BUCKLING

A short novel submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a degree with Honors in English from the College of William and Mary in Virginia

by

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Accepted for Honors

[Signatures]

Williamsburg, Virginia

May, 1972

544.446
"Brute beauty and valor and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!"

Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Windhover
The entire history of his acceptance and entrance into college was tainted by a sense of exclusion. From the first, when all of his applications had been dispatched to various state universities around the country, his application to the University in Fayetteville was more of a formality than an expression of choice. His father had insisted that in case scholarships were not forthcoming from the other more expensive institutions, the state school would be the only alternative. When the returns began to come in, appearing in the mail thick with promise, it had seemed strange that the University could only bring itself to put him on its waiting list.

As things developed, however, the replies from the other colleges did not include generous offers of grants-in-aid. One Midwestern school left-handedly offered a massive loan that came due on graduation. The prospect of instant indebtedness made the inexpensive, pay-as-you-go system at the state school seem worth waiting for.

Thus, when the letter finally arrived in June that confirmed Jim's at first tentative acceptance at the state school, his focus shifted from the cold Midwest to warmer regions in the southern part of Virginia. Jim felt somewhat chagrined, but accepted the economic necessity of his attendance there, and even admitted to himself that one school seemed just as good as another to him.

The summer elapsed passively, and Jim was able to earn enough money to help pay his expenses at the University. The day came when he and his father packed all his belongings into the car and set out over the interstate highways that would bring them to Fayetteville and the University. The matter of sorting through his possessions and distinguishing what was his and what was not so that he could transfer himself to another locale
was a strange experience for Jim. He felt that in packing these objects into a trunk and several suitcases, he was drawing a line between himself and the place he had known as home. This demarcation created an estranged feeling that stayed with him throughout the long, green drive and grew as he and his father finally arrived at the sprawling campus of the University.

The campus covered several hundred acres of reclaimed swamplands that had been converted into a veil of green serenity. The buildings attempted to blend with the landscape through the careful work of a talented horticulturist who had surrounded every structure with dense shrubbery and a coterie of shade trees. Jim drove along the campus road and felt a calm settling over him as he viewed the secure, down-to-earth campus. But this calm was to be violated by a betrayal that the machinery behind the shrubbery had worked on Jim, in his anonymity. Somewhere in the sheaf of letters and bulletins that the University had sent Jim in the summer months was a letter that referred to his assignment to living quarters. Jim had apparently passed over this letter, but its contents would have informed him that his dormitory, where he would relocate the person he had stowed so neatly into the trunk and suitcases in the back of the car, was located five miles away from this pleasant valley, practically out of the town of Fayetteville itself. When the student guide at the reception desk that was set up on one of the brick sidewalks informed him that he would have to retrace his route through the small town to find his dorm, it came as a shock, another blow to his sense of security that had first been troubled by his position on the waiting list.

Not a little astounded, Jim and his father drove for fifteen minutes in search of the dormitory. They finally located it, turning down a nar-
row road and coming upon the monolithic building set in the middle of a field. It squatted before a long drive and stretched out two wings from its main section. Several cars already were unloading in front of the building as Jim and his father pulled up.

"It doesn't look so bad, Jamie," his father attempted. "Actually, I'll bet it will be nice to escape out here in the country after a long day on campus."

"I suppose it will," Jim said as he stepped out of the car. His father's use of his childhood nickname at once embarrassed Jim and touched him. He and his father were almost nonchalant together. Their parting, which was now only minutes away, threw this casualness into focus. Jim knew that they would exchange a handshake and try to convey in that the affection they felt for each other. But Jim recognized that his father had used "Jamie" as a way of communicating his regret at having to take his son into a strange setting and leave him there.

He and his father came back to the trunk to unload Jim's possessions. As his father stooped to unlock the trunk, Jim gave the area around the dorm a cursory glance. His eyes rested on another group of buildings that were gathered about two hundred yards away across another space of grass. "I wonder what that place is over there?" he said.

"I guess you'll find out," his father said.

They each grabbed as many articles as they could carry and walked into the lobby, a bare drab vestibule that was painted yellow from the ceiling halfway down the wall. From there to the floor the walls were green. A desk stood against the wall and behind it sat an ample student, who forced a smile as they approached him.

"Good afternoon," he said, "welcome to Lansing Hall."
"Can you tell me where my room is?" Jim said.

"What's the name?"

"James Curtis."

"Curtis, James. That's Room 316, third floor in the East Wing. Sign in there and you can pay your two dollar room deposit."

Jim grasped the pen lying on the table and signed his name as his father drew the two dollars out of his wallet. The fat student produced a receipt, the key to the room, and a name plate with a pin on the back of it.

"Wear this during orientation so you can get acquainted faster. By the way, Jim, I'm your dorm manager, Ernie."

Jim took his name tag and put it in his pocket as they picked up his bags again and started for the stairs at the far end of the hall. At that moment, a loud piercing whistle sounded so closely that it seemed to be coming from within the building. Jim, nervous enough as it was in his new surroundings, almost dropped his baggage at the sound.

"What was that?" asked Jim, turning to Ernie after the whistle stopped. Ernie was completely composed.

"Oh. That's the whistle at the mental hospital. I don't know exactly what they blow it for. They blow it at six o'clock every day, but it's just now three."

"Mental hospital?" Jim's father asked.

"Yes, one of the largest in the state," Ernie replied, almost proudly. "As a matter of fact, this building used to be a doctor's residence."

"I told you you'd find out," Jim's father laughed. Feeling rather odd to be so close to a mental hospital, Jim followed his father down the
hall to the stairway.

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Steve Pollard stepped out of the fuselage of the jet that had brought him to the nearest airport to Fayetteville, some thirty miles distant from the University. Steve didn't reply to the stewardess who enthusiastically wished him a "Good afternoon." He was still groggy from having slept during the flight, the sort of slumber in motion that leaves one dull and more exhausted than ever. Steve stumbled through the passageway that had been extended to the side of the jet. Entering the terminal, he looked up in time to see a digital clock switch with a loud click to "4:37."

Steve was rumpled from his nap. He wore an ill-fitting suit that looked worse now for its new wrinkles. He had seen other young people on the plane in more casual dress, and regretted having worn the suit. Steve managed to clear his head enough to follow some of the young people, who he assumed were bound for the University, to the desk of a limousine service. They were occupied there for some minutes arranging for a car to take them to Fayetteville. Steve nearly forgot to claim his baggage, but when the car was ready, he gave his bag to the driver and sat in the rearmost seat. There was another few minutes delay while baggage was arranged on the rack above his head. Steve realized that he was not only unusual for his suit among the other students, but also strange because he had only one bag, and that a ragged one. All of the others seemed to have brought entire sets of luggage along. The loading was soon completed and the limousine started off for the University.

Steve experienced a moment's alarm during the ride when he wondered if he had money to pay the fare. He wasn't certain, in fact, that he had
even remembered to bring his wallet along. After fumbling in the unfamiliar suit pockets he found his wallet containing more than enough money, for apparently his mother had inserted the crisp twenties in its folds before he left for the airport. Steve also found his room assignment form, for which he was grateful. He held the pink form in his hand throughout the brief drive as though it were a sort of passport. It became evident that something was amiss when the driver made the rounds of the dorms on the University campus after their arrival, and the name of Steve's dorm, "Lansing Hall," failed to come up. The last student had disembarked at her dorm and Steve sat alone in the rear of the limousine. After helping the girl with her numerous bags, the driver got back in the car and looked back at Steve over three rows of seats.

"Well, son, what dorm are you in?"

"It says here 'Lansing Hall.'"

"I'm afraid I've never heard of that one. Any idea where it is?"

"No sir, this is my first time here."

There was a pause as each of them pondered the problem. The open spaces of the limousine absorbed even the silence.

"I'll tell you what," the driver said finally. "I'll take you to the administration building and somebody there can tell you where it is. How's that?"

"That sounds pretty good," Steve said resignedly. He sank into the seat, feeling like a second-rate celebrity cruising through the campus in the battered airport limousine. They arrived at the building and the driver charged Steve less than he normally would have as a sort of apology for his ignorance. Steve noticed, however, that he wasted no time in speeding away as soon as he turned to enter the building. Inside,
there was no one in sight, but Steve found a pile of maps of the campus. On it he found an index of the buildings, and Lansing Hall was listed with the number "53" beside it. Consulting the map itself, which was difficult to read in the dim hallway, Steve found his dorm off by itself in an inset that gave street directions to the off-campus residence.

Steve tried to control a desperate sensation that rose in him as he left the dark building to find another cab. His fatigue was extreme. He felt, as he passed dormitories in which other students were already settled, like an outsider, especially since he only had one suitcase. It was as though he was only here for the weekend. He wished that his parents had been able to drive him down. Instead, they had taken him to the airport and made arrangements to ship his trunk after him. But his immediate concern was getting to his room.

He reached the main road and tried to hail a cab. Several ignored him, but finally, one stopped and he told the female cabbie his destination. He began to show her the map, but she brushed it aside.

"That's okay," she said gruffly. "I know where it is." She wore grey pants and a shirt with a peaked cap perched atop her pinned up hair. She drove her cab like a man, speeding through the evening traffic. They drove up to the dorm after the short drive. Steve paid his fare and walked toward the lobby doors. By this time it was almost dark, and Lansing Hall appeared even bulkier than it had to Jim in daylight. Lights were burning harshly in the curtainless windows. Inside, Steve encountered Ernie, the dorm manager, who was still on duty at the reception desk.

"Are you Stephen Pollard?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We've been waiting for you. Have any problems?"
"Well, yes, my flight was delayed," Steve replied. "And I had no idea the dorm was this far out."

"You know a lot of people were surprised when they found themselves out here, especially next to the hospital."

"Hospital?"

"Yeah. The state mental hospital is right next door."

Steve was silent.

"Well, sign in, Steve, and let's get you settled."

"I know my room number."

The manager smirked. "But it'll cost you two dollars for the key."

"What?"

"That's your room deposit," smiled Ernie. "You can get it back at the end of the year."

Steve dealt out the two dollars and took his key and his name tag. He had turned and started toward the stairs when Ernie called out to him.

"Is that all of your things?"

Steve looked down at the single suitcase he carried and explained, "Yeah, the rest of my things are on the way."

"Oh."

Steve climbed the interminable stairs to the third floor, where his fellow students had already moved in and were mingling uncertainly in each other's rooms. He found a door with his room number on it and half expected to discover a roommate there when he remembered that he had been assigned a single room. That had seemed fortunate at the time, but now he wished that someone would have been expecting him, even if with dread. With a single, he wasn't forced to get acquainted. But perhaps it's better this way, he thought. I can meet people by choice. He opened the door onto a
bare cell with a bed, a desk, and a bureau built into the wall with a cabinet recessed in the wall above it. A streetlight had just blinked on by the road and it threw a blue-white glare across the tiled floor. Steve flipped the wall switch that turned on a bare bulb in the center of the ceiling. The harsh light emphasized the nakedness of his new furnishings. He set his lone suitcase on the floor by the bureau and sat on the mattress. The bed at least had a wooden frame, like his own at home. It was a good solid frame, but the mattress smelled faintly of mildew. Steve realized that he had no pillow or sheets to sleep on that night. His mother had told him to buy bedclothes that day, but his arrival came after the stores were closed. There was nothing he liked less than sleeping on a bare mattress. As he sat there, the six o'clock whistle suddenly sounded. The noise persisted for what seemed a minute, and again it had no direction, as though a train were about to pass through Steve's room. He jumped up and ran out into the hall, trying to discover its source. The long mournful note continued to pierce the heavy air while he tried to find a window. Before he reached one, it faded and stopped with a last wail. Steve looked out onto the rear yard of the dormitory and saw nothing but trees. It was as though the sound had originated out of the air itself. He returned to his room puzzled and a little frightened, wondering if he had heard the whistle at all. He was entering his room when he heard his name called.

"Steve Pollard?"

"Yeah," he answered, turning back and opening the door.

A short blond student in grey slacks, a sport shirt and a short jacket approached with his hand outstretched to be shaken. In his other hand he held a cigarette with a touch of daintiness.

"Hi," he said, waiting until they made contact before he spoke.
"I'm Mike Murphy, your Group Leader for orientation."

"Group Leader?" Steve said. "What group?"

"It's just a group of five guys with me as your leader to show you around the campus so you can get oriented to college life." It was obviously a practiced formula he was reciting.

"Where are the other four?"

"In their rooms I suppose," Mike answered. "We already had our first get-together."

"Can you tell me something?" Steve interrupted.

"Sure," smiled Mike, seeming glad to have a question to answer.

"Is there a railroad close by?"

"Well, there's one over by the main road, but it's far enough away so that it wouldn't bother you."

"Well, I thought I heard a train whistle a minute ago, and it seemed pretty loud ..."

"Oh that. That's the whistle at the mental hospital that means all the out-patients have to come back to their rooms for the night. It blows every night at sunset. It is pretty loud, but you'll get used to it. I lived out here last year and after a week or so, I don't think I ever noticed it again."

"That's good," Steve said. "I thought sure I was hearing things."

"Yeah. Well, shall we join the other guys?"

Steve held back. "Let me get settled and then I'll join you."

Mike eyed Steve's single suitcase standing by the bureau, and then his rumpled suit. "We were about to leave on the next bus to campus to go to dinner together. Why don't you wait till later to put your things away so you don't miss dinner?"

"That's all right," Steve insisted. "I'll catch up with you later.
how often do the buses run to campus?"

"About every twenty minutes," Mike said. "The bus that leaves after
this one will be the last one that can get you to dinner in time."

"I'll catch that one then. See you later."

"Okay, Steve. See you at the caf."

Mike closed the door behind him and Steve was left alone again. He
walked over to the steel framed window and saw the campus bus coming in
at the drive. A mass of students was waiting and as the bus stopped and
its door swung open, they climbed into it, filling up its seats from the
back to the front. The seats were quickly occupied, and the remaining
students assumed standing positions in the aisle. The last passenger was
forced to stand on the steps in the doorway, and Steve noticed that he had
to crowd back against those behind him to allow the door to close. With
that, the bus pulled off from the curb, straining with its load of humans
on their way to dinner.

Steve stepped away from the window and looked around his room again.
His eye fell on the bed, and he decided to lie down. His stomach reminded
him that he hadn't eaten since a late breakfast, and he resolved to
make it to dinner. Otherwise he might not have the initiative to go out
and buy a sandwich. He seized his suitcase and set it on its side on the
bed. Opening the clasps, he hunted in its folds for his alarm clock. He
found it in one of the pockets of the divider, along with his deodorant,
toothpaste, and shaving kit. His mother had been thorough. He pulled it
out and wound it, and set it on the table by his head. He noted that it
was now six-fifteen. The next bus would arrive at six-thirty-five. He
turned the clock around and set the alarm for six-thirty. Steve pulled off
his coat and shoes and let them fall to the floor. He stretched out on the
bare mattress and used his hands as a pillow. Despite his uncomfortable position, he was asleep shortly. A few minutes later, the alarm clock rang dutifully, but Steve continued to sleep. The harsh clatter of the bell continued to sound for several minutes and echoed in the hall until the spring finally wound down. The bell rattled to a stop. While Steve slept, the last dinner bus pulled up in front of the dorm and loaded with less students than on its previous trip, closed its folding door, and departed.

James Curtis and Stephen Pollard were now members of the University's freshman class. They had arrived by various means and settled into their common home, Lansing Hall. An orientation program awaited them to "ease their adjustment to the discipline of University life," as the University's catalogue would have it. Their reactions to the experience of the University would be quite different, it is true. But they would have in common the University, as sailors have the sea, a mutual problem to be dealt with. Whether they succeed or fail, they know of the dangers that threaten all and ensnare some. To the extent that one is drawn toward the vortex, one has compassion for those who are lost in it.

Two weeks later, Jim was well into all of his courses and had established a routine that seemed to him indestructible. He attended all of his classes faithfully, despite the fact that he found them a bore. His studying was less regular, however. He found that since most of his classes were large lectures, he could get by with an infrequent glance at his texts. Instead of studying, he had become one of a group that spent most of the evenings after dinner in the basement game room at the dormitory shooting pool. He had a group of friends with whom he played every night, and they were becoming good pool players by their regular practice of the
game. Jim always managed to escape before midnight, instead of playing through into the early morning as most of the others did. They invariably slept through their morning classes as a result of their late night activity. For some, it was an almost involuntary practice that they fell into helplessly; they were the ones who always insisted that this was their last game. Likewise, they were always hopefully setting their alarms and chronically sleeping through them. For others, it was a matter of choice. They chose billiards over biology and languished in their beds throughout the day with a defiance. Jim steered away from both these courses, managing to have his cake and eat it as well.

On this particular night, however, Jim was in his room reading a novel that bore no relation to any of his courses. It was Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, part of his renowned trilogy. Jim refused to classify Asimov as a mere science fiction novelist, preferring to regard him as a genuine artist who was able to portray characters in futuristic settings unlike most science fiction writers. His novels had a philosophical depth that raised them above the run of space adventures, or at least, so Jim thought. Despite the fact that several tests were approaching in each of his courses, Jim felt no desire to study for them, and relaxed instead with his reading. He sat in a deep red chair that he had moved in from the lobby, which was not a good piece of furniture, but was an improvement over the uncomfortable affair he had found in his room that first day. He was absorbed in the book when he heard a commotion in the hall. He put the book down and went to his door to investigate. The corridor was painted in the same two-tone style as the lobby and the rest of the building, but with different colors. On the third floor, the colors were a light beige at the top and a darker brown on the bottom half. Looking
down the hallway, Jim noticed that the two lines dividing the colors on each wall appeared to converge at the far end in the other wing, much like the rails on a railroad track seem to meet at the horizon. This effect made the building seem miles long. There in the distance, Jim saw a cluster of students huddled around three others dressed in dark clothes and wearing charcoal-smudged faces, guerilla-style. As he approached, it was obvious that they had been drinking, and one of them held a curved hunting bow. They were shouting excitedly about something.

"We're gonna go out there and shoot that goddamn rooster," the tall one with the hunting bow shouted. "I'm sick of him waking me up every morning at six with that damn crowing!" The cluster around him rocked with laughter and shouts of encouragement.

The three adventurers Jim recognized as pool-shooting friends of his whose late morning sleep was violated by the local harbinger of dawn.

"You know, Campbell," Jim said, addressing the tall one with the bow, "if you didn't shoot pool all night and got up at a decent hour, that defenseless rooster wouldn't bother you."

"Bullshit, Curtis," Campbell replied, inflated with beer, "I've got as much a right as anyone to sleep late, and that rooster is violating my rights. He must die!" he shouted at the others, and a cheer rose up from the sympathizers.

"Go ahead," said Jim, amused at the expedition. "I just hope you don't kill each other with that primitive weapon there."

"Curtis, you obviously have no appreciation of my skill as an archer."

"No, I don't," replied Jim.

"I want you to be here when we get back," said Campbell.

"I'll be here," Jim assured him. "There's no way I can escape since
the buses aren't running." It was past 11:30, and the last bus had left only a few minutes ago.

Jim turned away and returned to his room. He read for another hour and a half without hearing any further noise in the hall. As he finished the last page and closed his book, he sat back and rubbed his eyes, thinking about the novel as a whole. He was wondering what the next book of Asimov's trilogy would do to carry forward the history of the Foundation, when he heard another disturbance in the hallway. No doubt the huntsmen have returned, he thought. He got out of the chair and started toward the door, but before he reached it, it burst open to reveal Campbell with a mob of revellers behind him. In his left hand he carried his bow, and in his right, a live rooster struggled and squawked as Campbell waved him over his head, throttling him by the neck.

"There you are Curtis, you son-of-a-bitch," he shouted with a smile, "that's markmanship!"

"Marksmanship? Well why isn't he dead, then?" Jim said.

"Curtis," Campbell leered, "I'm such a good shot that I decided to knock him out instead of killing him. So I glanced the arrow off the crown of his pea head, and he fell off the coop right into our arms."

The crowd behind him cheered and laughed, swilling cans of beer in celebration of their tormentor's demise. The group was backed up in the passage down to the stairwell, and they swelled and pushed behind Campbell, all of them pointing and laughing at the dying rooster. Campbell marched out of Jim's room and the entourage surged after him, down the stairs to the basement. Jim followed in the midst of the mob, caught up in the swell and astonished at seeing the rooster in sacrificial procession. He followed close behind Campbell's lank frame, staring at the squirming
rooster still being held high for all to see. The huntsman's retinue followed him into the basement game room. Campbell went to the center of the room and stood on the couch with the rooster raised in his hand.

"For his crimes against the residents of this, Lansing Hall," he intoned in a solemn voice, "we the people find this rooster guilty!" A cheer from the crowd interrupted him. "The violation of man's sacred gift of sleep merits the penalty of death!" Another cheer. "Does anyone dare defend this criminal?" Campbell asked, looking significantly at Jim. "Then death it is!" he shouted, leaping from the couch and rushing to the wall against which he shattered the rooster's head. It burst on impact and left a dark stain on the cinder block wall that ran blood to the floor. Campbell dropped the rooster in its own blood beneath the stain, and the celebrants turned to the tables to shoot pool and drink beer into the night.

Jim sat on a couch for some minutes, staring at the rooster and ignoring the jibes of his friends. No one else seemed disturbed by Campbell's cruelties. As he brooded, however, Jim noticed Steve Pollard at the other end of the room. He, too, was staying apart from the crowd. Jim saw that Steve was intent on the corpse of the rooster as well. It appeared that Campbell's irreverence had found another objector, though a silent one. Jim looked again at the bird's stiff body lying against the wall. In spite of his indignation, he felt that there was nothing to be done about it. Campbell was as incorrigibly insensitive as the rooster was dead. He stood up, with that rationalization in mind, and joined the pool players, shooting grimly and without comments to his opponents. He played and won at doubles with different partners for an hour without losing once, as the ranks of the revellers thinned. They
retreated to their rooms losing only a few hours of rest to the unique events of the night. Jim, however, continued shooting pool, first with the last three students remaining, and then against one last competitor. Finally, by six in the morning, he was alone. Steve had disappeared with the rest. The crack of the balls as they collided and fell into the pockets echoed in the room. Otherwise, there was absolute silence.

Jim finished pocketing another rack of balls, and with the table clear save for the white cue ball on the field of green, he walked over to a window that faced eastward. There the sun had already stained the sky with an orange dawn. Fatigue suddenly washed over him and he turned back to head for the stairs and his room, when the crow of a rooster burst out from the woods. At the same moment, Steve appeared in the doorway with a cloth. Jim was startled by both the crowing and the entrance of Steve. The crowing continued as Steve stooped down with the cloth and picked up the rooster's body. He walked without a word to Jim to a trash can where he unceremoniously disposed of the corpse.

"For a minute I thought we had a resurrection," Jim said.

"Not a chance," Steve answered rather morbidly. "That one is dead as hell." He walked out of the room again with Jim behind him. Jim thought him rather a sloppy fellow. His gloominess was rather exces- sive. Jim didn't bother to wish him a good morning when they parted on the third floor. The defiant crowing continued to echo around the building. Jim smiled to himself in spite of the other's gloomy outlook. The irony was too much. He hoped that Campbell was awake with the successor's noise. A pale orange light came in diagonally at his window when he reached his room, coloring the sheets on his bed. The rooster was now crowing at regular intervals, but still as vigorously as when he had first ruptured the morning stillness. Jim stripped and slipped between the
covers. He decided that he would have to miss his classes that morning.
Jim heard the phone ringing at the end of the hall as he began to
awake from a sleep he had fallen into late that morning. It was now
three in the afternoon, two weeks since the death and resurrection of
the rooster. When Jim sat up to look at his clock, the figure on its
face brought a sharp pang to his conscience. Once again he had slept
through his classes. His weekly physics lab was being held on campus
some five miles away, and he considered for a moment catching the next
bus to campus. But he would be an hour and a half late, and the spec-
tacle of him entering the lab under the eye of some cynical graduate
assistant made him abandon the idea. He sank back on his pillow. Jim's
room was darkened by curtains drawn across the metal window, and he had
the distinct sensation of being out of touch with the cycle of night and
day. It was as though in the two weeks, he had lost the rhythm of the
academic community, which continued to rise early, attend classes, study
in the evening, and sleep at night. In the half-light he felt glor-
iously indolent by contrast, and the mid-afternoon gloom, for it was an
overcast day, did little to jolt him out of his complacent chaos.

The phone continued to rattle doggedly, demanding attention, and
finally Jim heard its ring break off in the middle as someone picked
up the receiver. Jim lay for a moment in suspense, wondering if the un-
heard voice in the phone speaking to the unknown ear of the answerer
was uttering his name.

"Jim Curtis!" It echoed in his ears. He leaped out of bed and
pulled on a pair of shorts, shouting, "Yeah!" in acknowledgment.

"Telephone," came the response, the voice falling a half-note on
the third, round syllable.
Jim emerged from his room and trotted to the phone booth, thanking the boy who held the receiver out to him. Jim did not recognize him.

"It's long distance," he said.

"Yeah," Jim said. "Thanks."

He sat down in the booth and put the receiver to his ear. "Hello."

"Jimmy?" the voice asked.

"Hi, Bev, what's up?" This was his girlfriend, as Jim described her, for lack of a better word. She attended a state school in the mountains on the other side of Virginia.

"Well," the girlish voice replied, "we're having a mixer here this weekend, Jimmy, and all the schools are invited to come." After each phrase she spoke, a hum of static would rasp and then subside as she caught her breath and began another phrase. Listening to this effect, Jim missed what she said.

"What?" he said.

"Well that's okay, if you don't want to come see me."

"No, wait a minute," Jim said, "I didn't hear what you said the first time."

"I said," she replied, drawing out the word with a hint of exasperation, "our school is having a mixer and your school is invited, so I'd like you to come."

"Oh. A statewide event, huh?" Jim said.

"Yeah, I guess so," Bev answered.

"Does it really make any difference whether my school is invited if you've invited me?"

"I don't know, Jimmy," she whined out of the earpiece. "Why are you being so mean to me?"
"I'm not," he said. "I'm sorry, Bev." He was annoyed with the childish evasiveness that was so typical of her. Why not just say that she wants to see me, he thought. "When's the dance?" he asked her.

"It's Friday night, so you can come Friday and leave Sunday," Bev said hurriedly.

He sighed to himself, trying to imagine a trip across the state. How could he gather his energies for such an excursion when he could scarcely bring himself to make the trip to campus? However, he felt an obligation to Bev, whom he had dated at home. He was reminded of the promises he made to visit her, despite the one hundred and seventy-five miles that separated them.

"That sounds okay," he responded finally.

"Look Jimmy," she said, "don't feel obligated to come."

"No, look," he reassured her, "I'm just a little tired. I guess I'll hitchhike up there, unless I can find a ride."

"Oh," she said. Jim realized that she hadn't considered how he would get all the way across the state. "Couldn't you take a bus?"

"I suppose, but I can't really afford it," Jim replied. He sensed the dilemma that faced him and tried to communicate its insolvability over the phone to her. "Well," he said with a sigh, "my last class is over by three on Friday, so I can get started then. You should expect me late."

"Oh, good! I'm so glad you're coming," she said excitedly. "But I have to go. This call is getting expensive."

"Okay. See you Friday," Jim said. He realized that she refused to acknowledge the difficulty of what she was asking him to do.

"Bye-bye, Jimmy."

"Goodbye, Bev."
Jim hung up the receiver and sat for a moment in the booth that had grown hot with his presence. He felt as though he had taken on a cross that he would have to bear without any hope of reward or sympathy. Friday became associated in his mind with a lonely trip across an unknown void of middle Virginia to reach a goal he had no desire to attain.

His dread pressed on the remainder of Jim's week, pressing out what little vitality he could muster for the daily routine. The prospect of departure made him postpone his efforts to re-establish his schedule for another several days. The interval between was lost to him, then. He surrendered them in advance to futility. Those days had the parched quality that Jim associated with endless vigils in doctors' waiting rooms where, unable to forget the imminent ordeal (however slight the actual treatment may have finally been), he would invariably fidget with magazines, scanning their smudged, wrinkled pages, always conscious of a hollow deepening in his stomach. So the week spent itself, while Jim floundered about from bed to dining hall and occasionally to a class. His indolence could be read in the slump of his shoulders and the droop of his eyelids.

Friday arrived, and Jim awoke irritated. His frustration found release in a burst of punctuality and industry. Out of sheer vexation, he actually sprang out of bed, took a shower and shaved, which was not his habit, especially of these colder mornings, and capped it off by going to breakfast for the first time that year. On the bus ride in, he sat with Mike, a friend who was visibly shocked to see him. Mike and his roommate, Roger, lived on Jim's floor in the east wing of Lansing.

"Stay up all night?" he asked.
"Nope."
"Why, Jim," he said, "I'm proud of you, boy!"
"Thanks."

They rode through town toward campus in silence. The bus driver held close to the curb, so that they lurched continually along the way. This added fuel to Jim's irritation. He tightened his muscles to resist the jolting, and the next bump rapped his skull soundly off the window. "God damn it!" he muttered.

Mike observed his struggle with considerable amusement.
"You've got to relax, man," he advised. "Roll with the punches. Like this."

Mike hunched over his books, his first cigarette dangling from his lips. The bus rolled over another hump and sent him into a rotation which he allowed to take him completely. His shoulders rolled and his head bobbed all the way to the dining hall, where they dismounted together.

"A science, my boy, a pure science!" he proclaimed, blowing smoke over his head.

They showed their meal cards at the table at the head of the line where a broad black woman was installed with a counting device in her thick fist. She smiled at Mike, however, who greeted her familiarly. They strolled past her to the food counter. No one else was on the line.

"This is a dream compared to dinner," Jim said.

"Of course," Mike answered. "You don't know what it does for you to have breakfast every morning. The best thinking is done in the early morning after a hardy meal and with the fresh air in your lungs. It's the secret behind my peace of mind."

They heaped their trays with cereals, eggs, and toast and sat at a
table near the door where they could observe the slow trickle of early risers. Mike ate voraciously, stooped over his tray so he could scoop cereal and eggs rapidly into his mouth. Jim had scarcely begun when the other bounded up to get another serving of eggs and toast. Jim watched him thread through the line, shuffling in moccasins. Mike was fond of contrast in his attire, wearing expensive sport coats over ragged football jerseys or T-shirts. Today he wore a shirt with the name of his prep school emblazoned across the chest, with a lush, tan corduroy jacket. He looked ineffably casual.

"What's on for you today, Chum?" Mike asked, returning to the table.

"A trek to the wilds, I'm afraid," said Jim. "I'm going to see a chick across the state."

"Aha!" Mike said. "A romantic interest."

"Don't know whether it's worth the effort, though."

"Hmm," he frowned. "That's not good."

"But... one must do what is expected of one," said Jim.

"I suppose."

They sat quietly over their coffee, the watered-down variety that was brewed in huge urns with the glass tube that indicated how many gallons were left. Jim pondered on a phenomenon he had noticed, the fact that when you drew your cupful out of the spout, the coffee in that tube dipped and then rose again to a slightly lower level. Something to do with air pressure he supposed. Jim sat and thought as he watched the sunlight edge down on the stand of trees that faced the dining hall in the rear. That was clearly another scientific phenomenon that he should know about, since he was taking introductory physics. The sun was rising
behind them, of course, and the roofline of the dining hall was forming the shadow line on the trees, and as the sun rose higher, the shadow line moved downward until at noon it would have crept along the grassy space between the woods and the building, moving imperceptibly like the hands on a clock, and disappeared for a moment, no more than a fraction of a second really, only to reappear on the other side of the building. You probably could tell time by that line, Jim thought, just by drawing lines on the grass and the trees and labelling them, as though the dining hall were the pointer on a sundial. But that wasn't the word: pointer. It was something more obscure than that, a word that had no other meaning. Nome ... gnome ... what was it?

"Hey, Mike," he said, breaking the silence, "What's the word for the pointer on a sundial?"

"What? The pointer on a sundial? What brought that up? I don't know."

Jim saw that his friend was still concerned over his trip. The admission of the futility of it had embarrassed Mike, and on realizing this, Jim, too, felt foolish. Mike clearly thought that there wasn't any point in going anywhere to see a girl who gave no promise of reciprocating, physically or in other ways. Jim realized that he hadn't even let the unpromising future of his relationship with Bev keep him from submitting to her insistent promptings when they came. This embarrassed Jim in turn especially since it was Mike who was aware of his weakness. It was he who confronted Jim, Mike who after only a few weeks of school had established liaisons with several attractive coeds. His acquaintances weren't ordinary girls, but those who were already known as part of the small circle of truly beautiful women on campus. His
successes with them made Mike the envy of those less adept at the art of womanizing, those who drifted in the wash of awkward men at frosh mixers, who made utter fools of themselves, spurned by scores of girls who had enough going for them, whether it be an innocent face, an outstanding bust, or a liberated bearing, to draw admirers, and enough prudery to spurn one and all. The men cursed every one of them, ranged along the walls, perched on folding chairs with their legs engaged in an impregnable weld. It was in this mood of anger and bitterness that they found curses for Mike, too, who appeared with a woman on each arm, offering quiet confidences to the girls in alteration, budgeted out to sustain their hopes and mute their jealousies. There on either side of him they were the most alluring, drawing all attention from the gallery of semi-beautiful, stealing their glory because they, Mike's women, not only had the firm breasts, the flat belly, and the striking face. They combined these elements so that they were not just an amalgam of erogenous zones, but an integrated system of sexuality that included every part of their bodies in the design. This plus their wardrobes of the right clothes, the most daring fashions, worn more to suggest than to conceal their gifts, set them off from the herd.

Jim was justly embarrassed, then, before this friend who had frowned on hearing of his expedition. Clearly, Jim realized, this uncertainty about the goal of the trip, this hesitation in his pursuit of the whining Bev, was not in keeping with Mike's conception of the male role in sexual relationships. This frown arose because Mike not only kept company with those outstanding women, but he cowed them as well. His attitude of casual dominance over the opposite sex could not admit such hesitation, such uncertainty.
Mike and Jim finished their coffee and left, separating at the door as they made for their respective classes.

"Have a good trip, Jim," he urged him with firmness. "Say hello to her for me."

"O.K., Mike," Jim answered. He appreciated the other's deference to his feelings. His farewell assumed the best about his relationship with the girl he would see tonight. But Jim sensed the contrast, as he walked on to his first class in the October morning, between that image of their friendship that Mike was projecting, almost imposing on Jim, and the fact of the situation. His resolve to cement Bev's affections, which would actually require only the least effort on his part, was undermined by Jim's own indifference. And yet he was going.

Jim found it gratifying to attend all of his classes that day, something he hadn't done since early in the term. Despite the fact that he was unprepared for them, he actually felt some new interest generating for one or two of his courses, particularly for his introductory physics course. He was anxious to discover some of the principles that caused the phenomena he witnessed every day and often speculated about. Too often he was able to perceive a problem, but not have the knowledge to solve that problem. Physics inevitably bored him, however, with its insistence on formulas. But while his faithful attendance rekindled an academic fervor in Jim, it also made it clear how far behind he had slipped. Tests and papers were imminent again in all of his courses, and the prospect of digging into the mass of work, the hundreds of pages and thousands of words that had accumulated while he slept and played pool was terrifying. It was an impossible task, to read all that had slipped past him. The worst of it was that even were he to
pick up that first text and begin to erode away the academic mountain that loomed before him, the mass of work that lay ahead would not be diminished by the least fraction. It made Jim think ironically about expressions of infinity that one found in simplified science books. What is the distance to the nearest star? If all the dollar bills in the United States were laid end to end... or, if a bull elephant charged at top speed, 24 hours a day, for the duration of his normal life span... or, if the sun was a pea on home plate in Yankee Stadium; the formula adapted readily to his predicament. If a certain student at a southern university were to try to recover after almost two months of no work, given his lackadaisical attitude, how long would it take for him to become discouraged and give up? These were the thoughts that occurred to him as he sat in his classes that Friday. He didn't bother to take notes, but sat listening, trying to orient himself in the course, to understand the relation of what was being said and what he remembered from the early weeks of the term. In his introductory government class, however, he ventured to raise his hand and make a comment. The professor looked at Jim with puzzlement, obviously not recognizing him.

"What's your name?"

"Curtis."

The professor consulted his roll and nodded, and Jim went on to say something about a book he had read that seemed relevant to the subject: Greek politics. As he spoke, Jim watched the professor's face to gauge his reaction. He was afraid that he might be revealing himself, demonstrating his hopeless ignorance. His comment had the opposite effect, however.

"Roberts points out in his book that the Greek system, although
based on sound ideals of democratic government by every citizen, was hopelessly unworkable and tended to be oligarchic simply because only those men who were wealthy enough to have the time could participate consistently enough to have any impact." Jim blew out the words into an airy façade that he hoped would screen his lack of preparation. He expected the professor to see through it.

Instead, he seemed impressed by what Jim had said. In fact, it led him to pursue Jim's point further, relating it to the reading the class had been assigned and the professor clearly expected Jim to take up the point again. Jim was forced to back out of the discussion, since he was unable to refer to the text at hand. He despaired of bluffing his way through in this setting where too much attention was paid to quoting sources with precision. In high school, Jim had been able to use vague generalizations to create the impression that he knew what he was talking about. College pressures showed the worthlessness of his background in which he had always relied on his ability to skim the readings and glean the essentials from chapter titles or first sentences in each paragraph of the concluding chapter. Jim's passing knowledge of a variety of topics was also helpful in the game. He wondered how many essays he had composed that were stretched like a tissue of speculation between a few salient facts. He always strived to make the simplest points possible, heavily qualifying what he said so that in the end he had said nothing. Jim also wondered how many times he had gotten those flimsy essays back labelled with "A's" or "B+'s" while his harder working classmates netted "C's" for their more educated efforts. It all pointed up for him the superficiality of his education. His success in school had been simulated in a way, based on his mastery of the art of the intelligent essay. Jim knew the tricks of finding the answer in the
terms of the question, extensive qualification, and striving for a simplicity that appeared to be a distilling of a more complex problem into its elements.

As he listened to the class discussion, Jim knew that he could succeed in the same way here with a minimum of work and further development of his test-taking and essay-writing skills. But Jim had tasted disgust in his throat when he mouthed his comment. He had cringed as he spoke; it was almost painful to him to know the vacuum that lay behind his words. He would have preferred to sit stupid, but honest. The problem with sitting dumb was that you were usually joined by the rest of the class in those painful silences that follow a teacher's general question. Jim wondered why college professors didn't ask questions of particular people instead of addressing them to the general audience. Invariably the general appeal goes unanswered, and most professors change their lecture approach so that all questions become rhetorical ones. Jim knew that he was one of those who could never allow the silence to continue too long, so he would raise his hand and take a blind stab at the question out of abysmal ignorance. Now that he was having scruples about such dishonest methods, he preferred to be absent altogether, so that he would neither be identified with the silent cows nor with the hot air faction.

So Jim thought about his situation in his classes that Friday, facing the realities of the situation, and recognizing the need for some sort of choice. He could attack the mountain of work and give substance to his words, fill out his hollow image as a student with some knowledge, however trivial. On the other hand, he could abandon himself to the advance of time, that inexorably added bulk to the work he faced. He could let it engulf him completely and bury his initiative.
As Jim's last class of that Friday wore on, he understood that he could begin by going back to Lansing and picking out that first book from his shelf (a novel that had been assigned for his English Literature course; he couldn't be too hard on himself), huddling up in the red chair smuggled in from the lobby in which he had been reading outside material from Asimov to Ken Kesey, and put in a long weekend of study. He longed to do it, he sensed that it was a desperate attempt this late in the game, perhaps impossible, but certainly worth the effort. He even thought for a moment about buying some dextedrine from a dealer he knew to store up against the all night sessions he would have to put in. His enthusiasm grew enough so that he felt he might be able to make it. And yet he was going.

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An hour after his last class had ended, Jim was standing by the road at the edge of Fayetteville, where the town's edge merged into the countryside with a cluster of gas stations and motels. He held out a sign, a piece of cardboard used by the University laundry in the shirts they washed and laminated with starch. The cardboard bore the name "MARLBURG," the town where Bev went to school. Jim had quelled the urge that had sprung up in him to begin regaining his hold on his academic future by simply throwing a few texts into his bag along with the clothing and supplies for his trip. Though he fully realized that he wouldn't give them more than a peremptory glance while sojourning in the western part of the state, this gesture was enough to quiet his conscience.

The cars slid by Jim in pulses released from a traffic light about seventy-five yards in front of him. Jim thought about the ritualistic
position that everyone assumed automatically when hitchhiking, as if it was instinctual. You stood with your back to your destination as though you were in a rowboat awash amidst a swirl of speedboats. The merits of holding out a sign were much argued among regular hitchers. Some felt that it was effective, that most motorists would at the very least slow down to read your sign. It also had the merits of identifying the hitcher as a resident of a particular place. If the motorist saw a student holding a sign that bore the name of their own home, they would presumably take a paternalistic attitude and pick him up like a son. The other hitchers who rejected the sign technique felt that it was too limiting. In response to those who felt that it identified the hitchhiker, they argued that the only motorists likely to pick up such a hitcher were those going to that city. Therefore, a hitchhiker holding a sign that read Boston would get rides only from motorists on their way to Boston, a severely limited number of drivers.

Jim also considered the usefulness of facing the oncoming traffic. Could you catch a ride by hanging the sign on your back and walking up the road? Obviously not, thought Jim. The position was clearly meant to give the potential driver an opportunity to judge the character of his potential rider by looking at his face and his general appearance. But what was it they looked for? Jim wondered. Different types of people looked for different things. Perhaps it was one's posture. Jim found himself changing his position with every cluster of cars that surged toward him when the light changed, adjusting the angle of his elbow, the height of his arm, even the angle at which his thumb jutted out. He found it ludicrous, that jutting thumb, as though it was extended out in expectation of some hook to catch on and snatch him off toward his destination, as if he were a bag of mail hanging from a post,
awaiting the cannonball express to come and snatch him away. Besides adjusting his posture, Jim also adapted his expression for almost every car, molding it into the image he imagined most likely to be picked up by each individual driver. He became jaunty and carefree for women, especially those who looked about his age. They would be most prone to giving a ride to the romantic traveler with wanderlust sketched all over his face. When business men loomed before him, he became a serious young man who was going places, or at least trying to. For the numerous married couples, older and parental, he put on a pained, nearly desperate look that he felt would be sure to appeal to their compassionate natures. And to those bachelors whizzing toward him in eager imports, he became an avid admirer who would literally leap at the chance to ride in their sports cars. As the time wore on, however, and no one had responded to Jim's mobile expressions, it was an indignant, frustrated look that dominated the rest. Jim became haughty and indifferent, slouching by the road as though he would have to be constrained to accept a ride if one were offered. And the cars continued to roll past, some drivers seeing him and looking hurriedly away as though they hadn't, others staring straight at him being direct with their refusals, while still others with their eyes fixed on the road actually didn't notice him.

Jim had begun to consider returning to Lansing, a short block away, and undertaking the task he knew he should start, when one of the bachelors pulled out of the traffic. Jim nearly lost the ride, not having noticed the MG pull off, but he bolted up the road when he saw the car as he stooped to pick up his bag and return to Lansing. He reached the car in a moment and tossed his bag in the back. Settling in the leather bucket seat and stretching his legs out into the front of the car under its hood, Jim asked the driver how far he was going.
"Carrollton." The man was young looking. Jim estimated his age at 25, judging from his face and the youthful clothes he wore: blue jeans, a ski jacket, and ankle high leather shoes.

"Fine," Jim said, a little embarrassed to question the man's destination as long as it was in the direction of Marlburg. The man guided the car out into traffic again as Jim felt the relief of leaving Fayetteville behind as well as the tension of projecting himself across the state. Travelling by hitchhiking had this quality of uncertainty, contrasting the inertness of standing by the road humbly and the relative speed of travelling in a car. Its success depended totally on chance. There were times when a ride came along minutes after you put your thumb out and carried you to your doorstep, while other times, you couldn't pay for a ride. Jim believed that one's attitude had much to do with it. In that sense it was a projection across distances by the force of one's will. But at least now he was going. He noticed the time was 4:35.

Jim and his driver were silent after exchanging the usual questions about what each of them were doing, one a college student visiting his girl, the other a serviceman going home to the mountains for the weekend. Once their identities had been established to this extent, the two of them concentrated on the road ahead as it reached out toward the mountains, far in the west. Jim staved off boredom by watching the settlements that swept past, each with its assortment of shabby buildings and people. The MG offered some amusement in itself since it didn't allow its passengers to become remote from the business of driving. The taut suspension transmitted every jolt to the two men, and the strain of the engine in its various gears and overdrives, the ritual of shifting,
made driving the car interesting both to Jim and his companion. In this way, Jim amused himself as they sped toward Carrollton, a small town that lay almost halfway to Jim's destination over the mountains. They passed from the flat country around Fayetteville into the more tortuous middle region just above the fall line. The highway altered its course more often in long curves and brief climbs. Jim was feeling good, despite the waning of the afternoon into early evening. They had left Fayetteville at 4:35 and it was now almost 6:45. They had gone close to 100 miles in that time, but the sports car's effect made the distance seem more considerable since it had been won with more difficulty. Jim enjoyed these small imports because they didn't overwhelm the road with horsepower and deaden the travelling with a cushioned suspension. In a sports car, propelled by its diminutive motor, one had to master the miles by skill, building a momentum through the perfect combination of gear changes at the appropriate moments, achieving the maximum efficiency of energy, no more and no less than is required. Jim's companion had an adeptness at this art that was unusual in servicemen, who generally preferred the hulking tanks with the superfluous engines.

They slowed as they entered Carrollton, a quiet town shrouded in ancient trees, standing bare now in late autumn. Carrollton hadn't yet modernized its nineteenth century bank or enlarged its post office. The MG's engine reverberated amidst the stone buildings along the main street. Jim's travelling companion lived at the other end of the small settlement that backed up into the foothills of the Appalachian chain. He dropped Jim off on the main road that wound away again toward a still distant mountain, a long ridge swathed in trees. Once more Jim felt over-extended, now on foot again before these peaks with the sun obscured
behind them. He took his bag from the back seat and said to the service-
man, "See you later," although he knew he wouldn't. It was a habit he
would have to break, saying that, he thought to himself as he watched the
MG cruise down a narrow side street. The evening was coming on rapidly
and the cars that passed had switched on either their parking lights or
their headlights. Once again Jim assumed his stance, but now there was
no dorm within walking distance to receive him if he despaired. He had
left his cardboard sign in the MG, but he knew that it would have done
him no good in the approaching darkness. In that situation, there was
no quarrelling with those hitchers who argued against signs. Jim's
commitment to this journey was now as real as the span of miles that
separated him both from Fayetteville and in the other direction from
the girl he didn't want to see. He was conscious of being a transient
on the outskirts of this little town, where others had homes, schools,
mothers and warm beds. But he could never remain there, even for a space
of hours. He had to push on, thrusting forward by the conscious effort
of his will. This anxious extension showed now as he faced the file of
traffic. He no longer sought to make an appeal to individual drivers.
Their faces were now obscured behind darkened windshields. He had to
assume that someone would recognize his need and take pity on him in-
stead of suspecting him. He stood for an hour, however, without suc-
cess.

During that hour, the evening descended to its last phase, when
the faintest glimmer of light was visible on the western margin of the
sky. Before that light had faded completely, Jim noticed in the hills
behind him a gathering of large birds, apparently hawks, since he could
make out the finger-like separation of the feathers at the end of their
wings. They were circling in a column over some unseen prey below. He gazed at the constantly moving column of hawks, some rising in spiral flight to its peak while others descended in swooping arcs below them, and wondered what it was that had brought so many of them together. That he had never seen as many hawks gather at once made him speculate that either there was some large animal dying below them, large enough to feed what appeared to be at least fifty birds, or that their gathering had nothing to do with feeding at all. Maybe it's some mating ritual, Jim thought. Whatever it was, their aimless gathering in that somehow purposeful formation held Jim's attention for some minutes, mystifying him.

Meanwhile the traffic, now much lighter, continued to slide past indifferently. The hawks had helped Jim to forget his situation for a time, but when darkness made them totally invisible, he was brought back to his lonely desperation. He started walking up the road during the intervals between cars, spaces that grew longer and longer as the night became darker. Jim's walking was meant more to pass the time than to actually get anywhere. He took some consolation even in this insignificant movement in increments of yards against the seventy or so miles he had yet to travel. Jim thought again about hitchhiking techniques and the general taboo against doing any walking. Motorists seeing a hitcher walking might assume that where he is going is within walking distance, therefore, why pick the lazy bum up? He disregarded this maxim. Jim kept an eye on the pavement next to him and the trees above so that he could spot the shine of headlights in time to turn around and project his thumb. He soon began to despair even of turning around, however, since for more than an hour he had been ignored. He was trudging
up the road with his bag, cursing the insensitivity of the average motorist, though he knew most of them didn't even see him. Several cars passed Jim and he allowed them to speed up the road without hailing them. But the thought that one of them might have been the single man on that road on that night who made a habit of picking up hitchhikers, and the realization that he was in no position to abandon his plea for a ride made him look up and glance over his shoulder. No cars were coming, however. The moon, whole and pearl-colored above the trees, showed the deserted road to him for several hundred yards in that direction. Jim felt a self-pity rise within him that pushed out a sigh and gave him a vision of his profound aloneness. He raised his eyes to the moon as though he could appeal to it for assistance, when he heard something.

"Hey!" a voice shouted. Jim looked back up the road in the direction he had been walking and saw a car waiting by the side of the road and a figure standing at the open door on the driver's side, gesturing to him in the bright moonlight. Jim broke into an ecstatic run and reached the car, an old black Cadillac, in a few seconds.

"Need a ride?" asked the man.

"Yeah!" said Jim. "I didn't even see you." Jim wondered if the man had seen him standing gazing at the moon.

"I could tell," the man said. "Didn't I say to you, 'That boy needs a ride, Dolly?' Didn't I?"

Jim opened the back door and stooped to get in, smiling at the woman named Dolly whose pasty white face glowed at him under the ceiling light. She smiled at him and said, "Howdy," as the light went out abruptly. The man, who seemed unusually tall and broad-shouldered, had climbed in behind the wheel.
"Didn't I, Dolly?"

"You sure did, honey," Dolly replied. She was still turned in her seat so that she could look at Jim who was nearly lost in the sprawling back seat.

"Just push those things on the floor if they're in your way, son." The man referred to a pile of sofa cushions and what Jim thought in the darkness looked like dirty clothing.

"I'm fine back here," said Jim. He noticed a slight irregularity in the man's speech for the first time, a blurring of the words as though he were speaking through a mask. Jim also noticed in the dim light from the instruments his close crewcut and large irregular ears protruding markedly from his head. He was unusually large, and his hands dwarfed the steering wheel as he maneuvered the Cadillac out on the highway again.

Despite some uncertainty Jim felt because of the man's appearance and speech, and because of Dolly, who still watched him closely with that doughy smile, he relaxed in the rear of the car, enjoying his renewed progress toward Marlburg. After a moment he posed the usual question: "How far are you headed?"

"As far as you want," the man said lavishly. "Dolly and I are headed for Chicago, so wherever you're headed, we'll take you there."

Jim was a little startled. His driver's generosity actually depended on what route he was taking to Chicago, whether it went through Marlburg or not.

"Are you going through Marlburg?" Jim asked.

"Oh, sure," the man said.

In the silence, Jim sensed that the man had no idea where Marlburg was and cared less. He secretly pulled out the map he picked up at
a local gas station in Fayetteville. In the intermittent moonlight that came in at his window, he could read the road numbers and verified by a sign they passed a moment later that they were still on the right highway. For a time, at least, he could relax.

Jim noticed, now, the quality of the man's driving. Being in the back seat, he realized that the man was unable to keep the big Cadillac on the road. He kept swerving so that his wheels went off onto the shoulder, making a low crunching noise in the gravel. It seemed to be a problem of his attention wandering. Jim saw him stare out the side window for several seconds as he swerved again, then he peered intently at the dashboard as he steered into the other lane. Dolly, who seemed to be as anxious as Jim about this, addressed the driver.

"Roy, can't you be a little more careful? We'll be in the ditch in a minute."

"Listen," he answered testily, "you asked me to take you to see your damned old man in Chicago, and if you don't like my driving, you can get out here!"

"No, Roy," she said, a little frightened. "No, I appreciate it, honest. I'm sorry. You're doing fine."

Roy continued to swerve erratically, however. Jim was alarmed by their spat, and he gathered from it that there was something unconventional about their relationship. And the reference to the "old man" in Chicago was equally puzzling. He was content to ride in silence, however, keeping a close eye on the edge of the road, as though his vigilance somehow limited Roy's swerving. He continued to wonder how the two in front had gotten together, and why Roy had consented to take her to Chicago. As he divided his attention between the road and Dolly and Roy's infrequent conversation, one of the causes of Roy's recklessness
soon demonstrated itself. He and Dolly were fighting over the radio, she insisting that it didn't work while he argued that it did, taking considerable pride in his automobile. In the middle of this argument, he reached under his seat and pulled out a pint bottle of Smirnoff's 100 proof vodka. Roy swerved again as he unscrewed the cap and took a drink. He then offered some to Dolly, who refused demurely. Roy then turned around to Jim, taking his eyes off the road completely in order to proffer the bottle to him. The car headed directly off the road and Jim snatched the bottle from Roy's hand as he shouted, "Look out!" Roy corrected the Cadillac's course with a massive paw and said to Jim, "Just give the bottle to Dolly when you're through with it, son."

Jim stared for a moment at the bottle in his hand and decided to take Ray up on his offer. He put the bottle to his lips and let a splash of vodka gurgle into his mouth. Jim reasoned that the only way to survive the ride was to be somewhat drunk. He tapped Dolly on the shoulder and handed her the pint. Slumping back against the eroding upholstery, he felt trapped with these two fugitives, making reckless progress nowhere as the night grew darker. He was in the hands of a drunkard who brought them to the edge of oblivion every minute. He looked out at the dark trees that passed at the edge of the highway. They were into the last foothills, riding up and down on the rough terrain, while the moon coasted through the treetops above them, all serene and pale. Jim recalled his childhood at that moment, remembering how he would watch that same moon rushing along, as though it were accompanying him and his family on their trip. His sleepiness enforced the illusion and he spoke softly to his father, who always drove so smoothly and quietly. "Daddy!" he had said. "The moon, he's following me."
"Oh. Is he smiling at you, Jamie?" his father had asked through the hypnotic hum of the tires.

"Yes, he is."

"Then he must be coming along to make sure that you have a good trip."

"I guess so, daddy."

His father always understood. His voice was thick and quiet, distant from the front seat because he was watching the road and moving his hand on the wheel ever so slightly to guide the car in which his family slept. Jim, then Jamie, had been convinced of the moon's good intentions, leaning his head against the window and watching it speed through the treetops, following him with a smile on its huge round face.

Now the moon chased the Cadillac down the road only because of its distance. "Parallax" was the word for it, Jim thought. "The apparent change of the position of an object because of the change of position from which it is viewed." He muttered the definition to himself, which he had somehow remembered from a physics lecture. It's probably the single thing I've learned this year, he thought. It's strange that such a word should describe such a poetic thing. The moon follows because your position of observation, the car, is constantly moving relative to the earth and the trees. But distance from the moon makes it seem to move as well. I suppose that's what it is, he thought, becoming confused.

Jim roused himself and was brought back to his anxious predicament. He felt the need to get out of the car, but couldn't while it was in motion. That was another problem in physics: the deceleration of an object dropped from a vehicle in motion, thought Jim. He envisioned
opening the car door and rolling out on the pavement and down over the embankment as in westerns the thief jumped off the speeding train. It came down to a problem of inertia; objects in motion tend to remain in motion and objects at rest tend to remain at rest unless they encounter another force, he thought. The ground would be the force in opposition to his movement forward. Although Jim could phrase the problem and understand some of the principles involved in these matters, he could never resolve the difficulty. This was clearly because he hadn't done enough work. There always came the point where his knowledge failed him. And that point always was the crucial one. Yet he still enjoyed discovering these principles of motion manifested in everyday circumstances. That was one of the motives behind his choice of physics as his science. But, as he had realized in class earlier that day, physics abstracted the problems too far beyond the mundane. He could sustain no interest in equations and formulas, but he saw now that a formula might enable him to solve his present dilemma. He therefore made a mental resolution that he would forthwith learn his formulas and so be able to solve such problems as they came up. But for the moment, without physics to aid him, he had to sit tight in the cavernous back seat of Roy's Cadillac as they swerved and bumped on into the mountains.

Roy and Dolly continued to argue occasionally over the balking radio. It was the best money could buy, or so Roy insisted, for it had a special scanning device that allowed the motorist to press a button, engaging this mechanism that would automatically search the dial and tune into the station sending in the strongest signal. The device seemed to be failing because Roy would jam the button in and the tuner would promptly scan over the entire dial without stopping. The sound
produced was a series of quick snatches from country and western songs, talk shows, new programs, chattering disc jockeys, and an occasional symphonic passage. Jim listened delightedly to the collage of sound as the red indicator bar passed up and down the dial, over and over.

"What the hell's wrong with this damned thing?" Roy demanded, as it passed over every station again and again. Dolly tried to convince Roy to use the manual tuner to find a good station.

"No sir, goddammit! I paid a lot of money for this radio, so it's got to work or we won't listen to anything!"

Meanwhile, as he punched the button repeatedly, each time creating the same series of blips and squawks from the stations, he continued to violate the shoulder on one side and the oncoming lane on the other.

Jim grew increasingly nervous in spite of the vodka, not only because of the scene being played out violently in the front seat by the two weird characters, but also because he realized that Roy was slow as well as reckless. He saw by the clock on Roy's dashboard, which he assumed to be in working order unlike the radio, that it was already 8:30 and he was still a good 50 miles from Marlburg. This increased his desire to abandon Dolly and Roy. Although he would be uncertain of another ride, he could at least be sure of staying alive and reaching his destination eventually. Roy gave him his opportunity when he spotted a dingy hamburger joint ahead.

"Hey! Who's hungry? You, Dolly?"

"Yeah, I guess so, Roy."

"How about you, son," Roy asked, peering into the rear view mirror. "Well, no, not really," said Jim.

"You don't mind if we stop for a minute do you?"
"Oh no, go ahead."

Roy steered the Cadillac into the dirt parking lot in front of the joint. A single bulb lit the entrance, surrounded by a fluted reflector that was battered with age. The windows of the establishment were dark, except for a cluster of twisted neon tubing that spelled "JIMBO'S RESTAURANT." When the car lurched to a stop, Jim found himself relaxing some of the muscles that had been in involuntary tension during the ride, strained to help keep the car on the road.

"What'll you have, Dolly?" Roy asked.

"Oh, I don't know, Roy. How about a hamburger with mustard and catsup and relish and a pickle on it and a milkshake?"

"What flavor?"

"Vanilla if they've got it," she said. "If they don't, chocolate's fine."

"Coming up," Roy said. "Are you sure you don't want something?" he asked Jim.

"Yeah, thanks anyway."

Roy got out and went into the dark restaurant. Jim saw his opportunity to escape, but he wasn't sure now that he wanted to. The guy's nice enough, he thought, but that could be just the vodka. Anyway, I might get to Marlburg just as soon at this rate as I would if I got out and had to catch another ride. Jim hesitated with these thoughts in mind. Dolly turned full around to Jim in her seat and spoke to him.

"Hey, fella." Her face emerged clearly into the harsh light of the parking lot. "What do you think of him?" Jim and Dolly both looked toward the doorway where Roy had disappeared.

"You mean Roy? I guess he's okay. It was nice of him to give me a ride."
"Yeah, you're right about that." Jim thought that she was weighing some sort of problem in her mind and having great difficulty with it. "He was nice to do this for me, too, giving me a ride and all. You know we're not married or anything. Not even going together. I just met him the other day and said 'I want to go to Chicago.' My daddy's sick in the veteran's hospital out there and I just got to see him. I found out he was sick by phone 'cause he called me about a week ago. And I've been trying to get out there ever since. Stopped going to work and everything. They'll probably fire me, but I've got to see my daddy."

Jim listened fascinated.

"They'll probably try to keep me from seeing him, you know, since I'm not his real daughter and all, I mean legitimate. I'm as much his daughter as anybody, but they'll probably try to keep me out. But, I swear, I'll bust in every way I know how just to see him and all of them together can't stop me 'cause I got to see him. I hope I can get out there before he dies."

"Where did you start out?" Jim asked. Dolly's story had raised an image for Jim of her struggling in a hospital corridor with nurses and orderlies. He wondered what kind of disease her father was dying of.

"We started in Raleigh, North Carolina. And Roy and me been going ever since last night late. He said he'd help me see daddy any way he could. But it's Roy," she looked back toward the door again, as if she were afraid he could hear them somehow, "I'm worried about, with the drinking and all, you know? He told me he'd just got out of prison two weeks ago and was going to California. But I'm worried 'cause he's acting so funny, with the drinking and all. And do you notice how he talks funny?"
Jim nodded.

"I think prison made him nuts or something. He's got some bad scars on his head. I think maybe they beat the sense out of him."

"Do you know what he was in for?"

"Armed robbery and assault, I think he told me. You see why I'm worried? I think maybe he's liable to go nuts if he drinks too much and his driving scares me senseless. I'm glad you're here though." She looked at Jim too confidingly. He envisioned her crawling over the seat and grabbing him and the seat was certainly big enough while Roy returned in time to go into a rage and try to kill them both. Now Jim was really alarmed. He hadn't realized what he had gotten into when he climbed into Roy's black Cadillac. If ever there was a time for him to go, this was it.

"Well," he began, "I'd better go. I've got to be somewhere in Marlburg pretty soon so I'd better try to get another ride."

"Wait," she said as he reached to get his bag from the cluttered floor. "Why don't you stay? It'll be a lot faster and anyway I'm worried about being alone with Roy when he's drunk like this." That's too explicit, thought Jim, opening the car door. Dolly reached over the seat and grabbed his arm and kept him from getting out.

"Really, why don't you stay?"

Jim gasped, looking frantically toward the restaurant, expecting the neanderthal Roy to emerge any second.

"No, really," he sputtered, "I've got to get going or I'll be late. I don't want you and Roy to go out of your way. Your father ..."

He wrenched his arm out of her grasp and jumped out of the car. At that moment, the door of the diner banged open and Roy stepped out
into the light with his hands full of bags and drinks.

"Change your mind?" he said to Jim.

"No, Roy. I've got to go. I don't want to hold you up."

"Well, listen, we'll just be a minute eating this stuff," he said. "Get back in the car and we'll go in a minute."

"That's okay," Jim said backing away. "Really, thanks, I'll get a ride right away and then you and Dolly can go on to Chicago without having to stop for me. Thanks, anyway, really."

"Don't be stupid, son," Roy said. "You probably won't get a ride for an hour on this road. There's no cars." He gestured toward the deserted highway with a greasy bag.

But Jim had turned away and started up the road at a rapid pace, shouting, "Thanks again," over his shoulder. He saw Roy standing by his Cadillac with his hands full, shaking his head in wonder after him. Jim shivered, feeling Dolly's strong grip again and imagining the possibilities had he stayed. Now he was afraid they would come after him, so he walked quickly, checking over his shoulder. The Cadillac remained parked under the light over the restaurant door, however, as Jim hurried on into the darkness.

It was much colder than it had been outside Carrollton where the MG had dropped him some two hours before. Jim's breath was visible, and he felt the cold air harsh and stinging in his nose and chest. He hoped to get out of Roy's sight so that he could begin hitching again. He walked up the road for a few minutes until he was around a turn and out of their line of vision. Jim found himself at a small crossroads where three highways intersected, crisscrossing and forming a traffic circle in the middle of a small hamlet. The crossroads was surrounded
by two gas stations and a late night drug store, all three of them ablaze
with neon and harsh mercury-vapor streetlights that threw a weird glare
over the intersection and *silently* flooding the grassy island in the center
with a purplish light. Jim picked out the road to Marlburg where it
spun out of the asphalt circle and continued west into more darkness,
under a tunnel of trees. He set out across the intersection to take his
position by the side of the road. The crossroads was like a stage. Jim
walked out into the glare of the streetlights certain that some audience
observed his progress first over one asphalt lane, then across the grass,
then down from the curb across another space of asphalt, and finally into
the shadow of the curb on the far side. Although Jim noted by the road-
sign that Marlburg was still fifty miles distant, the crossroads made
him feel certain that more traffic would pass by than before. He set
his bag down on the curb and waited, and after a moment, he heard the
drone of a motor. Jim couldn't determine the source of the sound, but
in another moment, a car entered the scene from the south. It slowed
into the turn, the noise of its engine muted, and picked its way through
the intersection, coming finally up the road past Jim. He stuck out his
thumb, but the car continued on, accelerating out of the crossroads. Jim
had just lost the sound of its motor when two more cars entered the
crossroads from north and south, one going straight through while the
other turned and came past Jim again. Although it, too, passed him, Jim
felt consoled on having found this perfect location. There was plenty
of light so that he could be seen if he stepped out onto the road, the
traffic was heavier by virtue of its being the meeting of three highways,
and the drivers were going slow enough through the complicated intersec-
tion so that it would be easy for them to slow down and pick him up, be-
fore they picked up speed again. Uncertain at first that he had made
the right choice about leaving Dolly and Roy, Jim now felt renewed and
confident.

After a few minutes and several more cars had passed, Jim saw the
black Cadillac round the turn across from him and approach the cross-
roads. Jim started and withdrew behind a hedge that shielded him from
the road. In the darkness, he watched Roy slow and stop at the inter-
section. Dolly was barely visible, slumping in the front seat. Roy
looked in all directions in turn, clearly uncertain about which way he
should be going. But Jim's heart pounded as he watched, certain that
Roy was looking for him. When Roy bent over and came up with a crumpled
roadmap, Jim laughed at the realization. Jim observed Roy studying the
map for a minute or two, noticing how his lower lip drooped slightly
when his face was in repose. Something's definitely wrong with him,
Jim thought. Suddenly, Roy tossed the map over his shoulder into the
now vacant back seat and took an abrupt left turn down the road to
Charlottesville. Jim laughed quietly. Dolly's father will be dead and
buried by the time they find their way to Chicago, he thought. And
it's a good thing I got out of it when I did. He wasn't even going in
the right direction. After he saw Roy's taillights fade down the high-
way, Jim emerged again into the light.

The bright lighting at the crossroads, and the fact that the
drivers had to slow down into the intersection to make their turns onto
whichever road they chose, all the advantages that Jim had calculated
paid off for him and he got a ride not long after Roy and Dolly made the
wrong turn on their erratic course to Chicago. A few minutes conver-
sation with the man in the red pickup who had given Jim a ride revealed
that he was a foreman on a road construction job who commuted on weekends to his home in Marlburg. The man not only knew where Bev's school was, but he recognized the name of her dormitory and told Jim he would take him right to her door. Jim was overwhelmed with relief and gratitude and settled back in his seat to enjoy the remainder of the trip. He reflected that he had certainly gone through hell to see a girl he didn't really care about. He had no doubt that her face, which he had always felt was cute at least, would be a welcome one, however. The road foreman took an understanding approach and appeared to enjoy the thought that he was helping a hapless Romeo rendezvous with his Juliet.

"Going to see your girl, huh?" he asked.

"Yeah," admitted Jim. He recognized that he was willing to accept the labels the man was applying to his relationship with Bev. Why complicate matters? he thought. Why not succumb to established rituals and act the assigned roles? Bev was more than willing to assume the part of his devoted girl. The warm sentimentality that typified the man's view of Jim swayed him and they approached Marlburg together, two men isolated from their women for too long, anxious for the reunion, but enjoying the anonymous comradeship for the moment.

Marlburg was penned in between a number of round-shouldered peaks, and much of their ride was spent winding up and around these mountains. It was a process Jim enjoyed, the slow acquisition of the peak, respectful of the millions of years of mountain-building that had thrust the barrier up before them. But he was also anxious about the time. It was nearly ten now. Like all Virginia colleges, Bev's institution observed a curfew for its women students. He couldn't recall the exact hour for Friday nights, but he was sure it was either eleven or twelve. With just
under twenty miles to go, now, and given the road foreman's moderate pace (no reflection, Jim was sure, on the man's confidence in the roads he helped build) Jim estimated that they would arrive at ten-thirty, perhaps a quarter to eleven. He and Bev would have time only to talk for a few minutes. Then he would have to go to the lodgings she had arranged for him. Jim thought that she was probably upset and worried that he was late. But he had no way of calling her. Jim also realized for the first time that he had missed the mixer that had been the original reason for the trip. But he and Bev would still have all of Saturday and a good part of Sunday to spend together. Jim stared out the window at the dark embankments that fell away from the road into a ravine as he envisioned scenes of excitement at a sports event, relaxation and good companionship at the college hangout, and affection by an open fire, all set in the crisp mountain autumn weather that gave it all a sharp, vivid quality. He was determined now to fulfill his role and plunge wholeheartedly into the affair. Money would be a problem, since he had none, but that could be easily overcome. As the pick-up attained the crest of the mountain and started down the other side toward the valley and Marlburg, Jim anticipated the warm reception he knew awaited him, and in particular a warm bed to relax in after his exhausting journey.

Jim's estimate of a quarter to eleven arrival time turned out to be the more accurate one. He jumped out of the truck in front of Bev's dormitory with a flurry of thanks and a warm sense of friendship for the road foreman. On his part, the foreman gave Jim his phone number to call on Sunday if he wanted a ride back to Fayetteville, which was on his way to the job site. Thus assured of his return ride, Jim again thanked the man and exchanged a hearty handshake. He was about to say,
"Give my best to the wife and kids," but he restrained himself. In spite of Jim's indebtedness to the man for the ride, he felt a superiority that forbade too much familiarity. He is, after all, a road foreman while I'm a college student, Jim thought. Certain social gulfs were too wide to be completely bridged. Nevertheless, Jim felt a genuine affection for the man as he watched him drive off to his home and an anxious wife. Turning to the dorm, Jim blew his breath like a plume over his head and entered at the glass doors.

He approached the student receptionist and asked for Bev, who was paged. "Bev Strathman, you have a visitor in the lobby." There was a pause. Then Bev's voice spoke, "Who's calling, please?" Jim was startled by the question and stammered his name to the girl. "It's a Jim Curtis," she informed Bev. There was no answer, but the receptionist assured him she was on her way down.

Jim nervously stepped into the lobby of the high-ceilinged, modern building. It was not the cozy hunting lodge he had envisioned, although a free-standing fireplace blazed in one corner. Couples were strewn about on modern couches placed at right angles to each other on the carpeted floor. The architecture was imitative of the popular A-frame, mountain lodge style, but it was as though the timber had been stripped away, leaving glass and painted cinder blocks in its place. The lobby had a chill atmosphere as a result, despite the fireplace, or perhaps because of it, too, made from stark white metal and supplemented by central heating.

Jim was awkward standing around with those couples who had had a full evening while he was just arriving. He put his bag down on the floor and casually draped his coat over it to conceal it. Then he sat
in the nearest chair and waited for Bev.

She entered through another door a few minutes later in a sweater and woolen slacks. Looking around the large room, she searched for a moment without spotting him.

"Over here, Bev," Jim said, thinking she ought to wear her glasses.

"Jimmy, I didn't know you were coming." She came over to his chair and knelt.

"What?"

"You didn't call me back, so I didn't know whether you were coming or not," she explained.

"That doesn't make sense, Bev. I said I was coming when you called last week." Jim was appalled. This wasn't the warm reception he had anticipated or deserved.

"I guess I misunderstood," she said. "I thought you would call to let me know definitely one way or the other. And when you weren't here in time for the mixer, I assumed you weren't coming."

"I'm sorry about that. I had one hell of a trip hitchhiking."

"Well, I'm glad you're here anyway. We can have the rest of the weekend together." She rose and wedged in next to him in the chair.

Jim reached up and kissed her briefly on the lips. "Well hello anyway. How have you been?" He would salvage it somehow.

"Okay. Pretty busy, I guess."

"When do they lock you in here for the night?" he asked, checking the clock.

"Eleven-thirty."

"It's eleven now. We can talk for a bit before I go," Jim said.

"By the way, where am I staying tonight?"
"I don't know," she said simply.

"What? Didn't you arrange a place for me to stay?"

"Well, I didn't know, Jimmy," she whined, sensing his anger. "How could I get you a place when I didn't know you were coming? Can't you stay in a motel in town?"

"I don't have any money," Jim said, disgusted with her. "Don't you know any guys I can stay with?"

"No, I don't. But wait here, I'll collect some money on the hall so you can get a motel room. I don't have any cash either."

"There's no time for a crusade," he said, restraining her. "I guess I can sleep in one of the lounges in the men's dorm or something."

"I don't think they allow that, but you can try."

Jim sweated, unable to vent exasperation, exhaustion, or anger. He faced the night with no place to go, penniless, and so tired that his legs were weak. The clock read 11:15 already, and the couples around the room were stirring in preparation for leaving. Jim again felt an outsider's desperation, with no bed to go to, no money, and no connections. He marvelled at Bev's unhelpfulness. He saw her as a brainless girl who was no good to him, especially since she couldn't provide him with a bed. Jim stood up after a moment and picked up his bag and coat.

"Keep this for me, anyway. I guess I'll find something." Bev took his suitcase and looked at him painfully.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy. If only you had told me."

He was too tired to argue the point with her. Jim shrugged and walked toward the door.

"See you in the morning I guess."
"Okay," Bev answered. She watched him go through the doors and wave limply to her as he walked around the corner. Holding his suitcase, she wished he hadn't come at all.

Jim stood out in the growing cold and wondered where he could go. He felt in no mood to sleep on a couch and risk being worried by dorm counsellors and security guards. So he turned away from the dormitories and headed toward the tennis courts below him across a stream that traversed the mountain campus. He walked stiff-legged down the hill and in a minute was on the tennis courts. Sighing, and feeling again that surge of self-pity swell in his breast, he climbed into one of the high judges chairs that overlooked the nets and huddled there in his coat. He blinked at the moon in the high, black sky, noticing that it had moved across the sky and was moving downward toward the other horizon now. His self-pity was so profound that he was about to cry, but a twinge of disgust held him back. Instead, he tried to get comfortable in the cold, hard chair. He had not really wanted to come. There had been a hundred good reasons not to leave the University and Fayetteville. She hadn't even expected him. And yet, he had come.
III

Jim returned to Fayetteville that Sunday with the road foreman, who faithfully provided the ride he had promised. The trip back through Virginia during the late evening gave Jim an opportunity to relax after his trying weekend with Bev. Although she had been more hospitable on Saturday morning and gave him bountiful sympathy when she learned that he had slept outside, it was as though he had imposed on her. Their mutual annoyance at the entire situation had made the weekend a disaster, Jim decided, as the evening purpled on the mountaintops. He resolved, while he and Pete (Jim had finally learned the foreman's name) rode over the darkening countryside, that any further contact with Bev would be confined to letters. He and Pete passed the time in easy conversation. They discovered that they enjoyed each other's company, and Jim altered his idea that they could never really communicate. Pete, in fact, became quite eloquent, discussing his plans to become a horticulturist. He confessed to Jim that he had grown tired of his weekly separations from his family and speculated about the chances of success as the owner of a nursery. Jim listened with an interest he didn't know he was capable of to Pete's detailed description of profit margins, initial investments, and specifics about boxwoods, cedars, and especially the dangers of bad weather and urinating dogs.

"One dog can ruin hundreds of dollars worth of boxwoods, you know."

"No kidding."

"You see, if they let go on your plants, you get a bad yellowing of the leaves that the plant just can't recover from. It's the acid, see."

Jim started to laugh. "That's what I call an occupational hazard."

Pete laughed heartily. In a few minutes, Jim found himself correcting Pete's impression of his amorous weekend. Whereas the foreman
had thought a real affair was blooming, Jim revealed the facts of his
and Bev's relationship. Pete's candidness about himself drew Jim out.
When he told of the night spent above the tennis court, Pete had his
laugh.

"You must have froze. It was way below freezing Friday night you
know."

"Yeah, it was pretty stupid, I'm afraid."

"Well," Pete said, "we all have our hazards, don't we?"

"I guess so, Pete," Jim replied.

Before long, Jim was put to sleep by the monotony of the high-
way and the whine of the tires. He slept soundly until they were within
a few miles of the University. Jim always found that the sleep he got
while travelling tended to tire him more than it did refresh him, but he
awoke relaxed and warm in the cab of the pickup. As they came closer to
his destination, Jim regretted that he wasn't likely to see Pete again.
His trip to and from Marlburg had been like a sojourn in another country
for him, away from the unreal life of the dormitory and the classroom.
Pete dealt with hard facts of existence, the laying down of a road and the
profitable use of land. It made Jim's occupation seem ephemeral and use-
less. He was not glad, then, when Pete drew up at the traffic light and
let him out. Pete was willing to drive him the half-mile down the side
road to his dorm, but Jim felt he needed the interim between Pete and
his dormitory to readjust.

"Listen, I can't tell you how much I appreciate you picking me up
the other night, Pete. And giving me the ride back, too. You're a real
life-saver."

"Anytime, Jim. Hope to see you again sometime. If you're ever in
Marlburg, look me up. The name's Mason, in the book."

They shook hands as the light changed to green. Jim slammed the door and watched Pete drive off. The inadequacy of his farewell rang in his ears as he turned down the road to the dorm.

Jim walked cautiously along the side of the road approaching Lansing Hall. In spite of the disastrous weekend, he realized as he approached Lansing, which he could see through a screen of tall bushes, that it had been a relief from the atmosphere of the University. Jim now felt stifled, drawn back to the bulky building ahead as if into a maelstrom. He also knew, now as he turned up the drive, that the weekend had only increased his desperation, his inability to escape the annihilating center of the whirlpool. The specter of unread books, overdue papers, an unattended lectures rose before him in the shape of Lansing, now increased by the wasting of the weekend. Now he would pay the consequences, he knew, entering at the lobby door.

There was no one in the halls as he ascended to the third floor. Jim had arrived late, but he knew his fellows were behind their doors engaged with their books and papers. Of course, the pool players were still indulging themselves down in the basement, and Jim felt the habitual urge to retreat into that labyrinth. He reached his door and put his bag down while he groped for his key. While doing so, Mike rounded the corner from his room in the east wing and greeted him.

"Ah, Mr. Curtis," he said, "how was the expedition?"

"Pretty much as expected," Jim answered. "But I know you'll be glad to hear that I'm abandoning it as a lost cause."

"Good, good," nodded Mike. "Hey, man, why don't you come down to the room later? Roger and I did some redecorating this weekend."
"Yeah, I will." Roger and Mike had one of the few rooms in Lansing that was big enough for two to live in. Having found his key, Jim opened the door and switched on the light. He was about to step in when he noticed an envelope lying on the floor just inside the threshold. He knelt and picked it up, seeing the seal of the University in the left hand corner and the legend, "Office of the Dean of Men." Jim tossed his bag on his bed and sank in his deep red reading chair to examine the contents. He opened the envelope, which he noticed had been tucked rather than sealed, and withdrew a mimeographed sheet:

Dear MR. CURTIS

It has been brought to my attention that your attendance at classes in the course(s) listed below constitutes a danger to your grade. Please come by and see me at your earliest convenience so that we can discuss any problems you may be experiencing.

Allen R. Bailey
Assistant Dean of Men

Below the unsigned signature was a section that identified the professor and the course in which the danger had arisen. In Jim's case, two professors had reported him. He sat for a moment, stunned. In spite of the impersonality of the form letter, Jim took it as a direct summons. He hadn't expected so tangible a proof of his shortcomings. The specter he had envisioned had been lurking under his door, lying in wait for him. The idea that the alarm had been sounded and that the higher officials were now aware of him, that perhaps they had discussed him and wondered what was the matter with him made Jim feel a compulsion to respond. In-
deed the possibility of ignoring the summons was nonexistent. He reread the letter and considered when his "earliest convenience" was. He thought for a moment of cutting his nine o'clock sociology lecture for his appointment with fate, but realized the folly of that. Jim resolved that he would attend his morning classes and go to see Mr. Bailey at eleven o'clock. The letter had jarred him into a strange attitude. Before this, he hadn't considered that he had a "problem" as such. Now it seemed that the decision had been made for him. The Assistant Dean of Men knows my name and thinks I have a problem, he thought. The notion also crossed his mind, however, that if Mr. Bailey were to initiate the discussion with "What's the problem, Jim?" he would be at a loss. A strange, irrational hope arose in him, however, that the Assistant Dean of Men already knew and had a solution waiting for him in the administration building, and that all he had to do was to go by and find out what it was. Jim thought as he sat in his reading chair that perhaps he could make it after all, with the sympathetic aid of such a man, who knew about him, and knew what his problem was.

He set the letter aside and stood up, feeling better to have returned. Doffing his coat, he tossed it on the bed and ventured out into the hall. Jim decided to wander down to Mike and Roger's room and see what they had done to their quarters over the weekend. He found himself in something of a festive mood. The thought of tackling his studies seemed unnecessary at the moment, in view of the letter. Jim was in the mood for wasting some time before he went to bed for the night.

The corridor in the east wing was like a dim tunnel. The electrical panel for the entire floor was located on the wall there and the occupants in the wing had mutually agreed to dwell in obscurity. They had only
to switch off the circuit breaker that controlled their share of the floor's lights. Jim had always wondered why they preferred it that way. He turned the corner in the hall and came upon Mike and Roger's door. On it was a sign, painted on the same rectangular piece of cardboard that the University laundry used in shirts. Jim thought before knocking that thousands of these had been converted into signs for any number of purposes. This one on Mike and Roger's door read: "EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED!"

Jim recognized in the slogan the strange humor of Roger, as well as the da-glo paint he used whenever and wherever he could. He knocked briefly and on hearing a muffled "Enter if you dare!" pushed open the door.

For a moment, Jim could see nothing. A bell had tinkled softly when the door swung open, and he was met with the exotic odor of sandalwood incense. He half expected to hear an oriental flute wailing, but the soft sound of a mournful folk singer's latest album suited the mood just as well. Before him he saw, now, a sheet that had been dyed, hanging from the ceiling. It apparently served to create an artificial hallway that led into the main body of the room. Jim closed the door behind him, while an ornate wind chime continued to tinkle quietly.

He paused for a moment to adjust his eyes totally. A blue light filtered through the bedsheets. There was an expectant hush on the other side of it, as though Mike and Roger were calmly awaiting his entrance. Jim decided to saunter around the partition. He emerged into the room.

"Welcome to the mysterious east wing," Roger intoned.

"A thousand salutations," Mike added, seated on a mass of cushions heaped on the floor. "Be seated, friend, and we shall discuss your journey."

"Give me a minute to get adjusted to these surroundings," Jim said.
The entire room was partitioned with more bedsheets so that it was a maze of colored cloths and dim lights. Squinting, Jim saw that tapestries, or imitations of tapestries were hung on the walls. Only here and there did the yellow plaster emerge from the swaths of fabric. In one corner of the room, a heavy oak table, no doubt appropriated from another part of the building, was set up as sort of an altar. On it the incense was burning, held in a brass affair that was shaped like a coiled snake. In the middle of the table, a lamp stood, divested of its shade and covered now by a red devil's mask. The bulb blinked on and off, highlighting the mask, and then obscuring it. A tall, heavy candleholder stood beside it, coated with the drippings of innumerable candles of all colors. The two single beds had been moved to the far side of the room and concealed behind yet another curtain. Roger had spoken from behind this barrier. A light over his bed silhouetted his shape against the sheet. He was sitting on his bed, cross-legged, apparently able to perceive what was going on in the larger part of the room. Across from the altar, a portable stereo squatted on a low table, laden with records. Albums and their covers were strewn all around it. A small table lamp illuminated the turntable. The body of the lamp was actually a statuette of an Elizabethan with his puffed-up sleeves and waistcoat. It was a young man, beardless and bareheaded, who was wielding a rapier. The shaft of the lamp rose directly out of the top of his skull, but only his legs supported the lamp at the bottom. Two regulation desks were relegated to another side of the large room. These were littered with stacks of books and magazines. Jim wondered where one could sit down and write something in the room, for there were no chairs. These had been removed and all sitting had to be done on
the floor. Several mattresses had been procured for that purpose, and they were covered with still more sheets. Every square foot of the floor was covered with the exception of the entranceway. More magazines were littered all around for the entertainment of guests. Jim caught himself gaping at the change. Even the ceiling had been hung with sheets and tapestries. The hard lines of the room had been obliterated by yards and yards of fabric. It made the room seem like a sultan's tent.

"You guys did this in one weekend?"

"Damn right, James. Roger and I went out to this junk shop on Friday afternoon and bought all sorts of paraphernalia, dyed some sheets, moved furniture on Saturday, and hung it all today."

"It's wild, gentlemen."

"You mean, so-o-rreal?" said Roger emerging suddenly from his lair.

"Without a doubt," answered Jim.

There was a pause that no one cared to fill. Jim sat down on a mattress across from Mike who was still sprawled atop the cushions in the middle of the room. While the stereo continued to play, Jim picked up the nearest magazine. It was a sophisticated fan magazine that dealt with the stars of the rock world, what they ate, what movies they were making, along with an assortment of reviews and features. Jim saw in a moment that it was the usual run of astrology, hero worship, and drugs all treated in the pop vernacular. Its main appeal for Jim was the flashy layout with plenty of color photographs. He thought after a few minutes of reading that it was sort of a hip Life magazine.

Meanwhile, Roger and Mike had drifted into their own individual amusements. Mike, too, was reading a magazine. Jim wondered how many
the two of them had subscribed to at the outset of the school year to have accumulated such a library of issues. It was the perfect material to spend idle time with, interesting enough to browse through without seeming to engage totally in reading them. Roger had resumed his seat on the bed with the curtain pulled back. He was looking over a text as though it, too, were a magazine. He would read a paragraph or so, stop, stand up and cross the room to the stereo to change a record, return to his book, think of something else to do and wander off again. Roger, who wore his blond hair long and parted down the middle, was the type of person, it seemed to Jim, who had tremendous reserves of nervous energy which he was unable to channel into any purposeful action. Wherever Jim had seen Roger in the short time he had known him, he was always wandering, dipping into magazines or books in the library, hopping from table to table in the cafeteria, unable to focus his attention for more than a few minutes. Even in conversation he was halting and inattentive. Roger also had a penchant for planning his activities. He spent a great deal of his time making lists on small yellow note pads of things to do. Invariably, he would fail to fulfill half of his resolutions. He would then be forced to revise his list.

Mike, on the other hand, was more intense. Jim noticed that while Roger was wandering about the room from his bed to his desk to his dresser to the stereo, Mike had remained where he had been since Jim came in, reading the same magazine. Jim saw that the difference was Michael's longer attention span. Although he was as impulsive as Roger, once Michael had decided on something, he would plunge ahead with it until he had exhausted his interest in it. This was consistent with his relationships with females. Mike would see a girl he thought attractive
and become obsessed with her. He might pursue a relationship with her avidly for a week or so with some success, and then abandon her, satisfied that her potential had been explored thoroughly.

Jim's musings on the characters of his hosts were interrupted when Mike looked up from his magazine and aimed a pointed question at Jim.

"So how was it? You gave her the boot, huh?"

"Yeah, you could say that. We didn't actually end it since there really wasn't much to end in the first place, you know? But I think there was sort of a mutual understanding after the weekend was over that we wouldn't go through that shit again. Really, man, I can't think of three days when I was more uncomfortable and out of place. I mean, after travelling for eight hours straight, how would you feel if you had no place to stay for the night?"

"I'd be pissed as hell," Mike replied.

"That's how I felt."

"You mean you didn't have a place to sleep Friday night?"

"No. She didn't bother to get me a place."

"That in itself would be enough for me to drop her ass."

"Well, like I said," Jim went on, "I'm not going through that again."

Mike listened attentively while he smoked a cigarette. He made Jim feel like a novice in these affairs, and Jim was anxious to put an end to the whole discussion. He thought of his letter from the Dean of Men.

"By the way," Jim said, "I got a note from the Dean of Men's office today."

"Oh, shit. Got to go see him?"
"Yeah, to discuss my problems."

"Bad attendance?"

"How did you know?"

Mike assumed his man-of-experience attitude. "About this time of the semester," he explained, "all the professors turn in reports to the Dean on students who aren't coming to class and they put out the dragnet and pull them in for a bit of counseling. For about a week, Bailey talks to these troubled lads and does his thing. Then he forgets about them for the rest of the semester until they're flunking out. Then he does some more counseling about what they should do now that they're out of school."

Jim began to feel stupid. Mike, who had an older sister who filled him in on such matters, since she was presently a senior at the University, dispelled Jim's notion that he had been singled out. The form letter came to mind as proof that no personal concern was being shown from the upper echelons of the administration. Besides that, Mike sounded as though he were prophesying his imminent failure. Jim resented the implication that he would be out of school by the end of the semester.

"Are you going to see Bailey?" Mike asked.

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"I'd don't think I'd waste my time."

This comment confirmed Jim's determination to see what Bailey had to say. His resentment had built up against Mike to the point that he was certain it could be seen in his face. Jim searched for a reason to leave.

"Well, I'd better get back to my room."
"Yeah, rest up so you don't fall asleep in Bailey's office," Mike said.

Jim rose from the mattress. "I really like what you guys did to the room. Looks real exotic." He was at the door.

Roger looked up from the latest issue of Rolling Stone. "Leaving us, eh?"

"Yeah," said Jim as he opened the tinkling door.

"Well, ramble on, Jimbo." Roger was forever coining clever ways of ending a conversation.

"Roger, Roger," replied Jim as he stepped out into the darkened hall. He was about to add something more straightforward, but thought his last remark clever enough to serve as his goodbye. Jim closed the door and listened again to the tinkling wind chimes.

Retracing his steps back to his door, Jim gauged his feelings. The visit with them had put him in a dark mood. He felt real resentment toward Mike and annoyance with Roger for his triviality. When he came to his door, he paused and decided that in spite of his weariness, he was not yet ready to face his bare, desolate room. Jim turned again down the hall, half wandering and half drawn by habit to the pool room in the basement. A few of his friends were lounging out in the hall by their rooms. Jim stopped for a moment to exchange a greeting, and brushed aside questions about his trip noncommittally. He preferred to forget the past weekend and concentrate on the crises he would face with exams and papers piling up before him. Thoughts like those were even less pleasant, however. He pressed on toward the basement. He took the stairway nearest the east wing and came down to the second floor where he entered the hallway. The pool room was located under the
west wing, so he had to walk across the building to the west stairway. On his way, he passed Steve's doorway. Jim didn't know him as Steve Pollard, in fact, no one in the dorm knew Steve's real name. Since the beginning of school, Steve had achieved a degree of infamy. He had become a recluse, seldom emerging from his room. Those who lived near him on the second floor had dubbed him "Swine." The name spread rapidly until everyone knew him by that title. Jim wondered what Swine was like. He had seen him in the pool room numerous times since the rooster incident. Swine was a ping-pong player, however, and seldom joined the others at the pool table. Jim expected to see him there tonight.

He reached the west stairway and descended the last two flights to the shadowy hallway that led to the game room. Jim could hear the click of billiard balls as well as the higher sound made by the ping-pong balls. This meant that he probably wouldn't be able to get into the game tonight, which often happened. Entering the brightly lit room, Jim saw four students intent on a game of eight ball while four others were playing at the two ping-pong tables, Swine among them. Jim strolled over to the pool table and greeted his cronies there, among them Campbell, the archer who had slain the rooster.

"Well, I'll be damned," Campbell said as he lined up a shot, "if it isn't Minnesota Slim. The only man who looks like the pool cue he shoots with." He punctuated his remark by ramming a ball into the corner pocket.

"I'd rather be Minnesota Slim than Fayetteville Fats."

Campbell ignored the comment and moved around the table to line up another shot. Jim leaned against a column to observe the game.
Campbell quickly pocketed the last striped ball and moved on the eight ball.

"You dudes have so many spots on the table I can't get a clear shot."

"That's the plan, Campbell," said one of the players on the other team. "We play a defensive game."

Campbell snorted as he examined the shot. The eight ball lay against the rail near the side pocket between two spotted balls, while the cue ball lay opposite it on the other rail.

"If you don't know how to make that shot, Campbell, you're hopeless," Jim remarked.

Campbell again ignored the comment and lined up the shot. He indicated the side pocket at his right hand. "Right there," he muttered bending over the table and sighting along the cue. He slid the cue back and stroked the white ball firmly across the table. It struck the eight ball on the left side, causing it to come back off the rail toward the opposite side pocket. The eight ball rolled quickly and carommed off the rail two inches from the pocket. Meanwhile, the cue ball had rolled diagonally across the felt and dropped quietly into the corner pocket. Campbell had scratched on the eight ball; the game was lost.

"Goddamn you, Curtis!"

"What the hell did I do, you hot dog?" Jim said.

"Ah, go to hell."

Jim thought for a moment about playing in the next game, but decided against it. Campbell and his friends always played for money, and Jim was penniless, as usual. He started toward the door but stopped to
watch Swine play ping-pong.

Swine stood at his end of the table, playing intently. His appearance always mystified Jim. Swine wore a white undershirt, baggy trousers, and a pair of socks with no shoes. The socks were a dark brown color, and riddled with holes. When Swine took a step to reach a shot, Jim could see the bottom of his feet, covered with dust from the corridors of Lansing. The trousers bagged at the knees, as though he had worn them so long that the imprints were held there by the dirt. His undershirt was filthy as well, with perspiration stains under the arms and at the collar. Jim could see from his face and neck and arms that he hadn't washed for some time. His skin was almost splotchy with grime, and his hair stood straight up in knots and snarls from his flaking scalp. Several other idlers watched the game. Despite his appearance, Swine was a good ping-pong player, perhaps because he concentrated so intensely. It was as if he wasn't aware of his opponent, but only the ball which came back over the net when he served. He kept his head down and, holding the paddle in the Oriental style, so that the face of the paddle was below his fist, Swine returned every shot with a wicked spin on the ball so it would bounce unpredictably off the table. He never said a word to his opponent, except to note the score, which was heavily in his favor.

Campbell wandered over in a moment to join the sparse gallery. He stood next to Jim and looked critically at the game in progress. After Swine won another point, Campbell spoke up.

"Do you smell something in here, Curtis? Smells just like a pig sty."

Jim remained silent. He watched Swine, who apparently hadn't heard.
He continued to play as intensely as before.

"Yes, sir," Campbell went on, getting louder, "I could swear I was back home in my hometown: Grunt, Tennessee." He was putting on a hillbilly accent. "Me and my daddy would go out every morning to the hogs and give'em their daily slop. Good God, did they smell! Never had any leftover garbage, though. Just carry out all that smelly shit in a pail (sometimes I thought I was gonna die from the stench), dump it in their trough, and man, they'd go to it. Yeah, that's just what this smell reminds me of."

The group of spectators laughed quietly at Campbell while they watched Swine to see his reaction. Jim marvelled at his composure under Campbell's ridicule. He could only detect a slight coloring in his face. Swine, meanwhile, was winning his last point. He served the small white sphere, spinning it to his opponent's left. The other player managed a weak return which Swine reached up for and smashed off the edge of the table.

"Sooeee! Man, that boy can play some ping-pong," Campbell roared. Swine continued to look at the table, waiting for another opponent, showing no sign of having heard Campbell.

"Well, now, who's going to play the ping-pong wonder? I'd take him on myself, but I noticed every time he waves that paddle the fumes get real strong. I don't think I could see the ball when that stench hits me."

The small group laughed loudly now. Swine continued to wait at the table, his paddle resting on the edge and the ball in his grimy hand. He was sweating at the brow, and the stains under his arms had been renewed by his energetic playing.
"Hey, Curtis! Why don't you play old Swine? Think you can stand it? Huh?"

Jim boiled within. Campbell rocked back and laughed at his own jokes, looking around at his audience. He noticed that Jim hadn't been laughing along.

"Why Curtis. What's the matter? You look faint, man. Maybe you'd better go to the window and get some fresh air."

"Why don't you shut the fuck up?" Jim exploded. He felt a crimson flush rise to his face as everyone transferred their gaze from Swine to him. "Campbell, you are the loudest, most obnoxious son-of-a-bitch ... Can't you leave a guy alone? What the hell has Swine done to you?"

"I live next door to the slob, Curtis. I have to put up with the way he stinks. He's an outrage to the whole dormitory, and I think we ought to do something. Since you brought it out in the open, Curtis, I think I'll speak to the dorm manager and see what he has to say."

Jim thought Swine had every right to live the way he wanted to. He looked over to him at the ping-pong table where he still stood. But now Swine had raised his head and was looking at Jim. Jim thought he recognized an appeal in his face. But he realized that he had made Swine's situation worse by bringing Campbell's ridicule to issue. The worst part of it was that he knew him only as Swine. No one knew his real name. What kind of defense was it to call the guy "Swine" in the same breath that you tried to stand up for him?

"You go ahead, Campbell," Jim said. "Old Ernie will laugh in your face."

"Like hell," Campbell retorted. "We'll get rid of him if we have to
carry his ass out."

Campbell spoke about Swine as if he weren't even there. The extent of Campbell's insensitivity astonished Jim. He saw that the best thing to do was leave and let Swine play ping-pong without further interruptions. The guy must have the hide of an elephant not to say something, Jim thought. He turned to leave the room. Campbell called out to him as he went out the door, "We'll get you, too, Curtis, you screaming faggot."

"Fuck off, Campbell," Jim yelled over his shoulder. He blazed with indignance. Jim realized that in spite of his impulse to defend Swine, he resented the idea of being associated with such a strange person. Humiliated and ashamed, Jim bounded up the stairs to the third floor. He walked hurriedly down the corridor to his room and slammed the door after him. The letter from the Dean of Men reminded Jim of his own precarious situation. If he had forged any resolve to regain his academic feet he now felt the urge to shut himself in his room and bag the whole thing. What the hell can the Assistant Dean of Men do for me? he thought. Why don't they blow up this goddammed dorm and all the assholes like Campbell with it? Jim walked over to his window and stared out across the field. The road was deserted, the buses had long since stopped running. A streetlight shed a pale blue light which filtered through the trees that screened the field from the road. Jim thought about Pete, and wondered if he had reached his job site.

In the past three days, Pete had been the only person Jim had felt comfortable with. The ride with him had been the most relaxed stretch of hours he had known for weeks. You could talk simply with the guy, he thought. He was interested in what you had to say, even if you were a total stranger. He hadn't encountered that much concern for a long
time, and he was sure the Assistant Dean of Men would not break the pattern. Jim turned from the window and decided to go to bed. As he removed his clothes, his thoughts returned to Swine. He had been a fool to say anything to Campbell. Swine didn't seem to care one way or another. But what had the look meant? he thought as he crawled under the covers. In spite of his own problems, Jim felt he ought to try to get to know the outcast. He doubted that he could do anything for him, but why not find out what he's like? Jim's thoughts began to fade from his mind as he descended into an exhausted sleep. But the last image hovering before his mind's eye was Steve "Swine" Pollard's pathetic face, and the haunted, searching eyes.
Though Jim had neglected to set his alarm and slept as soundly as usual, he awoke automatically at eight o'clock. It startled him that he found himself fully awake without his usual urge to roll over and resume sleep. It was not irritation that woke him, as it had been on the previous Friday before his trip to Marlburg. Jim was uncertain what the cause of his alertness was, but the memory of the previous night was still prominent in his thoughts. He put them aside to concentrate on making it to breakfast for the second time that year and catching his nine o'clock class. The gratification he had derived on the previous Friday was enlarged to a confidence that a new pattern of punctuality was emerging from his chaotic existence. The appointment with the Assistant Dean of Men diminished in its awesomeness. Jim felt that he could give evidence of this turn in his habits and could brush off the Assistant Dean of Men's concern.

His new attitude failed to survive the test of attending his sociology lecture, however. Although he had read none of the assigned material for some weeks, much less attended the class, he exuded aplomb. The professor, one of the two who had reported him to the Dean of Men, seemed almost shocked to see Jim sitting in the front row, his notebook open and his pen ready.

"How are you, Mr. Curtis?"

"Fine, sir."

"Still with us?"

"As far as I know."

"Good. Perhaps you'd like to see me after class?"
"Yes, sir," Jim replied. He expected that the professor would take up the matter of the paper that was long overdue.

"Now," the professor continued, "I'd like to pass back these tests to you and make a few comments on them." He picked up a sheaf of papers from the table and began to thumb through them calling out the students' names. He glanced significantly at Jim, who realized that he had missed the mid-term exam in the course as well. In spite of his new attitude, this cast him into a glum mood. The situation in this course was hopeless. He recognized that now. As the lecture began, he mentally reviewed the other courses he was taking. He found that they, too, were beyond hope. Jim knew that the only way he could salvage any of these courses would be to prostrate himself before the professors, one and all. He wasn't sure that his pride would allow such a humiliating experience, but it occurred to him that it would be better to confront them and at least make an attempt at passing than it would to spend the remaining weeks of the semester skulking about the campus in fear of running into any of his professors. It had already happened once, when he was on his way to lunch one day. His English professor, Mr. Dodd, drove by and recognized him standing at the curb. The look he cast his way made Jim feel like a lost dog. The teacher was a young aggressive type who kept his classes lively by challenging the students and exposing their illusions about life. Jim read in that brief glance the offence he had committed by his poor attendance. He felt, in his own defence, that it would have been worse to attend unprepared, when participation was such a vital part of this professor's approach. He wasn't sure what Dodd's reaction would be to an appeal from Jim. Jim was certain that he would receive a heavy dose of scorn from all of them.
And what would he tell them? Well, sir, he imagined his reply, I've... uh... I've had a rough time adjusting to college life. But I feel that I've come to the point where I can get into the routine. Jim shook his head as he sat in the front row. The professor had been lecturing about class structure among Puerto Ricans in Harlem. It indeed seemed hopeless.

Jim's reflections were ended when the sifting of papers and shutting of notebooks signaled the end of the class. The students rose and headed out amid much shuffling, conversation, and laughter. Jim closed his notebook, too, in which he had only written the date, and got up to leave. The professor called to him just as he was going out the door. Jim, embarrassed at having forgotten his promise to see him after class, returned to where the professor stood at the head of the classroom.

"Not trying to escape were you, Mr. Curtis?"

"No, sir. I just forgot."

"Yes, your attentiveness was remarkable during class. Have you seen Dean Bailey yet?"

"I was just going to see him, sir."

"Good. Well, I'll wait to see you until you've spoken with him, all right? Then you can make amends to me if you really plan to stick it out."

Jim writhed under what he recognized as a foretaste of the condescension he would have to endure if he did plan to salvage his courses. Several other students were standing around, no doubt with questions about the mid-term. Jim felt the scrutiny he was undergoing, and the amusement everyone was deriving from his ordeal.

"When can I see you, then?" Jim asked.
"I'm free this afternoon at two if you're not busy then, Mr. Curtis," answered the professor with considerable sarcasm. "We can calculate your chances of recovery then."

"See you then, sir." Jim turned and exited, relieved to have escaped the scrutiny of the amused professor. He remarked inwardly that his own estimation of his chances for recovery was dim. It was now a matter of finding out what Assistant Dean of Men Bailey had to say. His office was in the same building, on the floor below. Jim descended the wide stairway, pausing to read the various announcements posted on the wall in the stairwell. He was in no hurry to turn himself in. The building housed many of the administrative offices of the University. The ground floor was devoted entirely to offices, while the second and third floors had classrooms and the offices of professors. The Assistant Dean of Men's office was on the second floor, where Jim now paced up and down the length of the hallway before the door on which "Allen R. Bailey" was lettered with his title underneath. The frosted glass in the door dimly revealed the goings and comings of secretaries, or so Jim supposed the blurred shapes to be. He nervously paced back down to the end where a bank of vending machines hummed. Two or three had out of order signs taped over their coin slots, while one had messages scrawled on its face. They warned the prospective buyer that the machine stole one's money, dealt out stale products, and generally frustrated. While Jim stalled, reading these inscriptions, he heard the door to Bailey's office open. Turning to see, Jim shrank behind a corner when a small man emerged, shaking a dejected-looking student's hand. The hallway was otherwise deserted, since the ten o'clock classes had already started. The small man is no doubt Bailey, Jim thought.
He saw him similing and heard him making a few concluding remarks to the taller, dejected student.

"If you can just buckle down, Bruce, you'll be back on your feet in no time. I think under the circumstances your professors will understand and give you a chance to get back in their good graces."

Another delinquent freshman, Jim thought. Bailey was clearly reciting a formula, as he continued to hold Bruce's hand and pump it as he emphasized his words. Besides being short, Bailey had a thin, frail body. He was dressed conservatively, of course. Jim hadn't expected anything else. From his viewpoint at the end of the hall, he could also see that Bailey wore a bow tie, a white shirt with a narrow, fly collar, and a dark, checked sports coat. Jim wondered if the tie was the clip variety that some men wore because it was fast and easy to put on in the morning, or the old-fashioned type that required considerable dexterity to tie properly. He estimated that the Assistant Dean of Men's age was fifty-four, give or take a few years.

Bailey had finished speaking with Bruce and returned to his office. Bruce, for his part, came in Jim's direction with a dissatisfied look on his face. He looked up from the terrazzo floor as he passed where Jim stood. Jim saw something in his expression that was remarkably like Swine's look of desperation on the previous night. After Bruce had passed and gone down the stairway, Jim emerged from his hiding place, feeling childish. He marched resolutely to Dean Bailey's door, in spite of the gloomy prospect he had read in Bruce's face, opened the door and entered.

Two secretaries looked up from their desks as Jim entered the brightly lit office. Their desks were situated at either end of the room,
and each one commanded a clutter of file cabinets, bookshelves, and trash
cans. One of them was an elderly woman, efficient-looking, but rather
tired around the eyes. She only glanced at Jim and resumed her typing.
Jim noticed that whatever it was was being rendered in triplicate, as
evidenced by the alternate sheets of typing paper and carbon paper in
her typewriter. They were perfectly aligned, something Jim could never
manage on his portable. The other secretary, who still gazed expectant-
ly at him, was younger, but not by many years. Her hair, though jet
black, was clearly dyed. Her face attested to her age because it was
drawn into a pucker around her lips. She pursed them as she looked up
at Jim, which drew all the wrinkles in her face to her mouth like spokes
on a bicycle wheel.

"Can I help you?" she demanded.

"I'd like to see Dean Bailey," said Jim approaching her desk.

"Did you get a letter?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Name?"

"Curtis, James."

The secretary grasped a folder stuffed with carbon copies of the
letter Jim had received, arranged alphabetically. If Jim had entertain-
ed the illusion of personal interest before Mike's revelation of the
night before, it was completely shattered now. He estimated that there
were at least one hundred other letters crammed into the soiled folder.
The secretary quickly flipped until she located his copy, and withdrew
it. Clipped to it was a copy of his original application to the
university with his personal description. She looked it over for a
moment and then handed it to Jim.
"You'll be next, Jamie," she smiled, pointing to a bench that had been hidden when the door swung open.

"Jamie?"

"That is your nickname, isn't it?" she said, indicating the application. Jim realized that she had looked at the form to establish his nickname. She could then give the illusion of familiarity by calling him that. It had seemed like an idiotic question when Jim had filled out the application, but he had put down his childhood name at his mother's insistence.

"Well, not really," Jim replied. "Not any more."

"Then why did you put it down?"

"I don't know," he answered, feeling idiotic.

"Well, just have a seat, James, and Mr. Bailey will be with you in a few minutes."

Jim knew it was pointless to establish his current nickname, and retired to the bench.

While he waited, the secretaries typed on. They had a no-nonsense air about them, attacking their keyboards with all ten fingers flying like a flurry of birds assaulting the carcass of a dead animal. The typewriters were electric, and they whirred and buzzed under the attack, their carriages flying to and fro at an unbelievable rate. Jim listened distractedly to the noise while he looked over his application. The contrast between the hopeful frame of mind he had been in when he filled out the form some months ago and his present condition seemed humorous. He felt that he had aged considerably in that time.

Jim was still perusing his application some minutes later when the clatter of the typewriters halted and the outer office door opened.
He looked up, along with the two secretaries, and waited to see who would enter. He was startled when Swine's profile emerged from behind the frosted glass door. Jim watched as Swine hesitated in the doorway, clearly wishing he hadn't come. The secretary accosted him while he remained standing there.

"Can I help you?" she said in the same tone she had addressed Jim, only with a more insistent inflection.

Swine advanced without a reply and handed her a sheet of paper, clearly the same form letter Jim had received. The secretary read the name and went through the same procedure, practicing an economy of movement. Jim half expected her to address him as "Swine" when she handed him the two sheets of paper and directed him to the bench where Jim sat, having determined his nickname.

"You'll be after James, Steve. Have a seat."

Swine looked over to the bench and saw Jim for the first time. A flash of recognition passed over his face, that was still smudged with dirt. He put his head down, however, and shuffled over to the bench. Jim made room for him, feeling uncomfortable. The memory of the night before was still fresh. Jim felt responsible for having provoked Campbell into making a serious threat. He felt better, however, having learned his real name. Swine sat down beside him. There was no effort at conversation at first. Jim realized that he had unconsciously stiffened in anticipation of a waft of foul body odor from Swine. He was condemning himself for accepting everyone else's version of Swine to the extent that he couldn't stop thinking of him as "Swine" when his nostrils detected the anticipated stench. Jim stiffened again at the odor, an intense smell of sweat and grime that had settled into Swine's
clothes permanently. Nothing he had ever smelled in any locker room rivalled it. Only the aromas of a stable had the same power. Jim found it incredible that Swine could tolerate his own smell, but it occurred to him that he was probably unconscious of its intensity, since he had lived with it for some time. Jim turned cautiously to examine Swine's appearance more closely, being careful that Swine didn't notice his perusal. He still had his eyes rivetted on the floor, however.

Swine hadn't bothered to improve his appearance since the night before, even though he was going to see Dean Bailey in a few minutes. His hair had the same unruly way of sticking up all over, and Jim could see now that it stuck together in clumps because of grime and flakes of dandruff. His face had streaks of dirt on it and on his forehead one could see lines where sweat had dissolved the dirt and then left it in a line after drying from his brow. Though Swine hadn't much of a beard, the few whiskers that grew around his mouth and at his sideburns had grown out into solitary, black swirls that clung to his face. Jim looked at the rumpled, filthy clothes he wore and recognized the same shirt and slacks he had been wearing in the gym room. Jim was certain that he had slept in them. His shoes were a pair of ragged loafers that he had been out of fashion for at least four years: scuffed, black things that were coming apart at the sole. Jim realized why Swine went sock-footed around the dorm, since his shoes would have flapped as he walked about, like the comic shoes clowns wore. His socks were dusty and ragged, hanging down about his ankles because the elastic had worn out.

Jim was astonished at Swine's appearance and embarrassed for him when he noticed that the two secretaries were scrutinizing him with the same disgusted look.
Jim decided to make an attempt at conversation.
"So they hauled you up, too, huh?"
Swine looked up with a surprised expression on his face.
"What?"
"You got one of these letters, too?"
"Oh yeah."
"Nothing like the personal approach to counseling. Just send out a couple of hundred letters and solve everybody's problems."
Swine grunted in response.
"I think I'm probably an unusual case, though. Two professors turned me in. Most of these guys are probably in trouble with just one."
"You think so?" Swine asked. Jim noticed that his breath was no less foul than his body odor.
"Well, actually I'm surprised my other professors didn't report me, too. I guess they ran out of room on my form letter."
"No, they would have put it down," Swine said calmly, offering his letter as evidence. Whereas only two courses were listed on Jim's letter, five courses and professors were typed in on Swine's. He had been failing to attend every course he was enrolled in.
"Good Lord," Jim muttered. He looked at Swine's face, which wore a kind of defiant look, as though his degree of negligence was unrivalled.
At that moment, the door behind the dark-haired secretary's desk opened and another freshman emerged, followed by the slight form of Dean Bailey, who was shaking his hand. He had donned a thick pair of glasses with severe black rims that dwarfed his slight features.
"If you can just get into the routine, Don," he was saying, "I know you'll be back on your feet."

The student, who wore less of a dejected look than the previous one, Bruce, had, replied.

"I think I'm on the right track now, Dean Bailey. Thanks a lot."

"Come by anytime, son," Bailey smiled to him. The student crossed the office and left, apparently filled with new confidence. The Assistant Dean turned to his secretary and asked who would be next. She handed him the original copy of Jim's letter and indicated him on the bench.

"Go on in, James," she said.

Dean Bailey removed his heavy glasses and beamed broadly at him. He extended one hand for Jim's application and took his hand in the other, shaking it while he squinted at the application, searching obviously for the nickname line.

"Well, Jamie is it? Well Jamie, come on in and sit down," Dean Bailey said, ushering him into a small office and closing the wooden door.

"It's Jim, sir."

"Jim? Well, however you like it. Have a seat Jim."

He indicated a chair sitting squarely in front of his desk. Jim got a brief glance at his surroundings as the dean moved around to sit down in his padded chair. It was not a luxurious office. Heating pipes were exposed in one corner of the room and the floor was bare. A glass encased cabinet stood against one wall with a number of trophies on display in it, as well as a few yearbooks and other University publications. Two other bookshelves were arranged about the room, and the usual framed
diplomas hung behind him as he sat down.

"Well, Jim," the Assistant Dean of Men said as he put his glasses on again, "what seems to be the problem?"

"Poor attendance, sir."

"Yes, that's certainly true. But I want you to tell me why you're not going to class. Can't get out of bed?"

"That's part of it, sir, I suppose."

"You're living out at Lansing, I see. Has that caused any difficulties?"

"Only that the buses are the only way to get to campus. If you miss the bus you miss the class."

"I see." Dean Bailey looked over Jim's application, holding it out in front of him and reading the vital details. Jim noticed that his bow tie was, in fact, of the clip variety.

"You're from the northern part of the state, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"And why did you decide to come to the University?"

Jim knew he couldn't give the economic reason, so he said, "Because it has a good reputation, sir."

"And have you found that it doesn't live up to that reputation, Jim?"

"No, sir. I think it's about what I expected it to be."

"Do you find it too difficult?"

"It's not that, sir." Jim's pride had been alerted by the implication in the Assistant Dean's last question. "I think it's more that I haven't gotten into the routine. And now that I've fallen behind, there's so much I have to do to catch up that it seems impossible."
"So you shoot pool instead, is that it?"

Jim didn't answer. The drift of the interview was too derogatory. He had formed a rationalization that as a sensitive individual, he was entitled to a lack of motivation due to the moodiness of his nature. The dean hadn't gathered that, it seemed, and was accusing him of being like Campbell and the others.

"I can't really explain why I've fallen behind, sir."

"Well, Jim," Bailey resumed, mellowing his tone, "everyone has difficulties adjusting. And I realize that being out at Lansing may be an added problem. But that's no longer the question. You're in danger of flunking out, so you simply have to buckle down and salvage what you can. You're well into the semester, so if you can't salvage some courses, you'd better forget them and concentrate on the others."

With that he pulled out a small slip of paper and asked Jim what courses he was taking besides those in which the professors had reported his poor attendance. He then had Jim make a realistic evaluation of his chances of passing each course. He explained that he could fail as many as three of his five courses and still stay in school.

As the process went on and Jim answered his questions, he recognized that it was a standard technique. The Assistant Dean had effectively humbled him by the initial cross-examination, had gotten him to realize the desperate state he was in, and once in this realistic attitude, he could then evaluate what could be saved and what was beyond hope. Jim rebelled against it, feeling that it was a blow to his opinion of himself. He felt that he was actually capable of passing all five if he desired. But in the midst of this reaction, he saw that, too, was part of the plan. By implying that the University was too difficult for him,
Bailey had succeeded in challenging his pride. The reaction would then be to leave determined to salvage all five to prove that he wasn't inferior. Jim felt genuinely manipulated by Bailey's approach and felt an apathy already welling up. He began to feel that he didn't have to prove a damn thing to anybody. But then he saw that of course he did. No one would be convinced of his abilities unless he proved himself in his actions, his actual performance. As the interview drew to a close, and Bailey handed him the slip of paper on which he had worked out the scheme to salvage three courses out of the five, Jim grew sullen. He saw that he had entered into a system and offered himself to it for evaluation. If he were to say that he didn't care what they thought of him, Bailey could ask why he had bothered to come at all then. The circular nature of the system, a system which he had accepted as a standard of measurement of his own talents, revealed itself to him. He felt trapped in it. His only alternatives were to try to salvage his academic career which was already flawed, or he could abandon the entire thing. And yet, he would still have been humiliated, since his abandonment would be a virtual admitting of his inferiority. He was grim, then, when Bailey drew the interview to an end with his stock phraseology.

"I'm sure you have the abilities to stick it out, Jim. If you come through this all right, and overcome whatever difficulties you may be having, I know it will be smooth sailing from that point on." He rose and extended his hand again as he moved toward the door. Jim grasped it and followed. Bailey put his small hand on Jim's shoulder. He was much shorter than Jim and had to reach up to place it here, but his psychological advantage asserted itself.
They emerged from his office. Bailey talked on for a moment.

"I know if you talk to your professors and explain to them that
you've had a few problems, they'll be glad to give you a break. I know
you're anxious to prove your abilities to us."

Jim wanted to tell him he didn't care what they thought of him,
but he realized that it wasn't true. His pride was too much a factor
to allow him to be disgraced in anyone's eyes. He had the impulse to
please and to excell engrained in his nature too deeply to be able to
reject their opinion of him.

"Thank you, sir. I am." Jim tried to convey his dissatisfaction
in the stiffness of his tone, but Bailey beamed broadly at him.

"Good luck, Jim."

"Thank you, sir."

Jim headed for the door. Swine was still seated on the bench.
Bailey checked again with his secretary. Jim heard her say, "Stephen
Pollard," as she handed him Swine's original letter. Bailey was ready
to swing into his routine as usual until he looked up and saw Swine
Seated on the bench. Jim turned back in time to see the started ex-
pression on Bailey's face.

"Steve," the Assistant Dean of Men said with more concern in his
voice, "would you like to step into my office?"

Jim saw Swine get up and shuffle slowly across the floor, trying
to disguise the flop of his shoes. Maybe Bailey will pay more attention
to Swine, Jim thought. His problems are impossible to ignore. Jim
closed the door and stood in the hall feeling cheated. He realized that
no mention had been made of his specific problems, no attempt had been
made to determine the cause of his delinquency. Everyone just had prob-
lems "adjusting," and that covered all of it. The shallow solution made Jim laugh to himself. His confidence of the morning was completely gone now. His attitude was unchanged, his desire to make amends with his professors diminished if anything. As Jim walked down to the ground floor, he decided not to see his sociology professor that afternoon. After all, that was one of the courses Bailey had suggested forgetting about. So why bother? Jim stepped out into the cold sunshine and started across campus toward the post office, where he was expecting a letter from home with some desperately needed funds. As he passed under the bare elms that vainly shrouded the building he had just left, he wondered how Bailey was reacting to Swine, and how he would advise him to proceed. "Go back to the dorm, take a shower, and buckle down," he imagined the disgusted Bailey saying. Jim began to admire Swine's outlandish habits to an extent. He thought that he might talk to him that night in the game room and find out what Bailey had said to him. But he had to remember to call him "Steve" and not "Swine."
Jim had never had a post office box before and the suspense created by his visit to the post office every day was enjoyable. This was true in spite of the fact that his box was usually empty. It was still a pleasure for him to dial the combination, open the door, and stare through the vacant space into the mysterious maze of the post office beyond. When he turned the corner in the post office today, however, he spotted an envelope in his box through the tiny glass pane in its door. Jim squatted and spun the combination eagerly. When he opened the door, after failing to get the combination right the first time, he was a little disappointed to see that the letter was only from his parents. It was still a letter, however, and he eagerly opened it. It contained the check he had expected plus a short note from his mother expressing her hope that his studies were going well. This sent a pang of guilt through Jim and he considered whether he ought to write a letter to his parents that night to inform them of his difficulties. All of his previous letters had been extremely optimistic without mentioning any of the actual grades he was receiving in his courses. Instead he had written them about the beautiful setting in Fayetteville, the terrible weather that winter had brought to the campus, and other safe and traditional topics that college students wrote to their parents about. He faithfully ended each letter with a plea for funds to defray the miscellaneous expenses every college student had. He explained that he required certain items of clothing, money for laundry, since the University laundry didn't do drycleaning, as well as additional books that were required for his courses. It was all a hoax, however, so that
he could pay for the luxuries he enjoyed. With the money his parents faithfully mailed he bought the books that were his outside reading, he bought candy and cookies, clothes he didn't need, and the small meals he consumed at the local coffee shop, where he was accustomed to hang out while cutting classes and while waiting for meals at the cafeteria. It had become Jim's custom to sit in the Beanery, as it was called, and idle over a cup of coffee while perusing the latest book he had bought or to nibble on crackers and cheese while he chatted with the friends of his who also hung out there.

So Jim, after reading his mother's note, feeling a pang of guilt as he did so, took the check (which was written for the amount of $40) to the bank and cashed it. With the new bills tucked away in his wallet and the wallet securely placed in his back pocket, Jim wandered through the business district toward the Beanery, some three blocks away. He stopped in first at the clothing store where he examined a suit he particularly liked. Jim always looked at this suit when he was in the store, and the salesman who was invariably in the store in the daytime always made an effort to sell it to him, offering him terms, layaway plans, student discounts and any other snare he could come up with. Jim would allow the salesman to use all his best methods against him while he tried on the jacket to the suit (it fitted him beautifully, the clerk would croon). He would walk over to the three-way mirror and turn this way and that, admiring the fit and himself. The suit fitted snugly over Jim's broad shoulders, which the salesman would invariably stroke to be certain of the excellent fit, tapering down over his back and clasping him loosely around the middle when it was buttoned. Just when the salesman began to take the slacks off the
hanger so that he could get Jim's measurements and tailor the suit for him, Jim would slip out of the jacket and the store, saying "Not today. Maybe tomorrow." He delighted in this game, while he sincerely wanted the suit. It was much too expensive, though.

Today, Jim entered the dark store and did some serious shopping for sweaters, as he was with cash. The same salesman waited on him, but was thwarted again, since Jim wanted only one of the sweaters on display which they didn't have in his size. Jim departed again, leaving the frustrated salesman re-sorting the sweaters in his wake.

Jim then proceeded to a small bookstore another block in the direction of the Beanery. He entered there and browsed through the bestsellers, the classics, biographies, travel, art, religion, and poetry. In the poetry section he finally came across something that caught his attention. Half of one shelf had been stuffed with a ream of Richard Brautigan paperbacks. This was something new since he had last been in the store. In spite of his aching neck, a condition Jim always developed after fifteen minutes in a good bookstore, Jim lingered over several of the volumes. After sampling a page of two of each, he settled on *In Watermelon Sugar*, which wasn't really poetry, and yet he comprehended the owner's dilemma with classifying Brautigan. Jim paid for the book, refused a bag, adding the book to the stack he had with him, and headed for the Beanery.

On arriving at the small coffee shop, Jim spotted a table where three friends were seated. Roger was there, resplendent in a bright sweater, along with George, another resident of the third floor of Lansing. On the third side of the square table sat Kelly, a female acquaintance of George's. Jim approached and took the vacant seat,
filling out the square.

"Good day, people," said Jim.

"What's happening, Jimbo?" said Roger with his characteristic flair.

"Since when are you 'Jimbo'?" asked Kelly, laughing.

"That's Roger's latest misnomer for me. You know Roger, always expecting the unexpected."

"Jim, you're too damned erudite for me," George put in.

Each of them had a stack of books in front of them, flanked by a cup of coffee, partially filled. Jim set his books to his left in accordance with the pattern. He placed his new book conspicuously on top and stood up to get something to eat.

"Who wants something?" he offered.

"You mean your treat?" Kelly asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I got my periodic check from home today, so it's my treat."

"Well, since you're so generous, James, I'll have more coffee and two doughnuts." She stretched her arm out to hand him her cup.

"Make that coffee muddy, please."

"You mean you want cream?"

"Yes, but just enough to make it the color of mud."

"Are you referring to your standard mud," Roger said, "or good old Virginia clay mud, which is of the red variety you know?"

"Standard," replied Kelly. Kelly was her first name, but since it sounded like a last name, the use of it by George, Roger, and Jim made her sound like one of the guys. As Jim walked up to the line to get the food and coffee, he thought about her. She was one of the few girls he knew who seemed perfectly at ease with men. She seemed content to simply
be a friend to the three of them without actively pursuing a relationship with any one of them. Her casual friendliness made her all the more attractive, Jim thought. He went through the line, picking out the items the others had ordered. The Beanery was set up cafeteria-style. Jim was glad to have a full wallet. The uncertainty he usually experienced when he was low on funds—counting pennies as he approached the cashier at the end of the line with a tray of food he wasn't sure he had enough money to pay for—was an unpleasant thing. But today, as he reached her with his tray full of coffee cups, doughnuts, and pastries, he brandished a twenty-dollar bill under the cashier's nose. She wasn't as astonished as he hoped she would be, however. Putting away his change, Jim headed back to their table after collecting enough sugar and cream and silverware. Seeing Kelly, he thought further that she looked outstanding today, wearing a tight lavender shell with a scooped neckline and no sleeves. Though she was thin, Kelly had enough flesh to create the impression of softness on her exposed shoulders. Her scooped neck suggested an ample bust where there really wasn't one, but the open plain of her chest was appealing for its expansiveness. Kelly appealed to Jim because she seemed to be made to be held. To look at her was to be prompted to enfold her, to grasp her. She had the fine bones of an exotic bird, delicate and airy. Her collarbones were exposed by the blouse, arcing from her shoulders to her throat in precise symmetry. Kelly looked up as he returned and set the tray down carefully.

"The Mudman cometh."

"Salutations to the Mudlady."

Each one took his coffee and food as Jim sat down.
"Can't tell you how much I appreciate this Jim," George said. "My cash is at a low ebb this morning."

"My pleasure."

The four sat in silence for a few moments while they prepared their coffee and glanced through their books. Jim picked up *In Watermelon Sugar* and leafed appreciatively through the first few pages. Roger noticed the book.

"Ah, Brautigan!" Roger was always one to be concerned with whatever was current and fashionable. "I hear he's far out."

"I don't know," Jim responded. "Haven't gotten into it yet. I just bought it over at the bookshop."

"Getting careless with your money, aren't you Jim?" said Kelly. "How do you find time for that, anyway?"

"Ah, she's a naive girl, isn't she Jim?" Roger said.

"It's more a question of finding time to do the things one should be doing," Jim commented, reminded of his situation in school.

"How did your interview with the Dean go?" Roger asked. "Have you seen him yet?"

"Yeah, I saw him this morning. Talk about worthless. Bailey couldn't do anything for you if he knew how. All he can talk about is buckling down, putting the nose to the grindstone and all that garbage."

"Why did you have to see him, Jim?" Kelly asked.

"Well, my dear, I'm afraid my delinquency has come to the attention of the higher-ups, and they are suitably concerned about my welfare." Jim tried to disguise his embarrassment behind sarcasm. Kelly was interested, however.

"How bad off are you?" she asked confidentially.
"Pretty bad," said Jim, "but not as bad as some. Old Swine was in there, too, and I'm telling you, that kid's in bad shape."

Roger and George nodded, but Kelly remained in the dark.

"Swine? Who's Swine?"

"I'm sorry. It's actually Steve Pollard, I discovered. He lives out at Lansing with the rest of us exiles. He's known as Swine because his skin hasn't known soap and water for some time. Damn good ping-pong player, though."

Kelly frowned. "Do all of you make fun of him?"

"Some more than others," Jim answered, anxious to absolve himself. "A lot of guys really persecute him. He doesn't seem to mind, though."

"Does anybody talk to him?" she demanded.

"I don't think so," Roger answered. "He's a real outsider. Only comes out of his room to play ping-pong in the wee hours. Otherwise, nobody sees the dude."

"That's terrible," Kelly said. "To think that no one takes the trouble to find out what's bothering him. Why don't the dorm counsellors do something for him?"

"They don't give a damn, Kelly," Jim said. "They're just getting by themselves. They don't want to bother with somebody like Swine. It's too much trouble."

"Well, maybe the Dean can help him out, send him to the University psychologist or something," Kelly said lamely.

"If he's anything like Bailey, the guy will go mad."

Silence fell over the table again. Kelly seemed depressed by the thought of the isolated Swine stranded at Lansing without anyone to talk to. She stared into her coffee with a dark expression gathered into a
furrow above her eyebrows. Suddenly she got up.

"I'm going next door to get a paper." She went out the entrance and turned to the drugstore.

"What do you bet she gets The Times," said George.

"No," Roger said, "I'll say The Washington Post. The comics are better."

"You are a dumb ass," said Jim. "The Times doesn't have comics."

"I told you The Post had better comics," Roger replied.

Jim watched for Kelly to come into view again. She appeared in a moment with a paper under her arm. She walked into the Beanery looking resolutely at the floor. Jim noticed her legs. In bell-bottomed blue jeans, her thighs stood several inches apart, almost as though she were bow-legged. As she sat down, all three of the men saw that she had bought The Baltimore Sun.

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Jim spent the rest of the afternoon at the University Library, sitting in a music listening room with a pair of earphones on. He had chosen a program of classical music, Beethoven for the most part along with some Tchaikovsky. Rather than beginning the Brautigan novel he had purchased, he concentrated on homework, studying in the courses which Bailey had recommended that he try to salvage. The music tended to distract him to an extent, depending on what part of the symphonies was playing. If it were one of Beethoven's stirring, loud movements, he stopped reading to listen until the music became more lyrical and quiet, when he would begin again to read. He couldn't accomplish much this way, but it was an enjoyable simulation of studying.

The experience of the morning had faded during his shopping spree
and his session at the Beany with Kelly, George, and Roger. But at the mention of Swine, Jim had begun again to brood over both his and Swine's situation. It seemed to Jim that they had much in common, except that Swine's situation was more desperate. Jim at least had friends with whom he could discuss his difficulties. Jim resolved while listening to Tchaikovsky to speak with Swine in the game room if he showed up there tonight. He could launch the conversation by talking about their mutual experience with Bailey that morning. Then perhaps Swine would feel better to know that someone else was nearly as bad off as he and that someone was interested in him. But Jim secretly wondered whether he could put up with Swine's filth for very long.

With Swine's problems in mind, Jim went to dinner and sat alone, eating the breaded veal cutlets hurriedly. He felt relieved at having made some sort of decision. He had at least a reasonable course of action to follow with the abandonment of two of his five courses. It now seemed possible to recover in the other three, which would allow him at least to continue as a student at the University. Jim enjoyed his role as a student too much to be excluded from the University community before he had even started.

Having finished dinner, Jim boarded a bus and rode the distance out to Lansing once again. He disembarked in front of the dorm and mounted the stairs to his room on the third floor, where he sat again in his favorite red chair to write a letter home to his parents revealing his situation.
VI

Writing the letter to his parents put Jim in a depression that surpassed any he had experienced since coming to the University. The dismal tone mirrored his feelings. He tried in it to make an honest evaluation of his academic status and the possibility of his succeeding in staying in school. In reviewing once again his standing in each course, Jim could only come to the conclusion that his chances were slim. The letter became a forecast of failure, and Jim tried gently to prepare his parents for what he felt was a certainty. As the prophet of his own doom, he attributed his problems to such things as poor study habits, general difficulty in adjusting, the bad augury of being housed in Lansing, a place which (due chiefly to its pool room) was anything but conducive to study. But his own immaturity was the chief cause. Jim sat writing quickly, his hand aching from the pressure he applied to the pad. He had begun the letter with considerable reluctance, aware that his parents would be shocked at this grim report. The tide of optimism that had surged through all of Jim's previous letters would with this single message be reduced to its lowest ebb. But Jim felt that it was his responsibility to account to his parents for what he had done with their investment in him. Jim finished the letter finally, wiping his sweating palms on his pants. It lay on the floor next to his red chair, its pages curling up from the heavy-handed ballpoint ink Jim had scrawled on them. He considered the heap, thinking that he had written them as though he had been actually talking. And yet, before his purpose could be accomplished, the pages would have to be mailed, received and read. The letter was like potential energy waiting to be released in a kinetic explosion. But in spite of the fact that he
must mail the letter to accomplish his purpose, Jim nevertheless felt relieved now of a great burden; he had been absolved merely by writing it.

Jim stood and stretched. He paced over to his window and gazed on the field that darkened now in the twilight. A group of his fellow Lansingites were tossing a football around. Jim watched them play for a while, as they tried to prolong their game in spite of the gloom. But soon they began to misjudge the ball in the darkness, reaching for it when it had already passed through their outstretched hands. The group soon abandoned their game and retired within Lansing's hulking structure.

Jim watched the sky grow darker in the west, visible to his left. The sunset was rather dull, fading slowly in a series of smudgy purples and blues. It heightened in Jim his sense of melancholy. He found himself staring into the west and heaving a series of prolonged sighs, wondering what would become of him. It was in such moods that he liked to listen to lonely folk singers, whose songs so well expressed the emotions he felt. Jim sometimes wondered if the songs created the emotions. But since he had no record player, Jim thought of going down to George's room, where he had gone before to listen to mournful folk singers.

He turned from the window, where the sky had gone completely dark, and started to change his clothes. Jim shed the moderately conservative shirt and slacks he had worn for his interview with Bailey and put on a more comfortable pair of blue jeans and a loose sweater. He had no qualms now about getting any work done, having abandoned hope of staying in school. Jim was feeling relaxed and irresponsible when he emerged
from his room and walked down the hallway toward the west wing and George's room.

The west wing was a region of light, since the residents there declined to turn their hall lights out. Jim wondered if it was because the people in Mike and Roger's wing were more irrational, preferring to give themselves over to the darkness while the west wing was the realm of clear, cool reason. He finally attributed it to the fact that the west-wingers didn't have a light panel at their fingertips like the easterners did. But if the west wing was the region of wisdom, George's room was an outpost of irrationality. George's habits didn't fit into the daily regimen of the other inhabitants. When they were trying to sleep, George was up playing records on his expensive stereo system. When they were being noisy in the middle of the day, George would rave at them for disturbing his slumber. George and Jim had a lot in common, then.

Jim reached George's door, expecting to shortly find within the usual group that could be found there nearly every night. Before he knocked, however, Jim discovered that George had adopted Roger's use of a sign on the door. This sign, on the same shirt cardboard, read: "Let no one enter who is incorruptible, industrious, weak of stomach or mind, or straight." The hortatory mood of the legend smacked of George's taste for medieval literature and its modern imitations. Jim knocked and on hearing George's greeting, entered.

"Hail, noble wanderer," said George quietly from his bed where he sat cross-legged. "Too long have you strayed from our councils. Welcome and may you return often."

"Thanks, George."
George was barefoot and wore an open shirt, revealing a string of beads around his neck. His shaggy hair hung to his neck, and he was smoking a cigarette. Seated on the floor in the middle of the room were two other friends of Jim's, Bob and Andy. They nodded at Jim when he noticed them, but said nothing.

"Well, have a seat Jim. What brings you here?" asked George.

"I was suddenly hit by the urge to hear some of that Joni Mitchell album of yours. I'm in that sort of mood."

"Oh, yeah. I play that all the time myself. It does suit a melancholy temperament." George rose and gingerly drew the album from its place in a record shelf. He unsheathed the disk skillfully, being careful not to get his fingertips on the playing surface. He placed the record on the turntable and switched on his equipment. The tone arm rose slowly, swung out over the record and descended ever so slowly to the record.

"Did I ever tell you guys that this tone arm is unconditionally guaranteed to descend to the playing surface at the rate of one centimeter per second?"

"About ten times now, George," said Andy, who had his nose buried in one of George's romantic space adventure novels, Konan and the Attack of the Planet-Crushers.

The music began to play as Jim settled into a plush leather swivel chair that George had in front of his desk. He had brought it with him the day he came to Lansing. It was the most comfortable chair Jim had ever sat in. He leaned back in the seat to listen.

Joni Mitchell began her plaintive singing in a minor key, playing the doleful ballad on a quiet guitar. The album as a whole had as its
theme the innocence of a country girl (Side One) and its exposure to the forces within a city (Side Two). Both sides were equally sad, filled with rain-spattered images of wilted flowers and rampant gardens. Farmers and taxicab drivers emerged in her lyrics as so many Charons escorting the innocent across the Styx. The music, when played rather softly, would lay down a mist of sadness on a room, provoking sighs and sad expressions all around. It was this mournful effect that Jim enjoyed most, since it helped to express his gloominess and he felt that it was even an artistic thing to be melancholy. While listening and leaning back in George's plush chair, Jim picked a Tolkien from a bookcase and read a few pages.

As the record played in a mournful monotone, Jim looked about the room. George had furnished it sparingly in comparison with the lush grandeur of Mike and Roger's room. The floor was bare except for a single area rug which was of good quality, yet ineffective. It did little to diminish the starkness of the linoleum tile. The walls were mostly bare as well and painted a yellow that reminded Jim of the color of the yolk in a hard-boiled egg. On one wall, however, George had hung a showercurtain that had an unusual design. In the middle of the clear plastic sheet was a life-size reproduction of an Aubrey Beardsley print taken from his illustrations of Aristophanes' Lysistrata. George had made a point of telling everyone the erudite source of his print. To Jim it seemed hardly in keeping with the image he had of Greek civilization, for the shower curtain portrayed an obese, naked woman ascending a rope. The erotic details captured by Beardsley were shocking, but the idea of hanging such a print on a shower curtain was clearly camp. Jim spent some minutes each time he visited George looking at
the curtain and wondering about George, Beardsly, and Aristophanes.

The shower curtain was really the only distinguishing feature about the room except that the place taken as a whole had the mark of George's taste about it. It was neat, arranged with care, with candles placed carefully around the room, one by his bed, one on his desk, one on a stand by the record player. These were all flickering, giving the room a dark, secret atmosphere. The only lamp that was on was a high intensity reading light over George's head where he sat on his bed. George was presiding from that seat, with two enormous pillows behind him. A hardback copy of the Complete Works of Alexander Dumas, Volume Four, lay open in front of him on the blanket.

George, Bob, and Andy were quietly listening to the music while Jim sat in the leather chair. Andy and Bob were two more of the few Lansing residents who wore their hair extremely long, down their backs in fact, and were also distinguished as serious motorcycle enthusiasts. The two of them were liberated from the bus service since they rode their motorcycles daily to campus. Not that they were the only ones that did, but their bikes were high-powered, serious motorcycles. They scorned the others who timidly steered bikes with small engines. Theirs were hulking, ugly, loud machines that spat and roared down the driveway and screamed through unending gears to campus. They were huddled on the floor peering through George's record collection, which was rather an extensive one.

The mood was one of unabashed indulgence in things unrelated to the rigors of University life. Jim felt at home, since no one in the room seemed concerned about anything like studies or tests. Here one could quite easily forget about such things and become lost in the quiet
music, the fantastic literature, and the prevailing sense that these people chose to be different.

George looked up from The Count of Monte Cristo, tossing his hair off his forehead, and addressed Jim.

"So you and Bailey had a few words today, huh?"

"Yeah," said Jim, "I had an appointment with him."

"Things going badly?" George asked casually, but Jim detected a tone of insinuation. Jim knew that George was doing poorly, too, as were Andy and Bob. He felt that they were testing his degree of desperation to determine whether he was in as bad shape as they. Jim felt that it was clearly important that the four of them be equally indifferent to academics before any companionship could be reached. He readily admitted the seriousness of his condition.

"I suppose I'll flunk out, to be honest."

George gave an ironic smile. "Don't feel like the Lone Ranger. That makes four of us."

Jim's confession created a more relaxed atmosphere instantly. They began comparing encounters with teachers, and Jim narrated his interview with the Assistant Dean to the delight of the other three. He embellished on the Dean's stupidity at length.

"And when he told me to buckle down I could have laughed in his face. He must have been a football coach. What an asshole!"

"I guess I'll skip my appointment, then," George said.

"Me, too," Bob chimed in. "I just want them to leave me alone so I can flunk out in peace."

"You mean you guys got letters, too?" Jim asked.

"Damn right," said Andy, "I did, too. We're all on the list."
"Well, I think this calls for a celebration," George announced, rising out of his cross-legged position on the bed. "How about some weed?" He directed the question to Jim, and it was clear that Andy and Bob had smoked before with George.

Jim hesitated. He hadn't yet smoked marijuana, although he had expected that he would sooner or later. Making a quick review of his feelings about it, he found that he was interested, and that he no longer had the excuse of studies to attend to since he had abandoned hope of staying in school. Therefore, he casually agreed.

"I should probably tell you that I've never smoked before," said Jim. "In fact, I don't even smoke cigarettes. So I guess I won't get stoned."

"That's usually true," said George with the air of an authority, "but you have to start somewhere. If you just don't try to inhale too much so that you don't choke and lose the smoke, you'll be all right." George spoke as he went to his desk and drew a plastic bag filled with the pale green plant and began to roll joints under another high-intensity lamp. He worked quickly but carefully, rolling the joints tightly and neatly, and carefully sweeping the desktop with his hand after each joint was finished. "Four should be enough. This is really fine dope."

George gathered the joints together and carried them along with an ashtray and some matches over to where Bob and Andy sat on the floor.

"Sit over here," he directed Jim as he went to the door to be sure it was secure.

Jim completed the circle and waited for George to sit down. As George added a record or two to the stack and adjusted the volume, Jim
watched. The preparations were those made before a ritual. He was the novice, the initiate into the circle of freaks. He sat and pondered. His hair had grown since he first arrived, but it was not yet long enough to be truly freaky. Jim found himself assessing his fitness as the stereotypical pothead. It made him feel foolish, and yet he still felt that he wasn't the type to smoke marijuana. He was certainly interested in trying it, and he certainly wasn't afraid of ill effects. Yet, there was something about the ritual, the secrecy, the necessity of qualifying before one could be admitted to the clique. He decided to go through with it so that he could enlarge on his feeling and try to understand what it was that bothered him.

George sat down and rolled the four joints into the center. Setting down the ashtray, he picked up one of them and looked it over. It was shorter and thinner than an average cigarette, and twisted at both ends to prevent the grass from leaking out. George untwisted one end and offered it to Jim.

"We'll concentrate on getting you stoned. You get the first hit, and then every other hit after each of us. So just inhale a little bit and hold it, then exhale just before we pass it back to you and take another drag. That way you'll just be breathing smoke, and you'll get high faster. After four of these you should be pretty well stoned."

"No shit," commented Andy.

George struck a match and held it to the joint while Jim took a tentative puff. The smoke burned his throat and ached in his chest, but he held it in as George had told him. He watched the other three as they took a drag and passed the joint back to him each time. Jim looked up at the shower curtain on the wall while he waited for his next hit and looked at the naked woman ascending her rope. She had three
braid knotted in her hair that hung down her back and were each tied
with a small bow. He thought about some critic's comment that he had read
somewhere that everything that hangs noticeably in Beardsly's prints was
a phallic symbol.

The four of them smoked diligently until the joints were gone,
roach and all. Jim had heard something about the method of smoking
marijuana, but he hadn't heard about roach clips, any device used to
hold the tiny end of the joint so that it too could be burned and
smoked, its thin trail of grey mist breathed in through the nose. The
effect that this had was to make Jim sneeze, to the immense amusement
of the three veterans. He soon became accustomed to this as well, how-
ever. So they silently performed the ritual of getting "good and
stoned" as Andy put it. Jim perceived no difference, though, even after
the fourth joint was gone. While George and Andy and Bob grinned, Jim
tried to determine whether he was, in fact, stoned. He listened care-
fully to the music, and found that it sounded the same. He had heard
somewhere that under the influence of grass you could actually "see"
music, but he was unable to. He was aware of a tingling in his head
and face. It could be just the effect of inhaling and holding my
breath, he thought.

George and the two others seemed to have reached a state of pure
euphoria. They sat with their eyes closed and with pleased smiles on
their faces. Jim looked at them and saw at once that he was nowhere
near as stoned as they were. He was afraid that they would realize that
he hadn't gotten stoned, and that they would be disappointed in him.
George opened his eyes at that moment and looked at Jim. He started to
say something, but only opened his mouth as though he were having
difficulty speaking. He tried several times to speak, but couldn't. Andy and Bob noticed his problem and started laughing uncontrollably.

"Oh wow, oh wow, oh wow," Andy said, rolling over backwards.

Bob sat smiling, then chuckling, then giggling until he, too, was on his back. George, too, was laughing now but he finally managed to say something to Jim.

"Are you stoned?"

Jim thought again and tried to gauge his degree of stoned-ness.

"A little I think. I don't know. It's really hard for me to tell." Jim was becoming confused. He felt excluded, because he knew nothing that was funny to laugh at, and he was sure that he wasn't stoned in spite of all the grass he had smoked.

George listed with a straight face. "Well, it is your first time, you know. Hard to get stoned the first time. But after that, wow."

Andy and Bob were listening again, and they agreed in chorus with George, "Oh wow."

Jim rose from the floor. "I don't know. I think I'll look out the window."

This prompted more laughter from the other three, which confused Jim even more. He felt unsure of himself, like a child whose actions were the subject of ridicule. He walked over to the window with care, feeling a little dizzy and light-headed. Perhaps he was stoned and just didn't know how to act. He couldn't believe that the others had reacted so violently, that they seemed so messed up. Jim reached the window and looked out. George's window opened over the grassy space bounded on three sides by Lansing. A mist had rolled in and the moon has risen above it, filtering vaguely through. The mist was luminous under its light.
The streetlights on the road shed fuzzy cones of white mist now. Jim wondered for a moment if the mist was really there, or if it existed only in his head. His brain seemed to be blurry. His thoughts had no direction. His attention was unable to fix on anything without transforming it into a blur. He couldn't decide if he were stoned or not. But he sat up on the windowsill and wanted to be alone. He felt inadequate because he couldn't do anything right. He couldn't get stoned, he told himself, he was flunking out. Clearly his life was a mess. He had a helpless feeling that he had experienced in dreams. His dreams pictured him on a railroad track with an approaching train about to kill him. And yet he was unable to move. He struggled to pull himself off the track as the train drew nearer, but his attraction to the track was too strong. The train never arrived and he never died, but the sense of struggling to get out of the way was so real that he would awake in the morning tense, his muscles taut from the imagined effort.

As he looked out into the night Jim felt his helplessness. He had lost control. The matter of his staying in school was now out of his hands. Yet he couldn't give it up completely, as Andy, Bob, and George said they had. It was too much of a blow to his pride to admit that he was incapable of staying in school. He at once cursed himself for allowing things to fall apart as they had, and he felt sorry for himself. Jim's mind was in a confusion that found him frustrated and angry at himself even for his thoughts. Each time he found himself thinking about his right to be different, he thwarted that thought with a self-condemnation. He would then think that all of his problems were due to his uniqueness and his inability to fit into the mold. Jim would reply to that thought that he was uniquely irresponsible. The
inner conversation led him in circles, leaving him too confused to do anything other than sit in the window.

Jim knew as he sat there that he wanted to be alone, but he couldn't focus his thoughts enough to formulate a convincing excuse. His depression was becoming too profound to risk confronting George or Andy or Bob. They were too stoned to understand. Jim felt that he would probably cry if he had to say three words to them, and yet he couldn't just leave without saying anything. They would become alarmed in their state, and come after him. Jim looked plaintively at the moon as if it could come to his aid, descend from the sky and soothe him, help him escape from everything. He continued to think what a fool he was, but his self-pitying side was becoming stronger all the time. For a moment he looked down at the pavement under George's window, but he valued himself too much to commit suicide. He wondered if anyone had ever thought him capable of it. The thought made him resentful that anyone could think him so desperate, but it occurred to him as well that his conduct had given no evidence to anyone that he was not indeed capable of it. He cursed himself again, but couldn't pull himself out of his miserable state.

George recognized by this time that something was amiss with Jim. It exasperated him at first. The idea of anyone ruining a perfectly good stone by introducing a serious note mildly infuriated him. But he laughed at the ludicrous sight of Jim sitting in the window like a lovesick cow or something. Bob and Andy laughed as well, and were oblivious to any idea that Jim might be depressed. They were stoned both through the chemical effect of the drug and their fervent belief in their capability of being stoned. They were wrapped completely in
themselves, savoring the delight of being absolutely and undeniably freaky.

The increased merriment of the other three shook Jim partially from his daze and he felt impelled to leave to salvage his pride and clear his mind. Seizing on this thought with all the tenacity he could muster, he rose from the window sill and crossed the room to the door.

"Hey, Jim," George said when he noticed that he had moved from the window, "where are you going?"

Jim stared at the floor for fear of being stopped and forced out a few words. "Back to my room."

"What's the matter, man? Are you having a bad time? Are you okay?"

Jim shook off the questions with a slight movement of his head. "No, no, I'm okay. I just have to go, man."

George was worried, but Bob and Andy were only vaguely mystified by Jim's strange behavior. Jim seized his opportunity and unlocked the door. He stepped out into the corridor and was startled by the light. This, he remembered, was the wing that was bathed in light twenty-four hours a day. He hurried to his room and locked the door behind him. It felt better to be by himself, but now the argument between his self-pity and his self-condemnation raged more furiously. He paced the room and muttered through his clenched teeth, balling up his fists. He was a fool, an idiot. He was responsible for everything that had happened. He had set a goal and fallen miserably short of it. If he felt that he was too unique for it, why had he gone to college in the first place? Jim succeeded in building up a wall of self-hatred for a moment or two. But it collapsed before his urge to surrender, to give
up. Why hadn't someone helped him? Jim walked over to his red chair and sank into it. He began to sob. Didn't they know he wasn't ready for all this? Didn't they see how hard it was for him to fit in? But now, he told himself through his tears, no one cares about you. You have to keep fighting. You can't let them have the advantage. Damnit, he had been a fool to think he could screw around and still make it somehow. Jim rose from the chair enraged again. A fool! he muttered, seizing a book. "A goddamned fool!" Jim hurled the book with all his might at the mirror over his bureau. It shattered the glass, spraying it over the floor with a tinkling crash. Jim stood for a moment, abashed at his own violence. He hoped that no one had heard, but after a moment there were steps in the hallway and a knock on the door.

"Jim? Jim, are you all right?"

"Yeah, yeah. Just a second." Jim made an effort to clear the glass back out of the way with his foot. Then he walked over and opened the door. It was George.

"What the hell are you doing, man? I thought you'd gone mad."

"No, I'm all right," said Jim considerably subdued. He felt like a fool, standing in the glass, crunching its fragments that reflected him and George at a thousand different angles. What the hell has this accomplished? he thought.

"How'd you do that?" George asked.

"Well, I just got angry and threw a book at the mirror. I didn't think it would break so easily."

"Uuhh. Come here Jim."

George took out his lighter and lighting it, waved it in front of Jim's eyes. He stared intently into them after making a few passes with
the flame and nodded his head, putting the lighter away after snapping its lid shut.

"I think we overdid it, man. You're stoned all right."

"Really?" asked Jim.

"Damn right," said George. "Your pupils are dilated as hell."

He seemed proud of his diagnosis.

"I guess you're right, George. I was sort of depressed when I came down."

"I should have realized it. Marijuana tends to exaggerate moods, and it just put you into a deep depression. I should have seen that when you were staring out the window like that." George eyed Jim for a moment and then said, "Are you okay now? Should I leave you alone?"

Jim caught the implication immediately. "Hell, no. I'm all right."

The forcefulness of his reply seemed to convince George. "Well, take it easy, Jim. You can get a broom at the end of the hall if you want to clean that up."

"I know, George. Thanks for stopping in."

George departed, shuffling down the hall. Jim felt inclined to accept his hypothesis, but he had been aware of what he was doing. He certainly hadn't been temporarily insane. But what was George to think on coming into the room and seeing the glass? Jim cursed again, but more mildly. The explosion had left him washed out and tired. He felt that he could think more clearly. He resumed his seat in the red chair and closed his eyes. Jim's head still buzzed from the smoking, but it had subsided. He sat for several minutes without thinking, only reviewing in his mind more pleasant years of his life. He thought about high school, when he had been known as Jamie, when he had played basketball
and been popular and had done well in his classes. Those years seemed like paradise when he compared them to his present life. He was afraid to open his eyes and see the shambles he had created, the pieces of glass staring accusingly at him. For he was responsible. He finally realized that. It had all been his doing.

Jim was able to say that to himself more soberly, without self-hatred now. He had created his situation and now he was faced with the problem of getting out of it. But he knew now that he couldn't rely on anyone stepping in for him at the right moment and taking over.
The relaxing effect of the drug overcame Jim soon after he had sat down. He fell asleep slumped in the red chair. It had been almost six o'clock when Jim watched the sunset and then walked down to George's room. He was there for close to two hours. The mirror had been smashed at about eight. When Jim finally awoke, because of the uncomfortable position he had fallen asleep in, he was totally disoriented. But he saw by his alarm clock that it was one-thirty in the morning. Jim sat dully for a minute. He looked down at the glass still scattered on the floor. His own face stared back at him from a thousand fragments. It took him another moment to realize that it was Tuesday morning, and a moment longer to remember all that had happened in the past few hours. To remember brought on a lonely feeling, but his resolve was still in him, a hard center he had forged out of his violence and despair. He clung to this and rose from the chair. Jim crunched over the glass and went once more to the window. The moon had paced across the sky and was close to setting. The mist had dissipated and the stars were visible. Jim heaved a sigh and a yawn, and decided to stay up and try to formulate some sort of plan. He would review his situation in the University and determine realistically whether it could be salvaged or not. But more urgent was his gnawing stomach. The marijuana had taken a lot out of him. The only food available was from the vending machines in the basement. Jim recalled his wealthy status and decided to stave off his hunger with pastries and candy until morning came and he could have breakfast.

The hall was deserted when Jim emerged from his room. He crossed the hall to the bathroom and washed his face and hands. He shuffled out
again and headed for the basement. Taking the same route he always
did, Jim passed by Swine's door. I wonder what he's been doing since
yesterday afternoon, Jim thought. Nothing like my day has been. As
he approached Swine's door, Jim noticed first that someone had scrawled
on it with red paint. The dripping ragged letters spelled out, "SWINE
IS A PIG." Jim was sure that Campbell was responsible. It had his
unoriginal style about it. Jim also noticed that the door was ajar.
Swine was never known to leave his door open. Those who lived on the
hall with him said that he locked it even when he went down the hall to
the bathroom. Jim's curiosity impelled him to look inside the room. If
Swine were there he could use the pretense of asking how his interview
with Bailey went. He touched the door and gave it a slight push. The
room was empty. Jim advanced cautiously and surveyed Swine's small quar-
ters. There was a single unmade bed. The top sheet was pulled back and
twisted, while the bottom sheet was stained where Swine slept. The same
sheet must have been on the bed since the beginning of the year. Dirty
clothes were littered all over the floor, heaped up in one corner, and on
the bed as well. The room smelled like Swine did. Sweat, filth, and
fecal odors assailed Jim.

Swine's desk was littered like the rest of the room, covered with
papers and books. Jim approached the desk to see what sort of thing
Swine was reading. He expected to find the same type of extracurricular
reading that he himself had been doing. Instead, Swine's desk was
covered with open copies of books like Camus' Myth of Sisyphus, Either/Or
by Kierkegaard, novels by Sartre, and math textbooks. Jim was surprised
to think that Swine might be intelligent. He had thought of him as dull
and ignorant. But the dog-eared books revealed that Swine had carefully
read every book in his small library. It was almost as if he was doing
independent research of some sort. Jim had a collection of books in his room which he was always adding to, with his frequent trips to the book-store. The difference, however, was that Jim bought them, put them on the shelf, and never had a chance to look at them. He hadn't even read half of the books crammed on his shelves. Swine had set his sights lower and more selectively, so that though he had fewer books, he seemed to have read all of them.

Jim was leafing through Swine's copy of *Either/Or*. Its pages were stained and smudged by his filthy fingers. Jim was able to mark Swine's progress through the text by the number of clean pages left. He put the book back on the desk and was about to leave the room when he noticed a notebook open on Swine's desk. It clearly wasn't a class notebook, Jim decided after bending closer to inspect it. Swine had written in it in a clear hand, highly legible in spite of the trail of dirt that his hand had left where he rested it on the page. Jim looked closer and read from the top of the open page.

...because they have adopted a view of the world and held to it with fervent devotion, they have been singled out and persecuted. As a result, they have taken their view to an extreme, an extreme that drives them to manifest it, indeed to demonstrate it, even in the physical realm. This, I believe, is the essence of their insanity. They have taken a truth, as Anderson expressed it, and made it into a grotesque. While Anderson's characters were both physically and mentally grotesque, these are all physically grotesque and mentally insane. They have clung so tenaciously to their credos that they have died for them, died to the rest of the world and they have been confined to a mental hospital. This principle rules their lives: they have devoted themselves to an idea, and now it is all they have left.

The writing was strange and the reference to Anderson was lost on Jim.
He didn't recognize it, but the idea of the grotesque inmates of the mental hospital motivated in their insanity by ideals of some sort seemed strange and foreign.

Jim's curiosity was aroused now and he opened the notebook to its beginning. The pages were all filled with Swine's clear handwriting and nearly the entire notebook had been written. The part he had read had to be a summary. Jim leafed through and saw that all the sections were titled. Each seemed to be a name given to an inmate. There was "The Mad Cyclist," "The Ever-climbing Tobacco Chewer," "The Female Impersonator," and "The Crooked Young Man." The chapter titles were written in lettering that was ornate in the Victorian manner. Jim found the title page at the front. Swine had called his book "Fayetteville Histories." He subtitled it "A Collection of Portraits of the So-called Insane, written by a Student of their Genius." Jim cleared the chair and sat down to examine the notebook more carefully. He was amazed by Swine's strange accomplishment. There was no introduction. The first chapter was the one that dealt with "The Mad Cyclist."

I first saw the cyclist (it read) in late September, some two weeks after my arrival in Fayetteville. He was pedalling down Patrick Street, evidently on the way to the asylum, which is adjacent to the dorm in which I am living, if it can be called that. The dorm is called Lansing Hall. The buildings in the asylum have only numbers. The cyclist was riding a girls' bike. I thought that strange, since I hadn't yet recognized that he was one of the inmates. I was riding the bus that carries the students in Lansing back and forth from Campus. The cyclist rode in the gutter as we came upon him. From the rear, he looked only ragged, perhaps a poor man who was forced to ride a girls' bicycle to get to his job. But as we drew abreast of him, I saw that he was strange. He held his head to the right, so drastically that his right ear seemed welded to his shoulder. He was literally looking at the world sideways. His sideways face wore a grin that was like a crack in a china doll's face. He stared straight ahead of him and took no notice of our bus that nearly scraped his handlebars. I turned in my seat to watch him after we had passed. His hair was golden and tightly curled
all over his head. His grin revealed perfect teeth. He was indeed an insane Adonis.

I didn't see him again until two weeks later, then into early October. He was pedalling into town this time on the same battered bike, with a twisted wire basket clinging to the handlebars. His head was riveted to his right shoulder as before, and his face wore the same idiotic grin. I wondered if ever in his long days did he raise his head from his shoulder, if his world ever picked itself up from its side. If there were no physical reason for the deformity, it could only be due to a conviction of enormous strength, a conviction that would find him actually holding his head in that awkward position in all of his waking hours. Perhaps even in sleep the muscles of his neck remained locked in a position that was unnatural, but by this time acquired.

I have thought about the mad cyclist at length and have wondered about the origin of his defect. It is the sort of thing that a child might assume as a pose to oppose his parents. He might cross his eyes, or walk with a limp and do so before his parents to puzzle them. They would abandon the pose as soon as it became an annoyance to themselves, however. The mad cyclist had persevered, or so it seems. In all the times I have seen him, his head has been in the precise, same position. To maintain that pose, for it is not a deformity, that I can attest to, would require an insistence on the reality of the pose. A stubbornness that elevates to heroism in my eyes, for it is the ultimate nonconformity, assumed for no particular reason, except to prove that it can be assumed. The dedication, the commitment to a pose that literally creates a world view different, strange, even laughable to the rest of humanity makes the mad cyclist a hero, no, a martyr in my eyes. For he suffers ridicule at the hands of the philistines around him. Such commitment, such conviction I can only applaud and envy.

Jim put down the notebook and stared around Swine's room. The odd position that Swine was so passionately arguing had implications for Jim, as much of it as he could understand. What was the point of holding to the conviction that your head is on your shoulder, or that the real world lies on its side? Jim thought it was strange, especially because this cyclist, whom Jim himself had seen, put himself in the mental hospital because of his strange conviction. But even stranger
was Swine's defence of such a person. He was clearly in the same boat, except that his conviction seemed to be to wearing the same underwear and clothes all the time. Jim shook his head. He wasn't sure about Swine's mental health when it came down to it. Jim questioned Swine's insistence on heroism as a tag for insanity. But he was still curious. Who were these other people and what were their "convictions"? Jim resumed his reading, opening the notebook to the section that was titled "The Crooked Young Man." He had felt a little uncomfortable about sitting in Swine's room alone in the middle of the night, but his interest in the notebook was consuming. He resumed reading.

THE CROOKED YOUNG MAN

The man whom I refer to here as "The Crooked Young Man" is actually named Eugene. I have observed him from the University bus, just as I have seen all the others, but Eugene I have had more personal contact with. Eugene is religious, and he therefore spends a great deal of time at the church nearest the mental hospital. It so happens that once encountered him there while he was talking to the priest. I myself am not religious, you must understand. I visit churches to experience the effect they have on a non-believer. It was on such a visit that I encountered Eugene and the priest. Eugene's misfortune is that he has committed himself to a religion which he cannot understand. This is not meant humorously, because for Eugene, it causes real anguish. I overheard his conversation with the priest in which he was asking the most basic questions that can arise in one's mind. When I entered the church, a stark, severe structure inside and out, Eugene asked the priest, "Father, where is God?" "He is all around us, Eugene," answered the priest. "Why can't I see him, Father?" "You must believe, Eugene. Have faith, then you will see." Eugene, conscious that he might have been sinning and fearful of punishment immediately replied, "I believe, Father, I believe."

I choose to ignore Eugene's infant mind in portraying him, except that it enables him to experience all of the suffering imposed on man by religion. He is innocent and inquisitive, he looks for answers on the simplest of terms. He lacks the sophistication of an adult who stifles the basic doubts and conforms to a belief. Eugene conforms out of fear and out of his desire to please, yet his questions persist. The priest gives him only fear for an answer. Therefore, Eugene's fear and his doubt have made him suffer.
Since seeing him in church, I have seen Eugene on the street. I call him crooked, because his doubt and his fear of doubting have twisted him. His face wears a continually puzzled expression. His posture stoops. I have seen Eugene stop on the sidewalk and stand stock still, in intense, though childish contemplation of the questions that he cannot dismiss. I have seen him sitting on the curb, staring into the gutter as if the ants there hold the answer. In spite of the fear instilled in him by priests, he continues to ask, to inquire into the problem of God. Eugene, too, is heroic like all the rest of these because he embodies, he is frozen into a state that is in all of us, whether we accept or reject religion. He cannot silence his questions with a semantic argument. His agony is the desire to believe without anything to believe in.

Although the championing of these inmates was strange to Jim, he found Swine's writing rather forceful. One had to sympathize with Eugene, and yet one wondered why Swine made such statements. He didn't seem reliable. He was ignoring facts that were inconsistent with his elaborate arguments. And the details about Swine's presence in the church, his protestation throughout about himself seemed to be disguising something. Jim sat thinking for a moment about the whole business. He had never encountered anything like this. To find on paper the outpourings of an otherwise mute personality was new to Jim. He was amazed at the style of Swine's writing. It was clumsy, but driven by ... Jim paused in his thoughts. The word was obvious, as was the link, the reason for the writing of the notebook. Swine was driven by a "conviction." In what? Swine felt that he needed to defend himself for his strangeness. These portraits were a defense of the strange, the socially unacceptable. They were in the mental hospital because they were abnormal. But how did Swine know them so well? How could he draw such elaborate conclusions about them when he had "personal" contact with only one? That still puzzled Jim. And he was also puzzled as to where all this led.
He flipped back to the end of the notebook where he had first read what seemed to be the final summary. He reread the page he had opened to and turned the final page.

"...This principle rules their lives: they have devoted themselves to an idea, and now it is all they have left. They are martyrs, therefore. Unable to conform for whatever reason, they have been destroyed. But I, Stephen Pollard, am different even from them. While they are heroes, I am a coward. Their lives may not be as I have described them, but they have physical excuses for their deficiencies. I, however, am different. I cannot conform, I am an outcast, I haven't even anyone to address this statement to, no one who will read it. But WHY? For no reason whatsoever. I am all the strangest perversions of the human form I have described here, I am the purposeless climber, the obstinate questioner, the man whose world is on its side, and yet I have no questions to ask. I have no ruling principle. In my isolation, I haven't even a reason to keep me company. As I said, no one will read this, therefore even it has no purpose. I am a fool.

Jim read the final words with a shudder. He had spoken them only hours before. He had read what was never meant to be read. He was trespassing on Swine's ground. And yet the words ached to be read. Their desperation for a reader was their power. Jim recognized the despair and the self-disgust. It was his own.

He sat in awe in the filthy room and was frightened. Where was Swine now? How long ago had these words been written? These questions trembled in Jim's mind when he heard steps in the corridor. They didn't echo as usual. They were muffled and sliding, like socks. Swine was coming down the hall to his room.

Jim thought as he sat frightened that he must not be found in the room. He understood it, but he couldn't take action. He sat afraid, listening to Swine's approach with the notebook in his hands, feeling as if he had committed a sacrilege. When the shuffling steps were only a few doors away, Jim was finally able to stand up. It was a futile motion,
because he stood and turned just as Swine pushed the door open.

Swine looked as he always had, sloppy and chaotic, his dirty hair sticking up straight all over, the same T-shirt and baggy pants. He was wearing the same socks, crusted with dirt from the hallways of Lansing. Swine opened the door on Jim, who was standing amidst the chaos holding the notebook in his hand. Swine stepped into the room and looked up from the floor, stopping suddenly at the sight of Jim. He stared at him with frightened eyes for a second, and then looked down at his notebook.

"What are you doing in my room?" Swine spoke quietly, but his voice quavered. Jim felt like a criminal for having trespassed.

"I was looking for you to see how it went with Bailey. When you weren't here I just happened to see your notebook and I've been reading it."

Swine had started to shake. Jim saw that his face was unusually pale and that his eyes were wild and darting.

"Just get out of here. You have no right to interfere. Get out."

Jim started to protest that he hadn't meant to offend him, but Swine insisted that he leave immediately. As Jim stepped out of the room, he looked back. Swine stood in the center of the room, clenching and unclenching his fists. Jim shrugged his shoulders, feeling like a fool, and started up the hall to his room. He was almost there when he realized that he still held Swine's notebook in his hand. He started back to Swine's room, anxious that he not think him a thief as well as a trespasser.

Jim reached the vandalized door and knocked. He waited for a moment, expecting Swine to answer immediately. But there was no reaction from the room. Jim knocked again and listened again for some sound. There was none. It was impossible that he could have left the room again or fallen
asleep since Jim had been gone from the door for only a few seconds. Jim pounded on the door a third time, impatient with Swine.

"Damn it, I'm not going to kill you. I just have your precious notebook."

There was no reply. Jim gave up. He would keep it tonight anyway. He wanted to read the entire chronicle and he could return it the next day. As Jim returned to his own room and sat in the red chair to read, he wondered what Swine had been doing in the room while he knocked. Could he have been that frightened? Jim felt the fact that he had read what Swine never intended to be read had something to do with his reluctance. He opened the notebook again and started reading another description of one of the inmates of the hospital, another one of Swine's heroes.
Jim tried again on the following day to return the notebook without success. He had stayed up and read the entire work, and remained impressed by the strangeness and Swine's passionate advocacy of the martyrs he depicted. Jim reread the final section a number of times. He was conscious of its despair and of the expectation that it would never be read. As the reader that Swine hadn't expected, Jim felt a strong connection. He wasn't sure if he was privileged or attached too intimately by the fact. His efforts to return the notebook, walking down the hallway to Swine's room whenever he happened to think of it, were unrewarded by any response from Swine. Jim would grow impatient at the door after several knocks and retreat up the corridor. He felt increasingly guilty about having the notebook, but he was unable to get rid of it.

While Jim was trying to contact Swine, Campbell had carried out his threat made in the poolroom two days before. He had complained to the floor manager, a meek sort of person who declined to carry out any sort of reprimand against Swine. Campbell, angered at the weakness of the floor manager, took his case to Ernie, the bulky dorm manager who had greeted everyone on the day of their arrival. Campbell apparently found a sympathetic ear in Ernie, for the dorm manager agreed to talk to Swine, investigate the condition of his room, and take further measures if he found them necessary. Ernie, certain of his rights in the matter by virtue of a vague directive that could be found in the University catalogue which insisted that all students keep their rooms in good order, took his pass key and went to Swine's room. Campbell was with him on the Tuesday evening after Jim had discovered the notebook in Swine's room. The pair approached Swine's door. Ernie stopped square in front of the
room and read the scrawled message, "SWINE IS A PIG" with a frown.

"Do you think that was necessary, Campbell?" he said, turning an accusing look at his companion.

"I didn't write it," Campbell said, "but it's true. Can't you smell it up here? God damn, it's a nuisance!"

Ernie did not reply, but his lip curled when he sniffed the air. He turned back to the door and knocked soundly. As he waited, he remembered that he was also within his authority if he directed Swine to clean up, for there was another directive in the catalogue that urged all students to conduct and dress themselves as they would in their own homes. There was no answer to his knock. He rapped again more firmly on the panelled door. He and Campbell stood for another interval without hearing any indication of life.

"Guess he's not here," Ernie said, starting to turn away.

"Like hell," Campbell said. He advanced to the door and pounded with his fist. "Come on you swine, open up!" He was afraid that Ernie would give up the issue entirely and wanted to get the thing done while he had the dorm manager with him.

"You can at least open it up and look at the goddamned pig sty while you're here."

"I can't do that. He's got a right to his privacy."

"Not when he's stinking up the whole fucking floor."

"All right, for Christ's sake." Ernie yielded to Campbell out of a desire to get him off his back. He felt that he could step out of his legal authority for the sake of his own peace. He put the pass key in the lock, turned it, and pushed open the door.

The stench rushed on them when the door swung wide. Ernie took
a step in and retreated instantly, appalled.

"Coddamn!"

"See what I mean? It's incredible. He's a fucking pig!"

Ernie braced himself and entered the room again. Campbell was right behind him when Ernie stopped short. Campbell heard Ernie make a strange gagging sound and stepped around him to look. Swine's closet door stood open, and as Campbell took another step to see, there was Swine, his belt looped around his neck and around the clothes rod. Since the rod was only about five feet from the ground, Swine had been forced to arrange the belt around his neck and then sit in mid-air, stretching his legs out in front of him until the belt tightened enough to achieve his purpose.

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Jim learned of Swine's suicide an hour later when an ambulance finally arrived. The news had spread rapidly, but quietly. Jim was in his room studying, having resolved to try to learn something, even though he was faced with the prospect of failing. But as he sat reading, something of the atmosphere of the dorm, informed of death in its midst, crept in upon him. There was a hush. Quiet comings and goings in the hallways contrasted with the relaxed, frivolous air that had become the background of Jim's reading before. There were no shouts down the corridor, no scuffling next door. Jim raised his eyes from the page and listened. The difference made itself clear to him finally: no stereos were playing. The unusual silence alarmed him. He realized that something was going on. The siren made it clear that death or injury was involved. It made its approach from the highway, wailing distantly, coming nearer, then breaking into a frantic pattern at the intersection. Jim
went to his window when he heard the ambulance turn toward the dorm. In a moment, he saw its approach through the screen of trees, and its turn into the long drive to Lansing. An accident, Jim thought, someone's had an accident. He watched the ambulance stop at the front doorway before he went to his door to investigate. Before going out, Jim thought that he might find Swine in the hallway. He picked up the notebook in the hope of finally being able to return it. When he stepped out of his room and looked up the hall, he saw a group of people gathered at Swine's door. Ernie was one of them, and Jim was surprised to see him speaking to a policeman. Jim approached tentatively. How could the police have come into it? he wondered. As he drew abreast of the group, the ambulance attendants came around the corner by the stairway, wheeling a stretcher between them. The policeman addressed them.

"Over here. Looks like we've got a suicide." His tone was tired and bothered. Jim stopped short on hearing the word. He clutched the notebook and wondered if they would want it for evidence. But something made him hold back. Instead of speaking up and getting the cop's attention while the attendants were occupied with Swine, Jim retreated. He couldn't imagine Swine's dead face. In life he had been decaying in a way, always smudged with dirt and smelling incredibly. But the notebook Jim clutched was living. He carried it to his room and placed it in his desk drawer. Jim decided to keep it and make no mention to anyone. For an instant he thought that he might be questioned, but by whom? No investigation would be held. There was no one to talk to. No one had known Swine. The notebook would never be seen. No one would read it unless Jim allowed them. He would be its keeper.

Swine's suicide was the topic of conversation on the bus to dinner
that evening. His name was on everyone's lips, both as "Swine" and as Steve Pollard. Some had learned his name during the course of the day. Jim saw Mike and Roger sitting together near the back of the bus, and George as well. Jim wanted to tell someone about the notebook, because he felt it explained Swine. It helped one to understand who he was and what had driven him to his suicide. But Jim wanted to find out what their attitude toward Swine was before telling anyone. When the bus stopped at the dining hall, Jim managed to herd Mike, Roger, and George together. He wanted to eat with them and hear what they had to say. The four of them managed to pass through the line rather quickly and sat together near the windows in the rear of the cafeteria. As soon as they were seated, George spoke up.

"Well, gentlemen, that's one less undergraduate down the drain. I guess we can all breathe easier now."

"Clever, George, very clever," said Roger.

"Swine has forfeited his right to be reincarnated, you know," Mike said. "It's really too bad. I think he would have been happy in a sty of his own."

Jim was silent. Obviously the three of them relished Swine's death as a chance to make ironic comments. They cared nothing about him. He was only a subject for a bad joke. Neither George, nor Mike, nor Roger could drop their attitude of detached sarcasm even in the face of a death. They seemed not the least disturbed. They rankled Jim now, where he had found them witty before. He couldn't tell them.

The meal passed without a word from Jim. He brooded as the other three continued their casual banter about various things. Jim felt ready to burst with his knowledge, but he didn't want to arouse any morbid
curiosity. He was silent, then, and was ready to go back to Lansing after the meal had ended when he saw Kelly come in with her tray. Jim detached himself from the three easily enough and joined Kelly at her table. She was alone.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?"

"No, go ahead Jim."

Jim sat next to her and tried to think of a way to broach the subject of Swine. He remembered that they had talked about him the day before in the Beanery.

"Do you remember the guy we were talking about, Kelly? The one they call Swine?"

"Sure, of course I do."

"Have you heard what happened to him?" Jim felt sure Kelly would react sympathetically, since she had shown concern the day before.

"No."

"He hung himself."

The brutal fact stunned Kelly. She looked at Jim with astonishment.

"Do you mean he's dead?"

"You might say that," Jim answered. He tried to appear unconcerned still, since he was unsure of Kelly's reaction.

"That's really awful," she said simply.

"The worst part of it is that everyone seems almost glad about it. No one cares. They think the world's a better place without him. George, Roger, Mike... they think it's a joke. You should hear them talk about it."

"That's the only way they can handle something like this, Jim."
It would be uncool to show any concern about it."

Jim was satisfied that Kelly was the one to talk to about the note-
book. Though she didn't know Swine, she extended her feminine concern
to him. Jim thought that if she had ever seen him, she might have
rejected him, but her remote compassion was enough. No one else had
it.

"It's really bothering me because I stopped in to see Swine last
night. He wasn't in his room at first, so I looked around and found
this notebook. You wouldn't believe it, Kelly. It's filled with
character sketches of people from the mental hospital. Swine makes
idols out of them. I ought to show it to you. But the point is that
he wasn't a pig. The guy had brains, he was really suffering because
he was an outcast."

"Do you still have the notebook?" Kelly asked.

"Yeah, it's back at room. I'm almost embarrassed to have it, but
I might as well keep it. I don't think it would matter to his parents.
Why let them know he was in such bad shape?"

"You don't think they have a right to know?"

"I don't think they'd understand it," Jim said. He felt that
he was being presumptuous, but he felt he was right.

"I think we're all responsible for it, too," Jim continued.
"Everyone of us. But I was almost in touch with him, I think. Christ,
I could have been him. He's been going through what I have as far as
studies go."

"Yes," Kelly said, "but you've had people to talk to when you've
been unhappy. If you had let yourself go, maybe you could have killed
yourself. But you seem to have an impulse to seek out other people."
"Basically," Jim admitted.

"It's a real problem, though," Kelly continued. "We all seem to come close to that sooner or later."

Jim felt that their discussion was basically inadequate to the event. Perhaps Kelly was too removed from the death to understand how it terrified Jim. He had been alone enough in Lansing to know how the dorm itself isolated people. He had drifted about, afraid to go to his own room and be confronted with himself. Jim noticed that Kelly was paging through a text she had brought with her to the cafeteria. He recognized it as an anthology of English literature used in the freshman English courses at the University. Kelly apparently found what she had been looking for. She looked up from the page.

"Here it is. It's a poem by William Cowper about a man who's washed overboard. All they can do is throw him a cask and sail on."

Kelly pointed out the concluding couplet:

But misery still delights to trace

Its semblance in another's case.

Jim read it twice and looked up at Kelly.

"How does that apply?"

"There's no point in dwelling on a suicide. But if you see that someone else is suffering like you are, then there's some sort of consolation in it. It becomes a common human experience."

Jim reread the lines. It's too abstract, he thought. A man is dead. Poetry can't do a damn thing for him. But of course neither could I. There I was reading his notebook when he hung himself. I don't suppose anyone could have helped him, though.

Kelly's very presence made Jim feel better, a little more relaxed
about the work that faced him. He had discovered that he could read with more concentration now. He seemed to be able to forget his problems and concentrate on staying in school. He and Kelly finished their coffee and left together. When they were outside, Jim stopped and looked again at the moon, thinking about the other times in the last several days that he had gazed at it. It failed to infect him with madness now. He seemed to see it more clearly. Swine already was fading from his thoughts. His ugly countenance was hard to recall, and the resolution of the problem Kelly had offered was satisfying. Jim knew that he could accomplish nothing by dwelling on Swine's death. He had more pressing business to attend to. But he was glad he had kept the notebook. He felt it would serve him well by keeping the experience fresh, or renewing it whenever he happened to look at it. But he had other things to do now. Kelly was going to the library and Jim decided to accompany her. They had a class in common and Kelly was willing to bring him up to date on it. They crossed the campus road and entered a field that stretched toward the library's bulky structure. The moon made the field shimmer, reflecting its gaze on the frosted grass. Jim was glad to be with Kelly. They made their way through the field and passed into a woods where the moon was diffused and softened.