Discord of the Barbarians

At first sight Sam was terribly disappointed. The apartment was filthy, tiny--only one bedroom--and covered with someone's mess. Sam wondered if there could be a mistake, but the key Amanda gave him had opened this lock, and the door had the number Amanda listed. Sam had met her in front of the college housing bulletin board, when she introduced herself as a fellow adjunct faculty member also looking for housing, and in possession of a hot prospect.

Sam started to back out, after the most cursory inspection. He felt he'd blundered into someone else's home.

He had barely gotten the door locked again--the tumbler was cranky and stiff--when Amanda, panting but hardly sweaty, jogged up the corridor.

"Sorry I'm late, honeybunch," she said. "Damn students took forever handing out the fookin mimeos." She caught Sam's expression. "This isn't the apt. It's the one across. There is a problem. Not with the apt or anything....

"Let me start at the beginning. Let's go in and sit down. Got a few minutes?"

"Sure," Sam said. He was taken with Amanda, his class was over, the next one wasn't till late afternoon, and the only other thing he had to occupy himself with, besides bereavement (bemoaning the loss of his ex boyfriend), was working on an article he was trying to publish. Not excerpted from his dissertation, for the time being. He couldn't stand to look at it anymore at this point.

"See," Amanda said, "this one's Pat's. He had...this building is owned by a Palestinian. It's got some code problems, which is one reason it's cheap, but mostly it's because Pat has been helping Ahmed--Ahmed Alajouanine [Amanda pronounced the fricative: Achmed Allah-zhewah-neen], beautiful name don't you think?--with various...." Amanda waved a hand. "Murph--Pat, that is--is holding the fort, helping out, while Ahmed renovates­-excellently, I might add. They’ve gotten to be very buddy­buddy. Well, this morning Pat discovered....

"Hmm, this is going to be tricky to explain. See, the Murph hasn't seen his neighbor in about a week, and this neighbor used to be around all the time. He'd stop by to talk to Pat--he was depressed apparently, about, well--the neighbor was, not Pat, though Pat--anyway the guy was always pretty visible, or at least audible. Kind of loud, in fact.

"Now, you don't have to worry about that, because...well, the thing is, Pat peered in the peephole, and he thinks--it gives this distorted kind of telescope perspective you know, but--....I don't know how else to say this: It looks to us like the tenant is in there but, well, hanging from the chandelier fixture, not to put too fine a point on it."

"Dead," Sam said stupidly. Partly, he was still absorbed in looking at Amanda. She was even prettier than he remembered, and she moved--danced--athletically with her interlocutor as she talked, in well-articulated bursts. Expressive face, lots of eye contact. Sam was perfectly capable of appreciating a member of the opposite sex, even if the appreciation came with little romantic or erotic content.

"Deceased," she said. "No longer among us. Passed away. Kicked the bucket. Joined his majority. Ex nihilo, ut nihilo." Catholic, Sam thought. Irish? Northern Italian? Slender non-Slavic face. "Sorry," Amanda amended. "Kind of grisly, isn't it?"

"So that's the apt we have our eye on," Sam said, trying to redeem himself.

"Absolutely," Amanda replied, delighted Sam seemed to be taking to the idea.

Sam's recent and still greatly lamented ex, James, had been an ER resident, so Sam had become accustomed to urban squalor. Besides, he didn't know this neighbor, hadn't seen the body, and he was fully used to the idea that apts one rents have been lived in before, not necessarily by upstanding citizens. Rarely, in the kind his finances had compelled.

"I'd still like to see it though, you know. Without its present chandelier, I mean." Amanda frowned. Too coldblooded? "I mean, it is kind of grisly," Sam said.

"Yeh. Well, but we might need some help first.”

"Pas de prob. I know there's no such thing as a free lunch. Whatcha have in mind?"

"OK," Amanda said. Her shoulders dropped, relaxing. "Pat called Ahmed, who's on his way over--"

The buzzer sounded. They both jumped slightly. The timing had been too perfect, and their minds were still half on the pendant tenant. They buzzed back and went out into the hall to meet the elevator.

Ahmed had the beak and flat amber eyes of a raptor. But his Tut-Ankh-Ahmen Semitic nobility of skull contrasted with deep laugh lines and a full-lipped, kind and humorous mouth. He wore a sweat shirt and dirty chinos with a tool belt.

Ahmed was not happy. He glared into the peephole with his raptor's eye, his scimitar nose pressed against the door.

"Sonbitch," he said. "Pat right. Ach, Muhammad. Sonbitch."

Sam and Amanda looked at each other.

"How I gonna get that stiff outa my apt. Ach." Ahmed continued to peer fiercely into the door.

Amanda cleared her throat. "Don't you need to call the police?” she asked. "An ambulance?"

"Ambulance!" Ahmed said. "You pay? I don't think so! No. Ahmed pay. What, you think they rescue? Hanging there maybe days, girlie." Ahmed pulled his head back to glare at Amanda. "Big optimist, you Americans. Death optional." Ahmed put his eye to the peephole again. "He dead, girlie. No ambulance. Cost two hundred bucks ambulance. Sonbitch."

"Well, the police are free, aren't they?" Amanda asked, nettled.

"Later, later, police. Love to break down door, then mad too much work, so ask questions about building, want to know who owns, inspection...."

"But you own it, don't you?"

"Shhhh, who says?" Ahmed pulled his head back from the peephole again. "Say, Pat told me you OK, not gabby. Otherwise no apt for you, girlie. You shootin off mouth maybe?"

"No no absolutely not."

"All right then." Ahmed put his eye back to the hole, as if it might offer some solution. He glared at his late tenant.

"But don't you have a key, a passkey?"

"No. Miserable sonbitch want 'privacy.' Pay full rent, get privacy. His own lock, dammit. Good lock too. Fox. Big bar model, even."

"Couldn't a locksmith get in?"

"Locksmith? You think I made of money, girlie. Locksmith 40 bucks."

"Break down the door."

"Cost more than lock, replace door. Listen, hold tongue, girlie. I gotta think...."

Sam and Amanda looked at each other, intimidated.

Ahmed glared into the peephole.

"I got it" he exclaimed. "Gimme Pat's key. No, I use mine."

They trooped back into Pat's apt. Ahmed pried open its stuck kitchen window with a huge screwdriver he pulled from his toolbelt. He leaned out the window.

"Ah," he said. "You see. Balcony only twelve feet."

"Yeah," said Sam. Amanda had decided to keep quiet. "Twelve feet but also five floors up. Batman don't come cheap either, you know."

"Humorist. You want apt?" Ahmed snarled.

"Absolutely," Sam said. Amanda had elbowed him angrily.

"You want apt, you help remove stiff."

"Yeah, Sam," Amanda said, her sense of humor overcoming her fear of queering the deal. "Not even Ahmed would rent us a place with no key, a locked door and a cadaver."

"Yah, you have good laugh, girlie. No help, no apt. Laughing I don't care. Serious tenant, comedian tenant, what the hell, if pay rent, keep mouth shut, help landlord."

"Absolutely," Sam and Amanda said.

"OK. We go roof. First get rope in basement. Tie rope to chimney. Swing across to balcony. Jimmy door. Easy. Warped, only latch. Cost nothing. Besides, can fix. You wait. I get rope."

Amanda and Sam sat down on Pat's couch, after dumping his laundry on the floor.

"Gee," Amanda said. "You gotta be impressed. He loses Palestine; after 20 years labor he earns and borrows enough to buy a building; he talks a bank into lending him a mortgage in a bad neighborhood; he pays it off bit by bit; he buys a second building; the neighborhood starts to gentrify. Meanwhile he supports the PLO too, according to Pat. So he's worth maybe a mill by now, maybe two, he's 60, and he's rappelling the crumbling north face of his building over a 50 foot drop onto cement and a spiked railing: to save 40 bucks."

"I guess that's how he got rich."

"'The rich are not like you and I,'" Amanda and Sam quoted in unison.

"But aren't you an optimist, Amanda? I mean, how come you're so sure he intends to be the rappeller? rappellant?"

"Why, the same reason you are, bubela. I'd do most anything for a fab cheap apt in Boston, but I won't put out--and it ain't like it never came up--and no Alpinism with home-made gear and amateur teammates."

Sam watched the rope from the roof. It made him dizzy to look over the edge, but it seemed small-minded to complain in view of Ahmed's wiry body swinging back and forth below him, trying to generate enough momentum to bridge to the balcony. Amanda pushed Ahmed from Pat's window each time he swung by. It was like boosting a toddler on a swing, except the angle was bad. Ahmed reached the balcony, scrabbled with his feet, lost traction. He began again.

The next time he let go, and dropped onto the balcony. It held. Ahmed looked awkward, his paunch shook with the jar, but his stringy body appeared remarkably agile for his age.

Sam lowered Ahmed's crowbar, after pulling the rope back up. He decided not to watch the procedure.

After a bit, Ahmed said, "Hey, girlie!"

Sam looked over the edge again, his curiosity overcoming his fear of heights. Amanda stuck her dark head out Pat's window.

"Listen, girlie," Ahmed said. His face was wreathed in smile. His full lips revealed terrific white teeth. Now he looked more like a mask of comedy, or somebody's jovial uncle at Christmas, than a bird of prey. "I got French door open a crack here, but too fat to slide in. You slim, beautiful women. Swing over, slide in, save money, not break brass latch. Antique."

"Ahmed, you're out of your gourd. I told you I'm not swinging over! And then what, I cut down the corpse?"

"No no. Open door from inside. Then we call police. No. Maybe you right, cut down stiff. Make lazy police happy. Cover stiff with sheet. Look nice. Say prayer maybe? No, police not hear anyway. Besides, stiff infidel. Filthy Christian.

"Say, girlie, how about? Swing over, open door, you go, Sam and I finish, plus I forget security deposit. Just for you."

Amanda looked at him. She was grinning. "Hell," she said. "I have to admit that kind of looked like fun. Knock 20 bucks off my rent too, and it's a deal....

“Come on," she coaxed. "You know it's not just the latch. You'll have to crack the whole door. Try replacing a hardwood French door nowadays."

"Five," Ahmed said sourly.

"OK. Two minutes. Have to change. Entertain him, would you, Sam?" Amanda's head disappeared.

Ahmed groaned.

"So, Ahmed," Sam said. “What do you think of the Intifada? Going pretty good, no?"

Ahmed groaned again.

Amanda appeared on the roof. She was still wearing jeans and her silk shirt, but she'd changed her pumps for Italian climbing boots, and she had a coil of red nylon line and a belt over her shoulder, a brace of pitons in one hand, and a mountaineer's hammer in the other. She dropped the gear on the asphalt roof. She picked out two pitons and the hammer. She walked over to the cement retaining wall, stuck her head over and said, "Won't be a sec, Ahmed."

Ahmed groaned.

She slammed the pitons into the cement, tested them, and cleated the line fast to a carabiner. She hopped up on the wall, slung the line round her butt and backed off the roof. She bounced twice and joined Ahmed on the balcony.

The breeze ruffling Sam's hair, high up on the asphalt roof, smelled of car fumes and exhausted deep-fry oil. "Listen, guys," he called. "I wish I could stay for the finale, but I got a class. Hope you don't mind, but they sack you if you miss one, I been told." Sam felt queasy. Hanging over this drop didn't seem to be the right prep for inhaling corpse gas in sealed apts.

"Listen, chickenshit," Amanda said. She was pretty sure Sam was lying. "Poop out now if you must, but if you want the apt you're gonna be here with a check by six. 400 smackers. First month security, as described above. You wuss."

"Please," said Sam. "I'm a wimp. You're the wuss." He sensed Amanda felt daunted herself--though to Sam the mortuary work seemed no worse than the urban mountaineering—and that she longed for company. Well, try sugar instead of vinegar next time, girlie. I admire them azure eyes piercing their bosky ambush, but I'm not your natural prey.

Too bad.

Or maybe not. Maybe he should become a monk. At least for a while. "You're irresistible, Amanda," he said.

"Yeah," Ahmed added, brushing the chit-chat aside. "Money on barrel. Six PM. And keep mouth shut too. Otherwise..." Ahmed made a throat-cutting gesture. "PLO." His hawk nose and eyes glared at Sam. Ahmed's voice had dropped to hoarse conspiratorial sibilance, easily heard from Sam's spot on the roof 17 feet overhead. "You pay rent first of month; keep mouth shut; no night phone: 'toilet broke, window broke.' You fix. No day phone either. So: pay rent, help landlord, shut mouth."

Sam made a mouth-zipping gesture. "Absolutely," he said.

The apt was indeed up to Amanda's advertisement. It was ramshackle, yes. The plaster walls needed paint and had cracks. The fixtures were antique. The oak floors were dirty and had spaces between the planks. The window sashes and weights were old or fallen. Many windows were hardly or not at all openable. The marble fireplace had been bricked shut and then crowbarred open again.

But the basics were there. The place was roomy, light, high-ceilinged, central--if in a "changing" neighborhood--and most of all cheap.

And Sam was pleased to find that his two roommates had already adopted many of his own thrifty student ways. They had even invented money shaving shifts of their own.

Teaching part time they could expect to make between 1200 and 2000 a course. They could teach four courses a semester at various places, and with luck another couple in the summer. Or unemployment comp.

$16,000 didn't go far in Boston, even in 1980. And that was the max, subject to availability of courses and whims of administrators. No health care, retirement or other fringes. Nevertheless 60% of college faculty nationwide (more now) was “adjunct." They had the advantages of being cheap and easy to hire and fire, and the disadvantages of being furious and starving.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the equation, students can’t afford the ever rising tuitions or repay their student loans. Where in the middle is all that loot disappearing to?

Amanda had already posted cleaning duties. Her name was already on the buzzer. Amanda Nuss, in a strong, somewhat spiky hand. She and/or Pat had begun moving in the requisite Salvation Army and street-found furn, so the place looked orderly and comfortable. The state of Pat's room intimated that he was not to be counted on, domestically, but two out of three was sufficient, in Sam's experience.

Having received his Ph. D. in English Lit. from Harvard-­ from, except for Yale's, the premier English department in the world--being personable of mien, affable in manner, nowise defective, eager to work and industrious in making application for same, it had been with some surprise that Samuel Sheave had found himself finally on the faculty of R. Pitt Jr. College. Armpit Jr. And part time at that. The industry of higher education was in a hell of a state. A Ponzy scheme, educating students to replace faculty who weren’t going anywhere.

Sam had sent cover letters and CVs to every school in the Boston area. He'd paused between the onerous bouts of typing to lie on his plywood bed, cover his head with a sheet and weep.

Then he'd lapse into fitful naps troubled by strange dreams. His ex, James Peakin (already on his way out) had been unsympathetic. He told Sam to grow up and, in fact, be more of a man. While this hurt, Sam felt no resentment, for he felt James was right.

Sam had interviewed unsuccessfully in several places, but there'd been one school whose telephone and mail systems he'd never been able to penetrate. The phone would ring, on a weekday at 10:30, for 20 or 30 rings. Once a snappish West Indian voice answered, "What Department?"

"Uh, the Academic Dean?"

"No such department," the voice replied with a triumphant island lilt, and Sam was cut off. He later discovered that this operator was the only one who ever deigned to interrupt her chatting to answer the switchboard's myriad cheerful rings--but she operated on reward and punishment. One false answer or hesitation and she'd hang up. Sweepstakes winners who did satisfy her were either misconnected, thrown into the eternal silent limbo of hold, or sentenced to intercourse with a cognitively and speech-challenged student secretary, whose nominal function and location Sam never did discover.

R. Pitt Jr. was reorganizing. Even more than usual. A small Catholic institution run by the Christian Brothers "and the lay faculty," it had filed for well-deserved bankruptcy the year before.

One morning, however, as Sam and James had driven through a seedy neighborhood on their way to Plum Island beach, they chanced by sheer good luck to spot Armpit's creaky swinging sign

R. Pitt Junior

The F iendly C llege

hanging over the entryway-cum-parking lot of a straggle of ramshackle buildings cheek by jowl with various unprosperous- looking businesses and a number of junk food establishments.

Within the "Ad. Building," Sam was told by a student ineptly disguised as a secretary that he could find the "Dean of Academics" somewhere in the Library, reorganizing. The student's wit in so aptly translating Sam's phrase “Academic Dean," though admirable, was the less stupendous for the fact that the position had been so named the week before. Re-naming all the positions had been a major focus of the rehabilitation being enjoyed by R. Pitt Jr.

The library proved to be a large unkempt room off the main hall, where folks were discussing their various businesses at the top of their lungs, or scurrying around with books, papers or more usually other objects in their arms. Sam was drawn to one immaculate corner which boasted some well-ordered bookshelves and a large desk with a neatly squared-off sign plate which read George Packrat/Librarian. A small bespectacled figure was vigorously employing a hand-held vacuum to add to the din.

"Excuse me? Sir?" Sam said. "Do you know where I might find the Dean of Academics?"

"Students are not permitted in this section of the Library," the vacuumer replied.

This was a natural mistake, as Sam was wearing a tank top and jeans rather than his interviewing suit. On his way to the beach he'd hoped merely to drop off a CV with a secretary.

"I am not a student. I am applying for a teaching position.”

"Why?" George replied. "Oh, never mind. She's over there somewhere." He gestured vaguely in the direction of a herd of desks. He turned his back, and his vacuum back on, firmly, stooping so its mouth could reach the rug.

Deep in the distant jungle of desks sat a female gnome with a hairy stack of disordered papers before her. Dean Margerine was one of the ugliest women Sam had ever seen. She was tiny, at least in height and bone structure, but enormously fat. Five by five. She ported large magenta glasses which continuously slipped down to the end of her nose, so that she could never see really well. Her paste-on red nails also looked like they'd slipped to the end of her fingers and were about to fall off.

She wore a mumu. A fuchsia Hawaiian tent. Her face was twisted in two different directions by, respectively, an enormous hook nose and an enormous lower lip, flaky with glaucous pink lipstick.

She had, however, a benign aspect. Sam noticed whenever he caught her eye that it seemed surreptitiously fixed on his bare, swimmer's shoulders.

The interview went well. That is, it didn't feel at the time to Sam as if it had, but he was later hired. Few junior faculty at Armpit ever wore a full suit except George Packrat, who never wore anything else.

Except for George's tiny manicured oasis, the college was in sad shape. The halls looked like city streets during garbage strikes. Orange peels, cigarette butts and aluminum cans lay in tidal heaps along the walls, nestling into stacks of Leader Magazine and smaller, less distinct filth of all kinds. The rooms smelled each of some different disagreeable substance. Their rugs were scruffy as well as damp.

On the Thursday night before the Monday that classes were to begin, Sam was phoned by the Dean, who told him a full-timer had taken another job, leaving two sections of English Composition Sam could have. When Sam answered the phone, she'd originally asked for another name, but Sam had recognized her distinctively wobbly voice. There was some further confusion until she figured out who he was. Sam assumed she was calling from a list. The first applicant at home got the job.

Sam asked about the syllabus. Margerine wasn't sure if one had really been devised yet, but she did know they'd sent for material from The NY Times. They'd use the newspaper because the college specialized in media training. TV mostly, but....Sam wanted to meet with her before he began. The Dean said she'd have absolutely no time until, “ah, eight AM Monday.” A half hour before his class. Her office was on the same floor.

Margerine was unspeakably busy the entire time Sam knew her, reorganizing. This never seemed to include working on course syllabi or on hiring faculty or on any of the things Sam had formerly assumed were the responsibilities of a Dean of Faculty. (Her title was changed again.) Margerine was always on the phone; often, seemingly, to distraught parents. There could be little doubt that organizing, much less reorganizing, strained her faculties to their limits.

At ten of eight Monday morning Sam bicycled under the creaking R. Pitt Junior/The F iendly C llege and entered the "Annex Classroom Building," of which Armpit rented the eighth floor. He took the elevator up. No one was there.

Around the perimeter of the floor's open central space were office cubicles through which one had to pass to reach classrooms. Faculty and administrator's doors were thus "always open" to students.

This arrangement had been specially designed and executed during the last reorganization, probably by the last President, Robert Pitt. No one was sure. It was impossible to ask Pitt, since he had absconded with some funds just before the latest bankruptcy, during the interregnum period when faculty and staff stole books and office machinery in lieu of salary, and students stole whatever they could in lieu of instruction.

Pitt was still, however, viewed as the college's great benefactor. He had given it his name during the previous reorganization, moved it from another part of town, and obtained funding to keep it going.

The new benefactor President was to be officially sworn in later that semester, as soon as his check cleared. Until then he'd merely be acting President, although he was already regarded as the man who had single-handedly, perhaps along with Dean Margerine, saved R. Pitt Jr by reorganizing it out of bankruptcy.

In the floor's open middle space lay a massy jumble of desks, chairs, blackboards, wastebaskets, file cabinets, book cases, boxes of books, loose papers, tied-up papers, fragments of paper, blotters, piles of Leader Magazine and several bent, blackened spoons from which students or visitors had prepared themselves fixes. In one corner stood a large number of electric typewriters for the typing class. Unaccountably, none seemed to have been carried off. Later, Sam wondered if that was because they didn't work.

It became 8:15. Sam was still completely alone. His stage fright increased. He could feel sweat trickling down his sides. The floor was unairconditioned and unventilated. It smelled of wet ashes and chemicals, like an electrical fire put out by water. Sam began to entertain a creepy fantasy that some untoward urban disaster had occurred. A neutron bomb attack. Aliens.

At 8:25 Sam decided to descend the elevator, if only to make sure Boston was still extant.

The elevator did not come.

At 8:40 Sam heard banging. He went to investigate. Behind the rear firedoor stood a disheveled individual, apparently a building manager or super, and two raggedy young assistants.

The former proved to be Ears, Armpit's technical and media advisor, professor of video studies, chairman of Black studies and super. His shaven head and collarless dashiki served to emphasize the widestanding appendages for which he was named. Ears was generally quiet and obliging, but also prone to attacks of temper, during which he regressed to Black Power rhetoric. Happily, once he subsided he held no grudges.

Presently he was shouting at Sam through the glass door. The elevator had broken down. Sam hadda let him in! Ears had removed a fragment of cardboard from a broken corner of the wire window so he could stoop down and apply his mouth to the resulting aperture.

Sam began to push on the door's fire alarm handle, but Ears gesticulated wildly. His bent position made it difficult for Sam to decipher his meaning. His waving was causing his voice to warble, and the lumbagoed signals were equally unclear. Sam froze. He realized Ears was pleading for him to stop pushing.

"Naw," Ears screamed, "doan touch it. You hunky mo-ron! Th'alarm'll bring fire trucks, po-lice, the fire de-partment, inspectors and Ah doan know who all. "This buildin look inspected, you redneck leftass peckerwood? Look to you like it am goin pass, you witless foo­ el? Want 'em to close us down? Who gone pay yo salary then, jiveass?"

Ears motioned Sam to the front of the building. He and his Chaplinesque assistants disappeared. But the front staircase was identical, except that Ears and his assistants weren't behind the glass fire door.

Sam awaited instruction.

From out of the depths of the echoing building he heard tromping feet. After what seemed to him like a long time (Sam's watch was broken and he was no longer in sight of the one over the elevator, which in any case he no longer trusted) Ears & Co. reappeared, panting and further besweat.

Sam pointed out by means of dumb show that this door was similarly equipped with an alarm.

"S'all right," Ears panted. "This'n busted."

Admitted, Ears proceeded to the elevator.

The assistants remained behind, staring at Sam. The peculiarity of their dress was that it had obviously been clean and respectable not long ago. Their clothes weren't old and greasy but torn and besmirched. The youths seemed to have survived a recent disaster rather than to be habitually derelict. They asked Sam who he was. Sam explained that he was a teacher at R. Pitt.

It appeared that they were his students. They had been trapped in the elevator and had escaped through its roof with Ears' assistance, after he responded, without haste, to the alarm.

It was by now well after his class was supposed to start, but rather than attempting to teach them English Composition, Sam went to see what Ears was up to. The students tagged along.

Ears had just finished inspecting the elevator door. Having determined that the elevator was broken, he was headed toward an enormous walk-in safe which Sam had missed. Ears eyed Sam and the students suspiciously, and hid the combination lock with his body.

The safe was room-sized. Big enough for, say, all the typewriters. In it were some two-by-fours and Ears' tool chest. He clomped off with this, muttering "Ears fixit."

The elevator never again operated during the time Armpit used this building, which was re-organized out of Armpit's sphere the next semester.

Sam went to his classroom with his two students. Others began to trickle in, distraught. They had been led into the building through the side door, had traversed the parking garage, climbed the rear stairs to the empty fourth floor, traversed that to the front stairs, and climbed until they reached the defective fire door which had admitted Ears. This was to be the new access to Armpit's classes.

The back stairs were dimly lit by an occasional filthy window, and the fourth floor had glimmers of light across most of it, but the final four flights were climbed in utter darkness.

It may have been the only time many of the students and faculty had ever experienced a total absence of light.

Black nights and most dark rooms have some faint source of illumination. These stairs had none. A hand in front of your face was invisible, and only perceptible when it touched your nose. Objects no matter how large could only be perceived by the eyeball at the point when they hit it. Climbing students had no more vision than blind rats. They felt their way up the roughly plastered or decaying walls, stepping slowly so as not to trip over any debris.

Even the stoutest-hearted flatly refused to climb in groups of less than eight. They emerged to class squinting, blinking and dazed.

Sam's class finally assembled, or as much of it as ever met at any one time. Sam had no idea what to teach them or even what to say. He assigned an essay on their first impressions of R. Pitt.

This was a dangerous mistake, which would have been avoided by a more experienced or less rattled teacher. The assignment encouraged some students to focus their rancor and terror--the anxiety closing in on them. Others, who had no place else to go, R Pitt being their last resort, seemed determined to make the best of things, but they were clearly rattled too. "A bumer," was the consensus.

In theory, Sam's class consisted of 40 students. They ranged from one who wrote at college level to one who had trouble forming script. There seemed to Sam to be no way to teach so many and various students all something. The responsibility made him feel panicky.

Further, at any given class only 15 or 20 were in attendance, not always the same ones. Sam supposed that at one time or another he saw probably 35 or so. Some only once, so it was difficult to be sure.

He only saw twice, for example, the schizophrenic who wrote, in her first essay, "The walls they was all in a disorder. Man was more afraid of himself than of any being in this world or any other." This was actually a precise, even poetic, description of the experience of climbing the front stairs, but other parts of the essay were uninterpretable, even for a Joyce scholar like Sam, because they all referred in similar fashion to other private experiences, to which Sam held no similar key. Even a fan of high modernism had to admit her writing was incomprehensible.

The second time Sam saw this student was the last week of the semester, when she came to inquire how she could make up the course work she had missed. Sam was by that time more experienced, and less prone to assuming every student's failures were his own responsibility to overcome, so he gave the student a list of all the assignments the class had completed. Sam never saw her again, in this world or any other.

The material from The NY Times never appeared. Sam gathered that he was on his own. Dean Margerine was still too busy reorganizing to attend to curriculum or teaching problems.

Sam abandoned The Times. He did not like to read it himself. He assigned a book of humorous American short stories instead. Sam liked the Thurber pieces, and besides, this was the only English book the bookstore already had in stock. Even so, it was well into the third week before most students had a copy.

Sam, if not his students, learned much about humor from this experience. For example, if you take a funny story entirely seriously, it tends to be terribly depressing. About anxiety, incompetence, danger, feelings of inadequacy, failures, interpersonal tragedies, missed communication, desertion of loved ones, contempt, terror, loathing and despair.

After a while, his students refused to read any more. Life at Armpit was depressing enough without such gruesome reading.

Sam acquiesced. He'd already come to feel heartless, trying to get them to laugh at these fearful incidents of human misery. Besides, when challenged, he found it impossible to prove that the stories were, or were intended to be, funny.

So his hollow, forced laughter came increasingly to seem like "inappropriate affect" in the psychiatric sense. .Sam felt his grip on reality weakening.

Perhaps the deconstructionists were right. He'd never realized how disorienting it would be to eschew "the intentional fallacy" entirely. Who could prove what any of these sentences was really supposed to mean? Without being prescriptive and arbitrarily authoritarian?

Sam decided on some children's books, for example, “The Cat in the Hat Comes Back.” Even more vociferous complaints erupted, for now the students had to pay for another book. Besides, with a third curricular failure in the offing, they sensed the hand on the tiller wasn't firm. They had Sam on the run.

As the most junior of Armpit's faculty, Sam had drawn early classes, so long before the parking lot began to fill he'd bike under the crooked R. Pitt Junior/The F iendly C llege, lock his bike to the railing by the front door and cross the alley to begin his climb. In cooler weather he meant to run up. Swimming didn't maintain the legs, nor could you bike much in a Boston winter.

His classroom was long and narrow, lined on one side by a bank of windows overlooking a busy street. This made the acoustics tricky. At one end of the room was a raised platform, whose restricted space the teacher shared with a large wobbly lectern and a one-and-a-half life sized statue of Armpit's patron St Pessary.

Sam found him unnerving, but the other teachers seemed to have grown accustomed to his watching over their shoulders. Sam remembered that Joyce once said there are two kinds of public statues. The first, arms folded, chin in hand, says, "How do I get down from here?" The second, arm outstretched, says, "In my day the shit was piled yea high."

St Pessary seemed to be saying both. And his severe expression suggested that if he did get down he'd show how to deal with this modern low-level shit without further ado. Sam had the unconscious feeling that he taught in the presence and under the gaze of a much more competent person than himself

After his first classes, Sam tottered home exhausted to his new apt to nap. He hadn't even formally met Pat Murphy. Their busy paths hadn't yet crossed. Murph was not infrequently napping as well, if not singing ribald Irish songs over his glass on the kitchen table while Sam slept. Sam would come to find that a constant stream of verbiage or at least noise issued from Pat--or so it seemed to Sam's laconic American ear. Amanda rarely came home till late.

One day in the second week of classes, better accustomed, Sam looked forward to repairing to his just assigned office--his first professional office. The street seemed slightly less noisy today, his students slightly more tractable. Sam had momentarily attracted their attention. Even the sleazy Twiggy look-alike, Angela LaVeglia, had glanced up from her study of her make-up and his crotch. Even Louis Russo only required four explanations of why his sentence was a fragment. Today Russo's droopy St.Bernard eyes seemed lit, though dully, with something (perhaps not thought) other than a doggy concern for approval: he assumed grades were based solely on whether Teach liked him. Sam was glad Russo had asked a question rather than nodding perfunctorily.

In fact Sam was feeling so benign that Russo succeeded once again in touching him with those plangent downturned eyes and near-shaven head, with his resemblance to a puppy who is sad and uncertain because he is unable to grasp his master's commands. Today Sam did not even suspect Russo of acting. It had even come to seem normal that Russo came to class expecting stroking rather than info.

As Sam walked back across the street under the creaking sign, he imagined his office as a book-lined sanctuary. He planned to spend a half hour or so there marking papers, before emerging, refreshed, to meet some of the other faculty.

When he entered the small room he discovered he would be able to do both at once. For the first thing that met his eye was an immaculate small desk near the only window, in front of which sat George Packrat, in his home away from home. George was glaring through his glinting specs at the room's other occupant, his mortal enemy and Sam's second bit of luck, his new roommate Patrick Murphy. A jovial, witty, humorous, learned, sloppy, quick-tempered, burly, bearded and fantastical Irish-American, Pat looked unfazed by Armpit. He was, as usual, smoking a foul pipe. It dropped ashes over his ancient tweeds, to which a few strange-looking feathers also clung.

"Give it up, George," Pat was saying cheerily. His substantial brogues, tied with bits of string, rested comfortably on his littered desk. "You can't keep all the Library books in here. I concede they'll fit, and also that the students don't need them, but I won't bloody have them. We're cramped and musty enough as it is. I'll throw every last one out the window, and you with, you ruddy sodomite."

"I think it's mean of you. Just because I wouldn't let you keep those nasty birds in here. Going to the potty on the rug."

"Pedigreed Peregrine Falcons, you nit, not that that means anything to you, and I'd've kept them here anyway if you hadn't threatened to poison them, you dirty-minded little weasel. Hypocrite. The nerve of mentioning the Humane Society in practically the same breath...humph." Sam had never heard this noise actually articulated, as opposed to printed in the pages of an old novel. He felt enlightened.

George scowled. His beady bespectacled eyes squinted up at Pat's face only when Pat turned to Sam, after Sam coughed nervously and introduced himself.

"Oh sorry," said Pat, extending a bearish paw. "Pat Murphy here. My new housemate," he said to George. "Have you met? Ah, I see." He turned back to Sam. "Didn't mean to cut you. Thought you were a ruddy student, you see. Sit. Unlax thysef. Partake of the viands and comestibles. Store thy Urim and Thummim, thy Lares and Penates."

Sam asked Pat what he taught.

"Teach? Why man this isn't Harvard. I keep a brace of the English Comp menageries orderly, if that's what you mean."

George snorted. This creaky noise opened another of their interminable wrangles, which Pat seemed to enjoy as much as they made George acid. George burped quietly but desperately as Pat harangued him. Acrid pipe smoke curled and settled onto the musty rug like a slovenly neutered tom.

Seated, grade book and text stowed, Sam felt himself becoming drowsy in the close atmosphere of the moldy, peeling little room. Pat and George's voices ran on, bebop chase fours on baritone and alto.

Sam's head jerked as he heard Pat's bearish growl voicing his name.

"What aboot it, have you?" Pat was saying. Sam's instant replay, perfected over years of schooling, informed him that Pat was talking about lunch.

"Glad to," Sam said. He staggered to his feet, pretending he hadn't dropped off. It's odd, he thought groggily, how no one will ever admit he's been caught napping or drunk. Even midnight phone calls, begun with the idiot salutation, "Are you awake?" are answered equally foolishly.

Sam was glad Pat's previous sentence had contained the word “lunch,” as his playback mechanism only encompassed five or ten seconds. For example, if, instead of asking Sam directly, his high school teachers had been shopping a question round the class, Sam's replay used to deliver only the stumbling of the previous student. Not that he was complaining. This neurological feature had probably adapted him to his career--heretofore student--though that adaptation now appeared a mixed blessing. At best.

Still struggling for alertness, Sam was forced momentarily to duck his head between his legs to stop its swimming. The linoleum might have once been a swirly, bowling ball green. It was hard to tell.

Meanwhile, they had passed out of the room. Sam turned down the hall toward the front entrance under the hanging sign.

"Not that way," said Pat. "Come along. You weren't headed for the cafeteria, were you? Wake up, man. It's bloody poisonous. Besides, there are students there." Pat shuddered.

They passed through a small door and down a disheveled stairway, cobwebbed and loaded with piles of scrap building material and stacks of Leader Magazine as well as the usual orange peels and blackened spoons. There was a clattering noise coming from the bottom of the stairwell, but by the time Sam and Pat arrived below there was nothing but a marijuana cloud.

"Funny," said Pat, counter-attacking with a puff of foul pipe smoke. "I wonder why they ran. Never have before." He pushed his way carefully out the back exit, poking his head cautiously out the door first.

"Enfilade. Coast clear," he said.

They walked down the alley and turned through a little park to a greasy spoon. Sam saw that Amanda had already occupied the corner booth by the window overlooking the park. The manager scowled at Pat. Sam put it down to urban manners.

“Couplee three humbooglers, loaded," Pat ordered. "Everything else is an instant cure for constipation," he stage-whispered to Sam. "Disgustipating."

Sam looked around. Fabulous pressed tin ceiling. Art deco lead-in-glass upper windows. The place had seen better days, and a more appropriate menu, obviously. A find, in its undiscovered way.

Pat leaned back and sighed, pulling out a flask. The bench's vaguely maroon vinyl had a crescent-shaped tear repaired with duct tape.

"Unlax thysefs. I'm exhaustipated mesef...Stomach medicine?" he rumbled, pouring a couple ounces of rye into each of their water glasses. "Ah, a respite from the daily round of aggravated exacerbation. Were it not for the wretched food. Himboggers. Plato Nacional." He breathed deeply of the poultry-fouled oil. "Aaah."

"Why eat here, then?"

"Ah, they're free, ya see. I won a contest. In the noosepooper. Unlimited free Humbuggers for self and 'fambly.' Very liberated, small-type definition of family too--'sharing same living space.' Amanda, that means, and now you. When accompanied by responsible adult only, of course. Yours truly, that is to say, Patrick Aloysius Xavier Murphy, lineal descendent of Kings....

"It gets depressing, needless to remark, bekfast, loonch and dinner Humebuglers, but adjunct faculty can't be choosers."

Sam was impressed. "I'd like to donate a quid pro,' he said. He was admiring Amanda more than ever. She could listen as well as occupy center stage. Amused bright eyes. She was leaning slightly forward, attentive. "This is a boon, to be sure," Sam added. "Between this and the cheap rent, one might almost keep body and soul together."

"Were it not for the propensity of the latter to escape," Pat replied. "But you can do something for me, actually."

"Give it a name." Sam felt himself falling into the Irish cadence. He'd spent most of two years reading Joyce texts, Joyce letters, Joyce notebooks, Joyce bios, Dublin newspapers. It was exhilarating to participate in the flesh.

He wondered about Pat's true connection with the auld sod, but then Joyce himself could play the stage Irishman. Any Irishman with an education, and many without, could do an Irish comic turn, Sam imagined. And he'd find that Pat could mimic any number of accents. Not to mention, speak his own private, if infectious, tongue. Amanda called it Murphspeak or Patalk.

"Perhaps I can suggest something," Amanda said.

"Might it have something to do with housework?" Sam asked, blinking at her politely.

"The thing is..." Pat said. "We have a cleaning schedule, yes? which Amanda adeptly posted and organoozled?"

"Inarduous, really," Sam said. “Sweeping, the kitchen, john, baff. Maybe an hour a week, polishing the silver. I've seen it, and discussed it with Amanda, needless to say."

"For some reason, though, I hate it. It depresses me. In the owld counthry it war women's work. Now, I know that isn't fair or liberated, now that women are gainfully employed, but I somehow have, even so, taken on and retained the sensibility, all the same, not of your enlightened American man, but of your enlightened modern American woman: horsework, cookink, care o chirrun and the like are beneath my dignity.

"Now, consciously, literally, you know, I don't argue that's right, but...we were speaking of the soul..."

"Say no more, Pat. Say no more. Boogers in exchange for horsekeeping. Done."

"A man after my own heart."

Sam had already assumed that, given the state of Pat's room, Pat wasn't going to be conscientious about his share anyway. Sam calculated that in fact he was taking over, not Pat's third, but merely half of it. Pat's third would have devolved on him and Amanda anyway. So her share--now become his--of Pat's duties was a mere sixth. Half an hour's work. In the labor-intensive adjunct economy, worth far fewer Humbiggles than promised. Not that Sam loved boggers. Even good ones.

Tactfully changing the subject, Sam asked Pat what area of literature he'd specialized in, mentioning his own thesis on Joyce.

"Literature?" Pat asked. "Literature? Are you interested in litrachoor? Unusual hobby. We had a fellow here a few years back was interested in literature. Or was it sculpture? Can't remember anymoo. Best keep it to thysef round the Kludge, I'd say. Senior fac might feel you be puttin' on airs. They resent one presuming to rise from one's place, ya know. Insubordinate. Hobbies are for the idle rich. Like themselves: three Lit classes taught from the sere and yellow notes; no need to publish."

"Hired help for the housekeeping," Sam said. "--No, just kidding. It's a good deal. Thanks, really. And good advice. What else accounts for your success?"

"Show up in time for all your classes and lick everyone's ass. Proffered or not. That's my advice to you, me bhoy. You'll be President in no time. If Amanda don't beat you. She's got the scam."

Sam looked at Amanda.

"Women's Studies," she said. "Actually, cultural studies was my special field, but WS is the lay of the land now."

"And a fine lie to play it is," Pat said. "Tis to be sure. Amanda did history at Yale," he added in a hushed voice. Amanda whacked the back of his head with a placemat. The partially rubbed-out chicken logo on it--in leg warmers? tights?--shone dully through a thin film of grease.

"Just for an example," she said, "have you ever had any kind of response to anything you've ever published?"

"You mean," Sam asked, "has one of an academic journal's four readers been inspired to correspond? Has an institutional library? Has a colleague bothered to look up my work? Don't be silly. Publishing an article is like throwing it into a storm drain. You know no one reads those rags but other profs swatting up their own articles. No one else can."

"A tongue not for profane eyes," Pat said. "All professions are conspiracies against the laity. It's amazing those rags support themselves. It's those fat institutional subscriptions from the university libraries. The federal dole ultimately, one suspects."

"Well, that's what I mean," said Amanda. "People actually write me. Call. Talk. Women. We network. Pleasantly, too. Nice folks. And Women's Studies fits right in with the debate on the canon, deconstruction, Annales stuff on everyday life. Virgin turf, too. A Godsend."

"It's no sillier than any of the other niches, to be sure," Pat said. "AKA Irish studies or Joyce megababble. The misinformation explosion. The drivel highway. 400 channels scouring the vast wasteland like waddies the trackless Sahara. Though I question whether those political, ambitious bitches can truly be described as pleasant."

“Even an attempt to appear pleasant is gratefully received.”

Pat cut lunch rather short this time--Sam later discovered, as he experienced Pat's more usual two or three hour forays. Preferably, when in funds, to low rent Irish bars. Sam feared Pat was disappointed in him, but Sam was too frightened and overwhelmed by Armpit Jr to relax even with Pat, so Sam found it difficult to hold up his end.

The cashier took the five Sam wanted to change for the tip, and said, "This five you gave me is ACTUALLY worth $32.50."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a silver certificate.”

"Let me see."

"NO. It's mine now."

"I'll stand over here. Show me how you can tell."

Eying Sam suspiciously, the cashier held up the bill.

"The seal is red, and it says Silver Certificate up here. See?"

Pat's eyes gleamed enthusiastically.

"You know what?" he said as they left. "I'm going to have my entire check changed into five dollar bills next payday."

This was only the first of Pat's many get-rich schemes Sam heard about. There were the falcons, his black taxi scheme (unmadallioned, unyellow—and sure prey for retaliation) and his bank scam.

Which was that, toward the end of the month, when Pat ran out of money, he'd withdraw all but a dollar of his checking account, then hop the tram to Cambridge, and withdraw it all over again from his bank's Harvard Square branch. He'd repay the overdraft at the first of the next month, but meanwhile he was able to tide himself over with an unwitting interest-free loan from a bank specially chosen for its poorly-linked branches.

Every month Pat also received an angry letter from the bank President's office, accusing him of "unethical banking practice."

“So sorry,” he’d reply, “overdrawn again? I hope this check will cover it.”

Once, in his cups, Pat was unwise enough to respond sincerely, at length.. He claimed that, as a humanist schooled in Aquinas and the Nicomachean ethics, as an impoverished teacher of underprivileged, cognitively-handicapped youth, he felt he was considerably more of an expert on ethics than any bank president. The unfortunate result was that the next time Pat went to his bank, the President, as soon as he was put wise, stormed out of his office, and personally, publicly tore in half Pat's bank card. Stripping Pat, as it were, of his epaulettes for the almighty dollar regiment. His US passport. And so it went with Pat's unworldly schemes. What Sam came to think of as his innocent chicanery.

Pat and Sam and Amanda walked back through the park again. Pat's face became grimmer and grimmer as he lumbered up the alley past heaps of discarded furniture. Sam was lagging behind.

"Say, guys," he said, "there's a perfectly good couch here. Look. What say we cop it? We could use a comfy sit in th'orifice.”

Pat looked back at Sam with new respect.

"Now you're talkin," Pat said. "But I have an even better idea. Let's knick the Pres's leather job and switcheroo. George will have a fit." Pat chuckled gleefully. "We'll disguise it under a blanket. And the Pres has that Persian rug over his....Look, what time is it?" He looked at his watch, then held it to his ear. "Mine has stopped again."

"2:15," Amanda said.

"Not a soul in the orifice will be back from loonch yet, and the little weasel has his Liberry class."

"Have fun, kids,” said Amanda, "I have a class too. Besides, I dragged all our apt furn up six flights, and I don't use your orifice. That is to say, Sam, this does not pay off any rappelling, corpse-removal or po-lice schmoozing debts."

"Excused," Pat said. He and Sam grabbed the couch at either end and trotted off, giggling. They passed up the back staircase through a crowd of students enveloped in marijuana smoke. Once upstairs, they put the cover of the president's couch over theirs, stuck a pile of Leader magazines under the missing leg, and trotted off with his.

"Norg, oog, ek," grunted Pat as he struggled with the lower end. This was his invariable formula for any physical effort, from carrying out the apt "garbonzo," to encouraging his chronically constipated bowels to unclench in its spacious, echoing, tiled baffroom, whose door didn't close, and whose etched glass transom was stuck open.

Pat also believed it stimulated peristalsis to imagine himself in a plane or train. He was convinced both emitted the unfiltered contents of their commodes directly beneath them. So he'd excuse himself by rumbling, "Gmm lay a turd upon the populace." And when a droplet of rain, airconditioner exhaust or bird emission fell on him in the city streets, he'd glare suspiciously at the sky and say, "American largesse for the deserving poor."

The couch barely fit. Pat took an old blanket out of his desk drawer, shook it out and threw it over the couch. A few strange-looking striped feathers floated to the floor, introducing an avian reek to th'orifice's potpourri.

Sam was aroused from strange dreams by the insistence of his alarm and Amanda. He hadn't been able to fall asleep until late. "What's the point of that thing?" she asked. "It annoys the falcons and doesn't wake you. Rise and shine, honeybunch."

"’I'll rise, but I won't shine,’" Sam grumbled.

"Tennessee Williams. *The Glass Menagerie*," Amanda said.

"Wish I could stay and Lit chat with you, but I have a class in Cambridge."

"Give 'em hell."

Sam's usual unwillingness to arise did not this time pass as he bicycled to Armpit, under the lazily creaking sign. He locked his bike to a railing with a Kryptonite lock.

The lock was awkward. The bow part fell behind the railing as he was wrestling the key. Sam maneuvered his arm through the railing and tickled the bow closer. The bike, nudged, wobbled, threatening to fall. Sam grabbed for it, but thereby dislodged the briefcase strapped to the carrier. It opened and distributed papers to the balmy if fetid air. Sam scrambled up and then around collecting papers, much to the amusement of students entering the ad building. The unsecured bike fell anyway. On Sam's foot. He flinched, loosing some papers.

Somehow this was much more disheartening then it ought to have been. Sam guessed such pratfalls must happen to everyone as regularly as to him. After all, while he was no ballet dancer, neither was he particularly clumsy. He was an NCAA athlete in a sport practiced by amateurs for flexibility training. All the same, it often felt to Sam that much of his life was devoted to struggling with physical objects which were at the very least heartily resistant, if not actually malicious.

Sam collected himself and his artifacts and sighed. He wondered if small accidents aroused the same despair in other people. If the less-stressed suffered as many. He sighed again, and took a deep breath, straightening his back to look up from his household gods.

Fall was in the air. The exhaust from the chicken shack smoked foggily. Another Boston winter in the offing. Those rattly windows in the drafty apt....

Sam climbed the seven flights to his class. He was already nervously anticipating his first faculty meeting. He hadn't even met the new President yet, Brother Richard Soul.

Meanwhile he tried to explain what a complete verb was to Louis Russo.... It was difficult....How could the same word be a verb in one sentence and a noun in another? How could the same verb be complete in one sentence and incomplete in another? *Running, he fell.* was complete but *He running when the tram hit him.* wasn't, even though it was longer....

Russo didn't really grasp the parts of speech at all. Sam leaned earnestly on his wobbly lectern, gazing drowsily into Russo's doggy eyes....Bark three times if you get it....The lectern tottered forward.

Reflexively, Sam jerked back, whacking his head on St. Pessary's outstretched arm. The pain momentarily blinded him. The lectern toppled with a fearful crash....Russo yelped....Crushed paw?...LaVeglia screamed melodramatically.

Rubbing his head furiously with his left hand, Sam had no time to soothe the smart, for with his right he was trying to steady Pessary's tottering bulk. The tears of pain clouding Sam's eyes made it hard to balance. Pessary seemed larger and more ferocious through the lachrymose refraction. The two of them danced around, their arms waving and encircling each other.

A portly figure burst in, panting heavily and sibilantly through protruding and snaggly silver-supported fore teeth. The man resembled a rhinoceros, was Sam's first inconsequential thought.

"For Guh-ods sake," the rhino said. "What was that? Kuh, is anyone hurt?"

"Only a student," Sam replied, wishing the rhino would help subdue Pessary, instead of bothering him with silly questions. "And he's all right. I missed him."

Changing his grip, Sam clutched his head with his right hand and moaned, still trying to steady Pessary with his left.

"Ku-oh," the rhino said, nonplussed. "I'm ku-Hathaway, History." He had some kind of sinus problem, or perhaps difficulty with his silver-coated tusks, which caused him to snort in a characteristic way, particularly before dentals and palatals, also aspirates, apparently to clear a passage for speech.

The smart subsided marginally. Sam blinked at his tears. He left Pessary's embrace as soon as he had calmed and settled him.

"Most pleased to meet you," Sam said, now rubbing with his left and extending his right. "Sheave, English, Adjunct."

Hathaway pulled back instinctively, and then extended a few fingers with some reluctance. He couldn't bear to be touched. Then he moved back quickly to his usual, abnormally long interpersonal distance.

"I suppose we shall have to--kuh--light a kuh-candle for St. Pessary. It would appear he has saved this kuh-student from kuh-corporeal harm."

Could Hathaway really have said that? Sam's tear-filled eyes began to clear. His head throbbed redly but the pain was less vivid now. His hearing returned too, the echoes of the crash yielding to the honks, gear shifts and sirens coming through the bank of soot-coated windows.

"Most certainly," he said, abating his rubbing. May they both roast in hell, he thought to himself.

And so began Sam's second double life, for he discovered, during the rest of his tenure at Armpit, that he had acquired an internal voice. It answered and commented, often in dialect, quite differently than Sam allowed his spoken one.

"Anyway, it's the end of the hour," Sam said. "Class dismissed.'' (Prepare to receive junk food.) "I suppose you will be going to the faculty meeting," he inquired of Hathaway.

A look of surprise and then Christian resignation passed over Hathaway's face. Punctilious rhino lip. "Why-kuh-yes, I was."

"Where is Krotch Hall, anyway?" Sam asked.

"Kuh-Krotch Hall? Kuh, that's the first big room under the arch, uh, after the sign. I duh-do hope you haven't sustained too large a kuh-contusion?" Hathaway inquired solicitously.

"Considerobobble, I fear,'' Sam said, falling unconsciously into Patalk from the strain. "The saint is a muscular Christian. He shows little mercy to sinners like myself. A very Knight Templar, smiting the infidel." Pat's manner of speech was infectious, Sam found, especially for the insecure seeking protective coloration.

Hathaway smiled dubiously.

Yazzuh, dat sho am one sumbitch, dat saint. I get him fo dis, you betcha. Dat be one pow'ful wallop he done fetch me wit dat rock arm o his'n. En I nevah done him no ha'm, neider. Nawzuh.)

When they strolled into Krotch hall they found President Richard Soul himself, greeting old faculty and introducing himself to new. Soul was a tall, bearded, greying fellow who would have looked distinguished had he been able to focus both eyes on the same object. His neurological condition also impeded him from ever getting to the point.

He held out his hand slightly to the left of Sam, shifting Sam from eye to eye.

'President Soul," he droned.

Everyone at Armpit was President, Vice President, Chairman, Dean or at least Professor. In the Ivy league, only physicians were called Doctor, but here anybody who could conceivably be so entitled (for example by sending away for a correspondence school doctorate) and many who weren't (MA's, even BA's) was incessantly thus referred to. Sam sometimes felt he had walked in on an episode of General Hospital. This did nothing for his increasingly precarious sense of reality.

"Samuel Sheave," he replied. Chawemed, I'm shuah. There was an awkward silence. Hathaway smiled silver-tusked and began rocking on his heels and ducking his head, a mannerism which might have been an uncomfortable but unconscious mimicry of bowing.

President Soul, exuding nervous piney aftershave, received more faculty. His equally piney deodorant transpired through a layer of starchy cotton and then dry-cleaner-fluid scented gabardine. Activated, Sam's nostrils also detected his own chlorine. Damp or sweat always re-constituted it. Faculty pooled and clotted awkwardly in the doorway, tongue-tied but also blocking incoming members.

As soon as he noticed Pat already seated, Sam backed cautiously out of the clot. He left Hathaway davening, and sidled across the auditorium row to Pat. Pat puffed, stretching comfortably, and yawned companionably at Sam. Pat's string-tied ancient brogues were lolling on the matted, blue plush seatback before him. Big as boats.

A gleaming round face, uncertainly beaming, appeared on stage above a solid Roman-collared habit.

"Dood afternoon mm,' it said, rubbing its hands together. "I'm Brother Unctuous mmm."

"Da Prez' hatchet man," Pat whispered, scorching Sam's ear with hot pipe breath. Someone had unsuccessfully attempted to clean a pool of sticky amber fluid from the carpet, employing a solvent which made Sam's eyes tear again.

"It is my great and signal pleasure today to introduce to you our illustrious President, Dr. Soul mmm. I am sure those of you who did not know of him already will have seen his influential article on the future of higher education in the eminent journal, Leader Magazine. Perhaps you might not know mmm that this already stellar periodical thereby enjoyed the largest printing it ever sold in its entire mmm august history mmm. As you will know, this magazine is exclusively delivered to winners of the Nobel Prize, Corporate Chief Executive Officers and other world leaders."

"Whose secretaries' non-exclusive job it is to chuck it in the round file," scorched Pat as they all rose to their feet and began to clap. Tearing with solvent sentiment, Pat and Sam joined in with sycophantic enthusiasm.

"Thank you very much," said Soul, visibly touched. "I want to welcome back to this hall first of all all the old faces I saw, and to express my sorrow at the absence of some of the old faces ["Sacked," whispered Pat]. I am sure however that their places will be ably filled by these many new faces I see here, faces of all races, who will be able to fill their traces ably.

"I would also like to mention...introduce several...as I am also introducing several, uh, new faces, I am sure all of you have already met all, almost all, our new Faculty and surely our new Dean of Studies, Rotundra Margerine. She comes back to us this year as a well-known author. Bench Press has published her book, *23 Skiddoo*, a collection of great historical importance, of short stories rejected by Vanity Fair and the Saturday Evening Post in the 1920's." Soul clapped. They all clapped.

After this point, Sam must have dozed off, because he remembered little. Soul waved his hands gracefully as he droned on. He had the lights lowered so that he could draw, on an overhead projector, arrows pointing to a triangle containing the word *future*, a square enclosing *Higher Education*, a circle containing *Energy* underlined once*, Ideas* twice. It did not mean anything, it was not meant to mean anything, and it could not have meant anything. It was a visual aid.

Clearly, however, the good president was very hipped on something he called “scientific literacy," which he seemed to feel would attract money from government philanthropists. He argued that scientific literacy would help in our struggle with Russia. Sam, old enough to remember Eisenhower, had an eery deja vu experience.

During the question period, Pat inquired, smiling and blinking, whether the students would become scientifically literate before or after they learned to read, write and multiply.

Or perhaps Sam dreamed that part. Thereafter Soul suggested the emphasis of their curriculum should be re-adjusted from exhausted, failed techniques of the past to an emphasis on problem solving. ("Like learning how to tie their shoes," Pat whispered. "Or at least get the Velcro aligned.")

Then, though worried and frightened, Sam thought he may have dropped off again. He thought he remembered something about a new cure for jaundice, which could hardly have been part of Soul's speech, though one couldn't be sure.

"As for the report you have all requested, concerning ("our raises?" Pat whispered hopefully) “the progress of the elevator modernization, I refer you to our Yale-trained Chair of Technical Studies and Dean of the Media Department, Muhammad Jones. (“You know he collects pay checks for all thoe positions? Only Soul himself makes more loot,” scorched Pat)

A shaven head popped up out of the audience. "Ears fixit," it said. It disappeared again.

They adjourned for a reception held in the Library. Pat shook Sam urgently and pulled him, stumbling, to a prearranged route down the fire escape.

"Quick," Pat said. "Afore those wolves fall upon the freshment comestibles. Razzbeers. Strombeers. Bluebears. Alcoholidays. Coal cuts. Fresh wegabobbles. Pickles. Caviar. Maloons. Artichookies. No Homburgs." Pat whinnied ecstatically.

They trotted through a side door into the Library, following the drone of George's vacuum. Pat buried his muzzle in the sandwich tray while ordering a double whiskey from the caterer.

"Only one free loonch per semester," he growled, chewing rapidly.

Sam waved to George, who nodded sourly. Sam assumed he had discovered their couch. Sam grabbed a couple sandwiches. After he had inhaled them, he noticed a small but smiling crowd entering the main doors, coagulated around Soul and Hathaway.

Hathaway derived his resemblance to a rhinoceros, Sam observed, not so much from his teeth as from the square, vertical quality of his corpulence, from the stiff punctiliousness of his manner both in word and gesture, and from the pervasive greyness of his coloring: grey hair, greyish skin, faded blue blazer, grey flannel trousers.

Hathaway was, however, Sam discovered later, an amiable, well meaning and decent chap, only bent and not destroyed by Armpit. He was much loved by the faculty, for in the land of the castrati the one-ball is king. Hathaway could be called on to defend the innocent, though years at Armpit had irremediably twisted his view of the issues into the usual petty wrangling rather than support for substantive changes. But at least he didn't believe you could solve every problem by finding out whose fault it was and punishing them.

Hathaway noticed Sam's regard and toothily waved him and Pat over.

Assembled, they formed a small four-man square blocking off the bar cum hors d'oeuvre table, which Pat eyed circumspectly, like a dog separated from his dish by a larger dog. Soul was to Sam's left, Pat across from Sam, and Hathaway to Sam's right.

Pat, the one most capable of coherent speech, began telling jokes and insulting everyone in a friendly locker-room manner-­ which was the substitute for communication at Armpit gatherings.

Soul smiled stiffly at Pat, to his left. In order to do so, and focus his good eye on Pat, Soul had to shift his entire rigid torso, so that his back was turned to Sam. Sam instinctively shifted position to rejoin the group, moving closer to Hathaway. Alarmed by the near contact, Hathaway shifted away. This left Pat out of place, as the only one who had not moved counterclockwise, so he shifted too, still conversing fluidly.

Soul then again turned his back on Sam in order to keep Pat in focus.

In this manner, they waltzed slowly the length of the refreshment table. Pat, grinning wolfishly, snatched a drink and snack every time he rotated past the table, which he thereafter regarded, crestfallen, as it rotated away again.

He had attempted to cease talking once he reached it, in order to halt their progress, but of course someone else would fill in the pause, and the dance would ponderously resume.

Soul tried his hand at a few jokes. .He had the habit of telling them sideways, with the punchline in the middle, at which they would all sycophantically chuckle. Soul would run over this chuckle, raising his voice as though they were trying to interrupt him. Then he would lumber on to the end again--which would be greeted by strained and expectant silence. Half his audience, once chastened, waited uncertainly for something further; while those clever enough to feel the adumbrated, exsanguinated closure had already been prematurely squeezed dry of forced chuckle by its first pass.

Sam was a patient listener--no professional student could not be--but he would never be able to reach the end of one of Soul's bosky rambles. So Sam couldn't honestly affirm that they had no point, though that was what he suspected.

Soul turned formally to Sam. "Well, young fellow, what do you think of scientific literacy as a watchword?"

A look of alarm passed over Pat's face. He had almost reached the refreshment table. He watched with touching chagrin as it receded again, their waltz switching to clockwise with Soul's turn from him to Sam.

"That would seem to be a very intelligent solution," Sam replied, taking a fresh whiskey from the barman. (Yazzuh. dat sho am one fine eye-dee. Nevah heard nothin noway likes to it. Nawzuh. Aytall.)

"I'm glad to hear you think so. Too many of our young people, though they may have their head in the clouds, tend to forget they have feet of clay. Yes, it's good to keep your eye on the grindstone, but never forget to pull your end of the wagon to keep the boat from rocking and allow us to set one foot before the other."

"That's just what Pat was saying just now," Sam said, sipping. "Not so eloquently, of course."

Soul turned majestically to Pat. Pat eyed Sam suspiciously, hastily retracting his hand as their reversion to counterclockwise shifted him once again away from the approaching table. He seemed to be less adept at this dance than Sam. Perhaps it was Sam’s years of hero worship of dance and dancers, one of the things he had had in common with James. Though James’ pursuit of the dancers rather than the dance had been destabilizing.

"Yes," Pat said hoarsely, eyeing the whiskey. He watched it recede with palpable despair.

"Were you, now," said Soul. "It's funny, I have often remarked, how an idea whose time has come will seem to hover in the air."

Soul droned on. Occasionally one of the others would try to interject a ‘How interesting,’ or ‘Is that right?’ but Soul would raise his voice to drown him out.

Sam took a martini as he was waltzed by the table. Soon, much of Soul's speech having still been automatically addressed to him, Pat, nodding glumly and glassily, was surreptitiously eying the whiskey approaching to his right.

"Pat," Sam said, emboldened by drink, "I would just like to interrupt for a second here, now that I have the felicity of such a long interview with our President, to ask him how he achieved his present eminence. --How old were you, Sir, when you decided on an academic career?" Sam sipped attentively.

Soul expanded visibly as he turned to Sam, while Pat, rotated away from the table again shot Sam a look of pure hatred.

"Young fellow," Soul replied. "Part of my advice to you would be to take the Kudor Preference Test. Do you know it?"

"The one kids take in high school, with the series of questions with three multiple choice answers?” Sam asked, gulping amiably to free his hand for the approaching barman. "Would you rather a) raise pigs b) write about pigs c) be a pig?"

"Something 1ike that, " Soul said frostily. "Well, when I was in high school, in need of guidance and counseling from the administration, my high school administrative guidance counselor counseled me to have that test administrated to me for guidance. Once administered, this guidance test counseled me to guide myself into administration. It ascertained that I would become a college President, and since that day I have never looked back."

Pat was alternately peering around Hathaway, to check his progress to the waning liquor supply, and glaring at Sam.

"Professor Hathaway," said Sam. "How did you come to be associated with this noble institution?"

Soul turned to Hathaway, directly in front of him, and the dance came to a halt. Pat looked at Sam aghast. Avoiding his eye, Sam nodded at the barman, raising a finger. Sam nibbled carefully at a salmon caviar egg. Orangey red, yellow and white. Very attractive, but not matching the tie or polished shoes.

Soon, the supplies exhausted, people started trickling out, leaving the room empty but for Pat, lying in wait for Sam by the front door, and George, who was waxing his desk. In spite of his vigorous defense, it had been used by some receptioners as a table.

Sam escaped back out the side door fire escape. Hoisted on his own petard. He went home exhausted, but found he could not nap for worrying about the college and his eight AM class. He felt a-sea, adrift, responsible for his students, surrounded by an alien species.

Remorse quickened with the ontogeny of his hangover. 'Pat, old buddy, my only pal in the world,' Sam murmured brokenly to himself. He was a mean drunk! To be sure, Pat had made some invidious jokes about gay people, but everyone did in those days. Sam himself was far from comfortable with his own sexual orientation. Surely not enough to come out, indeed a rare thing then.

Sam had so far felt no desire or pressure to attempt to replace James, his ex, by bar-hopping or attending gatherings of the University gay alliances. Anxiety dampened sexual interest. Sam still felt shaky. Anyway, ambiguous, even torn, he didn't care to encourage his proclivities, though he recognized them as ineluctable. It was that or celibacy--in which he held no belief.

Sam finally fell into a restless half-sleep, dreaming he was being chased by a rhino who gored him in the liver; he had hepatitis in a Mexican prison and was being tortured with a loud buzzing apparatus, by a mustachioed, bandoliered bandit with one eye.

The alarm and Amanda nudged him awake to an even worse scenario. Armpit Jr.

"Any idea where Pat is, pal?" she asked. "He doesn't seem to have come home last night, and I'm afraid that means he's on a bender. I wonder what could've set him off. If he doesn't make it back by his afternoon class, we're going to have to go looking for him, you know, even if only to secure his rent money."

That morning's lesson was on how to conjugate a regular verb in the present tense. No one else appeared to teach any grammar at all. It was outmoded. Victorian. 'Well, I never learned any,' profs would say complacently.

The better-informed would tell Sam that 'all the research shows' that teaching grammar doesn't improve students' writing skills. Sam wondered how the research evaluated those skills. Surely not by number of grammar errors. Creativity?

"Rhetoric research" consisted of dividing your classes in half, giving the halves different assignments, tabulating the results and publishing them in rhetoric journals. Sam had generated a publication himself this way.

One clever synthetic article "surveying the literature" concluded from its contradictions that nothing helped students learn to write, except time and self-motivation.

Years before, Sam had listened with sympathy to the Black English controversy, and to Noam Chomsky's idea that "everyone speaks his own language perfectly." Now, however, he found that the charm of blues singers' grammar wore off as he found it in every composition, of any color source. Many of his so-called native speakers wrote “I walk, we walk, they walk, everybody walk.” Some of the better educated wrote “we walks, they walks,” on the principle they were plurals.

Sam was not trained in linguistics. He had become lost in the definitive sections of Chomsky's *Language and Mind*, though quite easily following Chomsky's introductory primer on tabula rasa and recovered memory in Descartes. Sam had wondered whether Chomsky knew the theory originated with Plato; and, if so, why Chomsky wasn't citing the earlier source.

But Sam couldn't imagine how his students' impoverished discourse could be described as speaking any language perfectly. And, since language is the tool which makes us human, Sam heard in his students a real inability to explain themselves to each other, or to themselves. Even in their love affairs. A few formulae--uptight, mellow--served to express every emotion. "Why you being so mean?" "I dunno, I feel down, baby." "Whatchoo mean, down?" "I dunno, just, you now, like, down."

Their emotions themselves were probably truncated or aborted, Sam speculated, as one might wonder about the feelings of chimps. People who can't describe what they feel, can't fully know what they feel, and probably feel less, or at least differently, than the articulate. Perhaps the feelings themselves were simpler too.

The students were also at a loss to describe what had caused their feelings, either in terms of their lovers' actions, or of their own responses. They couldn't describe why a particular movie or song appealed to them. Disco made you feel mellow--but how? Could they describe a film so that someone else would have some other reason to see it than their bald recommendation?

And while the physical plant at U/Mass was better--in fact gorgeous, in this most socialist of the American states--the students weren't. Sam had acquired a couple sections there. Amanda too. Both taught half time at each school, at quarter pay, passing each other back and forth twice a day on the Red Line like cruise ships on the Atlantic run.

Sam's students couldn't read The NY Times. Its language was too difficult. And they lacked the background knowledge required to understand a given article. Like where France was, or what the Supreme Court did, or what the Bill of Rights guaranteed.

The Rhetoric texts seemed to feel using Lit to teach writing was a bad idea--worse than teaching grammar--so Sam felt he might as well teach civics. He carefully paraphrased the Bill of Rights in simple words, using examples chosen from court cases.

It was voted down by a large majority of the class. Every single amendment. Sam felt daunted.

No one in the class, for example, understood the Christian concept that intent mattered. They believed a murderer should be executed, whether insane or not. After all, didn't he do it? "What if someone ran over a child because his car manufacturer installed defective brakes?" Sam asked. This confused them. Their first inclination was simply to hang the driver, but it paled. Didn't seem right somehow.

"Even a dog knows the difference between being kicked and being stumbled over," Sam quoted to himself from Learned Hand.

But then, Aristotle had said all humans naturally like learning; and G.B.S. Haldane, that all mammals are naturally curious. So his students....

Might a self-destructive/aggressive murderer actually be encouraged by the death penalty? or the climate of violence it engendered? or the principle it enunciated that execution was a legitimate solution to torts? as reinforced by movies and TV? Silent puzzlement.

Sam soon forbid them to use the phrase "think twice" in essays on capital punishment. He tired of the irony.

Or, if they did use it, they had to describe how sociopaths puzzle out cost/benefit analyses of contemplated felonies. Or they had to look up statistics, or expert testimony, on how effective a deterrent capital punishment was. Or describe some other function it served. Besides saving money. Which it didn't. Which also argued for using it in place of F's.

So, to a man and woman, they decided on the abortion option instead. "Abortion is murder" they began, then thrashed around helplessly trying to find something to prove, argue or develop.

Sam spent a whole class on an article on Russian disarmament proposals. He showed how it was slanted by journalistic cliches and unexamined premises. In their essays, students explained "it byass."

In fact, they couldn't really grasp why the Russians might not want America to be "number one," a desideratum they considered as universally self-evident. Like the proposition that Communism is evil. Nor could they grasp why foreign policy might have to be based on some empathy for such incorrect points of view.

Sam reverted to fiction. Dubliners was "gloomy." "Nothing happens."

At the end of the month, Sam administered a test. His distracted and exhausted gaze wandered from his book out the window. When it returned, he found a gentleman scholar's paper being returned to him by a neighbor. This particular scholar always sat in the back of the class, behind a pair of mirror shades, clutching a thick, bentwood, rubber-tipped walking stick. Sam had idly wondered what it was for. He hadn't noticed any limp. He was soon to find out.

Over the last weeks, the scholar had gained enough sense of security to emerge occasionally from the shades. He also had black leather, studded bracelets, and a sort of armored purse.

Sam demanded his paper and threw it in the waste bin. The scholar stalked to Sam's desk and overturned Sam's book.

"There," he said. "Find your place."

"You must leave the room," Sam said.

The scholar refused. He put his shades back on, and unpacked his purse, spreading a Maginot line of studded black leather possessions around him.

Sam took out his grade book.

"You don't be writin nothin bout me there," the scholar said. He sortied to the front of the room to hover over Sam's desk with his stick half raised. "I be checkin up."

Sam put the grade book down.

"I knew you wasn't a real man," the scholar said, retreating to his fortification.

"Weren't," Sam said, losing his temper. "Weren't a real man."

But they had reached an impasse. The scholar couldn't leave without losing face. His manhood, or propers, to use the appropriate Black English term. And Sam couldn't eject him without a) endangering his own life, short and long term, b) further disrupting the test, and c) assaulting the scholar.

"Course," the scholar said reflectively, "you could be writin later." He was no dummy.

The stalemate lasted until the end of class. The scholar tried to make up by showing Sam his grammar homework. Sam, in turn, examined it. Perfunctorily and with reservation.

Sam had to admit, in all justice, that he didn't know what he himself would've done differently, in the scholar's shoes. A slow starter himself, Sam had needed special help to pass first grade. Help not available to the scholar. So this gentleman couldn't pass without cheating or doing a lot of work. Besides being untrained even to attempt the latter (neither a work ethic nor study skills evidently prevailing in his home), the scholar was of course afraid to undertake it, as it would be less humiliating to fail nonchalantly than after trying hard.

Meanwhile, the scholar's *time*--"mead of honor" in Lang's translation from the Homeric Greek--was not accruing to him at all. As Achilles (a spear carrier from another hazardous warrior culture) had put it, *time* had been unjustly stolen from him by conniving legalisms.

Yes, the scholar was definitely not gettin his propers, as Aretha Franklin translates the Homeric term in "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." ("Your love is sweet but so is my money.") So there was little the scholar could do to establish his manhood except revert to a less sublimated level of competition. To a more honest and straightforward form of battle.

Sam did not punish the hard-working, shy girl who had checked the scholar's paper. She might've been afraid to refuse. She said she only looked at it--according the scholar his minimum due. Propers.

She was another typical figure from the matriarchal Black culture. Clearly terrified of whites, and probably of men. Sam had learned that a majority of Black children grow up in fatherless homes, caused by either/and a) black unemployment, b) social workers policing Aid to Dependent Children, which was dispensed only to fatherless homes, c) slavery's disruption of the black family, d) Africa's Old Testament, polygamous, matriarchal family traditions, e) racism. Depending on which sociologist you subscribed to.

The scholar further claimed not to know it was forbidden to get someone to check your work during a test; or that an in-class essay was a test. He might even be telling the truth, Sam thought. But how far back could one start with instructions? True, anything left out was misunderstood--or exploited.

So Sam's exam questions became short essays explaining what did and did not constitute an answer. Never exhaustively enough. Nothing is foolproof, Sam thought. Fools are too ingenious.

Sam nostalgically recalled the short, elegant exam questions of his own education.

After his third morning class, Sam stopped by the liquor store in the embrace of the Armpit complex to buy Pat a fifth of Irish which Sam could ill afford. He would have to emulate more of Pat's stratagems. The single tweed jacket and two ties. The five white shirts and two pairs of chinos Pat washed in the tub every weekend. The string­tied, indestructible brogues.

Most of all, Pat's four or five hours of sleep, not the 10 Sam longed for, including naps. Pat had insomnia--nightmares? too much alcohol?--and in those long watches he seemed to be able to read dense critical literature and philosophy, even to write papers.

Publishing. The only road to fulltime: less brutal course loads, fewer papers to correct, a salary above the poverty line. If barely.

Sam trudged to the office with his peace offering--ill disguised in a tightly wrapped brown bag under his arm. He waved to Soul, leaving for lunch; checked to see that his bike was OK; passed under the F iendly C llege sign, now hanging slightly more aslant; clambered tiredly up the garbage-strewn stairs, through a cloud of marijuana smoke partially hiding a group of students; and finally dragged his feet down the scruffy hall to his door.

Pat, looking seedy, broke off wrangling with George to scowl at Sam as he walked in. Stale pipe smoke. Cherry flavor overlaying something fiercer.

"Hullo, George. Hullo, Pat," Sam said.

"Hi," squeaked George.

"Fuck you," said Pat.

Sam was on good terms with the former. He'd found it warmed George to be asked about his mother, or for college gossip. Sam mostly did this when Pat wasn't around.

"Well, Pat," Sam said, "I don't see how I can give you this peace offering if you're not speaking to me." Sam sloshed the neck-tightened paper bag.

"Ah," said Pat. "What music do mine ears receive? Ah b'lieve tis lunch for two. Greeks, so long as they be bearing gifts, are always welcome, to quote the well-known tag."

Sam eased himself tiredly onto the couch.

"You have a nerve bringing that ratty thing in here when I have to leave all my Library books where the students can get their hands on them," squeaked George angrily, impatiently picking up where they'd left off.

"Offices often have couches," rumbled Pat contentedly, after taking a healthy swig. "They never contain entire college libraries. (Ahh, Irish!) Besides, if your compulsions and obsessions admitted any reason, you'd realize perfectly well that books are in absolutely no danger from students. Even stoodents who desthroy walls." Pat kicked moodily at a hole in the plaster by his chair. Puff, puff.

"Well, either that thing goes, or at least my English Lit section comes up here."

"Why not say that up front? A puffeckly acceptabobobble compromise. The addition of a half dozen books will hardly cramp us. I might even read a page or two meself from time to time." Pat rolled mouthful of whisky, swallowed and smacked his lips.

"But I still think the couch ought to go."

"What do you think, Sam?" Pat asked. "Stay or go? Your vote decides."

"Whu?" said Sam, hearing his name. But his stretched-out legs, nestled on fine leather (if cloth-covered), and his dozing head, cushioned on a stack of Leader Magazines, effectively answered the question.

Sam hazily heard their voices wrangle on. A rhino with a Mexican hat was prodding his stomach. He was fully awakened ten or 15 minutes later by ravening hunger.

"Lunch," he said.

George and Pat broke off.

"The dormouse pops out of his teapot," said the latter. "Yes indoody. There is an excellent Himeboggle establishment near here which permits one to import one's own vintage, wine of the country in this case. Ah, Bumbuggers. Homeburglars. Hambrosia.”

"Actually, Pat, I’d , like you to take me to the faculty dining room and introduce me around a bit. We can bring some take-out Bogies and avoid the tip."

Pat scowled, but then brightened. "I suppose I could bear it after a couple more quick ones."

"Or I could take you,” piped George.

"Lord, no," said Pat, shocked. "You can't do that. The pore young fella's repatootie might never rebecover. Much as I hate to go, I see it's me Dooty. S0S."

"I can't imagine what you mean" squeaked George. "I suppose it's better they associate him with a filthy, drunken malcontent like you."

"Filthy!" said Pat. "Only an anal like yourself--"

"Yes, I suppose your foul tobacco habit has ruined your nose. You probably can't even smell the bird poop reek coming from this foul couch you dragged here from God knows where. I suppose--" With that George sprang to his feet and started furiously pushing the thing toward the door.

Pat too leapt up, his face red, and began pushing more vigorously in the opposite direction, bellowing, "Going back on your solemn word, are you, you slimy hypocright weasel. I'll throw your whole beastly English collection out the winda, so help me begod, if you lay a finger on this cooch, and your bloody vacuum with."

"The window doesn't open, you drunken fool," George shrieked. "Besides, it's only the bottom of the airshaft. Even your threats are stupid and boring."

"Excuse me," Sam said to no one in particular. "I think I'll hit the john before lunch." The lurching of the couch had woken him fully, and its continued joggling was upsetting his belly again. He watched limply for a moment, passively awed by George's furious strength. The couch plus Sam must've weighed over 200 pounds, and Pat, an ex-rower, was a veritable bear. "Norg, oog, ek," he grunted.

Sam's diarrhea had worsened. Mal d'Armpit. His innards were in a hell of a state.

In the confusion he had forgotten their roll of toiletpaper. Fortunately, there was a stack of Leader Magazines nearby. But Sam found, to his dismay, that the flush refused categorically to digest any part of a Leader Magazine.

Sam returned to find George gone and Pat moodily drinking whiskey out of a paper cup. The couch was still there.

"Goddamned toilet is out of order," Sam said.

“Some fool probably tried to flush a Leader Magazine down it," Pat said. "Happens regularly. Many fools about. Stop by the Tech Department. Ears fixit. I'll meet you in the cafeteria after I have another.

"Besides, it's my office hour. Russo or some other excuse for a stupent is due to discuss his grade....Trick is to sympathize. Act like grading is a force of nature. Inexorable averages. They don't expect to pass. Just want you to like them. A little sympathy. 'Yas, must be tough, flunking. Parents upset likely, too, eh?'

"He prolly won't show anyhoo. If you see 'im down in the stairwell on your road to Ears, send him up, wouldja? If you can make out his droopy mug through the smoke, that is....

"Little rotters! Fookin drug addicts.

"You oughtn't smoke that crap either. You and Amanda." Pat looked at Sam indignantly. "Rots your brain." He hoisted his cup ostentatiously. "Gimme good Irish whiskey. The only thing. Now, that wretched 'Scotch.' What a hangover smoked peat delivers! Scots! The only folk on the face of the arth more backward than the bog Irish. Takes a Kelt to hate a Kelt. "Troglodyte Oat-eaters! Too fookin stingy to use real wood. Besides, they haven't any. Burnin that foul peat near good whiskey! On purpose, can you believe it? Foul peat. That's what it tastes like. A burning bog. Night soil.

"And rye! Why, lord, that's no grain to make whiskey with. And they're lyin at that, cause it's mostly corn. 'Cause even rye has more panache than corn.

"Corn. Another lie. Corn laws. Corn is wheat, the staff of life. What they're talking about, dumb hillbillies, is maize. That's what rye tastes of, when you can tell through the burn. Maize. Indian fodder, redman mush, animal feed. Amateur hour.

"Now bourbon is all right when Irish is unavailable. But even when it's not too sweet, it's uneven. Hasn't got that malty consistency...."

"You do drink a lot, I must say."

"Good Irish whiskey can't hurt you. Cirrhosis, hepatitis-­it's a little known fact that good Irish is innocent. Why, man, everyone knows hepatitis B is caused by fecal matter taken p.o. Per os. By mouth. Ask any physician, Doctor.

"Yas. Ass-licking. That's what causes liver disease. Not good whiskey."

"I worry about you all the same. If it isn't the alcohol, then the thousands of compositions, the midnight oil; why you even still row.

--How did you manage a scull on our salary, by the way?”

"Ah, I'm not at liberty to disclose that. Leave it at this: the salvage laws; the blizzard of '78. A vessel abandoned in a storm becomes the rightful property of its rescuer. Hahvahd don't even know it's gone. It is a nuisance having no boat house--not like Trinity, there was luxury!--but Ahmed lets me store it in the basement, and for a strong man a two block walk with a single scull isn't nearly as much exercise as the couple hours I like to put in. Weather permitting."

"It showed, pumping that mother couch."

"Ach, you held up your end, me bhoy, to be sure. Still swim, don't you?"

"I'm still amazed you can do all that without sleep and in vino."

"Vino! A libel! Dago juice. Good Irish gives you strenth. It's no handicap, man, it's a necessity. A necessity. Irish whiskey is the only substance that stills the voice of conscience in the small hours. Agenbite of Inwit."

“What do you have to feel guilty about?.”

“Many things. Many things,” said Pat, somberly. “You forget, I'm Catholic."

"I never see you go to mass. I assumed you left the church.”

"That is for the church to say. That is for the church to say."

After filling out several forms in Ears' office, Sam recovered Pat standing in line by the sandwich counter, chatting jovially with a Polish woman, who was intermittently but desultorily inquiring of the counter lady, "Sammich comink?"

"Ho, Sam t" Pat bellowed. "This is Anna [followed by an unpronounceable last name Sam immediately forgot]. One o the English faculty, but as dacent a soul as was e'er housed in a Slavic body. Take a pew in yonder corner wiv us. What's your pleasure?"

There followed the first of many relatively pleasant lunches, usually including these dissidents, loud and secret respectively, and various somewhat less companionable types. Hathaway, whom Sam discovered was Chairman of Humanities, sometimes joined them.

The faculty cafeteria was insulated from any natural light or air, but this had the advantage of sealing out sight and noise of students. On the whole, Sam would've rather eaten at the greasy spoon, but bringing their free Homebudgets to the cafeteria was even cheaper (no tip), and he felt he should bond with other faculty, particularly as he was feeling increasingly isolated and insecure.

A difficult task. Sam had already met the academic star. George Packrat had actually published a book. Not one he wrote himself, but still....A collection of letters. Actually written by John Gardner, but Gardner was dead, so he couldn't publish them himself.

Nor object. For perhaps he had never published them because he hadn't wanted them published. However, now that he was no longer around, they had become an easy score.

George, though indeed weasely-looking, and beset by a washing compulsion, seemed ready at first to exchange with Sam sly animadversions about the ignorance of the other faculty, but in time something mysterious, perhaps a rumor Sam never heard, seemed to turn George against him.

But Anna whatever-her-name-was was a true comfort. As full of Slav sincerity as a Dostoevsky novel, she valued personal truths, to which she'd penetrate instantly, waving aside all Anglo-Saxon small talk. Anna was reserved when Hathaway or others like him were around, but expanded with Pat and Sam, especially when they were having their lunch out of a bottle.

Which was not as often as they'd have liked. Their finances were in that pre-industrial, adjunct condition described by Brendan Behan as "when I was growing up drunkenness was not regarded as a disgrace. To get enough to eat was regarded as an achievement. To get drunk was a victory." So Sam didn't drink very much, or at least very often.

All the same, some weekend evenings in the apt kitchen, over lukewarm grey baggers; or in the living room, in front of their homemade marble mantelpiece, before a fire made of scrap lumber laboriously and unremittingly collected from round the neighborhood; or later at night in Amanda's room; during these times, when they took a respite from the bottomless stack of student papers, Sam and Pat and Anna and Amanda did on occasion dip into the Gallo Mountain Burgundy. It was warming, even in the winter drafty apt. Pat had taken to calling it The Winter Palace. They had to wear fingerless gloves to type.

Amanda's room was the biggest, behind a second bow window, under a fan in the high, scrolled ceiling. She had a small portable record player she got from her father in California. She and Sam would sit around late, sometimes, drinking Boone's Farm, smoking some reefer if Ears had confiscated any recently, listening to Billie Holiday and Edith Piaf records, beweeping their outcast state, lamenting past loves and troubling a deaf heaven with their bootless cries. It was soothing.

Amanda was on good terms with Ears. A gentlemen of many facets, it turned out. One was learning rock climbing from Amanda.

Sam had grown up in the urban US, so he'd been around Blacks. A member of the Dartmouth swimming team had been someone he talked to. But Sam was not gregarious. He had few close friends. Therefore no Black one. Like most Americans, Sam was segregated into a peer ghetto. So Ears was, for Sam, a gratifying addition to the apt's fauna.

And Pat was a jazz fan, like many alternative, intellectual Europeans. He played bass, in fact. So when Sam and Amanda gossiped in her room, having retired from the living room or kitchen, the background music which massaged their already winey mood was, often, Pat on bass and Ears on soprano, which he played in a plangent, blue Coltranish manner.

The name Ears seemed to refer therefore not only to the eponymous appendages, but also to other Eary attributes like his ability to pick up music. And dialects--at which he nearly equaled Pat. Their friendship had begun with a long-playing improvised buddy-movie routine. Pat took on a Mel Gibson Australian accent, and Ears did Danny Glover.

Ears, that is to say, had an unimpeachable ear. He seemed to know when to intimidate, when to be pleasant and when to fade into the janitorial staff. A remarkable gift. Particularly given that he really was born and bred in Roxbury, and not of oreo yups in some integrated suburb.

After Sam and Amanda's bedtime--even if it was late that night--Ears and Pat, inspired, would often head out to jazz spots. “Goombye,” Pat would call through Amanda's warped unclosable door. "Goombye. My mother's a Jew and my father's a bird, so its Olivet's breezy/ Goombye/ Goombye!'

But if that was the extent of Sam's bibulousness, Pat may've been another story. He possessed unique resources, after all.

It was impossible for Sam to determine if Pat was drunk all the time and acting sober half the time, drunk half the time and sober half, or whether he drank hardly more than Sam and just acted drunk half the time.

Anna, being fulltime, actually did drink. Or at least her minty breath, pale, sweaty face and shiny, swollen gums, which set off her gleaming childish teeth, suggested she did.

Anna would complain about her drinking, her headaches, her marital life, the college, the students, the faculty, money. Pat and Sam listened with sympathy, troubled by most of the same things. Sam unburdened himself about his intestinal problems.

"I never seem to sleep peacefully anymore," he complained. "I have strange dreams about hepatitis--liver pains, yellow things. And I think I've had dysentery since my first class."

"Iss nerves," said Anna.

"The wages of ass-licking," said Pat.

"Everyone here destroyed by collitch," said Anna. "Ghyou insomniac, Pat drink too much, I drink too much. Froggy [Hathaway was called this only by faculty over 50, and not to his face] never go home. Whole life collitch. That is why so nice. Wife is something wrong with, I think. Never go home. Always last with cocktail party, last with faculty meeting. We make Chairman. But Administration doesn't trust, all the same. Iss too honest."

Still, Sam felt too shy and insecure, especially after his recent break-up, for even this new nest to buff away his sense of isolation. The Armpit underwater currents and perhaps his own makeup were too strong.

And he was beginning to develop the theory that surviving the academic community required the Putney Swope maneuver: lay low like Brer Rabbit and let the other faculty destroy each other in internecine warfare. Keep mouth shut. Keep your distance: friends could turn, or you could inherit their enemies, who could only safely strike at their untenured proteges. Among faculty, Sam saw silent, anxious-looking strangers creep unobserved to niches, which they copped as neatly as the adeptly political did. Keep mouth shut. Help landlord. No phone calls.

That is, Sam feared his congeniality hurt more than helped. The lunch crowd was once, for example, discussing nuclear war. What one would do, where one wished to be.

"Well," Sam said, "I certainly hope it will find me right here on campus."

Hathaway beamed avuncularly at Sam's loyalty.

"Why?" asked Pat, astonished.

"Well, everything happens 40 years later here."

"Gorblimey," Pat said that evening in the apt. "Amanda, it's good you didn't make lunch today. Old Sam here inserted his entire pedal appendage into his upper alimentary orifice." Pat was sitting on the plum velour couch they had found discarded on Newberry street. The piney smoke of the imperfectly drawing fire was pleasantly overlaying its older funk, and the Gallo similarly cloaked the Beagles.

Amanda and Sam were still eating theirs at the kitchen table, a fine round one which, to become solid as new, had only required the replacement of one crippled leg with a two-by-four. Pat had already descended from his nightly constitutional on the roofs, "among the stars," from which he often returned with facial scratches and abrasions. Sam assumed he walked into the clothes lines--though why so often was perhaps not tactful to inquire about. Pat was temperamental.

"You know," Pat continued, "we gotta excape, man. Amanda has her Wormy Studies scam, which will get her a warm place to shit eventually, but Irish Studs is full, my friend. We're stuck. Ears got Black Studs...."

"How about Creative Writing?" Sam said. "It's the only Humanities field which isn't contracting. If fact growing by leaps and bounds. No one reads anymore, but everyone wants to write. And Armpit doesn't have a Creative Writing Department....Nah, the stoodents can't write even reg'lar Englitch."

"No no," said Pat. "I think you've got summat. Ghyou don't fully grasp your own brilliance, me bhoy, I t'ink. I mean look at it. Everyone wants to be A Writer. Big bucks. Hollywood. Self-expression. Writing a Blockbuster is every defeated incompetent's scheme to get rich quick."

"Yeah, but Pat, our students can't even do grammatical sentences."

"Well, that's why it'll be Creative Writing. And think about the money. Adult extension classes, electives, Viet vets on the GI bill!"

"But there are a hundred colleges in Boston and all of 'em give creative writing classes, some really famous."

"No, no, you don't see our hook yet! I mean, think of all the folks who want to be famous writers, but are handicapped by being illiterate!

"Handicapped!" Pat guffawed. "There you go! That's it, you see! Armpit isn't going to be elitist. Nawzuh. Cognitively Disadvantaged Creative Writing! Linguistically Challenged Creative Writing! Learning Disabled Creative Writing! Character Disorder Therapeutic Creative Writing!"

"But some students can't even form script."

"Brilliant! Oral folklore. 'R. Pitt proudly announces it now offers an Associate Degree in Creative Writing, with an Optional focus in Oral Lit' Redneck Lit! Cowboy poetry! We'll buy cheap tape recorders!

"Better yet, we'll sponsor readings. That's where the action is anyway, readings. Americans are kids, you know. They like to be read to while wearing comfortable shoes. Cool sneakers with neon bells and whistles. Setting-spud-in-the-couch athletic wear! High fives! Just like Michael Jordan!

"I mean, what's TV but folks--can't call them actors-­ reading scripts to you. The News is guys in suits reading a half page of newspaper text. No one minds it takes half an hour. They don't even notice the ads are insulting them.

"Glamorous TV personalities in trench coats....They'll do readings at Armpit....The Media C'llege...Professor Oprah, Ma'am, what do you think of Bosnia?

"Yeah, readings in costume! Endless possibilities! Grants! More students and more tuition without hiring more faculty! Brilliant, Samuel! Eureka. What say, Manda? You have a canny head on your shoulders."

"Isn't it about time one of you took out the garbanzo? I think the pile is about high enough now, don't you think? I'm sure I saw a rat scouting it this morning. And I saw you too, Pat. You failed the stacking test. That Schitz can fell off. Time, gentlemen, time."

"Pat," Sam said. "It's your turn to tend goal, if the Schitz can is yours."

"Oh hell," Pat said, his enthusiasm quenched. "All right, but watch the drop angles, wouldja? You nearly broke my neck last time."

Sam and Pat had discovered it was less arduous to drop the bags down into the alley from the kitchen window than to haul them down five flights of stairs. Unfortunately, somebody still had to walk down in order to open the lids of the cans. But at least he could do so unencumbered by garbonzo. Anyway, there had to be some penalty for failing the stacking test.

The remaining point of controversy was whether cleaning up the burst misses was the responsibility of the goalie or the shooter. It would seem to be the shooter's, since he was the one who missed, but if he had to descend the stairs too, what was the point of rotating goalies? And there was an art and responsibility to can-placement as well.

Amanda was particularly good at both, but not dumb enough to be therefore conned into taking more frequent turns.

It was quite a show. The neighbors turned out to watch, opening their windows even if Sam and Pat had procrastinated to a late hour. The plunge of the black bags, the freefall spin of the paper ones, the loose escaping flutters, the thunderous galvanized hits, the crashing misses, the falcons screaming from the roof, the drunken laughter of the players, the occasional goalkeeper carried from the field of play, the cheers and groans of the crowd, the enraged screams of the awoken super.

The simple pleasures of the poor.

The next morning Sam attended his daily morning grammar session with Louis Russo. Russo found it inconvenient to schedule any other time. Some students worked two jobs and had difficulty attending even their classes, others couldn't be bothered to drive their BMWs back from Vermont or the Vineyard. Moral distinctions were pointless, and served only to annoy the already overburdened instructor, unable and uninclined to sleuth out the truth. What is Truth?

Russo's eyes were still wide from the dark stairwell. It had clearly done nothing for his comprehension. Childe Harold to the dark tower came. And left again, still Childe Harold.

Then, still rattled, Sam attempted to explain the concept of a sentence to his eight AM class. It seemed to him that avoiding sentence fragments, run-ons and comma splices, as well as pronoun reference errors and incorrect adjectival, nominative and verbal forms, required grasping what a sentence is.

One school of thought held that grammar was "prescriptive" nonsense, that it only stifled creativity and motivation. Of course, if a classroom's creative magic should fail again, students would remain uninspired, unmotivated--and still agrammatical too.

Besides, the students were all business majors, at least in the sense that they desired eventual employment. And Sam found it hard to believe that many businessmen--even in "media"--could be art for art's sakers. Of course, undoubtedly, many businessmen couldn't tell a run-on sentence from a parallelogram. But many could, and others could at least dimly sense when a sentence in an application letter was incoherent, or too informally dressed for office decorum.

The students seemed to feel that any long sentence was a run on. For instance one of Samuel Johnson's. Or of anyone who wrote before Hemingway happily jejuned the language. Teach oughta hand out a formula for number of words, or perhaps a ruler or cut twig, rather than confusing them with concepts which seemed to have more exceptions than rules.

None had ever diagrammed a sentence. A process more boring to teach than to learn, Sam found. Inadvisable, too, because it got one labeled a grammar queen. Contemned, if not barred from re-hiring.

A few students had done multiple choice exercises: labeling words adj, adv etc. Some had written compositions before. Apparently, their teachers had concentrated on how colorful their prose was. These students could be identified by their bizarre piles of adjectives. Their more than usually uncertain diction. Their total disregard of grammar--not a circumspect, nervous, painful and fearful ignorance, but cavalier insouciance.

They all had been taught self-esteem and self-expression, so they knew their opinions to be at least equal to Sam's. Thus, naturally, grades were based on whether Sam liked them or not.

Sam had acquired his power merely by being hired, because he was older. I.e. graduated.

Sam tried to explain why they should know grammar. What it was based on.

This was a waste of time. Their reluctance came not from considered belief in the future of non-verbal media, but from unwillingness to do something difficult which they had successfully avoided for almost 20 years, and which one more year of perseverance was likely to reward them with never having to encompass. They were in sight of the goal. View halloo had been cried: the fox was in sight. They scented blood.

To get a sense of the level at which he could teach, Sam had asked them to make a list, by title and author, of all the books they had ever read.

A third of the class was able to list at least one book, though Sam couldn't be sure they had actually read it. Another third could list a book by either title OR author. The remaining third had either read books whose authors and titles they could no longer remember; or, besides never having read a book of any kind, also didn't know the names of any, nor of any writers.

Sam began to see the merits of Pat's creative writing scheme. It was either that or invent methods to teach Lit to students who had never read a book, and had no intention of blemishing a spotless record at this late date.

Sam inquired what they had done in grammar and high school, and why they supposed the former was entitled as it was.

He thereby showed himself to be ignorant, probably stupid. It was now called primary school. There, and in middle and high school, they had read, or perhaps been read, stories. And discussed them.

Probably winkling out their moral messages, Sam decided.

For they were mildly competent at translating simpler texts into sanctimonious cliches.

That's what text was for, was their belief. That's what speech was for. Confronted by any adult--which had happened rarely but had apparently been memorably unpleasant--they'd discovered that they could escape quickest by reciting the precipitating situation's moral lesson.

Since the purpose of deciphering boring texts was to translate them into proverbs which everyone already knew and ignored, it was no wonder they felt reading to be a waste of time. TV was clearly superior. It told you the moral message--right at the end of the show, where you couldn't miss it. And it didn't require special skills either. Like reading.

Once, Sam had lectured a "philosophy class" he took over for a sick tenured faculty member. He had painstakingly laid out the argument of a Platonic dialogue. One of the better, more earnest students came up after class. Genuinely baffled by Sam and Plato's dialectical labors, she said, "So Socrates is really just saying we ought to be moral, isn't that all?"

So Sam had his doubts about the discussions they said they'd had. After all, consider their reading comprehension, and his own failure to get them to discuss anything at all.

But he said, "Fine. Your grammar school teacher led college discussion sections, so I have to teach you grammar. That's what I got a PHD in Lit for."

The ones who were listening sulked.

"The reason you have to learn this material is because if you don't I'll flunk you."

Now they were scared and sulky, a dangerous combination.

The cornered student....

Months seemed to have elapsed. Sam had begun--insomniac yet drowsy, burdened with responsibility, appalled by their first compositions--by wondering desperately how he (their last chance to become literate, that is, to Sam's mind, fully human) could teach thirty eighteen year olds, all at different levels and each with different problems, how to write decently.

Sam resolved that if they all worked very hard it might be possible to get most of them through, and the rest a leg up for next time.

But he discovered that no one else had any intention of working hard. Dogged, he was met by absenteeism, cheating and disruptions; failure to hand in assignments, or to even glance at more than the grade on those he handed back, which were covered with his scrupulous corrections and comments.

On the part of the best students, rigid adherence to formulas about number of pages, spacing of margins.

He learned to anticipate that every student had some serious disability. The few who appeared to be bright, or who could write standard English, had emotional problems. PTSD. Sociopathy. ADHD. Substance Abuse. Despair, Restlessness, Anomie.

After class, Sam trotted back to his office. Obsessively rehearsing these complaints, he imagined telling them to Pat. But first he stopped by the Media and Technology Department to ask Ears about the toilet.

Ears had his feet up on his desk. He was reading and annotating copies of Oscar Lewis' “La Vida” and Zola's “L'Assomoir.” He looked up pleasantly.

"You know," he said, "it's not surprising 'the culture of poverty' should be exactly the same in Puerto Rican NY and turn­ of-the-century Parisian *quartiers*--I mean folks buying on impulse; coffee at the deli by the cup instead of from a saved­ for kitchen coffee maker: binge and bust, all that. Nor does it surprise me everyone credits Oscar Lewis instead of Zola with the discovery. After all, the catch-phrase is his, and how many politicians or reporters read old novels? But what I'm trying to figure out is why their writing styles are exactly the same. I mean, one is a 19th century French novelist and the other, even if he's kind of literary, is a 20th century American sociologist. My thinking is, could it be the *Erlebte Rede*?"

Sam might've been surprised, but, up until he'd left Harvard a few weeks before, this had been the daily tenor of conversation, so he slipped back into the manner without losing a beat. It was Armpit that had been the shock.

"You could be right," he said. "If you closely follow your characters' speech and way of thinking, the way both writers do, it might make the language come out similar, if the cultures are too. If you're interested in that style, you might try Celine. *Mort a Credit*. It's very slangy French, but there's a fantastic translation by Ralph Mannheim. “Death on the Installment Plan.”"

"Great title, I always thought. Now there's a sociology text title that could make my fortune. Death on the Installment Plan: (FULL dress colon) Life in the US Ghetto."

"There's a whole history of that style in France. Rabelais maybe, certainly Marivaux' book about a chambermaid—“The Chambermaid”? I can't remember the title--even though Celine is supposed to have invented it, the three dots and fragments and all. He did develop it. It's kind of like Eduard Dujardin and Joyce, I guess.... --Are you coming to lunch?”

"Naw, I gotta get some work done sometime. You gwan. Maybe Lewis read Zola. Hmm…."

Hathaway lumbered in behind Sam, a clutch of forms in his earnest grip, his rhino lip pursed to speak. Sam hastily added, "Well I hate to mention it--the sublime to the ridiculous and all--but you know the faculty toilet is busted again."

Ears set his powerful neck and jaw muscles, his grand feet hit the floor, and a terrible bellow issued from the barrier of his great white African teeth.

"Ears tard o fixin terlit. Honkie mothafuckas be pullin they own damn shit outa them fuckin magazines fum now on."

Pat puffed calmly as Sam told him about his morning.

"If that panzerized son of a bitch would fix it once right, he wouldn't have to be fixin it all the time. He makes as much as R. Soul, collecting a different check for all his positions. Media Dept, Super, Black Studies Chair, Affirmative Action Compliance Officer."

"Now I think about it, all that TV equipment the students are supposedly using can't be working either, can it?"

"Nope. The working equipment was stolen during the last re­organization. We weren't getting any pay checks, so we all pulled strings to get on the media, or at a worst Library, committees. Ears runit, them olden days."

"How do you stand it, Pat?"

"I'm fixin ta excape."

"The Creative Writing Program?"

"Nope. Going into business." Pat puffed importantly.

"What kind?"

"I have a number of schemes in mind, irons in the fire, you might say. Right now, as you may have surmised, I'm working on a proposal to sell falcons to oil-rich Arabs."

"What do you mean, falcons?. You mean falcons?"

"Falcons," said Pat firmly.

Sam's smile faded. He could see Pat wasn’t joking.

"Well, it might seem strange," Pat said defensively, seeing the smile, "but the thing of it is, these Arabs...apparently part of their upward mobility, becoming rich on oil money and all, is royal-type sports. You know, like Agha Khan horse racing. Desert traditions. And....and apparently the best birds for falconry come from right here. Then I met a guy who trains them, who needed a place....You may have noticed the shrieks from the roof? My forays up the firestairs to feed them? The rabbit and rat cages in my closet? Falcons." Pat put his string-tied brogues up on the desk and puffed some more.

"What kind of tobacco is that?" Sam asked, tactfully changing the subject. Though he disliked cigarette smoke, he normally found pipes aromatic, but Pat's was unusually foul.

But suddenly George's claim that it smelled like bird shit, and the striped feathers on the couch cover came back to Sam....Perhaps this topic wasn't so tactful....Another foot put wrong?

"It's only two-thirds pipe tobacco, actually," Pat said. "I found it's cheaper--goes farther--if you add about a third oak leaves."

"Oak leaves?"

"Oak leaves."

The next morning Sam was again woken by his bowels. A 'gut feeling' he should run for it? Samuel Sheave, navel-regarding haruspex.

He sat the toilet for a goodish time, unfortunately without the least need to norg, oog or ek. Brown water--Pat's name for US beer. Despite the pain, Sam still felt dazed and sleepy, even after nine hours.

Coffee, Sam thought. Coffee. Amanda had swiped that half sack of Blue Mountain from the rich old lady leaving the Harvard Coop. Ah, real coffee. It would aggravate the diarrhea, but let his bowels run. At least he'd meet his fate with his eyes open.

Sam staggered into the kitchen and set the kettle on the fire. He reconstructed Pat's home-made coffee machine, putting a take-out soft drink top from the greasy spoon upside down on top of a mug, and lining it with paper towel in lieu of a filter. He carefully filled the rounded towel with fresh ground coffee and sat at the table to wait.

The water boiled. Sam poured a modicum into the paper towel. He sat down again. He chucked the remains of a Humbug at the bin. It missed. "Hell, " he said, surveying the mustard­ splattered plaster.

Where had that damn sponge got to?

After a bit, Sam picked up the kettle again, but the hot water hadn't yet filtered through Pat's device.

"Damn Pat. This fucking thing will never unconstipate," Sam said, slamming the until-then only passively-resistant coffee drip into the sink. It splashed coffee and coffee grounds over the counter, the sink, the wall and his last white shirt.

Within Sam exploded a rage so intense it created a pause, a perceptible lightening of the ambient air. Within this stillness he experienced a furious desire to smash the homemade apparatus against the wall. He stayed his hand, not because he grasped that the apparatus was insensible, but because he feared his second counterattack would be as Pyrrhic as his first.

Well, cold buggers and rewarmed greasy spoon coffee it was. Cheap and convenient. He retrieved the bogger and watered it with a few tears.

"Having a good cry, are we?" said Amanda.

Sam jumped. He hadn't realized she was home. It was hard to tell. Amanda was quiet. And neither her door nor Sam's closed, so an open door was no sign. Only Pat slept in privacy.

She and Sam had gotten into the habit of wandering into and out of each other's bedrooms or bath time like sister and brother. The custom was rather a comfort.

"Well, care to share a cold booger?" Sam asked. "I didn't mean to hog it. Hadn't realized you were slithering around."

"The doors and fixtures do get depressing sometimes, don't they?"

"I don't mind the doors. Really."

"Still, getting your ass sprayed every time you take a shit can't be that great if you're already runny. I mean, I like a bidet in its place….”

"Truth be told, Manda, this is kind of the nicest place I've ever lived. Inclusive the homestead at Chevy Chase. But it's just so labor-intensive, with Armpit already draining you. R. Soul, excuse me. Arsehole Jr, that's the prob. The rest I enjoy complaining about."

"Aw, U/Mass isn't much better."

"True enough. You don't suppose we could get the toilet to stop that roaring? It's beautiful, the lion-claw feet, the porcelain, the old Italian tile, the leaded glass, and I can handle the two AM Irish sea chanties, but I've been dreaming about being thrown to lions....I mean, is Ahmed really hooked up with the PLO? Why would he trust us with the info?"

"I don't think it's trust. We're probably the only people to pronounce his name correctly since he left his homeland. Or at least try. He suffers nostalgia. Like all immigrants."

"'In this country, Sir, we are all foreigners.' All unconsciously remembering a lost Eden. Everyone's an expat of some kind. ‘The only true paradise is the one you have lost.’"

"Goodness, you are a moaner. --Besides, Sam, I doubt the FBI cares about the PLO. They don't operate here. MOSSAD, yes, but even they probably leave small contributors alone. I mean, however much Ahmed gives, it can't compare to Prince Fahd, can it? And it's not like Ahmed would have any trouble moving money on the QT....

"You know, Sam, I do remember, now I think about it, Pat telling me that the morning the Israeli-Egypt accord was announced, he ran into Ahmed in the hall. Ahmed said, 'He's a dead man." He wouldn't even say Sadat's name. Kept referring to him as The Dead One. Literal from the Arabic, we assumed."

"Fine. I keep mouth shut. No phone calls. Clawfoot toilet roar, martyr filthy Christian: what the hell, if pay rent, keep mouth shut, help landlord."

"Absolutely."

There was yet another note in Sam's mailbox from Dean Margerine requesting a meeting. Three PM. Sam had come to expect these command appearances almost daily. He was disappointed too infrequently. Sometimes he was summoned by her assistant from his very classroom.

Sam felt he had entered Kafka's world of the child again. You don't grasp the rules which you seem constantly to be transgressing. They only seem obvious after you've been punished. Your best efforts are rewarded with scoldings--but not often enough to establish a pattern--and the rare praise arrives with equal mystery.

Dean Margerine had a habit of employing the chair in front of her desk as a second waiting room. Sam would be ushered in, after a suitable time spent sitting in the outer waiting room, hearing Dean Margerine, through her open door, listening on the phone. Hmm...Oh Dear...Yes...Ye-es.

Finally, Sam would sit in the chair in front of her desk--a small boat in the trough of a sea of paper--while Margerine made and answered phone calls, continued to work on papers, remembered files she had to check.

She looked at Sam over her glasses. They fell, finally, off the end of her nose. The comic effect, instead of alleviating Sam's anxiety, made it somehow more abdominal.

"We've been getting complaints, urn. First off, urn, you seem to have been absent one day without informing this office beforehand."

"I had a flat. Missed my first class. They only give you ten minutes, you know."

"Then the students say you expect them to read 50 pages a week. This can't be true of course, but it does indicate, urn...."

"I'm afraid it is."

"Well, that will have to be adjusted. Of course you are enthused about literature, but you can't expect that of every student, you know. They have four other courses too."

"I'll adjust the reading. I had the idea the bulk of college students' work would be outside the classroom, but I can see that with their study habits and attention span my expectation should be that whatever I don't tell them in class, and then test them on, I can't expect them to have learned."

"Well of course. Write it on the blackboard. Tell them to copy it into their notebooks. Make sure they have notebooks."

"It does, unfortunately, reinforce their oral culture, though."

"Their what? Yesss....Then they say when they ask you to explain something they can't understand the explanation. Ah," she peered at a scribbled note, finally turning it upside down. "Ah, ye-es: 'he just makes it worse.'"

"I'll try to condense explanations to a word or phrase, I guess. Give them something to write down, instead of a discussion."

But Dean Margerine's mind was elsewhere. Sam sensed he was in the peristaltic grip of a process vague and long, forwarding his Armpit career.

The official routes were for show only. Promotions, recommendations, new policies, firings, all were actually effected through gossip. Not meetings or conferences like these, still less the official faculty evaluation procedure.

Sam, for example, seemed to be in the shit all the time despite his official superlative rating on that evaluation: in Teaching, Scholarship and Service: for good student evaluations; for his four publications; for spending one Saturday helping to move everything from the still elevatorless adjunct building to the Ad building

This clandestine habit of the Armpit mind meant that administrators' discussion with themselves--their thought processes--didn't proceed openly either. Instead of weighing pros and cons, the administrator presented a formal facade he or she could articulate, while the actual decision was made somewhere in the belly--as with Kafka's ape. The belly­ decision's verbal indicator was a tip-of-the-iceberg phrase or cliche. Ungraspable. "Untacklable" was Kafka's word.

In Sam's case, for example, the word was he was a bright guy, promising, good background, chatty (perhaps too chatty), but "there are complaints." "He's made a lot of mistakes."

What kind of mistakes, whether they could be corrected: such issues never rose to the top. The official mind meandered to something else. The belly had decided; its verbal signifier was arbitrary, inattended.

Margerine was still listening on the phone. Sam's mind again wandered, anxiously.

Reasoning with stupid people is trying. They're used to employing other organs than their brain. They recognize viscerally its inadequacy to make decisions--even to justify them. Discussion, they've found, leads to being “shot down”-­ without changing their minds. An unpleasant and confusing experience.

They loathe confusion. For they've learned that they see as through a glass, darkly, and what they do see is not what they get. Following the successful is a better method. Go with the flow.

The underhandedness of students, faculty and administration meant that the surface of any issue was locker room jovialities, or formalities and rules, which it was considered impolite and uncivilized--in fact threatening--to discuss.

Sam thought he might have a higher IQ than many Armpitters, but he knew he did not have their sensitivity to affect. Tones, hesitations or nuances in badinage nudged most of them--belly smart--to subtly and instantly reset their courses.

Brain-smart and belly-stupid seemed to be a deadly combination at Armpit. No wonder Sam had a nervous colon. It sensed it wasn't up to its job.

Margerine, phone hanging from the vise formed by her raised shoulder and inclined ear, rummaged through some files, perhaps needed for the this conversation. Hmmm. Yes, I see.

Her big magenta glasses' upmost temple had already lost her ear, but the other temple was compensatorily clamped to the phone. The glasses revolved. She could only see out of one eye. Oh dear. Ye-es. She squinted at the files. Her mouth twisted, trying to catch and hold the errant temple.

Sam would've pushed the glasses back on her nose but.... Besides, serves her right. Sam returned to his thoughts.

But he didn't want to expend his soul figuring out what everyone felt. Nor did he want to do it the way everyone did it. He wanted to do it right. Teach them to read and write. The way everyone did it, didn't work, obviously.

And the way everyone used to do it, did. Sam's teachers had taught him to read and write; these students', hadn't. There was your mass sample; your double blind, comparative study of rhetoric teaching methods. And it contradicted the consensus of a major, growing industry: Rhetoric Studies/Composition Programs.

Admittedly, the culture had changed. Kids interacted with adults less. People read less. Admired other kinds of celebrities--no intellectuals.

But Sam's old classmates had hated school just as much, he thought, and fought learning with equal resource. American kids hate school. There's your bottom line. Ergo, American schools are hateful.

Though perhaps his peers hadn't cheated as much. But Sam had been solitary, so maybe cheating just hadn't forced itself on his attention until he taught. All the same, Sam thought, there hadn't been any mail order businesses advertising college papers for sale, then.

And his peers had learned to read and write. The students in the rhetoric studies did not.

Sam had participated in these studies. Got a publication out of one, an easy score. You divided the students into two groups, used one method on one, another with the second. Of course, everyone knew which group everyone was in, so maybe the prophecies were self-fulfilling. The Hawthorne effect? Sam wasn't sure. He had no expertise in sociometric statistics. But neither did the rhetoric stars.

One bad study would just disappear, any one study would, any academic publication would, like a thrown stone's ripple in unwatched water. Mass society.

But a thousand bad studies led to belief. Even among the skeptical, even if facts proclaimed the studies wrong. The fact that students couldn't read or write.

Their vocabularies had declined 60% since 1947. Incredible, but true.

It's amazing how much influence ideas have on the stupid, Sam mused. Millions could sincerely believe in Communism for three generations, no matter what they saw it do in the real world. Other millions could believe in low taxes/less government, though no successful industrial nation had ever employed that model.

"Ah," said Margerine. "Let's see, now. Where were we?" She peered intently at a paper on her desk, holding her nose up in the air to secure her glasses. The phone buzzed.

Perhaps Sam's sexual orientation had alienated him. From an early age. He was well aware of the hatred it aroused in many. Why, he'd internalized that hatred himself. After all, he grew up in the same culture. So Sam had never felt secure about it. He'd avoided looking people in the face, retreated to a safer world. Lit. Academia.

But appearing to be what you were didn't seem to be smart either, at Armpit. Sam thought of Yalie Ears. He black­ panthered the way other Blacks tommed. Sam thought of Pat's jovial Irish act--harmlessness. Amanda disappearing into the woodwork like Putney Swope. Anna feigning to be a Polish joke. A dumb immigrant. (With a Gymnasium education!)

Like any reader, Sam had admired Joyce's Stephen reporting his unjust pandying to a higher authority. But now Sam decided Stephen only did what all Catholic students did.

Something about the habit of the confessional, about Catholicism's rigid hierarchic structure, overlaying its sub rosa human indulgence of real life, formed the Catholic world into a church of unquestionable rules overlaying tale-bearing, secret vices and winked-at sins. So long as lip service was paid to the public rules and priesthood, the secret disobediences could be allowed to flourish. The rules could jesuitically forgive or ignore a dues-payer's transgressions, but punish the obstinately virtuous.

In some odd way, Catholicism remained a shame culture, pace the historians. Where the Protestant North made everyone conform his behavior to his own reason--to be thereby justified to others--the Catholic South tried for as much ease or pleasure as possible, when not directly under the eye of an inefficient authority. Inefficient because suborned by its underlings and its own similar mentality.

Margerine brought Sam back to so-called reality. She'd hung up. Sam had found it pleasant to ruminate freely. No distractions, unable to do his paper-grading chores. Though it was stomach-troubling to daydream right in front of Margerine. Waiting for the next bomb. But still the enforced inactivity would, eventually, let his mind wander with perfect freedom.

Sam smiled uncertainly.

"I also have a report here that you told a student you did not get a PHD in Lit in order to teach him grammar."

Sam had a hell of a time excusing himself for that one.

Particularly since he now sensed the accusation and his explanation had no real relevance. Margerine hardly listened. She was taking another call from a parent: listening considerately, making occasional soothing noises, asking concerned questions.

Besides, everyone was so literal-minded that Sam couldn't explain that he'd been urging the student to catch up by his own efforts, for which no teacher could substitute.

Perhaps Sam should have denied saying it. And, in the shock of the moment, it didn't occur to him that his remark was perfectly true. Culture shock makes you doubt even basic definitions.

College classrooms which met 50 minutes three times a week for 15 weeks, and contained 20 year olds, were an ineffective setting for teaching grammar. And Sam couldn't teach a student who wouldn't learn.

Sam remembered his college classes had been focused on the subject matter. Jokes--and there'd been many--were "academic” in that they related to the subject.

This approach was hopeless at Armpit. The subject matter was boring, therefore joking about it made no sense. Instead, jokes functioned as relief. Personal remarks, digressions, personalities formed other breaks.

The Armpit professorate spent their many hours in front of bored classes developing longstanding routines of chatty idiosyncrasies. They become media personalities, as in primary school, where a captive audience also had to be entertained for hours.

A teacher who didn't personalize was seen as stiff and unfriendly. Being friendly was the cardinal virtue--the Armpit sign was no sham. It matched Armpit's Appearance if not Reality.

Short lectures sandwiched in chat, with the "important" material chalked in catch phrases, for inclusion in the notebook, to be coughed up later on short answer exams.

Discussion couldn't lead to a personal relationship, guided by the teacher, between the student and the human text. A student talking led to an immediate break in decorum. Students began chatting privately instead of addressing a forum, because if a student was talking, there was no need to listen, as the material couldn't be on a quiz. Besides, the hours spent listening instead of reading made students desperate for breaks.

Everything had to be incessantly tested. Students simply wouldn't read anything that wouldn't immediately affect their grade by providing an answer to tomorrow's quiz. Threatening an essay final which would require informed discussion of the texts just meant you had to carry it out and flunk most.

The incessant quizzes further oriented the class toward grades. It further increased classroom mechanics.

By the time attendance had been taken, the creaky personalities and digressions aired, assignments for further quizzes given, tests administered, handed back, discussed (in terms of grades, not subject matter), few of the 50 minutes remained. And verbal information transfer is slow to start with. There was so much work, with so little accomplished.

But many teachers found shuffling paper and answering mechanical questions a relief. More soothing than struggling for a flash of interest. Sam could remember no more than a minute or two when a student spoke about an idea. In a way he lived for those moments. A short life but not brilliant one.

Some teachers generated "Ripley's" interest. Michelangelo was the only person who could draw a perfect circle free hand. (Like the popular myths Orwell refuted, probably not even true.) Samuel Johnson could improvise periodic sentences, and write poems by scribbling the beginning of each line, leaving the rhyming endings to be filled in later. This one was true, and did indicate the incisive power of the Doctor's mind, but only in an Einstein-could-multiply-five-figures way, and not compared to the elegance and power of the sentences themselves.

"I think we're going to have to schedule you for a little brush-up composition and basic writing work with our head of Rhetoric and English Composition, Chairman Artschebaevski. Stop by Room E115 before you leave today," Margerine concluded.

Sam flinched.

"Professor Artschebaevski? Doctor Artschebaevski? Dean Artschebaevski? I made an appointment, don't you remember?" Sam addressed the yellow/white-haired head which lay on the rosewood desk of an immaculate office that formed a tiny, Mongol-rugged and Victorian-lampshaded enclave in the littered, filthy suite which was Armpit's Department of Composition and Remediation.

Its Chairperson started guiltily and looked up.

"Oh," she said. "Ghyou are not stoodent."

"No," Sam said.

It was his friend Anna. So that was her last name. After she had rubbed and focused her eyes, she smiled broadly in recognition.

"Ghwell...ghwell...gute....Ghwat can I do you?"

"Dean Margerine sent me to get some advice about teaching Comp."

"About ghwat? Ah, ghyes, compositchon....Ghyes, maybe I can ghelp you....You know ghwat iss verb?"

"I don't think the problem is my knowledge of grammar," Sam said stiffly.

"Says all teacher. Ghwat iss verb?"

"A word or phrase indicating an action or state of being. The main workman of the sentence."

"Ghyes, gute. I speak Politch, ghyou know...but still I know more dan liddle bastahrds....Ghwat iss problem, den?’

"Well, it seems my teaching methods....I make the students read books.”

“Ghyou ghwat?"

"Make them read books."

"No, no. NOT gute. Iss not possible. I read book, you read book, stoodent not read book. 'Selection,' maybe."

"Yes, I see that. But everyone hints I must be friendly to the students, otherwise they'll drop out or fail or go to another college."

"Ghyes, lose money. Manny udder collitch....Ghyes, you most be friendly to liddle bastahrds. Always friendly. Pretend you lauve dem. Day too stoopit know ghyou lyink.”

"Do you like them?" Sam asked.

"Me? Ghyou asking I like stoodent? I ghate de liddle bastahrds....I ghate dem.”

"How do you manage, then? How do you survive?” Sam felt he'd found a compatriot..Better, a person who lived in the same reality. Slavic seriousness, sincerity, a touch of the real, concern, even disaffection....

Anna looked around suspiciously.

“I tell ghyou,” she said. “You like vodka? Real Politch vodka?

“Yes, I do,” Sam said.

"OK,” she said. "Iss gute.” She reached into a cherrywood drawer and pulled out a bottle of Wyborova. She took a healthy swig. "Here," she said. "Iss gute vodka.”

Sam took a smaller swig. He coughed.

"See?" she said. "Iss feel better already, no?

"Luke," she said. "Ghyou younk American boy. Naife. Tink everytink is comink out OK, iss most be OK....I tellink ghyou, I am Politch whomman, middle age Politch whomman....I tellink ghyou, is nosink comink out OK. Ghyou understand. Iss big mistake Americans’....We know....Iss not OK." She took another swig and passed the bottle back. "Iss nosink OK...."

"Yes," Sam said, taking a swig.

"Luke," she said. "Iss same as my country, collitch....Ghyou understand? Iss like Polant."

She took a swig and handed the bottle back to Sam.

"What do you mean?" Sam took a swig. He coughed again.

"Listen," Anna said. ‘In Polant iss KGB. Ghyou know ghwat is KGB?”

"Yes," Sam said. "Russian secret police." He took another swig and handed her the bottle.

"Shhh," she said, looking around.

"Ghyes," she went on after a swig of vodka. "Iss like Polant. KGB iss comink, ghyou are smilink. Iss like Dean and Chairman and President collitch. Ghyou understand?"

"I think so," Sam said.

"Gute," she said. "Iss also comink round stoodent....Ghyes, no?”

"Yes," Sam said.

“No.”

“No?”

”Well, yes," she said, passing the bottle back. "Anyway…iss many people lauve KGB....Anyway, iss some....Iss peoples tellink KGB ghwat you say..."

"Iss like stoodent collitch," Sam said.

"Ghyou betcha," Anna said, delighted. "Ghyou got it. Iss someone iss stranger in Polant, ghyou smilink."

"Like at KGB," Sam said, passing the bottle back. It was going down easier.

"Ghyes, is maybe KGB. Or iss tellink KGB."

"Right," Sam said.

"Later then KGB iss gone, stranger iss gone, stoodent iss gone, collitch iss gone, ghyou maybe takink liddle bit vodka," she said. "Iss gute. Ghyou maybe not smilink then." She polished off the remains of the bottle. "But maybe you really smilink." She winked at Sam.

They embraced and kissed on both wet cheeks, through their tears.

"OK," Sam said.

"Iss NOT OK," she said.

"OK," Sam said. “Iss nosink OK."

"Gute," she said. "Iss OK iss not OK....Sometimes. You got it. Like Isaiah Berlin. You read."

"OK," Sam said.

Anna smiled beatifically and laid her gentle head back down on her padded leather desk pad.

Sam tiptoed out, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Quite an excellent composition conference, he thought. Motivational. Metaphysical. Vodka, made of potatoes, anchored you to earth, after you suffered the floating existential angst caused by pretending to the KGB you were what you were not. That YOU didn't exist. Anna had read her Lost Generation, her Sartre, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Being. Ah, to be sure. Urp.

Sam was beginning to realize he didn't dress right either. Sensitive to the sneers of, for example, James, his ex, he'd painfully evolved a uniform, so he'd no longer have to worry every morning about what he was going to put on. Black ostrich Lucchese boots (given to him by James on his birthday to make him look even taller and slimmer), jeans belted with a pewter buckle (second birthday present of their two year affair), faded polo or oxford shirts and one of two unstructured jackets--the linen in the summer, the thick raw silk in the winter, when Boston also demanded insulated Chippewa boots and a down jacket. Filene's basement, all but the presents. Even two years later he could still get a bitter-sweet thrill from examining the boots' painstaking artistry with the finest leathers. Was this perfection consoling? nostalgic? somewhere between?

However, observing Amanda's pressed jeans with heels and swirly silk shirts, her elegantly simple shifts, Sam had begun to contemplate a suit and tie. But now he could see that wouldn't do either. He could imagine Anna explaining, "Ghyou most wear brown ledder shoe wit cheap blue wool pant, pattern synthetic sock, check sport jacket, pattern polyester shirt, pattern tie." The Armpit uniform of the day. Armpit Dress Blues.

Sam shuddered. He didn't really care how other people dressed--he might even be suspicious of the chic--but like most people he was particular about what he and his imagined or real lovers wore, and appreciative of some people's taste. Amanda's.

It was probably too late anyway, he thought hopefully.

Next, Sam wove on down to the basement for his daily swim. It was late now, after all those meetings, but he was still rigidly clinging to his normal schedule. Compulsively trying to keep things from falling apart. Regular exercise. Transfer some Armpit tension from his colon to his deltoids. Besides, Sam was still vain of his swimmer's physique, and hoped not to lose it all at once.

Two or three times a week he loped· the bridges across the Charles, but running was good for the heart, lungs and calves only. Nothing anyone sees. 'Scrawnifying,' James had called running. Of course James hadn't been fully taken with swimming either. 'Pulling yourself 2K by your arms, like a polio victim.' James was a body-builder. Quick, efficient, easy to segment between ER traumas.

The pool was small (a real kick-turn put Sam a third of the way across), turbid, kept tepid, smelled suspicious and the shallow end was full of nonswimming third world peoples. Brought to Armpit by Headhunters.

Literally. “Headhunters” were recruiters who inveigled foreign students. Armpit lost on the tuition, after the headhunters' hefty cut, but made up on room and board. It was hoped such students' backgrounds might've accustomed them to doing without indoor plumbing.

However, whining seemed to have become internationalized--America's most successful export--so there were regular native uprisings; what was worse, mass defections to other lowlife colleges, which abound in Boston.

This floating--or rather wading or soaking--rainbow coalition made laps difficult, but less boring. Years of high school and college swimming had paid Sam's tuition, but left him less and less entertained by those old, familiar hours with his head in a green baggy. Bubble bubble. Sensory deprivation. Itchy ears, straw hair, dry chlorinated skin. “How delectable," James would sneer, impressed all the same.

Dartmouth and Harvard. Which was fortunate, since, while Sam's mother had become dully reconciled to what she didn't want to know about his orientation, Sam's father had the misfortune to be a Republican Committeeman. As result, he found adherence to a policy of don't ask don't tell fundamentally unsavory. Uneasy. For his family, his neighbors, his colleagues, the press, and especially for that still, small voice within.

He didn't see much of Sam. Politics and business kept him busy.

And Sam suspected his father was sensitized by previous family scandals: by some history which Sam had never been made privy to, perhaps under the theory that it would only encourage him. There was that brace of black sheep expat great uncles....

Today, after a few laps and disentangling himself from a Pakistani, an Arab and a giggling, plump African-American, Sam decided it was no use. Besides, the vodka was coming back on him. And the pool's smell made Sam suspect the foreign students were enjoying indoor plumbing after all. He was pleased that the many broken-into, bent and twisted lockers had not been increased by his during the time he was swimming, but he still felt sick, so he stopped on the way back to his office to throw up.

The toilet still didn't work.

“Fuck Ears," Sam said to himself moodily. High culture was coming to seem less important than running water. He’d have to waste time making his way across the bridges to Harvard’s pool, to which he still had a counterfeit ID. His real old one with a faked date stamp. Do a mile or two, 20 to 40 minutes.

On his way across the second floor to the stairs to his own floor, Sam passed by Hathaway's more spacious, though still decrepit, quarters. Peppermint deodorant? Hathaway's door was always open: a policy not so much of hospitality as of prophylaxis against sexual harassment suits. Sam paused to say hello. He wanted to seem friendly to the Old Guard.

Hathaway was entertaining a stoodent. It was Louis Russo. Russo was saying, brokenly, "·..I mean, Doctor, you just have to be one of the best, I mean just the best teacher in this whole place, school."

Sam grinned and tried to catch Hathaway's eye, so as to share some collegial, humorous appreciation of Russo's snow job technique. But Hathaway's gaze was modestly glued to the floor.

Sam went on. He clambered tiredly up the final stairs to his garret office. It was late.

A passing student gave him a strange look.

It dawned on Sam that she was one of his, the sleazy Miss LaVeglia. She looked more like Twiggy than ever. Slack jawed, open childish lips. Sam suppressed his returning queasiness. Completely sober, his head now hurting, Sam wondered idly what she was doing in his corridor.

Just before he reached the office, George came out. His tie was on crooked. "Ho," Sam said to himself.

George started.

"Hi, I mean,” Sam said.

"Uh, you're getting home late today," George said.

"Yes," Sam said. "Another meeting with Margerine."

"Oh…. Sorry," George said.

"Yes....How's your mom's sciatica?"

Sam settled tiredly into the couch while George filled in the details. When Sam's stomach woke him, George was gone. The cover had been pulled over Sam's legs.

He had been dreaming he was Prometheus bringing fire....It burned and no one seemed to want it....You cast your bread upon the waters, and the sharks eat it....The man he was trying to unload the fire to looked more and more like a St. Bernard puppy....Its droopy sentimental eyes looked sinister on the vulture eating Sam's liver….The tail feathers tickled his nose. Sam sneezed himself awake.

A striped feather floated gently among the motes in the dusty air.

The next semester, as Armpit began falling into the red again, it began to enjoy daily faculty meetings. Though stupefying, they did gradually lay bare to Sam the administrative functioning.

These long meetings were held in the low-ceilinged main hall, which would gradually fill with smoke. Better colleges' faculty smoked less, published more and seemed less physically repulsive, Sam thought, though they didn't appear to teach English much better.

Armpit's veneer of mutual backpatting slowly dissolved in acid. The measly paychecks dwindled and stopped. The meetings grew longer.

More re-organization. Threats of cuts. Amanda was appointed Dean of Women's Studies. Still part-time, though.

In view of President Richard Soul's generous benefaction and fund-raising, the college was to be renamed R. Soul Jr. College. Sam could hear Pat already. Arsehole Jr.

"Same number of letters as Pitt," the President joked lamely, "so Ears can just paint over them while he repairs the old sign--and even fills in those missing letters. A symbol of the new economy measures. Lower taxes less government. Ha ha."

One afternoon, faculty were assembling for another of these meetings. Some folks were already seated; others milled around the foyer. Sam had come in late, after lingering over some Baggers at the spoon with Pat. The restaurant manager (owner?) had been surlier than ever. A level of rudeness remarkable even for urban America. Even the view of the Park charmed less, now the windows were getting so grimy. Had the deep-fry oil ever been changed?

Sam was standing next to Hathaway, near the auditorium doors. He'd been rubbing up to Hathaway, since Hathaway represented the solid old Kludge to him. Sam was beginning to see that visible malcontents like Anna and Pat might be safe because of their longevity--the Village Molester--but newcomers associated with them weren't. Sam rolled his shoulders and shook his triceps loose. Sweaty pits, tense neck. Did that smoky smell come from the age-old ashtrays, or another electrical fire?

"I ku-can't see how these meetings will help the duh­financial problems of the kuh-college," Hathaway was saying, raising his voice to be heard over the vacuum cleaner. "It's not if it were a as Duh-partmental problem."

"They certainly are interesting though," Sam replied, stifling a yawn. "For example, the business manager gets sacked for paying for the elevator repair. I never realized you could improve cash flow by putting off bill payments. To say nothing of stiffing them entirely. And I've been paying my bills on time. When I can. No wonder I’m regarded as a fool."

Hathaway glanced up briefly, momentarily disturbed in his grey concern for the kuh-college. Sam realized he was once again betraying his lack of identification. Yazzuh, dat po callage sho be needin ouwa hep now fo showa. It do bring de tears to yore eyen, dat po lil chile. I be cryin my eyen out ebbery night, t'inkin bout dat po pick'ninny. Nebber done no ha'm to no-body.

Before Hathaway could unravel his concern enough to move his feet in the direction of the assembly, a hell of a din broke out. A crowd of yelling and crying students was pushing into the hall, focused around some large object.

"What kuh-has transpired?”

Sam trotted to the window to look, while Hathaway blinked his small eyes in alarm.

A student ran past, sobbing. Sam grabbed him.

"What happened?"

"A kid got hurt."

"What kuh-is at hand?"

"A student has been injured."

Sam peered out the gritty window. He could see Pat in the melee, and hear his stentorian bellows over the babble.

"Professor," Sam said, "I believe the college sign has worked loose and felled some unfortunate student."

"Don't pick him up," Pat was yelling. "He may have a neck injury. Help me edge him on the sign....Let's carry him inside....You, stabilize his neck….You, call an ambulance. From the phone booth...that phone booth….Well, borrow one from someone. Well, find one that does."

The crowd moved through the revolving doors, where many of its members were cut off, thinning it. Pat was negotiating the side door, forced shut by the milling, thrusting mass. He was pushing the sign with one hand and holding the door open with the other, his bearish shoulders straining.

"Put him down over there," he bellowed, nodding with his head at George's corner.

The vacuum shut off abruptly.

"No you don't," shrieked George. "You know anywhere else is just as good. Can't you ever leave me in peace, you wretched bully....Blood! My carpet!"

Pat, his swollen Irish face red with rage, was bellowing back at George. The words selfcentered and psychotic were all Sam could make out. George ran up and began pushing the sign back out. Pat resumed his thrust toward George's desk. Norg, oog, ek. George fell back, overpowered.

Beside himself, he darted to his vacuum, detached the pipe and rushed back, brandishing it. He began beating Pat over the head and shoulders.

Pat retrenched, protecting himself with his right hand, while using his left to hold his corner of the sign, which wobbled dangerously.

"Maniac," he screamed. "Someone disarm him.”

Hathaway left off blinking and charged, tusks down.

"Du-this is unseemly," he cried, his voice high and unsteady with outrage. The sign surged forward again, like the body of Patroklos.

Suddenly, Pat's shoe-string gave way and he pitched forward, his knees loosened. The student tumbled from the sign, as its remaining chain, held by Louis Russo, snapped.

"Clumsy fool," screamed George. "Now see what you've done."

The student groaned loudly. His armor clattered upon him.

"Ears fixit."

"Don't you touch him, you mad Ethiopian," yelled Pat. He grabbed for the giant screwdriver Ears was brandishing.

"He means the sign, Pat," Sam said, laying a calming hand on his shoulder. Sam had taken one corner.

"I'll kill you if you touch him," bellowed Pat, his eyes unseeing as he shook Sam loose.

"Racist pig. Ears know who been flushin dem magazine downa terlit." Ears waved his screwdriver over his head.

The semi-conscious student whimpered in fear, his eyes wide in his pale face as he stared, possibly hallucinating, at the struggling black and white figures waltzing unsteadily above him. His eyes darkened.

"Kuh-unseemly wrangling."

"You broke my tubing," sobbed George, beating at Pat's shoulder with his bent vacuum. Missing, he whacked Ears soundly, the blow resounding on the shaven skull.

"Gen-o-cide! Alla you racist mothafuckas tryna...Gen-o­cide!..."

Other faculty began pouring in from the assembly, joining students delayed by the revolving door. As when bees, swarming from their hive....An ambulance could be heard over the din.

Sam saw President Soul hanging back fearfully. He was wearing a back brace. One noticed such inconsequential details in crises.

The faculty meeting was postponed.

The atmosphere in the office the next day could have been basted onto a rack of barbecue ribs. After George left for his library class, Pat looked up and winked through his head bandage.

"Notice the back brace?" he asked.

"Yeah,” Sam said. "How did he come by it?”

“He was fookin that slinky LaVeglia on his coach--she war flunkin Television Appreciation--when the Leader Magazines shifted from under the back leg.”

Pat's face dropped back moodily.

"The heat is going to be on, though," he said.

It was nearing the end of the semester, so student appointments were heavy. Weeping, Angela Laveglia pleaded with Sam to take her parents' divorce into account. Not in exactly those words, of course. It was hard for her to concentrate.

"Oh dear," Sam said sympathetically. "Yas, muss be tough. An F. Parents upset likely, too, eh? When did the divorce come through?"

"What?"

"The divorce. When did it happen?”

'

"Three years ago."

Laveglia’s slinky low cut shirt was of no use on Sam, of course, no matter how far she bent over.

Louis Russo clicked in on his tap-equipped shoes. "Sit," said Sam.

Russo did. His droopy eyes looked up at Sam plaintively. Sam had gathered that, to his peers, Russo seemed--or at least attempted to seem--a suave smoke-blower. Russo was the only one among them, as Pat had observed, who had enough command of language to even attempt to BS, run a snow job, kiss the blarney. Russo's connery was attempted with the expansive and commanding manner of some model. Sam imagined some uncle, a patron in the Latin sense.

But a decade of failed attempts had caused to dawn in Russo's doggy brain a dim intimation of the probability of failure. So, during his attempts to pull the wool over his teachers' eyes, his voice tended to drop into a mumble whenever his inspiration became unduly taxed.

"Still, you have to give the pup credit," Murph had said. "None of the other stoodents are even up to attempting a snow job anymore. Ah, how we older faculty miss the ole bull-shit essay. You need a little knowledge in order to stretch it thin. Can't be done with none at all. You can't pad simple declarative sentences, after all. You need a little experience away from the TV to learn to bamboozle folks."

“Speak,” Sam said.

"I know I didn't do good on the quizzes and stuff," Russo whimpered, "and, like, you know, papers and all, so I was wondering if that could affect my grade any." His ears perked hopefully.

"It has to, you know. We spent a week going over how the averages are taken. Plus we discuss grading after every test. As I said, that's our 'contract.'"

"Does that mean I won't get a A?" Russo whined. "I'd hate to get a B. I always got A's in English. My Dad'll hit the fan."

"An A or a B? Mr. Russo, your average is 48. That's not even an F."

"You mean you're going to flunk me?" Russo growled. "But I'm the best writer in the class. I have perfect attendance. I read some of the reading. Lots of guys didn't even buy the book!’

"Listen, I'll do an extra credit assignment," Russo yapped. "Write a big paper on, on, Joyce! I mean it. I'll send it express mail. Right to your address, or if you're vacationing....By the end of next week, without a doubt."

"Mr. Russo, I can't give you an incomplete except with a medical excuse, validated by the school nurse."

"Just give me the grade now," Russo yelped. "The paper will be in the mail absolutely, positively by next Monday."

All Arsehole students were convinced extra credit substituted for, rather than supplemented, regular assignments.

"I know it must be tough for you, but I have no choice. I have to treat everyone alike. Give grades by the averages. It wouldn't be fair to make exceptions. Besides, I can't. It's in my contract. I really sympathize. Your Dad and all."

"But, Doctor, I handed in every assignment. Not only that. I've been coming in here to do even more work. And it was really boring too. What was that for, fun?" Russo barked. "It was torture. You bastard," Russo snarled. "I'll get you for this, see if I don't. You promised! I don't know how you can sleep at night."

Angela LaVeglia tried again.

"Professor, uh Doctor Sheave, I just have to pass this course. Or my scholarship will be cut off. Doctor, I'll do just anything to pass." Angela tucked her foot under her behind and twisted in her chair. Her minny hiked up even further.

Her legs were terrific. And they were boyish enough so that even Sam found them mildly attractive. Though not enough, of course, to make up for her more feminine attributes. Just as for any heterosexual, for Sam it was the revolting idea of the whole which remained the chief deterrent.

Besides, even if she'd been boyish all the way up, and equally sexy, chicken wasn't his taste. James had been almost a mentor. Anyway, Sam's anxiety level had reached a pitch which rarely allowed blood into his mucous membranes any more.

But supposing she had been male, of age, and desirable, and Sam were in a more healthily bloodyminded frame of mind? To Sam's pre-Arsehole mind, the ethics would've been clear.

Students earned grades by achieving objective standards. Faculty were honor-bound to award that achievement. Period.

But what were the standards here? Sam had heard faculty say a student's "attitude problem" had caused his academic difficulties, so Sam began to suspect that the students' conviction that grades reflected whether profs liked or disliked them might be at least partially correct. Were they evaluating students more objectively than each other, Sam, for instance? Hiring and firing? Promotions? LaVeglia herself had been passed up to him without learning how to read or write. Plus, from what he overheard, standards varied from teacher to teacher. Many felt forced to reserve F's for the fifth of their classes who never showed up or never handed in assignments, D's for all those who did, C's for adequate form, B's for passable content as well, and A's for recognizable college work. Even then faculty had to adjust the curve to look normal. "Grade inflation."

Therapeutic grades. Hermeneutic grading.

So, if preventing "a feeling of failure"--emotional distress, in other words--was a reason for passing a student, why not lusciousness?

Sam was pretty sure, all the same, that Arsehole would view the exchange of grades for sex or money as illegitimate. At least if either were forced publicly on its attention. But what was the rationale? Perhaps the concept that extra-marital sex was wrong would cover it.

Sam might have felt more comfortable in a Mongolian village. At least the inhabitants wouldn't have expected him to understand local mores.

"We-ell?" purred LaVeglia hopefully. Sam started slightly. He realized she had misinterpreted his brown study--unfocussed in the general direction of her legs.

"Uh, I don't see..." Sam said, apologetic for his absent­ mindedness. He felt he'd lost control of the interchange, and this had put him in the wrong. "I mean you're a very ap--uh charming young woman--did anyone ever tell you you look just like Twiggy?--but, goodness, you're nowhere near a passing grade. Perhaps we could schedule a conference with the Dean of Compositchon. She might have an idea. I'll call her office. Just check with me tomorrow."

Never say no. Never close the dialogue. Confrontation causes violence. Let it fade.

That night, Sam, sleeping shallowly, tossed and turned on the bed he'd brought along from Cambridge. The mattress wasn't bad--foam didn't last long, but it was cheap and started firm. It rested solidly on two full pieces of 3/4 inch ply supported by nine cinder blocks.

The toilet was babbling quietly to itself, mourning its failure to relieve its duet partner. The chanties had long since faded into the night.

"Sam? Sam-u-el."

"Whuh."

"Listen, sweetypie, would you mind awfully if I snuggled in with you? I'm having a really bad night. I'm skinny and I don't snore."

"That's what they all say." Even half-asleep Sam recognized Amanda's note of false bravado. "Uhmh, sure, Manda. But remember, no touching of intimate parts and no exchange of bodily fluids."

"You really don't like women, do you?" Amanda said happily, burrowing her way under the sheet and comforter.

"I like women fine. That is, I mean, I don't know if I like *people*. I like some women. I like you. Geez," Sam said, waking further, "would I let you sleep in here if I didn't? Would you want to?"

"I guess I don't understand men, or get along with them or something. Real men, anyway. I've had a checkered career."

"REAL men? It's no flaming wonder. Anyone who'd describe himself that way... --Gimme a break with the men bit, wouldja? I mean, what do you want, advice? I haven't been doing so hot myself, is all I can say."

"Chill out. No offense."

"REAL men. Unreal. What is it, two AM?" 'In the long dark night of the soul—‘"

"it's always three o'clock in the morning,'" they quoted in unison.

"Fitzgerald, but what book?"

"Now you have time for Lit chat," Sam said.

"With my good buddy."

"Hey, watch it."

"Men. I don't know what their problem is."

"My name is Sam. I'm a pedigree falcon."

"Please ta meetcha, I'm sure."

"What is the problem, Manda? You go out a reasonabobble amount. Charm and looks abounding."

"Thanks, but it never seems to work out. I seem to panic and cut it off, or I don't really like the guy--they're weird or boorish or something. Or something. Then I do find one and he doesn't like me.”

"Seems normal to me. I mean, welcome to urban America. Or the turn of the century. Or life. Or something."

"And I always thought of gays as having it so easy."

"You can't possibly mean that."

"I mean, going out and social life and all."

"You can untangle many of these prejudices merely by looking upon me as human....I mean this is how wars start...Boris is OK; it's just Russians are evil."

"I'm just babbling. Keeping the night sweats at bay."

"Tell me about it. I thought we had a deal about fluids. And it wouldn't hurt to move over 10 centimeters."

At the faculty meeting, Soul was stern.

"I am very disappointed in many people here. Very disappointed. Disappointed indeed. Many people."

("If they were getting their salaries, they'd be fired," Pat whispered, scorching Sam's ear with charred oakleaf.)

"I am speaking, partly, as many of you know, about this ugly incident which caused the cancellation of our last crucial faculty meeting, for one thing....

"We can ill afford to lose so many students....No matter what the provocation, faculty should restrain themselves....I am negotiating to have assault charges dropped on all sides....”

("Hell, " Pat scorched. "I thought I had the little weasel at last.”)

"The college sign, fortunately, will soon be restored to better than new order, uh, apple pie, uh, repainted, uh, better. It was, as you know, due for repair anyway. I have appointed our Chairman of Black Studies, Professor Jones, to head that committee.

"But I also have to report something more serious, uh, less remediable. That is, unfortunately, it has also come to my attention that person or persons unknown have purloined the Presidential couch, substituting one of inferior workmanship, and attempting to disguise their felony by desecrating a Bokhara carpet. It is clear to me that this was what I believe is called an 'inside job.' We are thus taking appropriate steps to apprehend the malefactors and to restore college property."

George shot Pat a look of malevolent triumph through his glinting specs. Pat paled, his upper lip beading.

"Ah, shit," he said. "The weasel is gonna squeal.”

”Pat,” Sam whispered urgently,” get to George before he gets to Soul. Ask him who else might know Angela LaVeglia intimately, and does he think she might be supinely familiar with both Presidential coaches, in their two respective locations. But, please, don't tell him you got it from me."

"Ah," said Pat admiringly, "the little weasel. I didn't think he had it in him."

Ruminant, Sam was sitting at the kitchen table over his cold Burper. He was coaxing a bristly hair from his right eyebrow, edging it under his ring fingernail, squeezing the nail to the nailbed to trap the hair, and pulling till the hair popped back out from under his nail and his brow twinged; then starting the process over again.

"Picking at ourselves, are we?" Amanda said. Sam started. "'Worried?'" she quoted. "'Upset? Stuck in a dead-end job? Call 1 800 TEAM STAR.'" Her source was a computer-generated envelope which had been delivered to the apt addressed to "Sam!" Sam had hung it on his Arsehole office door.

"You're always sneaking up on me. Stalker."

"Naw, I'm normal. You're just dreamy. Out to lunch. Besides, you look cute when you're startled. Kind of innocent."

Sam's stomach constricted, but he was not surprised to find a notice from Margerine's office that his contract would not be renewed. It was followed by polite phrases about being at his assistance to offer any help she might in these distressing circumstances. Yas, most distressing. Spouse upset too, likely?

Sam had to try for some redress. His financial situation had long since flagged the oil warning. He hoped, from his first teaching position, for at least a recommendation.

That he got readily enough.

Anna came to his defense, a noble sacrifice to the demon of Slavic paranoia, but she was helpless alone.

Sam went to Hathaway.

“Hu-I am sympathetic to your plight, kuh-but I have to think of the duh-good of the duh-partment, of the kuh-college as a whole. That is my primary responsibility.

“HI du-do wish you the best of luck in whatever en-duh-eavor you next attempt, whether ac-kuh-demic or not, however. Please let me know if I ku-can help in any way.”

Anna suffered a transient ischemic incident, and was confined to the hospital for a few days. Sam went to visit.

Mass General was forbidding, more glaring and alien than the sere grey harbor it overlooked. The fugued corridors smelled like cafeteria tapioca and medicated skin-care lotion.

Anna's thin hair looked buttery against the green hospital sheets.

"Ghyou know,” she said, “Dey were right about one ting.”

"Yes, Anna?"

“Not fixing dat sign."

“Because it got rid of at least one stoodent?”

“No, no. Because iss F'iendly C'lege....Kludge. Mean fuckup in computer lingo, ghyou know.”

They kept silent.

"At least, wass always fiendly to me, too."

The phone Pat had spliced into the Bell lines began to ring. Woken, Sam picked it up, morosely.

"Sam? Lisken, ol' boy, the jog is ip. You gotta run fort, my man."

"What!" Sam said, both sleepy and alarmed.

"That doggy devil Russo squealed. Soul knows who knicked the cooch. I been runnin damage conterol, but I kin only save my own royal Irish arse this time, me bhoy. To get either of us out of the soup, someone had to be thrown to the wolves. Kindly pardon the mixed mephator.

"You know how they are here. They feel much better now. They needed a blood sacrifice.”

“I—“

“--No no, don't talk, we haven't much time. I had to tell Soul and Hathaway I was greatly shocked by your behavior. Appalled. I didn't know what to say. I'd considered you my friend! Obviously I was mistaken. Quite the Pecksniff, you see. An orgy of hypocrites. Who could have imagined? A Harvard man! You would've been sick. Almost lost me own luncheon Borgs. No other choice. *Sauve qui peut*, you know. Evry man for hissef. Catastrophucker. Holocouggle.

"Soul is pressin' charges for salt and berry, as well as larceny. He's connected, he'll get the prosecutor to lie down for the neck injury. Deliberate reckless disregard or summat-­ I'm no lawger. But I know him.

"I just hope it's enough. He's lible, big prob like dis, on top of the re-org and all, has to be more than just one person's fault. It's gonna be touch and go. “Wisht I could give 'em George, but he corroborobberated it, ghyou know. Besides, he's the golden haired bhoy. Never peeps word, and they can't get over his akchool pubbing a Book, doncha know. I know he didn't write it, but look at the competootie.

"Listen, pack up some stuffneys quick. Cops on the way. Get thysef to Logan and pick up a tickee for Miami at Delta. I had it left there, nefer mind hoo.

"Listen, bro, it's not as bad as you tink. TV gives you the idea the Effa-B-I is relentlesogoggle searchin for everybooble on a foogitive warrant. Akchool they too lazy. Thin aboot it. They're Irish, you know. Follow the forms, take it easy. “Don't give a fuck. Too many felons. Tee many foolons. What happens, you don't get arrestabobble in the next year or so they forgeet it. Statoots of limitooties run out, Russo will be God knows where--job carrying brandy to the avalanched--Mass isn't gong bother extradite for a small brouhaha like this.

"Listen, my man, the country's crawling with fuckatives. They're thick on the ground. Can't go out for a sammich thout tripping over severobobble. Get a teachin gig in sunny Miami; wheresomever you want. Little schools don't even request credentials, you know. They take your word. Tell 'em you graduated from Trinity in Dubloon or summat. Taking your word is easier than correspondence and filing. Even if the sekatarians do it. They forget. It's a third world here now, man.

"The union rep had to plead for me personal. Cost a boodle. Threaten to file suit, publicity, mention La Laveglia...Said I have pictchoors.

"You don't even wanna know what I had to do for her-­ Lascivious, I mean. Laveglia, that is. I'se regustapated, Andy.

"Almost desthroyed the cooch compaletely, it was, compalootely. My dick may never be the same...."

Sam was laughing, but scared too. He heard a siren, panicked, and hung up. Of course sirens screamed 24 hours a day in Boston. A couple plainclothesmen, taking their time, might be more likely.

Nevertheless, panting, Sam hurriedly threw his few clothes and toiletries into his one suitcase and made for the roof stairs. The only thing he'd have to leave were books. Maybe Amanda could send them.

The phone rang again.

Sam jumped. He paused. He decided just to pick up and listen. It could be Pat with further instructions. Or Amanda. He needed her help.

Sam held the phone to his ear. He heard sobbing. He couldn't make out the words, and didn't know what to do. Every moment in the apt made him nervous.

But the voice asked for Pat.

"He isn't here," Sam said impatiently.

"Well you just tell him, that monster, tell him for me...give him a message from me, will you?"

"Sure," Sam said. He shifted from foot to foot, torn between fear, curiosity and reflexive politeness. He could feel his ears pounding. But he thought he recognized the voice of the spoon owner, though it was hard to tell through the sobs.

"Tell him that's the last hamburger he'll ever eat for free, the son of a bitch.'' More sobbing.

"Hello?" Sam said. His bowels rumbled, trying to digest, or at least stomach, his sympathy, curiosity, fear.

"Tell him I lost the place, tell him my wife divorced me, so he can do whatever he wants with that tape recording. Shove it up his fucking asshole."

"’Publish and be damned,’" Sam said.

"What?"

"I"ll tell him, and listen...I'm really sorry, but...I gotta go. It's kind of an emergency."

Sam put the phone down, picked up his suitcase and headed for the fire stairs. He banged open the fire door and climbed the narrow iron treads, to the shrieks of falcons. He put the suitcase down in front of the cage and sat on it, catching his breath . So, he thought, it was Bogmail. Eating Bloodblisters. I'm a cannibal. Patrick of the House of Atreus.

Probably spat in each one. *That*'s regustipatin.

The raptors screamed.

Sam stood up and walked over to the huge cage. He opened its door. The perched birds watched him with their flat yellow eyes. Sam walked around the back of the cage and banged on it with the flat of his hand. Several birds fell to the floor, dead. Others sat ruffling their feathers. They looked sick.

But all of a sudden the remaining hawks began to burst in groups through the open door, in increasing explosions of striped feathers and yellow and red tails. Like flights of angels singing. The air was full of noble screams, ferocious, aloof.

The wings thundered. The raptors wheeled, balanced, dove among the chimney pots, smashed into or avoided washing lines. Sam's field of vision was a kaleidoscope of flashing feathers and open fierce yellow or beige beaks showing sharp, pale tongues. The falcons soared, dipped, plunged among the building canyons, shouldered their way with heavy strokes into higher altitudes. Flights of angels sing me to my rest.

Sam walked to the edge of the roof and peered down at the street. He was looking for police. Many suspicious-looking characters. He walked to the adjoining roof, climbed over the railing and leaped the gap--only two yards across but five stories high. He walked across that roof, and then two more, to a fire escape, which he descended to an alley.

He walked away from his block. He bought a baseball cap and a greasy fedora in a thrift shop, meanwhile persuading the owner to change several dollars into quarters. He found a working pay phone and called U/Mass Harbor Campus. He managed to get Amanda­-he knew it was her office hour--on their efficient phone system. He explained to her what had happened

"Jeez, good buddy, that's ominous."

"Well, I really need a favor."

"It depends, Sammy. Sweetypie, I'll stick my neck out for you, but I'm not going to jump suttee on the pyre, if you can stand the mixed metaphor. Sorry, I'm a little upset. Shouldn't say that to you, I know, but..."

"Amanda, all you have to do is pick up the ticket and bring it to me. If anything goes wrong, just say you hadn't heard anything, and I asked you to get it for me on your way back from U/Mass on the Red Line."

"Right after my class, bubela. Be home in a couple hours."

Sam's bank was already closed, but he happened to have some cash. Give Manda a check? He got the max he could withdraw at one time from the cash machine.

He really did want the computer disks he'd left in his office at Armpit. His notebook. His diary. An almost finished article. Some touching, if not necessarily grammatical, thank­you's from a few students whom his blood, sweat and tears had been able to help.

So Sam stashed his bag and disguised himself as a stoodent. Shorts, tank top, athletic shoes. He'd long since observed that if he chanced to appear on campus so appareled, no member of the faculty or staff would ever recognize, or in fact even look, at him. Apparently, they'd identify his silhouette--out of the corner of their eyes--as belonging to a member of the species they found in their classrooms. A kind of hairless orangutan gifted with a form of speech learned from television. Just to be sure Sam reversed the thrift shop cap on his head.

He slouched to his office undetected. Empty. He slid in quickly, unlocked his desk and shoved a few items into a bookbag. Back out, safe, Sam melted back into the crowd of stoodents.

Sam watched the Delta counter from under the junky fedora. Otherwise, he'd changed back into his regular clothes when he picked up the suitcase. In urban America, people only glance at strangers, so big hats--who wears them but weirdos?--make one invisible even to family. It wasn't long before he saw Amanda.

She showed the agent ID or something.

The agent walked behind the rear partition. He came out with what looked to Sam like it might be a plainclothesman. Sam could see from Amanda's posture that she was both indignant and scared.

Sam beat it by tram for the South End station, where he hopped one of the busy commuter trains to Providence. SRO, but once past the suburbs, he sat poleaxed on one of the old plastic rush seats. A pebble had gotten into his boot on one of the roofs and up to now he hadn't had a moment to find it. He pulled off the boot and dumped a screw out. He looked into the boot morosely, admiring its exquisite workmanship for perhaps the hundredth time. Craftsmanship is mastership. It was always mildly consoling, somehow*. Fr. Lucchese/San Antonio* inscribed in scroll lettering into the buttery lining.

At the Providence Greyhound station, he used a check to buy a ticket for San Antonio. He arrived in the morning two days later. He rented a cheap room, using another check. No one at Arsehole even knew what bank he used.

They took an out-of-town check! Maybe it wouldn't be so hard getting used to this culture. Texas. Of course, he'd only heard bad things about it, but....

He applied for jobs at Incarnate Word and UTSA. Long, nasty bus rides even from an ideal intermediate location. Harvard sent them his records. They were confidential, though probably subject to subpoena. Sam had to take the risk, though, and he did believe Pat about that. Boston Metropolitan Police were unlikely to assign squads of full-time detectives to his case, tracking down every lead.

Until his first pay check arrived, Sam ate leftover entrees he scooped from open air restaurant tables as he strolled the River Walk. His lonely and unsuccessful state frightened and depressed him, of course, but the call to action, abetted by the exotic clime, had inspired his sense of adventure, so he took up arms against his sea of troubles, for a change.

He did miss Amanda. Otherwise it wasn't too bad. Colleges in Texas paid the same, but the money went farther. By Fall semester he'd switched to a nice, clean, roomy, roach-free apt with all the conveniences. Less rent than the slum in Boston. Swimming pool. His own washer and dryer. No more spending Thursday afternoons watching his clothes go round and round, guarding them, while he tried to mark papers in the steam and noise of a laundromat.

The students were no better, but Sam had learned something. He wasn't paid to teach them. He was paid to keep them out of administrators' offices. To get along with the latter in the fewest possible words. To appear to follow the older faculty.

It was easy. He might even get full-time.

Sam ate in Mexican neighborhoods, and learned Spanish. His Mom sent him $4,000 to buy a three year old Dodge Colt. Weekends to Corpus and empty beaches, or to Austin's gay and arts scenes, or to New Braunfels to tube the Guadeloupe. Bicycling in the Hill Country. All year round. No snow. It was hot in the summer, of course, but even then the mornings were fine.

Ah, yes, Austin. The gay scene was better than Boston’s.

More relaxed, less snobby, more athletic. Sam’s libido was rejuvenating with the Spring. A great university, live music, restaurants, picturesque hills and river; the arts, writers and film colonies....Sam had gotten tired of cold weather.

With time to think, Sam realized that he had been rather naïve in school. And conformist. (Rebelliousness is not independent thinking. The prisons are full of patriotic conservative Christians.) Schoolmen had told him to follow what he loved and not worry about making a living. But a literature PHD meant either he published a lot of high quality criticism or research—biography basically—or taught lousy students.

He had discovered that of all the many forms of literature he loved in four languages, neither criticism nor biography was among them. He’d read an occasional enlightening critical article which helped him read a beloved test better, but even those were not in the idiom of the academic journals. The only people who could or would want to read those were professors swotting up an article of their own.

Unfortunately, that meant teaching mediocre students. Well; there are people who become interested in pedagogy. Kind of like animal training. Sam was not one of them.

If you go into literature because you love it, because it means a great deal to you, because you find it beautiful, inspiring, hilarious, insightful, informative, a second and better native country, then possibly the last thing you may want to do for a living is cram it into students who have no interest or insight or talent or motivation.

A certain kind of sanguine professor adapts to his job, enjoys the leisure, makes do with the low salary. But Sam was no golden retriever. He still hoped for a job he really liked, or that at least paid well.

Some of his new gay contacts had some good leads. There were film and publishing people.

He still missed Pat and Amanda, all the same. Especially Amanda

Near Christmas, he dialed his old Boston number. Amanda answered. She seemed really pleased to hear from him.

"All is forgiven, Sammy. You can come back. You see--"

"Tell me about Pat first. He still living there?"

"Naw, Sam, I booted him. I eventually forgave what he did to you--it really was him or you, and you were mean to him at the reception. I mean, he hardly gets any fresh fruit or veggies, you know, no wonder he's constabated--but I got tired of cleaning up after him. Enough is enough. Eventually everyone has to go, except maybe your second spouse. I wouldn't know, but that's what I hear."

"Manda, depriving a person, no matter how constipated, of lunch, no matter how fine, is hardly the same as getting someone indicted for six felonies, and then setting a trap for him while you pretend to coach him to flee, now is it?"

"Whatever. Anyway, he's remorseful. I think. Drinks more than ever. And I did boot him into the street. 'Sides, I need him at the Kludge now. Politics. Need allies. You know, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, all that."

"So you parted apts on good terms?!"

"He didn't hold any grudges about el booto, after he got his full-time at Arsehole. Which I got him.--Hold on, I'll get to that. Because you know the apt was in my name, don't you? Old slyboots didn't want his Irish moniker on the manifold, so that was the condition he let me in. Serves him right. Besides, you know, it's going co-op. I'm going to help Ahmed with the renovation--pay for some of it--in exchange for this apt. The 'hood is gentrifying fast."

"Where on earth did you get the money?"

"My Unc is in real estate. It's not that much money, and if I ever sell, I have to give him half. It's going to be a lot of work, but I really love the structure, you know."

"So you're still teaching at Arsehole."

"Man, I own it. That's what I was trying to tell you. I own a college!"

"What? There's an echo. You're at Iona College now?"

"No, no, you heard right.

"What!"

“I own this one!"

"Yeah. I'm the new president/benefactor. Chair of Women's Studies, Dean of...you get the picture. See, they went blooey again, so my Unc bought it."

"But isn't he going to lose all his money?"

"Naw, you don't understand bankruptcy. In this country, you really have to work at it to lose your money, once you have any. See, he loans them money to keep going, secured by the building they own--the Ad building? The other ones are rented. He structures it so he gets paid first if they go under: which will be, that is, anytime they're not returning 12% on his loot: .his sleeping buddies will call in their equity. And the building's worth more than the loan, he says. Which isn't much, and besides it's leveraged. The amount he actually had to engage is pathetic. 'Course, if they do make a go, even better. Grants, state funds, Vet loans, GI bill, overseas students--you ever hear of any school but this going bankrupt? It beats me how Pitt did it, and why he bolted. Pure incompetence."

"Wow, I don't know what to say."

"Yeah!....Just say Yes. That's our new slogan. Very Joycean, don't you think? Yes I will Yes. You can come back. Full time. I'll rent you a room cheap. Until I get married. If I ever do. And we're even a four year school now. I got Ears to really fix the sign. Just picture it--"

"I can, I can."

A. Nuss College.

Just Say Yes

The Bructeri were totally exterminated by the neighboring tribes, provoked by their insolence, allured by the hopes of spoil, and perhaps inspired by the tutular deities of the empire. Above sixty thousand barbarians were destroyed; not by the Roman arms, but in our sight, and for our entertainment. May the nations, enemies of Rome, ever preserve this enmity to each other! We have now attained the utmost verge of prosperity, and have nothing left to demand of fortune except the discord of the barbarians.

Tacitus