
MSS



Fall/Winter 1981

DOUBLE ISSUE

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Winter in Bolton

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I

The murder came to him as it had come to everyone else — in the pages of one of the large-selling dailies, one of the rags whose owners subsist by peddling people's sorrows — the more bleak, the more incongruous, the more deadly to simple hope, the larger the number of nickels. He stood at the kiosk, hunched against the February wind. Securing his footing in the day-old sullied snow, he stamped, scraped, snorted a little, shivered, and pulled his collar around his neck. Standing at right angles to the rack of bold type, not sure if he would buy, he matter-of-factly followed his eyes where they led him. This, only to be fixed for a dozen uncomprehending seconds, while in a distant part of his mind there developed a connection between a student of his in the classics and the face on the front page.

He bent to pick up the paper, already absorbed in the rough print, already aware that something awful had happened. He read in a new way, as if he had never read before; with a dim, awkward sense of excited fear. To his genuine, if somewhat remote horror, and in this perfectly innocent way, he discovered that Evelyn Seabrook, an attractive, intelligent graduate student in his own field of study, had been brutally bludgeoned to death in her apartment the night before. Transported by puzzled anguish into an absent-minded trance, he began to shuffle off with the paper spread before him, only to be apprehended by the long arm of the vendor who, at the same time, conceivably saved him from being run down by one of the automobiles on the busy street.

And that was how he knew; so that when, two days later, the snake of rumour that flickered, rather predictably, from lip to unkind lip at last

coiled in his ear, he flew immediately into a righteous rage. He had heard it from a second-year student, not one of his favorites — he couldn't remember the name — who had stopped him by touching his elbow just outside the door of the main office. The student had been obsequious, but had seemed to take a kind of delight in the sordid revelation. Clearly, too, the student had been frightened — he had heard it from someone who had heard it from someone who had heard it from.... By the time Karkov had turned from him and leaned against the heavy oak door, he could feel the anger well up in his body. The secretaries winced, watching his thin face whiten and, as the surprise bled out of it, crouched gamely but tensely under the torrent of words.

"Oh-oh," said Olivia, touching her hair.

"Such language," said Mrs. Conant, who at fifty was formidable and self-assured.

"Well how would you feel if you found out that people you trust, people you work with every day, were calling you a murderer behind your back? How would you feel? How?" His voice was shrill, and an ominous looking blood vessel stood out on his forehead. His arms swung threateningly at the air.

"But Professor Karkov, we didn't *mean* —" Olivia tried to say.

"You didn't mean? You didn't mean what? What the hell *did* you mean, goddammit?"

"Well I don't know, but —"

"Such language," Mrs. Conant said.

"You bet your sweet *life*," he began, turning to Mrs. Conant, and then stopped himself. You are in the wrong place, telling the wrong people, he thought.

Seconds later he was in the Chairman's office. Without having knocked, without a smile, without a word of greeting he extended a long arm in the direction of the outer office shouting, if not at the top of his voice, then certainly very loudly, "Your secretaries have been telling the students that I'm a murderer. Now what are you going to do about it? I want them reprimanded. No, I want them fired. Now! Do you expect me to go on in this department after being accused of murder by the typists?"

"You're joking," proposed the Chairman.

"Joking? Joking? A hell of a joke it'll be when I get led out of here in handcuffs. Some joke! Marvelous!" His tension animated stiff, abruptly oscillating struts in the little room. His arms jerked about outside of his own volition, but in a stylized way, like a tin soldier's. "Christ. Christ Almighty, do you know what this is going to do to me?"

His extreme agitation, which his colleague had never seen but had heard about from students and office staff, infected the Chairman, at last, with a severe, absorbent gravity. "Sit down, Greg, sit down. Keep calm. You have a right to be ~~angry~~, but you must know this is ridiculous. God only knows where it came from, but it's too silly to hurt you. In any case, I'll put a stop to it immediately. I'll talk to those women right now."

"No you won't, Richard. I'll tell you what you're going to do. You're going to get the best lawyer in this town in here within the hour. If I get dragged through the mud this department is going to come right down with me." He pointed a stiff, trembling finger at his colleague's chest. "If this gets out it's going to be the biggest scandal in the history of American colleges."

Richard Stephens complied. He sat down immediately, and the phone was at his ear before he settled into his chair. He responded not because he was intimidated by his younger colleague's anger, and certainly not because he believed that something as sordid as a graduate student's murder or a professor's blood guilt could shake the reputation, three hundred years in the building, that was Ulster College, but because he perceived, in this abrupt, childish threat, the great ugly depth of his friend's fear. And suddenly he was afraid for him as well.

II

Gregory Karkov, for his part, regretted his threat as soon as he had made it, reflecting, as he often did after moments of heightened emotion, upon the exact nature of his position, and upon how little compatible it was with verbal bullying. He was, he knew — to put it straight-forwardly — the most junior member of the foremost Department of Classics in the country. He had a five-year assistant professorship which was renewable for three more years at the discretion of his senior colleagues. And he indulged himself in the not completely baseless hope that they might, at the end of those three years, see fit to alter this uncertain, painful condition by opening their arms to him as, not a son, but a brother, and by listing him permanently and, one could say — with the usual qualifications attending a human promise — irrevocably, among their small and rather illustrious number.

But he did not cloak this hope in illusion. It stood bare in his mind against the background of his achievements — past, present, and, in the

realm of the probable, future. He was extremely bright, knowledgeable — on occasion, startlingly knowledgeable — careful, and in the best tradition of Greek classical scholarship, good at what he did. But there were others who fitted this description, a small but substantial, growing number of bright, knowledgeable, careful, competent young men, most of whom shared his own ambition. Like most men in their mid-thirties in academic professions, he had flirted with, then, briefly, struggled with, then, finally, released his grasp upon that shadow of a hope of genius, and now he was ready to settle for mere respectable competence; but it would be the highest competence, and the highest respectability. How many classicists his age would have gladly given ten years of their lives to be sitting where he was, in that office, in that building, on that campus? Most of them, probably; possibly all of them.

These thoughts instilled in him a subdued, regretful mood, and he wished for the sort of restraint he had seen in others under stress. He repeated to himself, *Grace under pressure, grace under pressure*, relying, as he always did, on the way he had learned Greek, in the years when not a single person believed in him. *There are never any outbursts*, he thought, *there are never any outbursts at Ulster College*.

But still, his outburst seemed in proportion to the problem — no, not a problem: a catastrophe. In the most extreme exertion of control, while his colleague was attempting to contact the lawyer, he forced himself to try to think it through. His mind clutched at a dozen threads straying away from the murder, or, at least, what he knew of it from the massive investigation, trying to find the one that might have led to this creation. He filed through the events of the last two frantic days, the press interviews, press conferences, police grilling, discussions with students, discussions with colleagues, newspaper articles, even television. What was it? What produced the rumor? What was animating their vague, smutty little minds?

Of course, there was the scribble in “Greek” on the wall. The journalists had loved that, had pushed him and begged him to tell them its “true” meaning. They had even forced him to say that some silly “translation” was *possible*. But as anyone who had Greek could see, it was almost certainly produced by someone who had copied it out of a primer, someone who had no Greek at all. It was a string of twisted, broken letters, a totally meaningless alphabetic jumble.

Then there was the unknown faculty visitor. A friend of Evelyn’s told the police that Evelyn, quite late one night, had been paid an unexpected call by one of her professors, she couldn’t remember which. But through

questioning others the police had established the identity of the late-night caller as that of a one-year lecturer in another department who had, for several reasons, not been rehired, and was, by the night of the murder, teaching in Iceland.

Third in their minds, he could not resist suspecting, was the newspapers’ theme of Evelyn as a frightened, resentful student. It was easy to see what intricate, dark elaborations could be made, by newspapermen and students, upon that. But to the police, he knew, it was simply silly. All students were somewhat frightened, somewhat resentful. That didn’t generate tensions that provided a basis for murder.

But suppose they thought he had singled her out — because she was so attractive, for instance? Suppose they thought he was unfair to her for reasons unknown to anyone? Suppose they pictured him as a crazed, jealous lover, a failed suitor chaotic enough in heart and mind to at least try to extort sex from a student? And suppose, further, that she had refused? What choice would he have? What choice?

And when all this was proved wrong, proved vicious or even criminal in intent, proved patently, damnably without foundation of any kind, when his name was finally, in a tiny courtroom, cleared, would his career ever recover from their suppositions?

As these at first slight considerations persisted in his imagination, they acquired magnitude. They murmured and turned and fled and returned and murmured and fled like a terrible soft laughter, sounding and echoing in his brain. At length, and in spite of their improbability, they exerted an effect upon his mind, so that he faltered in his pacing, and stopped, and tore with his teeth at the flesh around his thumbnail, and glanced like a fugitive at Professor Stephens and at the door, and resumed pacing. In the room as in his mind there seemed to be no place to go, except to return ceaselessly over the same jagged ground. He felt as if he were pacing the width of a narrow corridor, constrained from proceeding along it in either direction by its infinite extent into the unknown.

The lawyer, Ulster ’41, a quite correct and able man with a fine analytic mind, was able to reassure him. He pointed out that the whole thing was only the flimsiest sort of vile campus rumor; that such suspicions often arose in the minds of disaffected students; that many another instructor had suffered to hear such nonsense — provoking nonsense, to be sure, but nonsense nevertheless — spoken about himself, and lived through a week of dazed fear, anticipating disaster, only to find, belatedly, that the students had forgotten it as quickly as they had taken it up, and that his colleagues had never heard of it, or had not taken notice when they did.

This was good, very good. These were things to quiet his mind, to repeat to himself privately. They calmed him. They made it possible for him to go about his business.

But their palliative action was temporary. That afternoon, at the funeral, at the bare, spare, sparsely furnished, mahogany-trimmed white church — so empty, although it was not large, that two hundred people scarcely made a presence in it, throughout the service — he felt their eyes on him. The minister's stark sentences clattered over the coffin, extolling God, extolling the Kingdom of Heaven, extolling grace, and mercy, and righteousness, depicting a bright young girl on the brink of something lovely, something unexplored, inviting, as if she were going off to college, or marrying, or giving birth, and never once, not for a moment, alluding to loss, death, grief or comfort, although his toneless reading exerted itself against the pitiful loud sobbing of the mother under the lectern.

Gregory Karkov shrank from these words. He shrank from this shrinking from death. It made him feel death's presence the more clearly all around him. In his mind, the mourners' bodies were disappearing, sucked from the pews by the church itself, its vacuum abhorring nature; and what remained were the eyes — the eyes hanging alone in the air, inattentive to the minister's voice, glazed, and fixed on *him*. Only two had bodies — he and Evelyn Seabrook — and he could not talk to her, could not tell her about the eyes, because she was nailed into a tastefully made-up box and would not hear anything ever again.

When this vision was over, and the minister's vision was over, as the coffin was lifted onto a half-dozen shoulders and borne along the rows of pews, as he raised his long, weakened body from the bench, Gregory Karkov's head stood over the rest. And he crouched perceptibly as he trailed the grim casket and followed the line of mourners out of the church.

He arrived at home in a confused depression to find a message, taken by his wife from Sergeant Mulvey, who had called to say that he wanted one more interview with Professor Karkov the following day. For Karkov, at that moment, coincidence was unthinkable, an obscene self-delusion. The students, he knew, had done it. They were going to wreck his life.

There followed a family dinner in which he was more than typically irritated with the boys, more than typically stung by his wife's barbs, so that he pounded the table once, and for what seemed minutes the room was perfectly still except for the noise of the dishes trembling. He apologized, explained himself to his wife; she softened, sent the boys away, consoled him.

"It's not their fault, you know," she said gently.

"I know it's not their fault, dammit. Do you think I like scaring them half to death?"

"You're under a lot of pressure."

"Under a lot of pressure? I'm at my wits' end. I really feel as if I were losing my mind."

"Greg, I know it seems awful but really I think it will pass away. Really, you're making something out of nothing."

"And Mulvey?"

"Mulvey is a coincidence. I don't know what he wants to see you about, but I guarantee you it's not to accuse you of murder."

"But can't you understand? Forget about the logic. It's what I'm feeling."

But in the end she could not see it his way; in the end he was on his own, physically and spiritually; because after dinner, she went off to sleep, a boon which was not to be granted him tonight, while, without moving, bathed in the moonlight at the dining room window, he receded into a long, dark, wakeful night of fear. And, in the darkness, as he stared out the window, he found himself reviewing his life as if he were someone else; as if he might, by being completely objective, find out where it had gone wrong.

III

When the German tide receded over the shambles of Eastern Europe it left in its wake, among much other debris, a small boy. This particular boy had fourteen names. By the time the war ended he had lived two years in a convent. He did not tell the Russian soldiers that his father was a count (so the nuns had warned him), as he had not told the nuns that his father was a communist (so his mother had warned him). In a casual conversation he learned from a Russian soldier that his father was not the right kind of communist, and after that he never talked of his father. But he often thought, at night, while they were trying to find his family, of the fact that on his birth certificate were fourteen different names. He would see them in his mind's eye, wrapping themselves around the back of the paper, the paper that was probably lost forever. He saw them, heard them, tasted them, dreamed of them, held them in his heart whenever the men came back and said, "Those people never heard of your family." The names assumed such a fine, sharp reality that they stayed in his mind much longer

than anything else, after his mother's voice had fled, after the glow of his father's arms and face had gone out of his heart. How strange for a boy to have fourteen, fourteen names!

There were two other events in his life; two; only two. One year after the war, and more than five years after his father had been shot, he and his mother were living in America with his American aunt, Lily. Lily was ill and did not work and his mother supported all of them. He knew that his mother was changed from the way she had been before; but, to be truthful, he hardly remembered. Now she was sharp in her movements and stiffly dressed and dark in her way of speaking.

His aunt would stay home and be kind to him, but still full off her illness. One evening Aunt Lily was playing a record she had bought, that she called a "cantata." He liked the sound of the word almost as much as he liked the music. The music filled the big, warm room at the front of their apartment. It reminded him of the convent, where he had been happy. It made him feel lighter, almost rising into the air. His mother came home looking, as she often said, as tired as if she were dead, took off her hat and laid her purse on the table. Then she heard the music, and her face flashed in a rage. She strode across the room to where the record player was, while the air rang with high women's voices, and, with a single movement of her arm, drew the needle across the record. The rasp that filled the room from the dark cave of the speaker seemed to the boy like the cough of death itself, the fabric of life tearing, the sound of a skull cracking under a club. His mother's voice began above the rasp in her thick Czech English, "When the last German is lowered into the soil of the glorious Fatherland, when the last German words have been expelled from human mouths, we will play the mass of Herr Bach. Until that time there will be no German music, not in my house, not while I am living." His mother's voice went on, burning in his brain; but the rasp of the needle was burned into his heart.

When he was grown, at the university, the night before his comprehensive examination, he received a long-distance telephone call to inform him that his mother and aunt had been killed together driving on the highway. His mother had been taking his aunt to the hospital. He became violently ill, but in the morning he took the examination before flying home. The classics were now all he had left; he could not let go of them. He held on to the paper as if it were a baby — tender, entranced, embracing. He read the questions, and was moved by them more than he was challenged. The tears poured down over his cheeks and dropped on to the

page. He did not budge except to wave away would-be consolers. For six hours he wrote and cried. He wrote the best examination ever submitted to the department, and then flew to the graveside.

IV

What animated their "vague," if not exactly "smutty" minds, was not an authoritative original source for the rumor, nor a series of logical inferences from fact, nor even a clumsily linked together chain of circumstance, but a simple, animal dislike. The students detested Professor Karkov with a vividness and clarity of feeling that, in the young, is rarely reasonable, and yet not always wrong. Their arrogant tribunal of the spirit pronounced him unattractive, cowardly, dishonorable, disloyal, callous, self-elevating, hypocritical, calculating — guilty in general of conduct unbecoming a young professor, whose age-old role, precious in tradition, was to intercede for the students with the senior faculty. The rumor, then, in which he was depicted as a murderer, was not so much an allegation of crime as it was the punishment they meted out to him for the subtler crime of being what he was, or what, at any rate, they thought he was: a severe, frenetic, icy, driving man.

They knew little about him. Their dossier of gossip was composed painstakingly in a coffee-and-cigarette haze, its items entered mentally in an ink that was mostly bile. It consisted largely of silly things; things that were silly for him to have done and for them to have remembered. For instance, he gave an examination in which he wrote, "A classicist should know his history from A to Z. List twenty-six figures of Ancient Greece from A to Z and write a paragraph about each." A random, mindless sort of task that he, forgetting the feeling close to terror that can attend examinations, thought would be clever and challenging. Or, he would call on students who, he suspected, had not prepared the lesson, in order to embarrass them, a practice that had gone the way of the birching-rod. Such things were common in his style of teaching.

They had managed to form the impression that his home-life was disappointing. His children were said to be brats, and his wife, whom they scarcely knew, to be having a hard time holding him. Even the students knew that such speculation was easy, too easy to be interesting, but it was simply too enjoyable to forgo.

They held him to account for more serious things as well. Women

students in general fared poorly under his tutelage; but one especially, a close friend of Evelyn's, had had great difficulties. Her excesses of devotion — mental, physical and financial — even after her fiance was for no apparent reason shot to death on a road in Panama — were the product of her immense love of the classics. She was neither the brightest nor dullest of students; her performance was generally adequate. But she was a very nervous young woman. When the long-prepared-for time came for her oral examination, she descended by degrees into a pit of tense fear. Before it, she wept openly with Karkov, her advisor, and he reassured her. But when she appeared before the examining board and, inevitably, faltered, he himself led the onslaught in which five mature men reduced a scared young woman to tears again. One of the secretaries reported that Karkov left the examining room whistling, with his thumbs down; and that, after he left, two senior faculty members stood around talking about him, calling him a very bright young man. This, while Daphne Hillman was on her way to the campus infirmary, to pass a long night under sedation.

Then, too, there was his behavior since the murder; not incriminating, of course, but undeniably strange. He seemed to be, noticeably, relishing the aftermath — the excitement, the horror, the pathos, the attention from the outside world that scholars never enjoy, and, perhaps most of all, the action; the need to assist the police in resolving the murder mystery, the urgent, essential, inescapable need. They were too young for it to have occurred to them that they were affected in similar ways, that they too relished this disruption of their daily lives, as, indeed, anyone might; too young to notice the small expressions of these same inclinations in themselves.

So they devoted special attention to the evidence of this turn of mind in Karkov. They deemed his behavior toward the police and toward the press to be, at best, tasteless, and, at worst, calculated to turn attention toward himself. On the day after the murder, before Karkov had even read the news at the kiosk, a freshman who had had Greek at preparatory school gave the police his analysis of the writing on the wall. After a careful study, he said, it could be concluded that this was a feeble attempt to reproduce a passage from Homer, Odysseus' supplication in Kirke's boudoir:

but I

threaded the dark to Kirke's matchless bed and held the goddess' knees in begging, urging, as she bent to bear: "O Kirke, keep your promise, it is time."

It was clear, the student alleged, that the scrawl above the bed in Evelyn Seabrook's apartment corresponded to the last line of this passage. To anyone who had *more* than preparatory school Greek, this was ludicrous, rather like looking at a child's alphabet practice and seeing a Hamlet soliloquy. To the journalists it was a godsend, but one couldn't go around quoting a college freshman. So later that day, in a rush of cacophonous questioning, Professor Gregory Karkov of the Ulster College Classics Department, an authority on the Homeric Greeks, was startled, cajoled, confused, charmed and threatened into saying that it was conceivable to him that the murderer was making a feeble attempt to write that passage.

The next day the *Inquirer* headline read, "MURDERER BEGS RELEASE; REJECTED, KILLS." As Karkov struggled decently to impress upon many deaf journalistic ears later that day, the awful irony of this most improbable reading was that in the passage Odysseus was begging Kirke *not* to make him sleep with her any more; as if the journalists cared. Their truth had already been created; actual truth now mattered not at all.

This egregious error resulted in hours of expert testimony by Karkov, with the police and with the press, a humane, serious effort on his part to make them leave off their nonsense. However, since it was one of only two clues — the murderer had evidently smoked a cigarette after the murder because the ashtray, but not the butt, was spotted with blood — they could not relinquish it. The citizens of Bolton wanted action; they deserved it. They deserved to feel safe again. They deserved, at least, to see the police "on the trail." The police were embarrassed by their impotence, the journalists were hungry for sensation, and the ludicrous interpretation stood.

The students saw Karkov's interviews as a cheap bid for attention; and when, on the morning before the funeral, he strode down one of the corridors of Thompson Hall, waving his arms, saying, "I'm not giving any more press conferences," they saw in this exhausted gesture the incarnation of tasteless self-importance.

V

Still, this was not the central, not the essential thing. The essence of his ghostly "guilt" lay not in any action of his, nor even in any aspect of his character, taken by itself, but, rather, in a certain aesthetic relation. It was that he stood, in every apparent feature of body, mind and heart, in contrast to Evelyn Seabrook — a contrast so vivid that its clarity crashed like

dissonance itself on the senses of all who bothered to look or listen.

"Beauty and the Beast," one wag had said — in a moment of questionable inspiration — and the *mot* stuck. But while Karkov's nickname slipped into general currency, supplanting the long-exhausted jokes on his actual name, the nickname for Evelyn was never spoken. Still it was there, in the minds of the speaker and hearer, whenever Karkov was casually mocked; and along with it went a sense of something faintly loved.

There was nothing simple or conventional in their feelings about her. She was not "a good girl." She drank more than most of them, so that at twenty-three she had the slightly alcoholic eyes of the woman of forty in her social set. She was not promiscuous, but she never stayed with a man for more than a few months; she seemed to quickly exhaust their possibilities.

That she was beautiful no one questioned. She had the stately, self-assured, highly styled beauty that comes only — and then rarely — of being born to the manor. No one of either sex with the slightest aesthetic sense could fail to be stirred by her, if only as an object of natural wonder. Her eyes were riveting; appealing, yet not asking for help; establishing relation. Everything else about her changed constantly, but her bright, liquid eyes were more constant than stone. Her hair hung loosely around her shoulders, or stood in a circle on her head, or dropped down in shoulder-length braids. Her clothing ranged from sweaters pulled over torn, faded jeans, to modest but rather short skirts, to sleek dresses out of place in the classroom. Her voice could be a whispery come-on drawl, or a clipped, autoritative staccato, or a barely audible, sulky monotone growl — that is, when she was not cultivating a stony silence. But, strangely, no persona seemed less real than any other. On the contrary, the vivid reality of Evelyn-at-present, or Evelyn-in-the-room-with-you, of Evelyn-here-and-now, seemed to be everything anyone knew, or needed to know about her; but there was, of course, a good deal more to know.

She was an "old Bostonian" — indeed, a very old one, and she was not entirely comfortable in this heritage. Where another person might have picked and chosen among the threads, and woven herself a pretty braid of tradition, Evelyn thrashed, and found herself in a tangle. Eight New England generations caged her, circumscribed her spirit, which she longed to endow with a genuine, guiltless caprice. And in the cramped space within her, between the long-lived sense of guilt and the looked-for sense of abandon, there grew, early, a keen sense of proportion; according to which, "what's important in life" consisted of things denoted by five words,

words that old Bostonians never conspicuously used; and these were love, hope, joy, terror, grief.

The Classics consisted of just such things. In spite of the efforts of generations of scholars to make them seem sensible, to make them comprehensible, to make them seem to belong in dusty libraries — in spite of them, they would not give up their wildness. It was just this resilience Evelyn cherished. Page after page of the Greek and Latin was filled with sentences that brought tears to her eyes, even as she strove to gloss the words. As clearly as she knew anything, she knew that the merest missed heartbeat of a Sophocles, the most vague and momentary flicker of lust in a Catullus, would resist the analytic acumen of men like Gregory Karkov until the end of human time.

Her mother, a pleasant, confused woman left with the short straw in a broken marriage, had taught her to read from English translations of Homer; this seemed to her proper, if forward-looking. She couldn't have been expected to realize that her five-year-old daughter was appreciating the *Odyssey* with a passion more deeply stirred than any the mother had felt in her adult life. And she was surprised, not at all pleasantly, when Evelyn, instead of marrying and settling down after college, insisted on going to graduate school, getting her own apartment, and, when she wasn't "running around," "burying herself in a pile of old books."

Her father worried himself to distraction from the moment she moved out of her mother's house. He had always feared for her, spoiled her, and fawned over her, but his feeling when she went off on her own was a new, deep-rooted panic. One obsession now took charge of his very complex feeling for her: an abject fear of fire. Most of his visits were dominated by examinations and searches; his gifts were a fire extinguisher and a rope ladder with aluminum steps; his conversation dwelt on the design of old buildings. At the end of these visits he would stand in the doorway, with his head inclined toward Evelyn, smile a little, and take one of her hands in his.

"Evie," he would say sternly, smiling a little more. "I hate to sound like a *father*," dragging out the open *a*.

"Yes, Daddy," she would say, pulling the hair back from her face, gently, indulgently, lovingly; but knowingly.

"Evie, the place is a fire-trap. You know, I want you to be free, as free as a rare, beautiful bird. I want you to be grown-up. But find another place. Please. Please?"

"Yes, Daddy, really, I'm looking." Then she would reach up and kiss his face.

It was Evelyn who received the broken Daphne when she came home from the infirmary after her debacle. And Evelyn knew, she knew Daphne should have easily passed. But what was more astonishing than her failure — after all, there were always “nerves” — was that she had been terminated. It was standard practice to get three chances at the exam. If you were exceptionally unpromising, you could be terminated after two. But this was Daphne’s miserable first try.

And there were a dozen men Daphne was better than, men Evie had sat beside in a hundred boring classes, who never showed a spark of interest except when they leered timidly at her; men who plodded from one dull half-thought to the next, whose head for facts, that crown jewel of scholarship, wasn’t even as good as Daphne’s, but who had breezed through that silly exam like rats gliding through garbage in a sewer.

So an angry curiosity, mingled, a little, with fear, brought Evelyn, after she consoled Daphne, into the office of Professor Grenier. Grenier had just gotten tenure, and the students liked him almost as much as they disliked Karkov. He was handsome in a rougher way, with a definite poise and presence, and he had, so it seemed to them, a greater depth of intellect and greater imagination. There was a light in his eye that made one think he had spent less time in libraries. Although Gregory Karkov was Evelyn’s on-paper advisor, it was Henry Grenier that she went to for advice.

She had sufficient aplomb herself, and confidence in Grenier, to walk straight past the secretaries, her high heels clicking along the hardwood floor, and rap insistently against the clouded glass of the inner office door.

“Yes,” came a slightly annoyed voice.

She opened the door enough to put her head inside. “Can I have about a minute and a half of your precious time?” She smiled.

Professor Grenier smiled back, looking up from a mound of papers. “Would you believe thirty seconds?”

Evelyn knew that this last gambit was part of a not very convincing pose. In fact, Grenier, once you got in the door, was unfailingly generous with his time. He tried to protect himself, but was never able to, and the students of course loved him, although his colleagues thought he let them “run all over him.”

“I know you’re busy, but this is important.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s important. Just once, I would like to have someone come in here with something that isn’t important.” He sounded very

warm, but very tired.

“It’s about Daphne Hillman. She just spent the night in the infirmary. You know that.”

“No. I didn’t. Sit down.”

He put his pen down on the desk and leaned back into his chair. Evelyn settled into a Danish armchair opposite him and fixed his gaze, kind and full of concern, all the impatience now gone, across the massive, cluttered desk.

“I want to know why Daphne Hillman was terminated,” she said.

“Why ask me? I wasn’t even on the board.”

“First of all because you know, and second of all because you’re the only one on the faculty who might tell me.”

“She wasn’t good enough. That’s why.”

“She was better than half the Ph.D.’s who ever come out of this place. Well, a quarter, anyway. And you damn well know it too.”

Grenier paused to note and parry the misdirected anger. “Actually,” he said, “I don’t know the first thing about her. She was in one of my courses, but she made absolutely no impression on me. She did nothing at all to distinguish herself, except that she was one of those girls who was always menstruating.”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“You bet I heard you. What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that on at least two different occasions, when there was an exam or a paper due, she came up to me with excuses about her menstrual problems.”

“And so you terminated her for menstruating.”

Grenier took a deep breath. “Look, Evelyn, I didn’t terminate her. Please. I had nothing to do with it.”

“O.k. You’re right. I’m being unfair. I’m sorry. Now will you please just tell me what did happen?”

“Alright. This is only hearsay.” She nodded. “The way I hear it,” he went on, “the exam ended and the candidate left the room so that her performance could be discussed. Everyone looked at Karkov. Since Miss Hillman was so, well, shy, no one really knew her.”

“And?”

“Karkov just shrugged.”

“And if he had spoken up for her?”

“Oh, he was her advisor. If he had spoken up for her she wouldn’t have

been terminated."

On the same day a parallel conversation took place between the third woman engaged in the graduate study of classics at Ulster College, and her advisor, who was also the chairman of the department. But this conversation took a different tack; Susan Ross had gone to his office to resign.

"Well, I must say I'm not surprised," Professor Stephens said at once, giving every evidence of surprise.

"Why aren't you surprised?"

"I never expected very much of you." Professor Stephens' gaze was fixed on the right-hand corner of his side of the desk, the corner closest to the wall. This was where his gaze invariably rested during difficult conversations, whether with men or women. Professor Stephens was a cleanly handsome and completely sexless forty-five year old college professor. His colleagues considered him intellectually undistinguished, and not even a very good administrator. Indeed, his only claim to distinction was that he was good at raising funds, an ability that was based upon whom he knew.

Susan Ross, for her part, was an attractive young woman, trying to steer a difficult course between her desire to appeal and please — partly natural, partly engrained — and her desire to utilize nothing but her excellent mind to make a smooth path for herself in what was evidently a man's world.

The faculty thought of her as "a hippie," but the hippies she knew thought of her as a fairly straight young woman who was trying to be less straight. She could not renounce the straight world because it was the custodian of the classics she wanted to study. If she was to read them and write about them and teach them for a living, she would have to make some links to men like Stephens; she knew that. Nevertheless there was only so far she would go, only so many concessions she would consider. And, moving among the Ulster College corridors, it pleased her to know that none of the faculty liked her presentation of self, that they found it "unbecoming." She found it delightful. She wore her black hair straight and long, covered her eyes in all seasons with big, round, purple-tinted glasses, wore boots in the winter and sandals in the spring and, always, wore dresses with quite short skirts.

On this occasion it was a purple knit, and Professor Stephens, in an unwitting exaggeration, thinking himself a little clever, would have dubbed it "ultramini."

The young woman's voice broke when she asked, "Why didn't you

ever expect anything of me?"

"You were never a serious student. That was evident. You were involved with too many things other than your studies. And you're always flitting from one thing to another."

"What do you mean, flitting?"

"I mean, you spent your first year with us studying Latin drama. A lot of time and effort was devoted to preparing you to be specialist in the field of Latin drama. Then suddenly you decided you weren't interested in Latin drama. So you switched to Greek drama. What is it now, home economics?"

"I never lost interest in Latin drama. I was always interested in both. What I was switching was professors, not subjects."

"Oh?" For the smallest moment the eyes flicked to the young woman, and instantly retreated to their sanctuary.

"Yes. In point of fact you devoted, if you think back, no time at all to me that year. So I thought I would try my luck with Professor Hall, in Greek drama, and I had a fine year. But I'm running out of money, and Hall says he can't get fellowship money for women. Still, I was ready to get a job and stick it out. Somehow. But after what's happened to Daphne Hillman I really don't see the point."

"Well, it's too bad about your finances. But you can't expect us to start investing money on the sort of student who's going to turn around and quit on us without warning."

"You have a funny way of looking at things," said the young woman, but the exchange had already exhausted her into a flat resignation.

"I'll ignore that," Professor Stephens said. "Well then, what are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to do what I've wanted to do ever since I can remember."

"And what would that be?"

"That would be," she said, already sorry that she had mentioned it, "that would be writing plays of my own."

"Writing plays of your own," Professor Stephens quoted, and then, after a long pause, snickered.

During the last part of the conversation the young woman had been sitting with her elbow on the arm of the chair and her forehead enclosed in her hand. The other lay in her lap and toyed idly with the tinted glasses. At the last, Professor Stephens' snicker struck her as if truth itself were suddenly manifest in the little room. She abruptly uncrossed her slender, ivory-colored legs and jerked herself erect. She walked smoothly to the door and, realizing

that Professor Stephens' eyes were on her for the first time — on her back — she whirled and caught them with her own. He was too startled for his usual retreat. She had time to throw her hair back with a small toss of her head and find him still fixed, agape. Amazingly, he was looking into her eyes. She smiled at this windfall, but her smile went away quickly.

"Go fuck yourself," she said.

There was a very long walk past the secretaries, but throughout it she was smiling, and the tears held back until she crossed the threshold of the outer office door.

VII

The view taken by Karkov in the aftermath of the Daphne Hillman affair was one of a restrained self-abnegation. He knew he had been too hard on her, he detested himself for having been so hard on her, but he felt an external necessity that was above and prior to his lack of generosity or guilt. The girl had shown herself to be so incompetent that to do otherwise than crush her pathetic dream of professionalism would have been to do as great a disservice to her as to the profession. Who could have expected such a pitiful timidity, such open-mouthed ignorance of the most elementary things, such inarticulate fumbling for words that never rang true? Was this the face she would show to generations of students? Would she trot this dumbstruck, shaking pool of tears out on to the lecture platforms of the learned societies while amused but annoyed classicists turned wonderingly to each other saying, "Karkov's student?" There was nothing wrong with having women in the profession, provided they had minds like men. Provided they could face the oral exam with equanimity, meet the same standard in the scholarly trial by fire, feel fear, yes, of course, but never let that fear become dominant, never let any emotion erode the foundation of rigorous thought. It was, indeed, just the ability to think and speak rigorously in the context of high emotion that made classical scholarship a profession — as structured and flawless as science, but incomparably more difficult, because of the work of the heart. Not this simpering, timorous, weepy, tongue-tied, flat *betise*.

That Seabrook wouldn't have been like that. It'll be another story when she comes up for the orals. Like a rock, that girl. She looks you straight in the eye. It wouldn't fluster her if she came in and found the examiners done up in black leather and horse-whips. Spit the answers right in

their faces, and they'd be the right ones too. What she said today in class about Andromache's role in the Iliad, Christ that was good. If she keeps that sort of thing up it'll make her famous. She's got it all.

A nice piece, too, a really lovely piece. If she weren't a student. — Christ, sometimes she slinks into the classroom and I feel like I'm going crazy. There's a girl I could rape, if I were that sort of man. Or even if I weren't. Those slick little dresses right over the thighs, the breasts; or tear it off. What wouldn't I give to see that face with a certain cock in it. Or to see a woman who looks like that, who walks like that, who speaks like that, flat on her back with her feet in the air screaming, begging for less, for more, both at the same time. Struggling, but never really. Or dinner, if she weren't a student, sure, why not, and candles. Dinner, wine, a fire, candles. Sure, why not, build up to it slowly. No rush. Touch her face. Touch her arm. Touch her breast. Just graze it. Girl like that. Sweet Jesus, what a lovely piece.

VIII

Two women sat together at a table for four, in the dim light of a much frequented, not expensive restaurant near the campus, toward evening. They were near a window, and beyond the window, outside, the snow settled slowly through the dusk. The soft benches of the booth hugged the two women, held them leaning toward each other in the winter light. At other tables near them, groups of relaxed, good-natured boys and men seemed to find it increasingly difficult, as their rounds of drinks revolved, to take their eyes off them. This fact, on this occasion, concerned the women not at all. One of them, who was wearing a purple knit minidress, and folding and unfolding her purple-tinted glasses, called the waitress and ordered another glass of beer.

"I'm going to get really drunk," she said

"You'd better," said the other woman, pushing the sleeves of her sweater over her elbows. "After that parting shot he must have been convinced your resignation was a good idea."

"I don't know. Anyway, it was a good idea."

"You're pretty sure about that."

"No."

"Susan. How could you do it? How could you just quit like that?"

"How could I do it? How could I *not* do it? How in the name of hap-

piness or common sense?"

"But it's letting them win. It's like saying they were right all along."

"I really don't care if they do win. If they want it that badly, let them have it. I'm not wrecking my life for some damn feminist principle. What's the point, anyway? That I get a degree and go on to write *The New Annotated Bibliography of Latin Drama Exegesis and Criticism?*" This had been Professor Stephens' sole publishing venture in twenty years.

"I thought the point was to read Sappho to every coed in Christendom."

"Rah, rah. Listen, can we talk about something else?"

"Who's going to read them Sappho?"

"I don't know. Somebody."

"Who? Grenier? Stephens? Karkov? Who?"

"Sappho has shifted for herself for twenty-five centuries. She can get along without me for one more."

"But that's not the point."

"So what's the point."

"The point is the point is that I don't want to be left all alone with them." Evelyn said this with the sense of recognition that attends a rather discouraging self-discovery.

"Who?"

"Stephens. Karkov. Any of them. With Daphne and you out, I'm going to feel like a trapped animal."

"So " Susan dragged out the "o."

"No."

"Why not?" She was smiling, but she still wanted an answer.

"Not me," said Evelyn, as if it made her ashamed rather than proud.

Susan took off the purple-tinted glasses and bit one of the temples.

"Too much blue blood," she said teasingly.

"Something like that. Too much of 'You don't leave this table until you finish your dinner' "

"So for once in your life leave the table."

"And do what? Write my mother that I'm no different from her after all? Marry some twit from the law school, join the Junior League, and spend my father's hard-inherited money? And stay drunk twenty-eight hours a day?"

"Speaking of twits, anything happening on that front?"

"Nothing."

"Really nothing?"

"Nothing and nothing and nothing."

"New York?"

"Less than nothing."

"Why do you bother?"

"I like the bar at the Plaza. I like dancing. They don't let you dance alone, so I always have to drag along one of those woodenheads. To hang from."

"Funny."

"Some of them, you would not believe. The other day one told me that Sophocles was all invented by Plato. Made a whole speech about it."

"He meant Socrates."

"Let's hope so."

"Do you have to sleep with these masterpieces?"

"I throw them something once in a while — usually I can get away without it."

"Some Plaza Hotel romance. And all this time I thought you were Ginger Rogers, sort of twirling along Fifty-ninth Street."

Evelyn laughed. "Sometimes I wonder why I bother."

"I know why."

"Because I still haven't given up the wish to be the girl my mother wanted," she countered, in the whiny voice of a make-believe psychiatrist.

"No, that's not what I meant. Although, now that you mention it ."

"Forget it, I beg of you. What did you mean in the first place?"

"What I meant was, you can't not, that's all. Just like me."

The words "you can't not," which neither apparently felt compelled to clarify, hung in the air between them like a bell. Then, briefly, together, they made a circle of quiet in the now quite noisy restaurant. They had drunk enough, they had talked enough, they had even managed to laugh a little, in the way you do when you really feel like crying. Evelyn leaned back into the soft seat of the booth, looking at Susan tenderly, wondering whether she should risk another attempt at the subject Susan had twice suppressed.

Susan was looking around the dimly lit bar, and Evelyn, following her eyes, saw too, the inevitable glances, the slightly scary expressions on the faces, the inaudible remarks, the inaudible laughter. Susan shook her head, as if trying to shake something off. She put her glasses on.

"They bother you?" Evelyn asked her gently.

"Usually not. Tonight they bother me."

"I bet I can guess why "

"Don't even try. I'm out, that's it. I'm through with it."

She took her glasses off, and played with them again, and looked around again, and looked at Evelyn.

"You want to eat something?" Evelyn asked.

"No. I'm not hungry." Susan looked out the window, where the falling snow was sticking to the ground. No one had walked on it, and it made a glittering clean white blanket over the parked cars and the sidewalk and the poorly lit street. "I just wish"

"Yes?" said Evelyn.

"I just wish I could get some tender loving care once in a while, that's all, just once in a while." Despite the raw, breaking sound in her voice, it was a remark that had neither call nor need for an answer.

At around this time — the time of Daphne's expulsion and Susan's resignation — Evelyn, for reasons perhaps not even explicable to herself, stopped making her visits to New York City. Since she had usually spent a weekend there at least once a month, not going seemed as good a measure as any of what the young men in New York saw as a new dedication to her studies. To Daphne and Susan, with whom she remained in close touch, it looked less like dedication than fear; and with this Evie herself would not have argued.

Also, at this time, as if in defiance of the fear, she began to leave the door to her apartment unlocked, first at certain hours, then, from change of habit, continuously. In the beginning it was, at least ostensibly, so that Daphne, who had the adjacent apartment, could feel that she had access, without even knocking, whenever she needed it. But that was only in the beginning. Eventually it became, in Evelyn's thoughtful, incautious mind, and in the context of a social epoch charged with warmth and belief, a way of being open to the world.

IX

Gregory Karkov parked the bright red Volkswagen almost directly in front of the police station, just outside the no-parking borders at the entrance. I might as well show them, the thought crossed his mind, that I'm not their stereotyped college professor. If they thought the Ulster faculty liked to see him drive that car, they could think again. But he wasn't giving it up for all the tenure in the world. He drove past the President's house in it every day. Stephens had taken him aside to say it wasn't "an Ulster car."

What the hell was an Ulster car? He didn't care if the whole Board of Trustees saw him drive it; he loved that car and he wasn't changing. So if these policemen thought he was only another weird stuck-up college professor, they might just as well think again.

Although he tried to feel these thoughts to be spontaneous and sensible, they seemed to him arch, strained and ludicrous. Nevertheless he could not shake them; they were part of an unvoiced strategy that had begun to take form in his mind, amid many troubles, just before he dropped into a cold, fitful sleep. This strategy — for which, it must be mentioned, the better part of his mind shared no responsibility — was to convince the police that he was, as they themselves might put it, "a regular guy." If he were to let them think him a typical professor, they could conceivably concoct a chain: bitterness, frustration, mental breakdown, explosion, murder. Without the starting stereotype some essential links would be missing. So reasoned Karkov in the very early hours of the morning.

When he pried his body from the little car, its black top closed against the grave Bolton winter, the wind was still blowing. He pressed shut, and locked, the door. He turned his collar up and winced against the wind. For twenty-four hours a cold wind had blown, and he could not help thinking, attuned to symbols as he was, that it seemed like the cold wind of doom. This thought too he punished himself for, telling himself how very silly it was, and yet he could not shake it. He wrapped his neck and chin in the smart wool collar of his overcoat, and trudged up the flight of icy steps.

The broad, cold, stone steps reminded him of school, the first schools he'd attended in America after the war. When he opened the door the warm air rushing out at him underscored this first impression; it had a smell that was specially institutional. Many old government buildings seemed to have it — overheating, perhaps, or a certain kind of cheap wood, or the damp on the metal staircases, or the piles of old papers. In any case, it reminded him of school, so that when he walked into the wide, long lobby of the building he felt as if he were a small boy again, stepping into the immense abyss of an old, severe, smug, humorless grammar school. Even the faded, pale-green paint, gradually peeling from the walls, echoed the feeling. I must shake it off, he thought to himself. I'll be playing into their hands. Remember, for heaven's sake, who you are.

He stretched himself to his full height and presented his name to the officer at the desk. The officer directed him, respectfully, as if he were a grown man, to the small office down the corridor on the left, which he had passed in and out of several times before. The door was ajar enough for

him to walk in familiarly.

"Oh, hello, Professor," said Sergeant Mulvey, rising, although preoccupied. "Please," he gestured. "Sit down."

Sergeant Mulvey was what one expected a police detective to be like if one were quite familiar with television versions. Kindly, but firm; thoughtful, polite, but when necessary, stern, even commanding. After getting to know him a bit, certain graduate students in the Ulster College Classics Department had begun to form the opinion that the firm, stern, commanding part might be a pose acquired from television.

Several of them had also surprised themselves by liking him. He was fifty years old, large, slightly paunchy, slightly balding, evidently a family man. He was the nearest thing to a homicide expert to be found in the small city of Bolton. And he was plainly more appalled than intrigued by the business of solving its infrequent murders.

"I'm very sorry to be dragging you in here again, Professor."

An innocuous beginning. Was it to put him off his guard? Should he ask the Sergeant not to call him Professor?

"No trouble at all, Sergeant. I want to see this thing solved. That girl was one of my students. Not to mention that I have a wife and family in this city. Anything I can do, really, anything at all"

"Yes, well, would you mind having a look at this? It turned up in a garbage can behind the Seabrook apartment house."

Sergeant Mulvey extended across the table, with his thumb inside it, a faded, small, blue volume. On the binding, barely clear enough to be read, were imprinted the words 'Basic Greek. Karkov didn't recognize the text, but reflected that it could, perhaps, have belonged to Evelyn Seabrook, that she might have used it in finishing school, or wherever it was that she had prepared for college. He expressed this opinion to Sergeant Mulvey.

"It isn't used in the college here?" Mulvey asked.

"No."

"Do you think it might be used in one of the high schools here?"

"Yes. Very possibly. I don't know. Not many high school children are studying Greek these days. But, as I say, it could also have been Miss Seabrook's"

Mulvey interrupted him by opening the book to the place held by his thumb, and extending the open book across the desk. The two visible pages were dabbled and, at their edges, smeared, with many dull crimson flecks and smudges. The color was faded and dirty and looked very strange in a high-school Greek exercise book. Karkov shuddered, unable to prevent

himself.

"Is that blood?"

"I suppose so," said Sergeant Mulvey. "Can I ask you to look again at this photograph of the writing on the wall, and see if you can match it up with anything on these pages?"

Karkov stared at the photograph for perhaps the hundredth time, although the image of the scribble was already engraved on his mind. The matter on the two pages before him consisted of the end of a selection, for practice reading, in Greek, followed by one and a half pages of vocabulary. The selection, immediately evocative for Karkov, was from Herodotus' description of Xerxes building a bridge of boats to cross the Bosphorus with his army.

As he compared the passage with the photograph, it now seemed to Karkov that the scribble on the wall might well have been an attempt to copy the first line on the left-hand page. The scribble began in the middle of one sentence and ended in the middle of the next. The two sentences described Xerxes striking the sea with his staff in an impotent rage. All the letters were malformed, many were skipped, words were broken or run together. The book had been opened at random and the first line feebly transcribed on to the wall.

"I rather suspected it would be like that," said Sergeant Mulvey, after Karkov had explained.

"I said all along it was someone who didn't have Greek."

"I know you did. I never doubted you, Professor." Sergeant Mulvey smiled slightly. He took a deep breath, rubbed his forehead up and down with the tips of his fingers, and brought his spread hands together in front of his face. "Well, that's the end of the mystery of the Greek scribble," he said.

He got up and walked to the window, put his hands in his pockets, took them out, adjusted the blind against the glare of sun on snow, listened to the wind, and put his hands in his pockets again. "Will you listen to that wind," he said.

This is it, thought Karkov. He doesn't believe a word I've said. He's making up his mind how best to start on me.

"Professor Karkov Is there anything else you remember, anything you might not have told me? I know I've asked you this before, but please, think, try to remember. Anything at all about Evelyn Seabrook."

"You know I've been trying to help, Sergeant. I haven't slept well all these nights for trying to remember. I've already told you everything I could think of."

Mulvey turned to face him from the window. There was a new trace of impatience in his face.

"How many graduate students do you have, Professor? That you 'advise, I mean."

"That I officially advise?"

"Yes."

He thought for a minute. "Three. Counting Miss Seabrook."

"Three," the policeman repeated to him.

"Three, yes. Three. Why do you ask that?"

There was a restricted, slow, slight, but steady rise in Mulvey's voice as he said, "Do you mean to tell me that you were this girl's advisor, that you only have three graduate students, and yet all you can remember about her is that she was a very good student but that she dressed sloppy sometimes?"

"Now, wait a minute, Sergeant. I think I've been most cooperative most . . . cooperative. I don't know that I have to sit here. . . and be subjected to insults. What are you trying to insinuate?"

Mulvey sat down, exhaustedly.

"I'm sorry, Professor. You're right, of course. Your teaching methods are none of my business. I'm sorry." He rose again, paced a little, and spoke now in a calm, quiet tone. "I'll be frank with you, Professor. I'm at my wit's end. I've been over it all a thousand times. No theft, no rape, no clues, no motive, nothing. When you walk out of here I'll pick up that phone and call New York. To throw in the towel. And tomorrow they'll parade in here with an army of criminologists and forensic doctors and Sherlock Holmeses and slick newspaper tagalongs. And they won't find out anything. But before they stop trying they'll smear this little police department all the hell over the northeast."

Karkov was shocked by this strange confidence, so at odds with his own conception of the purpose of their interview. It was, in fact, the first thing that had passed between them that he was unable to twist into a ploy intended to trip him up, a veiled effort to fish out information. "New York," he said confusedly, for want of something to say.

"Yes. Ordinarily when we get stuck we call Boston. But she used to go to New York all the time, so they're already involved."

"She used to go to New York all the time?"

"You didn't know. Yes, well she spent almost half her weekends there."

Karkov was elated at the turn in the conversation. For the first time it seemed more dialogue than interrogation; not merely the conversation, but his entire life circumstance appeared to him to have palpably improved

in the last few minutes. A renewal of confidence surged in him. He felt himself becoming, again, the reserved Ulster professor, the man of learning whose strength derived from wisdom and maturity. And Mulvey, the man who he thought would be leveling accusations at him, was brought to the pass of soliciting his advice. This reversal, however undreamed of, was pleasant enough now to take charge of his thoughts.

Nevertheless, at the same time, there was, beneath the elation, a slight sense of ill-at-ease, a measure of confusion. What was Mulvey saying with his outburst and his veiled sneers? What business was it of his whether he knew or didn't know some fact or other of the life of this murdered girl? If, as was evidently the case, it was not an insinuation of guilt, not sleuthing, not a ploy, what, then, was it? What could it possibly be?

But he withdrew comfortably from the precipice of these thoughts to the safer region of Sergeant Mulvey's failure.

"Well, Sergeant, if she spent so much time in New York, then very possibly someone from New York was responsible. You can't be expected to conduct an investigation in New York." He heard the sound of his voice change to that of the paternal, knowledgeable, superior man. Even in such practical matters as this, he found himself thinking, men like Mulvey look to men like me. The word *virtue*, in the medieval sense, flitted very briefly through his mind.

"No," said the Sergeant. "It wasn't anyone from New York. I wish it were. I wish it were that easy."

"Well, how do you know? Who knows what she did there? Maybe she —"

"I know what she did there, Professor. She stayed with one of the richest, oldest families in New York. The daughter had been her best friend at finishing school. The chauffeur picked her up on Saturday afternoon, at two o'clock, at Grand Central Station. The two girls were inseparable for the next thirty hours. Saturday afternoon, a museum. Then dinner, and the opera or ballet. Sometimes escorted, usually not. Always unimpeachable men, absolutely untouchable. A drink at the Plaza, maybe two. Usually, dancing. Sunday, Central Park, the zoo, or another museum. Or wandering up and down the stairs of a five-story brownstone on East Seventy-second Street barefoot and bathrobed all day Sunday, sinking into the two-inch carpet, sipping coffee, reading the New York Times. Finally, the train back to Bolton at seven o'clock in the evening. Always the same. Never a questionable liaison. Never one single doubtful connection."

Mulvey paused and gazed out the office window briefly, then looked down at his shoes. "No, not New York," he said. "Here. Some cheap bum in this town. Some hopped-up high-school junkie, some Ulster Square wino, some poor perverted derelict who crawled out of a hole in the basement, some maniac, some inebecile, some man."

He sat down at his desk and began to handle his papers idly. He glanced again at the telephone, and stopped shuffling the papers. "Well, Professor, I've already taken too much of your time. You've got problems of your own, I'm sure. I want to thank you very much for coming. I won't be bothering you again. Please forgive any impoliteness. I'm very edgy."

"Not at all, Sergeant. Think nothing of it. Nothing at all."

Mulvey extended his large hand across the desk. "Thank you again, all the same. I believe you know the way out?"

Karkov rose and began to turn, but stopped himself. How could he leave, not knowing? It seemed settled, but could he be sure? Could he wait the days, weeks, until the murder was solved, wondering when the police would start to suspect him, when some vindictive secretary — anonymously, to protect herself — would call the police to "tip them off"? And suppose the murder were never solved? How many good nights' sleep would he have over the next few years?

But there was another side. Suppose it hadn't occurred to them? Suppose it never would? Could he risk planting the notion in Sergeant Mulvey's mind? Even if Mulvey didn't believe it, found it, even, ludicrous, he could seize on it as an answer to his difficulty. Mulvey was a man of the world, conceivably a ruthless man. Surely he was capable of it. Possibly. No. Ridiculous. Mulvey was a good, honest, reasonable man. He would sympathize. He would appreciate the awkwardness of the position. Hadn't Karkov just now sympathized with him? There was some common feeling now, a basis for understanding. Still, it could backfire, destroy him.

No, he thought at last with a jolt. I won't go out of here not knowing.

"Professor Karkov?" the policeman asked, wondering why he was lingering.

"Uh, yes, uh, I was just remembering something else I had meant to ask you about."

"Yes?"

"Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Of course," and he made the gesture.

"Well, it's something that's going on over at the college. Some of these students some sort of school-boy prank"

"Yes?"

"Well, for heaven's sake, Sergeant, these kids have been spreading rumors about me to the effect that they've been saying that I murdered Evelyn Seabrook. Now, you and I know that this is ridiculous. Nevertheless it could ruin my career. My position at the college isn't secure yet, you understand? Maybe you don't know the system. Anyway, take my word for it. If there should be an indictment, or even a serious investigation, it could very easily ruin my whole life. Well, well, what I want to know is, can you advise me as to what is likely to happen? How vulnerable am I? Do you think there might possibly be an investigation?"

Sergeant Mulvey looked at Professor Karkov as if he were thinking, "What an odd creature!" Also, he had a puzzled smile, as if he were meaning to humor him.

At last he said, "You fancy yourself a murderer, Professor?"

"You find this funny, I see."

"No, not funny really, just odd, a little odd." He was evidently trying to keep from smiling.

Karkov bristled. "I would consider it a favor if you would simply answer my question."

"Of course, Professor. I'm sorry. Yes, I know, I heard all about it. Ridiculous, to be sure, but then again in my business 'ridiculous' is very often not a helpful word. So, I looked into it. Strictly routine, you understand. No suspicion on my part whatsoever."

He began shuffling papers on his desk, this time deliberately. Karkov sat trembling, on the edge of his chair, holding his breath, hating the policeman's professional matter-of-factness.

"We—well," he stammered, "what did you find?"

"Well, as you know, Professor, the time of the murder has been fixed at between the hours of eight and ten on Monday evening. Because of that late class Miss Seabrook had been to, you remember, and because of the later discovery of her body by Daphne Hillman."

"Yes, I know. It was all in the papers. So?"

"So, where were you on Monday evening between the hours of eight and ten?"

"Home, working, as usual. But that's no alibi. I take out the garbage, I walk the dog. I don't live far from Miss Seabrook's."

"But you weren't home that evening, Professor." He paused and stared at Karkov. "You weren't home. You were at the Bolton Public Library, addressing two dozen citizens in the Monday Reading Circle on, let's see,

what was it? — ” He located and opened a file folder.

“My God,” said Karkov. “My God.”

“ yes, here it is. I can never find anything. ‘Burials in the Late Middle Iron Age: Gateway to the Life of Ancient Greece. ’”

“My God,” said Karkov again. “How could I have forgotten about it? How?”

“Easily,” Sergeant Mulvey said. “People forget things like that all the time.”

“But you don’t understand, Sergeant. I’ve spent the last twenty-four hours agonizing over whether I would be going on trial for murder. And the perfect alibi, which I had all along, never even entered my mind. Why didn’t I think of it? Why?”

“I don’t know, Professor. Guilty conscience, maybe?”

“What do you mean?”

“Relax. Just kidding.”

“Please, Sergeant, this is no time for joking.”

“Right. Sorry. You know, it’s a funny coincidence, it was one of those same Monday library lectures where I saw Evelyn Seabrook. That was the only time I saw her, alive, I mean.”

Professor Karkov looked surprised.

“My wife drags me along sometimes,” the Sergeant explained. “She belongs to the Ladies’ Library Volunteers, and so did Mrs. Seabrook, Evelyn’s mother. For her, I suppose, it was a sort of slumming. Anyway, she got the girl to come along and give some readings from the Classics, with interpretive remarks, you know.

“She was too badly beaten for me to have recognized her in her apartment Monday night. But as soon as I saw the picture, I remembered. Because at the time, at the lecture, I mean, I knew right away that she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, up close. My wife’s mistake for dragging me along.

“She read nice, you know. She made it sound alive. I read it in school, once. I had a year-and-a-half of college, you know — of course not Ulster. Anyway, back then, it was just so many meaningless words. But when she read it, it sounded like like Shakespeare, or the Bible maybe serious, but interesting. Powerful. Alive.

“Well, then an amazing thing happened. Amazing to me, anyway. She was reading something from one of those epics — the speech that some guy’s wife makes to him, you know, with their baby boy beside them, before he goes off to die in the battle.”

“Hector and Andromache.”

“Yeah, that’s it. Something like that. Well I knew it was quite a speech, but I didn’t expect what happened. She just started crying, near the end of it, up there in front of everyone. I mean, she wasn’t sobbing, but I saw the tears. Well, she stumbled, but didn’t stop. She just pushed right through it. When she finished the passage, she apologized. She said she should have known not to read that passage, she should have known that it would make her cry like that. Then she finished up with something light. Well, I never saw anything like that in all my life.”

“It’s true,” said Karkov. “It’s a very moving speech.”

“It’s too bad you didn’t get to know her, Professor. Quite a girl, if you ask me.”

Well, thought Karkov, the next time she comes around to the office, I’ll — and he remembered.

“I’ll tell you something else about her, Professor. One whole wall of her apartment was covered with drawings of animals she did herself — squirrels, owls, possums, robins, cats — snakes, even — all perched on the branches of this enormous wide tree with a great tangle of stretched, winding extensions. Nothing fancy, you know, no pretensions. Just cute little animals with big staring eyes.

“I suppose it’ll be painted over now. Yeah. Sure it will. Well, Professor, I guess I’ve answered your question. It’s nearly five and I haven’t made my phone call. I hope we meet again under more pleasant circumstances.”

As he walked back down the bare, shabby corridor, Gregory Karkov felt more like a child than ever. He felt ashamed of himself, foolish, confused, mocked, empty. He had spent a night and a day frantically prospecting for excuses to hide something he hadn’t done and wasn’t to be accused of. And he had forgotten that such an accusation would be impossible.

He stood now in the doorway of the large, dark lobby, preparing himself to go out. A light snow had been falling for an hour and the wind was gone. The air was so still that the big, slowly floating flakes fell straight to the ground without slanting to the right or left and without the least disorder. Nor did any move faster than another; all fell in a dense mass as if woven together, as if, together, they made up a great silky fabric, a white dewy gauze endlessly folding itself to the ground.

Through this veil, in the park opposite the police station, two small children, a boy and a girl, were playing. The boy was stuffing snow down the back of the girl’s dress and the girl was squeezing her head between her

fists and releasing intermittent, high-pitched, rhythmic shrieks into the freezing air. The shrieks sounded faint and ghostly over the snow and through the glass of the door.

Then, passing in front of the children, a couple, probably from the college, walked huddled together arm in arm across the snowy grass. They looked at each other frequently and looked at the sky and held their free hands palm up feeling the snow. Now they were laughing. They stopped abruptly. The girl stretched her body up to reach the boy's greater height and licked a snowflake from the end of his nose.

Karkov climbed carefully down the steps to his red Volkswagen, the top of which was already white with snow. It's getting dark, he thought almost aloud. My God.

He twisted into the car and closed the door. As he settled in, stopped moving, and felt the temperature change, his body began shaking. He shook and shook like a puppy doused in an icy lake and then saved from drowning. He was still somehow terrified, still not sure. His body was now out of his control. He couldn't move, he couldn't get up, he could only shake miserably.

He had forgotten to scrape the snow from the windows and it was dark and close in the little car. This is what it must be like, he found himself thinking, to be inside a coffin and still be living. This, he thought, was what his life was like. He sat alone or moved alone as if in a tiny snowbanked car, and outside there were people who were alive and saw and touched each other, but he couldn't see out and they couldn't see in.

All at once it seemed to him as if his life were over. At thirty-four he had become so thickly encapsulated that it had been impossible for him to reach out to or to be reached by a beautiful, brilliant woman in his tutelage. He seemed to sit alone, irrevocably removed from something, something he would now give half his life to encounter; something clear and bright and bracing like the still winter dusk, diaphanous and evanescent like the guaze of snow.

The light that filtered through the snow caked on the glass windows grew fainter and fainter. He leaned his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. He knew that he had succumbed to a feverish rush of feeling such as he had rarely felt. He tried hard to be still. He tried to listen to the snow falling against the roof, but it fell too softly to be heard.

His life appeared as if in a jumble of worn snapshots before his eyes. His eyes filled with tears. He watched the days, the evenings trickle down away from his eyes like the delicate drops slipping over his cheeks into his

mouth, or evaporating, vanishing into the air. He held his elbows, consciously, as if trying to comfort himself.

And through it all, in the back of his mind, for the first time in his memory, instead of a *mot*, or an insight, or a meaning, or a proposal, was a face; a warm, bemused, regretful, gentle, pitying woman's face; a mocking face, that smiled sadly and prettily at him from the yellowing front page of the *Photo-Courier*.

