin exuding sweat in big drops--shock.

The man passed him without seeing him and plunged into the elevator. He pushed a button--at random, it seemed to Tom--and when the door closed he was still standing partly bent over, his hand cupped to his mouth.

"Seeya later, hope you enjoyed the show," someone cracked, and there was a mindless ripple of laughter that Tom also associated with shock.

He went to the window, taking the man's place. He looked out for a long time, unable to tell what was wrong, what had changed--something had, but it was so big and so complete that his mind was unable to grasp it for a full five seconds. The traffic on the highway was gone. All the traffic.

He turned to the woman standing on his right, barely registering the fact that she was young, pretty, and gray-eyed. "What happened?"

"They disappeared," she said. Her voice was low and apparently calm. "All of the cars and trucks. They just disappeared. It was like--" She groped. "It was like a ^{really wonderful} special effect in a movie."

"That's impossible," he said, wondering if she was having him on--maybe she thought he was making some kind of pass, and this was her way of turning him off.

She nodded. "But that's what happened."

He saw she was not having him on; she really believed it had happened. He looked away from her, and at the others. They were looking blankly out at 481, and he saw that it had happened...that they, at least, believed it had happened.

There has been some sort of nuclear alert, a voice inside him spoke up. It spoke slowly and coherently, this voice; it spoke as a person would speak rather than as a thought moves. It lectured. There has been a nuclear alert and all of those people have taken shelter. But--

(but where are the cars)

Ah yes. Good question. Did all of the people out there going to work on 481 tune into Conelrad--if there still was a Conelrad--at the same time, and then somehow take their cars with them to the nearest fallout shelter? Ridiculous.

He looked at the road again. No cars. No cars in the MacDonalds' parking lot; no cars in front of Mallway Sports. And at Cantrell's Chevrolet--

Tom felt a ripply sort of vertigo that was like seasickness and immediately squeezed his eyes shut. A moment later he opened them...reluctantly. To the right of the Chevrolet dealership was a used-car lot. There were still cars in this lot, but they had

an odd ~~unusual~~ ^{wavering aspect} that was sickening to look at. They were there but they weren't there. He tried to focus on a Chevy Malibu but his eyes wouldn't hold the car in any sane image. There...not there...there...not there...

His stomach did another lazy rollover and he had to close his eyes again. He thought he understood now why the man whose place he had taken had left with his hand cupped over his mouth.

It was like a special effect in a movie, the young woman had said, and yes, that's just what it was like. And then he thought of the way Beverly had sounded, the way her voice had run up first into something like a novelty record and then into high-speed gibberish. Like a special effect.

Behind them, a woman uttered a high, shrill giggle. ~~then~~ ^{The} giggle became a series of short, sharp screams. There was a mutter of protest at this, and the girl next to Tom turned, as if startled out of a dream.

"Pamela," she said in a low voice, and then, louder: "Pamela, it's all right--"

Tom turned as the woman next to him turned and ^{he} saw a narrow, middle-aged woman with huge hysterical eyes, fingering the beads around her throat and screaming her head off. She looked not just hysterical but insane, absolutely insane, and Tom felt a crawl of atavistic terror.

"Quit it, lady!" someone yelled.

"Turn it off!" someone else cried.

"Pamela!" The young woman said again, and started toward her. The others had drawn away from her. The woman named Pamela did not notice; she went on staring out through the foyer windows, screaming like a firebell. Tom thought: Who's going to take her out? Who's going to take care of this if we can't open the doors

or use the phones? And he found himself thinking of Myers, who lived on the ~~4th~~^{4th} floor, for the first time that morning.

The ~~young~~^{young} woman went toward the screaming Pamela, and that was when the elevator doors opened and Pulaski came out with ~~a club~~^{a club} in his hand.

11

During the days that followed, Tom came back to that image time and time again--more than once he dreamed of it. For a moment he was struck forcibly with the idea that it was not Pulaski at all but some hulking caveman, a beast not much higher than an orangutan who had been dressed in khaki clothes. In just a second or two he's going to ~~start~~^{commence} laying about himself with that club and ~~cracking~~^{he} breaking heads, ~~then~~^{he} thought dimly. There's going to be brains--Jesus! brains!--on that carpet...let me out of here!

Then he saw the club was only a baseball bat--a child's bat, really, short and somehow old-fashioned in its chunkiness.

Pulaski glanced at the screaming woman and then dismissed her--Tom saw him do that. He saw the young woman glance at him and saw her moment of startled fear...perhaps she had the same thought Tom himself had had. ~~She~~^{Thanks dismissed Pulaski as Pulaski has dismissed Pamela.} went on to the screaming woman, ~~Pamela~~^{she} and put her arms about her.

The others drew away from Pulaski, eyeing the baseball bat nervously. Pulaski simply came on, thudding the head of the bat into his open palm. As he entered the foyer, several of the watchers scattered back hastily.

Pamela's screams had subsided to moans, and Tom could hear the young woman's voice, low and soothing and somehow firm. He felt both envy and inadequacy--he never would have been able to handle the situation so well and so confidently.

"What are you doing?" Tom asked.

"Getting out, Babycakes," Pulaski said.

"Listen, Pulaski. The cars out there..." He trailed off. It seemed suddenly too complex. Endlessly complex. He looked out again and saw that the cars in the Tennis Club lot looked all right...almost all right, anyway. There was something there, too, something that not even the weirdly depthless quality of the light could fully explain, but he ~~blurred~~^{suppressed} it. At least they weren't rippling like a film image seen through a heat-haze.

Pulaski dismissed Tom as well. He thudded the head of the bat against his hand with a metronomelike regularity. The others watched him, as still and apprehensive as deer. Pamela's moans had become soft and regular weeping.

"Okay," Pulaski said, and stopped thudding the bat into his hand.

Tom watched, fascinated, as the big man settled both hands onto the bat, seeming to dig into the carpet with his feet. And he found himself thinking of another Pole, Ted Klezewski of the Pittsburgh Pirates--Big Klew, they had called him. He had had no speed and no finesse, but like Harmon Killibrew, he'd had power enough to knock a baseball just about a thousand miles.

Pulaski pulled the bat back and then swung, bringing it down and then up in a hard, smooth arc--there was just room enough in the small foyer to allow that. Tom slitted his eyes. He saw an older man in jogging attire shield his face instinctively, although the glass would spray outward, onto the walkway and into the ornamental bushes that bordered it.

Tom heard the explosive cough of breaking glass--but as with the bray of the fire door's alarm bell, he heard it only in his mind. The bat struck the glass with a solemn and somehow dimwitted

thud--it sounded not like wood against glass but wood against wood. The glass ~~was~~ ~~wasn't~~ did not break; it did not so much as shiver.

Pulaski dropped the bat on the floor, his face a bitter grimace of pain, and ~~clutched~~ ^{stuck} his throbbing hands ~~underneath his armpits~~ ^{into} ~~his armpits~~. Tom, who had felt that sting as a college baseball player, took a sympathetic step toward him.

"Keep out of my face," Pulaski ~~growled~~ ^{snarled}, and Tom stopped where he was. Only a fool would have approached a man with such an expression of ~~pure~~ mingled pain and fury, ^{on his face}.

"Did you see that?" a ^{fatish} man in a glen-plaid business suit was saying aloud. "Did you see that? Did you--"

"I saw it, I saw it," someone else said testily. "Let it go."

Tom squatted on his haunches by the bat.

"Don't touch that!" Pulaski said.

"I just want to see if the handle's cracked," Tom said. "Man, you hit that door and I thought of Ted Klezewski."

"Big Klew? Yeah?" There was recognition in Pulaski's voice, but Tom did not make the mistake of thinking it was pleasure.

"How bad's it cracked?"

"Doesn't look like it's cracked at all," Tom said.

"Yeah? Fucking-A!" This time there was pleasure in Pulaski's voice. He bent over, picked up the bat, and tapped it lightly against his open palm. Even that gentle touch made him wince, and Tom saw both of Pulaski's hands were bright red. He had hit the glass a fearsome swat, and it really was a wonder the bat hadn't cracked...or simply shattered at the handle. But that wasn't the real wonder, was it? No. The real wonder was the unbroken glass.

"They built stuff tougher in the old days, Babycakes," Pulaski

said, and although it was a sentimental thing to say, Tom could detect no sentiment in Pulaski's voice...and he felt disturbed again, looking at the man's broad, large-pored, ungiving face.

"Well, people have always said ^{So} ~~it~~, anyway," Tom answered. It was an inane comment, but he could think of nothing else. In a way, his mind felt not so much dazed as swollen completely shut.

Pulaski nodded, looking through the glass.

"So what is this, Hill? You got any ideas?"

Tom looked out, studied that eerie yellow light (but he avoided looking at Cantrell's Chevrolet across 481--avoided it studiously), and shook his head.

Pulaski swung around to look at those in the lobby.

"Any of you?" He asked, raising his voice slightly. "Any of you got any ideas what this thing is?"

There was no answer; only their solemn, shining eyes and Pamela Andeyric's soft sobbing.

Chapter V: The Tennis Club (II);
First Weird Scenes inside
the Goldmine (7:00 A.M. to
8:00 A.M.)

1

By eight o'clock, ~~the residents~~ ^{at home} almost every resident of the Tennis Club Apartments who was ~~in~~ on that morning of July the 19th knew that something had gone radically, if obscurely, wrong. Most were up by the hour of eight o'clock anyway. Tennis Club residents did not pay the rent out of their dime banks, but neither was it a retreat of the rich; the people who lived ~~at the Tennis Club~~ ^{there} worked for their livings, by and large, and with the major route into the city's downtown district torn to pieces, even slothful nine-to-fivers usually rose by seven-forty-five. They didn't necessarily like it, but they did it; it was a survival tactic.

Of course, not everyone ~~who lived there~~ ^{who lived there} was a nine-to-fiver...or an eight-to-fourer, for that matter. Tim Jefferies, who lived in 820, had listed his occupation as real estate agent, and although he had indeed passed the state realtors' test and did indeed maintain an office in The Crescent, his real business was selling dope; he had not actually shown a house in close to seven months. There were several fairly well-to-do retirees in the building, including Leon and Betty Williams on the fourth floor; two years before, Leon Williams had turned over his fast-food franchise on 481 for a tidy sum of money. There was a fellow named Roddy Trangennet on the same floor who made an eccentric living hustling pool--not surprisingly, he was a friend of Tim Jefferies, the dope-dealer.

~~Many of~~ These people, and most of those who hadn't needed to get up for work that morning, were either awakened by ~~friends~~ ^{friends} acquaintances who wanted to know if they had heard, if they had seen...or they were roused by the mounting noise-level. ~~As~~

~~the noise~~ The Tennis Club had been adequately sound-proofed, but these circumstances were extraordinary, and knots of people boiled up and down the halls or gathered in apartment doorways, talking in voices that were almost shouts.

Myers, the only person in the building Tom Hill really knew (if pressed, he would have called Myers almost a friend), was one of the eight or ten residents who slept peacefully through all of it. He would not wake up until Tom hammered on his door at ten-thirty that morning, and ten-thirty was still two hours ^{before} ~~the~~ the time Myers usually rose. He slept on in whalelike splendor, his body clad in bright yellow pajamas, oblivious of the rising racket outside.

And outside, the initial panic was beginning.

2

A delegation of six people who either hardly knew each other or who didn't know each other at all converged on Rinaldi's apartment and hammered on the door until he opened it.

The de facto leader of this group was Dave Ashmore, the older man in jogging attire. Ashmore, who was sixty-one and known as Turk to his closest friends, ran a publishing company downtown. This company was small but quite successful; it published books of regional interest, many of them humorous. It also did a fair amount of vanity publishing, which was referred to more decorously in the Ashmore House brochures as "subsidy publishing." What this meant was that Ashmore House would publish and issue books if their authors paid for the service; it also provided some limited promotion in the local papers. Most of these vanity publications were bad poetry and obscure novels, and Ashmore himself decided whether or not to take on a vanity client strictly on his assessment of whether or not the would-be author could and would pay when

the bills came due. His judgements on this score were generally good, and Ashmore House had prospered. The only Ashmore House subsidy title he had ever read in his life was Raising and Caring for Your Scottie; he and his wife Florence had had four Scotties, *although* ~~that bitch~~ *Florence* ~~all four~~ following the divorce, ~~they~~ *they* had ~~each taken one~~ *each taken one* of them. Turk Ashmore was used to getting his way.

As spokesman for the group, he told Rinaldi that he had no idea what was going on around here and didn't really care; his lawyer might care, and his lawyer would certainly be in touch with Rinaldi's lawyers or whosever lawyers were retained to defend legal actions against this place, and his, Ashmore's, lawyer could be counted on to sue the living Jesus out of whoever was responsible for what was going on around here, but Ashmore didn't care, not a bit; he was, in fact, bored with the whole thing (but he doubted very much if his lawyer--a person who began to sound more and more like some bloodthirsty jungle animal each time Ashmore referred to him ~~he~~ *- would be bored*).

As Ashmore made these points, beginning with his unconcern and ending with his boredom, his voice rose from its original tone of abrasive sternness to a ~~harsh~~ *shrill, almost female* shout. He was still wearing his red tee-shirt and his white jogging shorts, and now color began to climb up the gnarled column of his neck and into his cheeks.

No, Ashmore concluded, his lips drawn back from yellow, uneven teeth which nonetheless looked very strong, his one interest was in getting out of here and getting in his morning's run and then getting back in here and ~~then~~ *then* ~~getting~~ *out again* ~~to~~ *go to* work. Those were the things he paid for and he intended to have them.

The other five in Turk Ashton's group--three men and two women, all dressed for business--were vocal in their support. One of

the other men, an architectural draughtsman named Minetti with a sunken and yet intelligent face, cried "Damn right!" like a cheerleader at every point Ashmore made. One of the women was apparantly struck by fresh injustices at every turn of a phrase; this woman, ^{Georgie}~~Louise~~ Endicott, tried to inject various bits of news about the coin-op washers that didn't work, the crazy man who wrote bad words on peoples' doors, the smell of urine that had permeated the righthand elevator the month before, ^{and various other unpleasanties,} Ms. Endicott, who worked as a secretary in the Squirrel Hill Mall's executive offices, was the sort of woman who can clog up what should be a routine forty-minute meeting and turn it into a marathon mare's nest of asides, detours, and backward loops...unless the meeting's moderator happens to be brutally determined to push through from point A to point Z. Turk Ashton had no problem with her; each time she began with "And that's no worse than the dryers that--" or "Maybe you could also explain why the incinerator chutes are always--", Ashton simply rolled over her, as natural a force as a tidal-wave burying flimsy beachside shacks under tons of water. At last Ms. Endicott fell almost silent, her face rather awed.

The other three were more or less content to follow along with Minetti's cheerleading--growling their support, nodding, or simply looking steely-eyed and menacing at each "Damn right!" Their united point seemed to be that they didn't care, they were bored (not only with being trapped in the building but with the way the doors to the incinerator chutes were sometimes locked after nine PM, but never mind that right now), and if Rinaldi didn't do something right away, they would have his guts for garters. They were apparantly half a dozen people with a violent reaction to apathy and a murderous resentment of ennui.

Rinaldi stood in the doorway of his apartment, right hand

on the inner knob of the door, left hand resting lightly on the jamb--it was a casual enough posture, and none of the six angry people standing in the hallway recognized--as Tom Hill might have done and Denny Pulaski surely would have done--that he was effectively barring them from coming any further. Nor did any of them realize that he was prepared to slam the door on them, and to do it very hard and very quickly, if the tone of this "meeting" got much hotter.

Although his sallow face betrayed ^{no} more than it ever did, and although his dark eyes rested steadily on Turk Ashton's face, not jumping to Minetti's at each "Damn right!" in a way that might have betrayed nerves, ~~not~~ ^{not} shifting away from Ashton's darkening complexion in a way that might have admitted the possibility that Ashton had a point or two, ~~that~~ a number of warning bells had gone off in Rinaldi's

He was not precisely frightened--Rinaldi could not have then ~~admitted~~ ^{admitted} the possibility of being frightened by mere tenants, although that time would come--but he was ~~much~~ alert and ~~thoroughly~~ aware that he was facing a kind of verbal lynch-mob.

Rinaldi knew the signs; he had faced such verbal lynch-mobs before. He did not exactly view the tenants of the Tennis Club with contempt; he would not have wasted such a strong emotion on them. They were no more worth his contempt than the doings of a heap of ants in an ant-colony would have been. Because his lack of contempt was a real, practical thing and not simply an intellectual stance (when an intellectual speaks of something as being "beneath contempt," what he or she really means is that he or she hates that thing with all his or her heart), it had made him both more practical about his job and more apt to survive such storms as this one.

He had seen three of these people--Ashton, the Endicott twat,

and the fat guy in the green sport-coat, Costello--before. They fit into Category 2: Busybodies. Ashton and Costello had been parts of other verbal lynch-mobs that came before him...except, of course, the members of these lynch-mobs called themselves "delegations." Never mind the simple fact that they had delegated themselves; the word had an official sound and it apparantly made them feel they had the right to raise their voices and blow off steam and sound threatening. And, of course, sooner or later there was a lot of hollow, strutting talk about somebody's lawyer.

Because his lack of contempt was real and practical, he saw through the "delegations" to the verbal lynch-mobs that were beneath, and he understood that, while the "delegations" might use all manner of big words and orotund phrases, it always came down to a simplicity: spoiled people who wanted their own way and who were determined to have it.

There ^{had been} ~~was~~, for instance, ^{last year's business} ~~an~~ ~~old~~ ~~one~~ of Elevator 1, which was called "the lefthand elevator" by most of the tenants because of its position in the lobby. Elevator 1 was technically a "freight-passenger elevator"--and the safety certificate mounted under plastic on the wall of the car so proclaimed it. This meant that, although it looked like an elevator meant only to carry passengers, its load capacity was much bigger ^{than} ~~than~~ that Elevator 2, and its fpm speed was slightly slower. Also, the chrome-edged panelling on the walls of the car could be quickly snapped out, increasing the space and revealing rows of high hooks where movers' pads could be hung.

Because the turnover in the Tennis Club was fairly steady, Elevator 1 served its freight function on a regular basis. The movers (or the tenant, if he had elected to handle the job himself) would obtain the HOLD key from the office and turn it in again

when the job was finished. Elevator 1 was taken to the floor of the departing tenant and the HOLD key was turned. The elevator was loaded up with all the tenants' earthly goods (in most cases the elevator could move everything in a single trip) and ~~the~~ ^{was then} ~~the~~ ~~key~~ ~~was~~ taken off hold. ~~When~~ The movers used a second key, also to be returned when the job was done; this one was labelled BASE. When the elevator reached the basement, the HOLD key was turned again. ^{Thus} ~~When~~ the movers could remove the furniture and load it into the truck--there was an outside door and a convenient ramp for this at the rear of the building.

All of this was very well if you were moving, but it meant that two or three times a week--even more often during the last week of the month--one elevator was out of service, and tenants sometimes had to wait as long as ninety seconds for Elevator 2 to reach them.

Eventually, Rinaldi was visited by a "delegation."

It did not surprise him; Busybodies were always forming "delegations." During his term of service at the Tennis Club, he had received the Elevator 1 Delegation (for so he thought of it) five times; he had received the Incinerator Delegation four times; the Energy Efficiency Delegation once (he suddenly recalled the Endicott twat had been on that one), and various Sports Complex Delegations--mostly dealing with pool rules or the food in The Clubhouse--over a dozen times. And although the faces varied, each group thought it must be the first to uncover this Burning Injustice, each group was headed by a spokesman or ^{Spokeswoman} ~~man~~ who gradually grew redder and redder as he or she spoke (just as Ashton was growing redder and redder right now), and each spouted the same bullshit, laced with the predictable threat of lawyers.

The Elevator 1 Delegation was typical from start to finish.

They talked of the inconvenience of having one elevator "down" in a building that served hundreds of people (one "delegation" had actually come equipped with an "elevator flow-chart" done in three colors). They spoke of the fact that all tenants had equal rights. Someone usually asked Rinaldi if he had ever gotten stuck waiting for the single ^{working} elevator with his arms full of grocery bags (the members of most "delegations" seemed to assume that, secreted somewhere in the building, was Rinaldi's private--possibly nuclear-powered--elevator). And underneath all the arguments lay a single fact which years of dealing with Tennis Club Apartments residents had convinced Rinaldi was the Great Unalterable--and this fact was the simple childish pigginess of the tenants. The words they had learned in college were only a veneer over the ~~unshakable~~ "Gimme it! It's mine!" idea they had apparantly absorbed as the central truth of their lives in sub-primary or kindergarten.

If he had been disposed to reason with them or to discuss their philosophy with them (he wasn't; Rinaldi was a pragmatist through and through), he might have said this to each of the Elevator 1 Delegations that had visited him: Look. Flow-charts and tenant rights and how concerned you are about the physically handicapped aside--and by the way, there's only one cripple in the building, Stanton on the third floor, and he's never come down here to complain about the elevators, only you guys who go out and jog and lift weights and play raquetball do that--all that aside, the truth of it is just that you don't give a fuck if some guy has got to schlepp his couch and his chairs and his console TV and his fucking dehumidifiers down the fire-stairs, do you? Or if some poor guy has a heart-attack trying to move in, who cares? Not you. Not me, either--but I can't afford the luxury of shutting my eyes to what's down the road...in this case, ~~any~~ the "dele-

gations" screaming about why we don't have a freight-elevator.

All of this made a certain amount of sense, but Rinaldi also recognized the fact that people to whom the Great Unalterable is "Gimme it! It's mine!" are rarely receptive to sense (it was these same people, Rinaldi believed, unable to face a future without electric hair-dryers and electric carving-knives, who had approved the state's long-range nuclear power-plant program at a referendum two years before). Because he was a pragmatist, though, he did not mourn their lack of sense; he only expected it. Instead of trying to reason with them, he simply showed them copies of the lease they had signed--the lease clearly spelled out the fact that the management reserved the right to convert Elevator 1 to its freight-function at any time between the hours of 5 AM and 6 PM. None of the "delegation" members had, of course, objected to that clause when the lease was put before them, because then they'd been faced with moving their own stuff in.

Eventually they went away, muttering.

Rinaldi had won most of his battles with this wonderful blank pragmatism, which ~~also~~ recognized that the childish selfishness which motivated most "delegations" was accompanied by a childish lack of commitment. They talked of lawyers, but when retainer fees were actually mentioned, most "delegations" fell apart. And although both he and the owners had been threatened with a tenants' union from time to time, such a union had never materialized. It was taken up occasionally as a kind of fad, there were a few meetings, and then it all blew over.

Ashmore, Endicott, Minetti, and the other three forming the current "delegation," had a great deal in common with all the "delegations" Rinaldi had faced in the past, but he recognized a potentially dangerous difference in degree...which was why he kept one

hand on the doorknob in a gesture that was much less casual than it looked. This wasn't a question of Elevator 1 or whether the fry-cook at The Clubhouse was shorting the hamburgers, and that ugly feel--that lynch-mob feel--was much clearer.

this was something much more serious, something that was at least temporary affecting everyone in the building

Ashton wound up his speech at full volume and then folded his arms in a theatrical gesture, seeming to suggest that he would stand here all summer if that was what it took to get some action out of Rinaldi.

"What do you want?" Rinaldi asked mildly.

"Want? Want?" The Endicott twat spluttered. "Haven't you been listening at all, you stupid man? We want to get out of here." Her cheeks began to tremble. Her eyes widened. "I...I'm--"

"--bored," Ashton finished for her, and gave her a stony glance that drove her back a step or two.

"Bored, yes, that's right," she said, a little faintly. "I'm bored with the whole thing, Mr. Rinaldi."

Rinaldi looked back at Ash^{ton}~~ton~~.

"Well?" Ashton blustered. You could never read the damned superintendent's face, and Ashton always had the feeling that he had been judged and found wanting. It was not a feeling that sat well with him.

"I repeat, what do you want me to do, Mr. Ashton?"

"I want you to unlock the doors to the Sports Complex," Ashton said promptly. Facing Rinaldi's black, moveless eyes, he suddenly wished he had changed out of his jogging shorts before coming here. "There are at least three sets of exits over there that I know of, and probably there are more. We can go out through there."

"Damn right!" Minetti said, and bared his teeth at Rinaldi.

Rinaldi considered Ashton's suggestion--his demand, if you

wanted to be honest about it. He would be on perfectly firm ground if he told Ashton and these other Busybodies to stick it in their collective ear; that they could take up whatever they wanted to with Roger Adler when he came in at nine, but the Sports Complex--which had been the Tennis and Swim Club until the previous year, when the raquetball and handball courts had been opened--was not his baby.

Yes, he would be on firm ground, at least technically. But he didn't like the way Ashton looked, and he didn't like the way Minetti kept saying "Damn right!" as if it was the only thing his shocked brain could remember, and he didn't like the way the others kept crowding up, their faces too white and their eyes too wide. This was like the Elevator Delegations in many ways, but he felt that in other ways--maybe vital ones--it was quite a bit different.

The Sports Complex was Adler's responsibility, but ^{Rinaldi} ~~he~~ had a key. He supposed it was even possible that Ashton and his merry band could get out that way. ~~even~~ If not, they would ^{at least be out of his hair} ~~have to~~ ^{for the time being.} He could close the door and think. Because this could be very bad. Very bad indeed. He had seen it on that bohunk Pulaski's face, and on Hill's face as well; Hill had left Rinaldi's apartment walking as if someone had just squeezed his balls good and hard.

"Suppose I give you my key to the door at the end of the tunnel-way?" Rinaldi ^{asked} ~~asked~~ mildly. "Would you bring it back, Mr. Ashton? Slide it under my door if I'm out?"

Ashton's face showed first surprise and then a rather repulsive mixture of gratitude and conceit; that was easier than I thought and told you I'd show him who's boss.

"Course," he said. "You don't end up heading your own business unless you're responsible, Rinaldi."

"No, I suppose not," Rinaldi said, and thought: Gimme it!
It's mine! He deliberately looked from Ashton's face ~~to~~ ^{to} the
 Ace bandage wrapped around the man's knee and then back up at
 his face again. Ashton flushed.

"We don't have all day," ~~Ashton said~~ ~~Ashton said~~

"No," Rinaldi agreed, still speaking mildly. He could see
 they were relaxing now, losing that ^{slightly} frightening focus they'd had
 when they first came to the door, two or three hammering on it
 at the same time. "I'll get it for you."

He turned away from the door, leaving it open and unattended--
 he wouldn't have done that five minutes ago, but now it was okay.
 He glimpsed Ashton's face--baffled, wary, a little embarrassed,
 still having trouble comprehending the ease with which Rinaldi
 had capitulated...he probably feels a little like a guy who got
a bunch of his friends to help him drive a battering ram against
the castle door and then found out it was papier-mache, Rinaldi
 thought. Good.

He went down the hallway between the kitchen and the apartment's
 two bedrooms, moved a picture (it swung outward on hidden hinges)
 and quickly dialed the combination on the safe set into the wall.
 There was a litter of papers, reports, and blueprints inside,
 along with a considerable amount of cash in banded bundles--better
 than eight thousand dollars in cash, as it happened. Rinaldi found
 a second keyring, this one labelled DUPLICATES AND MASTERS. DO
 NOT COPY.

He removed the key which opened the door at the end of the
 tunnelway (wondering to himself if they would be able to open
 the door even if the key turned in the lock) and tossed the key-
 ring back into the safe. He relocked the safe, swung the picture
 back into position, and went back to Ashton and his group.

"Here you are," Rinaldi said, and gave the key to Ashton.

"Could I have it back in an hour, Mr. Ashton?"

"Before lunch," Ashton said, starting to turn away, ostentatiously dismissing Rinaldi. Thank you, thank you, my good man.

"In an hour, please," Rinaldi said, still mildly. "Slide it under my door if I'm not here."

"Look, Rinaldi, an hour may not be--"

"It will have to be," Rinaldi said. His unflickering dark eyes fixed themselves on Ashton's face again.

"What will you do if I'm late back with it?" Ashton asked.

"Evict me?"

"No, sir. But I wouldn't trust you with one of my keys again."

Ashton looked at him sullenly, and then around at his little band. They had drawn back a bit from him, and even Ms. Endicott was looking at the floor, as if embarrassed. Rinaldi allowed himself an inward smile. Ashton knew that Rinaldi had quite effortlessly made him look ^{both} graceless and ungrateful, but he didn't know precisely how, and he certainly did not know how to retrieve the situation.

"All right, an hour," he said. "Come on, folks. Let's get out of here." He threw Rinaldi a final glance.

"Damn right!" Minetti said, his enthusiasm returning at the prospect.

Rinaldi let them get ten feet down the hall, almost to the left turn that would take them to the elevators, and then he called: "Oh, Mr. Ashton? Ms. Endicott? Folks?"

They turned toward him. Ashton in particular looked truculent and on edge. Rinaldi liked him that way just fine.

"That key will let you into the Complex, but it won't let you out," he said. "There are actually four or five doors which go outside from the Complex, but all of them are locked from the

inside as well as the outside. Mr. Adler has those keys, but I don't."

^{Four} ~~three~~ of them were looking at him with untingered dismay; ^{the big man's} ~~face was blank, unreadable, and~~ ^{both calculating and angry.}

Ashton's face was ~~unmoving, like a mask, and~~ Rinaldi suspected that Mr. Ashton might soon graduate from the status of Busybody to that of Troublemaker. Not good, not at all, but it had been an upsetting morning for Rinaldi as well (although no one would have believed it, except perhaps his mother), and it felt good to take the wind out of the pompous old airbag's sails.

"There are two fire-doors, of course, and maybe the ones over there are in working order," Rinaldi added. "The doors from The Clubhouse to the outside push open--it's a state law that all bar and restaurant doors have to be perpetually unlocked from the inside, I think--but of course the doors leading into The Clubhouse from the pool area are locked. You could break them open, but I don't advise it. You'd be liable for damages...and then someone just might start eviction procedures against you all. Right, Mr. Ashton?"

Ashton began to splutter.

"Ask your lawyer," Rinaldi said. He smiled gently and closed the door the same way.

3

As things grew steadily worse that first day and in the days which followed, Tom Hill came to think of some of the things which took place in the Tennis Club Apartments--scenes both comic and tragic--as "weird scenes inside the goldmine." The phrase eventually became widely current--one of those idiomatic phrases that many people know and use, but one which few on the outside of a given society would or could understand without so much background that, like a joke that has to be explained, it would have lost its savor

in translation. Even Pulaski knew and understood the phrase, although he would not use it. But it was actually Jo Page who first coined it, remembering the strange and ominous song from which it had come--"The End," by The Doors.

The first of these weird scenes occurred that morning between seven and eight A.M., while Tom Hill and Jo Page were having coffee ^{laced with brandy} in Tom's apartment and trying not to look out at that strange, clear, yet somehow yellow light that blanketed everything.

The middle-aged man who had left the foyer with his hand over his mouth, the one whose place Tom had taken, was named James Upshaw. He was one of two freelance writers who lived in the Tennis Club Apartments--the other was Tom's acquaintance Myers, who was still sleeping peacefully in apartment 525.

James Upshaw wrote greeting-card verse for a living, but unlike Myers, he did not work at home. Upshaw maintained an office in the Herkimer Building downtown. Like the Brill Building in New York, it was ^{an old} building largely occupied by songwriters, freelance writers, ambulance-chasing lawyers, and a private detective or two specializing in divorce work. The ^{fellow} ~~man~~ in the office next to Upshaw's was a tiny man named Eugene Bradley with a large capacity for vodka, which he brought to work each day in a Thermos. Bradley lived with his mother and eked out a living creating crossword puzzles. Upshaw had learned from him--among other things--that "surah" was a soft twilled silk ^{and} ~~not~~ the guardians of the Olympian gates were "Horae."

Upshaw went up to his apartment, let himself in, and vomited three times in the kitchen sink, aware that his chances of making it to the bathroom were slim and that the smell of vomit might never come out of his apartment's pale green shag rug.

Standing upright again, his head throbbing and his mouth slimy,

he wondered if Gene Bradley had a word for this.

When he felt he had control of himself, Upshaw rinsed the sink, walked down the short corridor to the bathroom (trailing one hand along the wall as he went) and opened the medicine cabinet. From this he took a tube of Alka-Seltzer and a perscription bottle which contained Valium tablets. He filled the bathroom glass with cold water and took two Alka-Seltzer. He drank the foaming glass off, uttered a resounding belch, and immediately felt better. He rinsed the glass, filled it again, and took it into the living room. He had put the bottle of Valium in his pocket.

It was the car dealership on the far side of 481 that had gotten to him. He remembered having much the same reaction while on a vacation in Puerto Rico with his mother and her second husband as a boy. The second husband, whose name had been Milt, had arranged for the three of them to go on a fishing expedition.

"You might be wiser to wait a couple of days," the charter boat captain had said, casting a doubtful ^{eye} ~~look~~ on James (known in those days as Jimmy). "She's pretty rough out there, and if I have to take you back, I'll have to charge you for the whole day. Once I book my time, you understand--"

Milt had laughed...the sort of bluff, hearty laughter that Upshaw had despised ever since. "We're all good sailors here, gang, aren't we?" He slung his arm around his mother's shoulders and she had laughed and agreed...but Upshaw had seen the ^{with} ~~look~~ in her ^{glance} ~~eyes~~ she looked as ^{unsure} ~~sure~~ as the charter captain.

They had gone out, the waves had been huge, and the boat had corckscrewed sickeningly through them. Eventually little Jimmy Upshaw had begun to vomit (his step-father had called it--with an infinite and dripping contempt--"upchucking"), and ^{finally} ~~eventually~~ his mother, who was also looking much too pale, insisted that

they go back. It had cost his step-father forty bucks, and he had barely spoken to Upshaw for the rest of the vacation.

Looking at the car dealership, with its cars wavering in and out of reality, had recalled all of that with a totality that he never would have believed. In the moments before he had finally managed to tear his gaze away, it seemed to him that he had actually been able to feel the foyer floor heaving up and down, as if the entire apartment building had set to sea on a blustery day.

Now he felt better...sort of.

His actions in the next two or three minutes were being repeated all over the building. He turned on the television and got only snow across the entire range of twenty-six cable stations. Upshaw had suffered the depredations of Cable-Puller, and his first hopeful thought was that he had been at work again. But when he tuned manually to channel 22, which was so close it needed no antenna to pull it in, there was only more snow. ←

→ He turned off the TV and turned on the radio. There was nothing all the way across either the AM or the FM band--not so much as a single squawk.

He pulled his chair over to the window and looked out.

All the trees in the greenbelt were bare. The leaves had fallen off them. They looked as they would look in December.

James Upshaw sat down heavily in the chair--if it hadn't been there, he probably would have sat on the floor. He closed his eyes. Opened them.

The leaves were back.

He closed his eyes tightly for three seconds.

When he opened them the leaves were still there, but he had a fleeting impression that they had gone orange and red and purple and gold...autumn colors. A few moments later and the trees were

bare again; the leaves just seemed to melt away. He could quite clearly see the housing development beyond the greenbelt that was--for the moment, at least--not green at all.

James Upshaw felt the floor of his apartment heave under his chair, and heard his step-father Milt say: I guess if the kid is gonna upchuck all day, we better put about, cap'n.

He opened his eyes.

The leaves were back, but now they had an odd, dusty, depthless look that was somehow painted. No breeze stirred them. He waited for them to fall, but they did not. For a few moments he had a feeling that they were pulsing, but then the pulse either stopped or became too fast for him to see.

"This is crazy," he said, and his voice sounded so far away that he was frightened. He supposed you said something like that because you couldn't bear to say I am crazy.

He took the bottle of Valium tablets from his pocket--a doctor had prescribed them to him, ^{five years ago} during his deep depression following the death of his mother--and took two with the glass of water he had put on top of the TV. Then he sat down in front of the TV again, waiting for something else to happen. But nothing did.

⁴
Benton Honey, the young man who had sworn hysterically that the cars were there,
[redacted] went back to bed and slept for seven hours.

^{Cavellis}
The ~~people~~ on the third floor, who were gregarious, decided to organize a Who Knows What party. They began to knock on the doors of people they knew, suggesting that people bring their own booze or reefer. The party began at around quarter to eight, and continued, more or less continuously, for the next two and a half days.

On seven, Hansel Greene, who owned a restaurant called Green Acres, took off all his clothes and went into deep meditation

on the Arnel shag rug that covered his living room floor. Hansel Greene was thirty-five years old and deeply into (meditation, rock music, and) hashish. ~~For~~ For the previous twelve years --ever since he had graduated from college, in fact--Hansel had bought his hash from a wall-eyed black man who lived in the Fultonville ghetto and who drove a succession of gigantic American luxury cars; in the last eight months, however, he had discovered a source closer to home--Tim Jefferies in 820, right here in the building. ~~and~~ As he meditated, he looked at a movie poster from a Frank Zappa film called Baby Snakes. He wore a t-shirt showing the face of the late Jim Morrison and nothing else, and as he drifted toward what he believed were the deeper levels of his consciousness (he had actually dozed off), he thought about getting stoned. He was not seriously worried about not being able to get out of the building ...but then, Hansel Greene had not been seriously worried about anything since a cop struck him in the ear with a nightstick during a peace-march in 1967. For three days afterward he had heard nothing in his left ear but an unpleasant ringing sound, and while he could bear the thought of being partially deaf in most ways, the thought of having to listen to Cream and the Jefferson Airplane in mono for the rest of his life was extremely depressing.

Other dope, both legal and illegal, was brought out in other apartments--in fact, if those early weird scenes had a common leitmotif, then drugs was surely it. There was James Upshaw and his Valium, Larry and Jassey ~~and~~ ^{Cavelli} with their Who Knows What Party, Hansel Greene, who would shortly finish meditating (or dozing) and then blow his brains out with a bong of Tim Jefferies' dynamite hash.

In other apartments, librium capsules were washed down with water, milk, and Gator-Ade; Letitia Morganfeld in 121 took one look outside at the greenbelt, saw what was happening to the trees, and took a Quaalude; George Ihsome, a good-looking young man who was very quietly gay (he lived with another quietly gay man who had been visiting his parents on July 19th), took two Motrim, a cold shower, and then two more Motrim.

Most people who took things took tranquilizers (it was, in a peculiar way,

a variation of the old Service cry, "Smoke 'em if you got 'em!"), but there were others who took booze--Pulaski had a can of beer after putting his

baseball bat back into the closet, thought it over, took the bat out of the closet again, and leaned it in the far corner of his bedroom. Rinaldi

treated himself to a good-sized chunk of Haig & Haig not long after getting rid of Ashton and his "delegation." And as already mentioned,

Tom Hill and Jo Page found themselves in Tom's living room, having coffee laced with brandy at 7:30 A.M. ~~where~~

~~he took in on short time~~

Tranks were number one, some sort of squeeze was number two, and dope was number three (one of the few people with a considerable amount of dope on hand that morning who took none at all was Tim Jefferies). Hansel Greene and his hash; all sorts of people at the ^{Cavelli's} ~~St. Louis~~ Who Knows What party with pot ranging from bad to good to fan-fucking-tastic; not to mention Reg Smithfield on the eighth floor, who kept a wad of opium ^{-it was} as big as a double-chaw of Bazooka bubblegum and as smoothly dark as a well-worn cordovan shoe in the bag of the Kirby vacuum cleaner in his closet. And although the Tennis Club Apartments were full of junkies, Reg Smithfield, who sold Brookhaven Computer Systems, was the only one who admitted it frankly and fully to himself.

But of all those who found themselves grabbing some sort of illegal high to get a handle on the morning, perhaps the most unlikely was Pamela Andeyric, who could have been observed at 7:30 on that mad morning taking a Baggie of marijuana from her dresser drawer and removing one of the two joints that lay beneath the loose dope. She lit it with a book of Tennis Club matches she also took from the Baggie--for she did not smoke otherwise--dragged deep, fought the urge to spew the smoke out in a spasm of coughs, and at last felt the tension that had wound her so ^{hysterically} tight begin to loosen. And, not for the first time, she blessed her nephew Peter...and her lower wisdom teeth. She'd had them pulled over three years ago and still they would not rest easy.

After the initial surprise, and after some time for reflection, a thinking person might have begun to understand better how Pamela Andeyric, forty, pretty in that slightly curdled-around-the-edges way that speaks of an uneasy ~~and uneasy~~ stress, ~~which~~ ^{may have} risen from some long unresolved crisis, could have come to a place in her life's experience where a fly-on-the-wall observer could have watched her take out the dope (it was very good dope, too; the best reefer that Tim Jefferies sold, and it went for a hundred and fifteen dollars an ounce) from her bureau drawer and light it with the ease of long--fairly long, anyway--experience.

In truth, she was not much different from some spinster ladies of the Victorian age, who, after living thirty or forty or even fifty abstemious years, found themselves for the first time taking brandy or port or perhaps even a diluted whiskey, either because the doctor had ordered it or because some very close friend had recommended it as a cure--or at least an ameliorative--for insomnia, arthritis, headaches, or "the female complaint." Unable to enjoy a drink just for itself, as their husbands and fathers could do, many of these Victorian ladies stretched their illnesses in their own minds in order to keep taking their "medicine"--and in some cases they found the "medicine" so pleasant that they became genteel alcoholics. Not good, but then, the menfolk of the age who became alcoholics were often a good deal less genteel.

At the age of thirty-seven, less than three months after the death of the mother who had tyrannized her whole life--who had, among other things, forced her to go to a community college in order to keep Pamela close, although there had been two firm scholarship offers based on her outstanding high school mathematics performance--Pamela Andeyric, good Baptist, proprietor of her own small business, and lifetime subscriber to The Readers Digest, entered a painful and almost absurdly premature menopause. Six months after that (and still two months short of her thirty-eighth birthday), her two lower wisdom

teeth decided to come up at the same time. Both became impacted, and Pamela entered a ~~period~~ ^{time} she could now barely remember--she continued to go to work and she had, so far as she could tell, remained coherent, but she could ~~recall~~ ^{recall} little: ~~more than~~ ^{more than} a fever-dream of pain as her lower gums swelled to the size of link sausages and ~~as~~ her menstrual period came on her with the force of a dry typhoon.

She distrusted doctors. She knew that her mother's petulant assertions that her cancer had been misdiagnosed were lies, just as she knew her mother had been wrong to treat her and her beloved brother Frank with a variety of home remedies when she and Frank had been kids (and she had, perhaps, been responsible for Frank's death of peritonitis at the age of fourteen--until Frank's fever rose to a terrifying 104° and he began to rave, Yolanda Andeyric had been treating her son with a concoction of crushed pumpkin seeds and honey), just as she knew that her mother's assertion that all dentists were either quacks or sadists was so much cant. But when things were drubbed into you long enough and hard enough as a kid--pronouncements to the effect that people who sought out doctors before the issue had grown obviously grave were cowards, for instance--some of it stuck. As a result, Pamela had put off going to the dentist (she didn't even have a regular dentist) until the morning she opened her mouth and observed that her tongue had turned white. She spat into the bathroom sink--and then had to clap both hands to her mouth to stifle a wretched scream. Her tongue was white because pus was running out of both gums in sticky rivers.

The dentist she chose was flabbergasted by her condition. By the time Pamela sat down in his chair (collapsed into it was closer to the truth), she was running a fever almost as high as Frank's had been before he died, and her mouth was one great ~~infected~~ ^{infected} sink. He refused to operate on her in his office. He had his secretary call a MEDCU ambulance, and forty minutes later he removed the dripping, stinking, blackened hulks of two wisdom teeth from the ~~upper~~ ^{her spongy} lower jaw. He had Pamela admitted to the

nearest hospital, which happened to be Squirrel Hill Receiving. She stayed there for two days, and the antibiotics went on for a month, with related vaginal infections adding to her menopausal miseries.

Nor did her problems with the wisdom teeth end there. One of the sockets refused to scab over, instead developing into what dentists call a "dry hole." It was a minor complication reserved almost entirely for smokers, which Pamela wasn't...but she developed it anyway. The right socket was healing sans scab, and her days were filled with a steady, throbbing agony from the ~~raw hole.~~ ^{raw hole.} Asprin could only dull it, and she didn't like to take her late mother's Darvon, because it made her woozy.

Her eighteen-year-old nephew Peter Simms showed up ^{one day} at the Tennis Club Apartments, to which she had recently moved (Senior Lease--unlike Tom Hill, she had no desire to move Onward and Upward), with ^{half an ounce} ~~was~~ of what he claimed ^{was} ~~the~~ Acapulco Gold.

"You're crazy!" Pamela said, horrified, when Peter took one of the Baggies, with which she would later become so familier, from the pocket of his high school jacket. She waved her hand at it, as if to make it disappear.

"No, I'm not," Peter said earnestly. "Dad told me what a hard time you're having with it, Aunt Pamela, and you look...well..."

"I know how I look," she said, only sounding petulant because she was fighting a warm flood of childish tears. "I look terrible."

"Yeah, you do," Peter said, his open smile taking the sting--some of it, anyway--out of his agreement. "But this stuff...Aunt Pam, it's good for pain! My roomie at Pitt catches for the college team--baseball, you know--and last spring he got hit in the...well, he got hit in a bad place. He swelled up ^{like you wouldn't believe.} ~~swelling~~ The doctors gave him some really heavy painkiller, but he said doing a joint was better. He said it was the only way he could get to sleep at night."

Pamela, who had only been managing three or four hours of thin sleep

a night, took the Baggie from Peter. She handled it gingerly, as if it might turn into a poisonous snake at any second.

"You get hooked," she said finally.

Peter looked for a moment as if he were fighting a stomach cramp-- it was only later that she realized he was, kindly, trying not to laugh. "No you don't," he said. "I mean, you can, but the chances aren't any better than getting hooked on booze."

"You sound as if you've studied it."

"I did. We did. Last year, at West Side. In Psych-I." He thought of adding that they sometimes gave ^{pot} to terminal cancer patients, thought of great-aunt Helen, and wisely held his tongue.

"But I don't smoke. I couldn't hold it in."

"Yes, you can," Peter said. "You've got to look at it as medicine, Aunt Pam. When it's medicine, people can do all kinds of things they wouldn't do otherwise. Put drops in their eyes, needles in their arms--"

"Ugh!" Pam said, putting the Baggie down. She was thinking of heroin. But a moment later she picked ^{the Baggie} up again. Peter was, after all, right-- diabetics had to put needles in their arms. And at that moment, exhausted, sunken-eyed, the entire right side of her face throbbing, she would have tried almost anything if someone told her it might end the pain.

"You just pull a little of the smoke in at first. If you feel like you've got to cough, then cough. Wait a minute and try again."

She looked doubtfully from the Baggie in her hand to Peter's hopeful, concerned face. She felt a rush of love for him. Love, and concern.

"Do you use this, Peter?"

"Oh, no!" He said...and then, after consideration: "Well...not much."

"Where did you get this?"

"From Carl. My roommate." This much, at least, was true.

"He's the one who got hit in the...in the bad place?"

"That's right."

"Do you smoke it in a pipe?"

"Well, you can...but it's better to roll a joint."

"A marijuana cigarette," Pamela said dolorously, and shook her head again. "I don't know, Peter...I just don't know..." But the pain had been so bad, so rotten.

"Just try it," he said. He reached over and touched her hand--the one that wasn't holding the Baggie. "I want to help you, Aunt Pamela. It's a bummer, seeing you ~~be miserable~~ ^{hurting so} bad."

His simple concern had been too much, and the tears had come. "All right," she said through them. "I'll try it. But...but if I vomit...I'll make you clean it up!"

He laughed, nodded, and produced a package of rolling papers from his hip pocket. For someone who only used marijuana occasionally, he rolled a very professional joint. When it was done, he handed it to her.

She looked at it doubtfully--a small cigarette in funny ~~purple~~ ^{sand}-colored paper, smouldering between her fingers. The smoke that drifted up to her was acrid but rather fragrant. She looked at Peter doubtfully, and he nodded encouragement.

She took a small puff, held it in her mouth for a moment, and then let it out.

"You've got to pull it in deeper," Peter said, taking the joint from her. "Like this." He ~~put it in~~ ^{took} a mammoth drag that burned up a quarter of the cigarette.

"You're sure you only use this once in awhile?" Pamela asked, and Peter coughed the smoke out, his face reddening.

She took the second small drag deeper and coughed it out immediately. On the third drag her head began to swim...but wasn't the steady, throbbing pain from her jaw less? She thought it was. By the fifth drag (she barely noticed Peter had produced a small pair of tongs--it was only later that she learned it was a roach-clip, available at head-shops everywhere) she was

definitely woozy and would not have trusted herself to walk across the room. But the pain in her jaw was gone. Definitely, blessedly, no-kidding gone. She could have wept with relief. She didn't feel like weeping, though--she felt, in fact, rather giggly.

She ~~couldn't recall much~~ ^{couldn't recall much} about the rest of that afternoon--only that she and Peter had talked a lot, and laughed a lot. That latter seemed particularly amazing to her, because in the wake of her mother's death, her female problems, and then the horror of the impacted wisdom teeth, she had honestly believed she would never laugh again. She could remember Peter guiding her down the hall to her bedroom--the floor seemed to be tipping slightly this way and that in the most friendly way--and seeing ~~her~~ ^{her safely on} ~~her bed~~ ^{her bed}. He had put a ~~blanket~~ ^{blanket} over her.

"Go to sleep, Aunt Pamela," he said, and kissed her forehead. ~~She~~ ^{She} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~asleep~~ ^{asleep}

"Can't sleep," she muttered. "No good sleep since Mom died."

"You'll sleep now," he said.

She closed her eyes, aware that Peter was sitting in the sun by the sliding glass door which gave on her cement balcony, rolling another joint. When she woke up, it was the next morning. She had slept for sixteen hours, and although her jaw throbbed hellishly, she felt wonderfully rested. She sat up, expecting a bolt of hangover to stab her between the eyes...but there had been none.

The Baggie had been resting on her dresser, its contents rolled up into eight neat joints--already she had begun to think of them as that. A scrawled note on a sheet of her yellow legal paper rested beside it: Lots of love, Peter. She read it twice and then cried again.

She smoked half a joint after breakfast and the pain went away. She smoked a little more on her coffee break, nervous, using the small bathroom, afraid she wouldn't be able to work afterwards. She had, if rather more slowly than usual. The relief from the pain made that a small price to pay.

And there seemed to be a gloss on the day that she had never noticed before.

The dentist ^{pronounced} ~~her~~ her wisdom teeth sockets completely healed some three weeks later. Although she didn't come right out and say so, Pamela Andeyric begged to differ. The pain was much better, but it was still there. Thank God for the marijuana! The marijuana took care of it.

She had been an obedient girl who had grown into an obedient, law-abiding woman. But she was more than law-abiding; she lived scrupulously by those social codes in which she had been raised. She refused to question them, as Jo Page had found out when she, Jo, had tried fruitlessly to interest Pamela in independent Bible devotions. Pamela did not litter. When she had taken her mother's Pomeranian, Fifi, out for walks, she took along a pooper-scooper. When slit skirts came in, she reluctantly bought two (with very modest slits), and a navy-blue dress with a kick-pleat. She bought slit slips to go with these, mentally begrudging the expense when she had half a dozen perfectly good half-slips and probably a full dozen full slips--but she would have no more have gone out in a skirt without a slip beneath than she would have gone out on the street with no blouse on. She felt that the country had to support the President.

The fact that such a woman had developed a fairly hefty dope habit ^{since that terrible} ~~when~~ ^{when} year ~~when~~ her mother had died, her menses had paused, and her wisdom teeth had impacted ("Good things come in threes," her mother had always said)--that fact was more a striking example of the human mind's endless ability to compartmentalize than it was a refutation of her previous life; like the lady of the 1890s who drank because of her "female pains," Pamela changed very little in other ways. ^GMan became man, Jung said, when he first became aware of those life-metaphors we call the gestalt; Pamela Andeyric might have replied that humanity is also inherent in the conscious refusal to see the gestalt. So it was that, only a month before, she had gone to Tim ^{Oeffen's} ~~apartment~~ apartment, purchased a lid of the very Panama Red she was now smoking, and, after the transaction was completed, spent the next fifteen minutes trying

to get Tim interested in coming to church ("You'll like the Reverend Tom so much, Tim! Everyone does! He understands young people!").

Tim ~~Jefferson~~ ^{Jefferys} listened to Pamela's pitch with a straight face as long as he could--sitting there on a low cushion of electric blue (there was no furniture with legs in Tim's apartment), wearing faded bellbottom Levis and a t-shirt which read EVERYONE NEEDS SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN AND RIGHT NOW I BELIEVE I'LL HAVE ANOTHER BEER--and then went off into gales of laughter. Pamela, understanding (her mind was compartmentalized, but a long way from being schizoid), stopped talking at once and got up.

"Listen, Pammy," Tim said (he was the only one who had ever called her that), also rising, trying to control his laughter, "I'm sorry, you know. I wasn't really laughing at you...it's just...you know...sometimes something bangs you in the face and..." He sniggered, snorted, and went off into another brief gale of laughter, trying to apologize for it even while he was still hooting and braying.

"I understand," Pamela said, not at all unkindly. "Think about it, Timmy. That's all I'm asking."

She was the only person in the world who called him Timmy.

6

And if told that Tim Jamieson regarded her (also not at all unkindly) as a hypocrite of the first water, Pamela would not have been half so dismayed as she had been at some of Jo Page's scriptural questions. She understood Tim's view of her, and although she had never read Jung, she also understood the essentially Jungian view of life which suggests that mental compartmentalization--the wilful refusal to see the gestalt--must be hypocrisy.

If forced to speak on the subject, Pamela would have declared adamantly that it was not hypocrisy but nobility. Without it, no social code could stand.

And besides, the dentist had been wrong. Her teeth still hurt. It wasn't that she liked smoking marijuana, or getting stoned; and even if she did, it didn't change the fact that the pot was medicine.

She would also have declared that life is balance and normality. And that was why the events of that July morning shocked her so badly. She had felt herself sliding toward hysteria, had felt the screams crawling slowly up into her throat, and had told herself to get into the elevator and get upstairs before she did something that would make people look at her ("Before you Disgrace Yourself in Public," was how her mother would have put it) but she had been paralyzed, unable to move.

She had suddenly thought of a newspaper article she'd read in the newspaper a month or two before; one of those little space-filling squibs. They had pulled out the cornerstone of the library in some Texas town, and a lizard that someone had put in ^{as a joke} along with the more usual cornerstone memorabilia had been found alive and well...although the ~~cornerstone~~ cornerstone had been laid almost a hundred years before. That's how we'll come out, Pamela thought. Fine 'n dandy, just fine n' dandy. She heard a giggle, as shrill and rancid as the smell of old pickle-juice, come out of her mouth. In her mind's eye she saw the lizard, its green skin now dead black, its eyes a milky white from its long years pent up in the darkness, and suddenly she was screaming. She saw the tenants of the Tennis Club Apartments tottering out into that crazy yellow light, their skins blacker than the skin of the blackest Negro that ever lived, their eyes white and fishy and blind.

She became aware that the others in the lobby were drawing back from her, and felt some dim surprise--she did not see contempt, the emotion momma had always associated with Disgracing Oneself in Public, in their eyes. She saw fear.

Out of balance, she thought, aware that this was the real reason she was screaming. I sense that things are radically out of balance this morning.

Then Jo was there--sweet, sweet Jo--putting an arm around her, whispering for her to calm down, whispering that this would all be cleared up very soon, whispering that nothing was really wrong. She sensed the balance that still

rested neatly inside of Jo and put her arms around her tightly, not wanting to scream anymore, not wanting people to look at her anymore.

For a few moments they did, and then the elevator door opened and a big, burly-looking man strode out with a baseball bat in his hand, and people looked at him instead.

Pam felt the first throb in her jaw, and understood that she needed to take some her medicine...and take it as soon as possible.

8

"Any of you?" Jo Page heard the big man say. "Any of you got any idea what this thing is?"

There was a little mutter that died out quickly. She was still holding Pam Andeyric--the collar of her silk blouse was wet with Pam's tears--but Pam's hysteria seemed to be wearing off.

"I didn't think so," the big man said. "Son of a bitch." He crossed the lobby quickly, his head down, his breath coming in strong little puffs. Jo could smell him as he passed, although Pulaski was five feet away from her at his closest. Her sense of smell was eerily good, and emanating from Pulaski she smelled the morning's first after-shower sweat, strong but not really offensive, a fairly bland soap--Ivory, perhaps Dial--and a slap of what could only be Old Spice after-shave. Something in these combined ~~man~~^{man smells} frightened her and she fell back half a step, dragging Pam momentarily off-balance.

The big man got into the elevator and slammed a button with the heel of his hand. The door slid closed and Jo felt definite relief.

"Is she all right?"

Jo looked up and saw the man who had been standing next to her in the foyer just before Pam started to scream. His eyes were a direct blue, and she noticed that while his lower lip was full, his upper lip was oddly thin by comparison--the lower lip of a sensualist, the upper lip of an aesthete. For just a moment he made her think of Jimmy Estabrook, the first boy she had ever kissed--really kissed. She had had a strong sexual reaction to Jimmy Estabrook's

kiss, and her ~~memory~~^{clear} memory of that reaction, prompted by this stranger's face, made her flush a little. It was almost certainly an unobservable flush, but it annoyed her just the same.

"You'll have to ask her yourself," she said, more snappishly than she had intended.

The man's flush was quite visible...and she was ashamed. He had come over to help, which was more than anyone else in this milling crowd of forty or fifty people had done.

"I'm all right," Pamela said. She had taken a tissue from her purse and now she wiped her eyes with it. "I'm sorry I made a fuss. It was just...just for a moment there...it was too much."

She looked up, first at Jo and then at Tom Hill.

"You bot it's too much,"
~~Tom~~ Tom said. He glanced back at the foyer and saw that both his place and that of the young woman with the close-cut blonde hair had been taken. "I don't think there's anything we can do down here, at least for now. I'm going back up to my place and make some strong coffee and lace it with brandy. If you ladies would care to join me, you'd be very welcome."

"No," Pamela said, wiping her eyes again--almost scrubbing them. "My jaw is bothering me. I had impacted wisdom teeth, you see, and sometimes my jaw still bothers me. Where they were. I think I'll go back upstairs and take some of my medicine and just lie down."

"You, ma'am?" Tom asked Jo.

She was ready to decline politely, but heard herself saying: "A cup of coffee would be very welcome. No brandy--just coffee, please." ^{It} She supposed

she said yes when she meant to say no partly because she was ashamed of her own asperity and the man's uncomfortable blush--he had only been trying to help--but more because she was very badly shaken and did not much want to be alone. She had not yet allowed her mind to consider ~~the~~^{the} full import of what she had seen (or thought she had seen, she amended immediately), and she did not want to be alone when that consideration came.

But she might still have said no if he hadn't called her ma'am in that half-awkward but rather charming way.

"You're sure?" He asked Pamela.

"Really, I am."

"Then we'll see you to your door," he said. "I'm Tom Hill, by the way."

"Pamela Andeyric." She held a hand which was not quite steady out for him to shake lightly.

"And I'm Jo Page."

His hand was warm, his touch light--there and gone. But she thought she felt it afterwards. For just a moment.

Others were leaving the lobby even as strangers were arriving, first in their own private fogs of morning sleepiness, and then in emerging fogs of surprise and bewilderment. Those leaving were not quite fleeing...but Jo thought she sensed that, just below the surface. In her mind she saw it all again, an impossibility that hurt the mind because it was both awesome and somehow prosaic: the custom van crossing traffic, turn-signal blinking, bikes strapped to the roof-rack. Disappearing halfway across the opposing lanes. There...and then gone. She felt her mind sideslipping toward panic and fought the panic away.

"Ladies?" Tom Hill asked, and Jo nodded.

"Thank you," Pamela said gratefully.

"Yes," Jo agreed. "Thank you very much."

They walked toward the elevators, where an unaccustomed number of people were waiting for an up-car.