

THE CRYING OF LOT 49

THOMAS

PYNCHON

THE

CRYING

OF

LOT

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I

ONE SUMMER AFTERNOON Mrs. Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million collars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. Oedipa stood in the living room, stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, tried to feel as drunk as possible. But this did not work. She thought of a hotel room in Mazatlan whose door had just been slammed, it seemed forever, waking up two hundred birds down in the lobby; a sunrise over the library slope at Cornell University that nobody out on it had seen because the slope faces west; a dry, disconsolate tune from the fourth movement of the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra; a whitewashed bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed on a shelf so narrow for it she'd always had the hovering fear it would someday topple on them. Was that how he'd died, she wondered, among dreams, crushed by the only ikon in the house? That only made her laugh, out loud and helpless: You're so sick, Oedipa, she told herself, or the room, which knew.

The letter was from the law firm of Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus, of Los Angeles, and signed by somebody named Metzger. It said Pierce had died back in the spring, and they'd only just now found the will. Metzger was to act as co-executor and special counsel in

the event of any involved litigation. Oedipa had been named also to execute the will in a codicil dated a year ago. She tried to think back to whether anything unusual had happened around then. Through the rest of the afternoon, through her trip to the market in downtown Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak (today she came through the bead-curtained entrance around bar 4 of the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble's variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist); then through the sunned gathering of her marjoram and sweet basil from the herb garden, reading of book reviews in the latest Scientific American, into the layering of a lasagna, garlicking of a bread, tearing up of romaine leaves, eventually, oven on, into the mixing of the twilight's whiskey sours against the arrival of her husband, Wendell ("Mucho") Maas from work, she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be first to admit it?) more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjurer's deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye. It took her till the middle of Huntley and Brinkley to remember that last year at three or so one morning there had come this long-distance call, from where she would never know (unless now he'd left a diary) by a voice beginning in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-Negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; then a Gestapo officer asking her in shrieks did she have relatives in Germany and finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he'd talked in all the way down to Mazatlan. "Pierce, please," she'd managed to get in, "I thought we had"

"But Margo," earnestly, "I've just come from Commissioner Weston, and that old man in the fun house was murdered by the same blowgun that killed Professor Quackenbush," or something.

"For God's sake," she said. Mucho had rolled over and was looking at her.

"Why don't you hang up on him," Mucho suggested, sensibly.

"I heard that," Pierce said. "I think it's time Wendell Maas had a little visit from The Shadow." Silence, positive and thorough, fell. So it was the last of his voices she ever heard. Lamont Cranston. That phone line could have pointed any direction, been any length. Its quiet ambiguity shifted over, in the months after the call, to what had been revived: memories of his face, body, things he'd given her,

things she had now and then pretended not to've heard him say. It took him over, and to the verge of being forgotten. The shadow waited a year before visiting. But now there was Metzger's letter. Had Pierce called last year then to tell her about this codicil? Or had he decided on it later, somehow because of her annoyance and Mucho's indifference? She felt exposed, finessed, put down. She had never executed a will in her life, didn't know where to begin, didn't know how to tell the law firm in L. A. that she didn't know where to begin.

"Mucho, baby," she cried, in an access of helplessness.

Mucho Maas, home, bounded through the screen door. "Today was another defeat," he began.

"Let me tell you," she also began. But let Mucho go first.

He was a disk jockey who worked further along the Peninsula and suffered regular crises of conscience out his profession. "I don't believe in any of it, Oed," he could usually get out. "I try, I truly can't," way down there, further down perhaps than she could reach, so that such times often brought her near panic. It might have been the sight of her so about to lose control that seemed to bring him back up.

"You're too sensitive." Yeah, there was so much else she ought to be saying also, but this was what came out. It was true, anyway. For a couple years he'd been a used car salesman and so hyperaware of what that profession had come to mean that working hours were exquisite torture to him. Mucho shaved his upper lip every morning three times with, three times against the grain to remove any remotest breath of a moustache, new blades he drew blood invariably but kept at it; bought all natural-shoulder suits, then went to a tailor to have the lapels made yet more abnormally narrow, on his hair used only water, combing it like Jack Lemmon to throw them further off. The sight of sawdust, even pencil shavings, made him wince, his own kind being known to use it for hushing sick transmissions, and though he dieted he could still not as Oedipa did use honey to sweeten his coffee for like all things viscous it distressed him, recalling too poignantly what is often mixed with motor oil to ooze dishonest into gaps between piston and cylinder wall. He walked out of a party one night because somebody used the word "creampuff," it seemed maliciously, in his hearing. The man was a refugee Hungarian pastry cook talking shop, but there was your Mucho: thin-skinned.

Yet at least he had believed in the cars. Maybe to excess: how could he not, seeing people poorer than him come

in, Negro, Mexican, cracker, a parade seven days a week, bringing the most godawful of trade-ins: motorized, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at, frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself, inside smelling hopelessly of children, supermarket booze, two, sometimes three generations of cigarette smokers, or only of dust and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual residue of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost: clipped coupons promising savings of .05 or .10, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-shy combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill, all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a gray dressing of ash, condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes it made him sick to look, but he had to look. If it had been an outright junkyard, probably he could have stuck things out, made a career: the violence that had caused each wreck being infrequent enough, far enough away from him, to be miraculous, as each death, up till the moment of our own, is miraculous. But the endless rituals of trade-in, week after week, never got as far as violence or blood, and so were too plausible for the impressionable Mucho to take for long. Even if enough exposure to the unvarying gray sickness had somehow managed to immunize him, he could still never accept the way each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life. As if it were the most natural thing. To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest.

Oedipa couldn't understand how he could still get so upset even now. By the time he married her he'd already been two years at the station, KCUF, and the lot on the pallid, roaring arterial was far behind him, like the Second World or Korean Wars were for older husbands. Maybe, God help her, he should have been in a war, Japs in trees, Krauts in Tiger tanks, gooks with trumpets in the night he

might have forgotten sooner than whatever it was about the lot that had stayed so alarmingly with him for going on five years. Five years. You comfort them when they wake pouring sweat or crying out in the language of bad dreams, yes, you hold them, they calm down, one day they lose it: she knew that. But when was Mucho going to forget? She suspected the disk jockey spot (which he'd got through his good buddy the KCUF advertising manager, who'd visited the lot once a week, the lot being a sponsor) was a way of letting the Top 200, and even the news copy that came jabbering out of the machine all the fraudulent dream of teenage appetites be a buffer between him and that lot.

He had believed too much in the lot, he believed not at all in the station. Yet to look at him now, in the twilight living room, gliding like a large bird in an updraft toward the sweating shakerful of booze, smiling out of his fat vortex ring's centre, you'd think all was flat calm, gold, serene.

Until he opened his mouth. "Today Funch," he told her, pouring, "had me in, wanted to talk about my image, which he doesn't like." Funch being the program director, and Mucho's great foe. "I'm too horny, now. What I should be is a young father, a big brother. These little chicks call in with requests, naked lust, to Punch's ear, throbs in every word I say. So now I'm suppose to tape all the phone talk, Funch personally will edit out anything he considers offensive, meaning all of my end of the conversation. Censorship, I told him, 'fink,' I muttered, and fled." He and Funch went through some such routine maybe once a week.

She showed him the letter from Metzger. Mucho knew all about her and Pierce: it had ended a year before Mucho married her. He read the letter and withdrew along a shy string of eye blinks.

"What am I going to do?" she said.

"Oh, no," said Mucho, "you got the wrong fella. Not me. I can't even make out our income tax right. Execute a will, there's nothing I can tell you, see Roseman." Their lawyer.

"Mucho. Wendell. It was over. Before he put my name on it."

"Yeah, yeah. I meant only that, Oed. I'm not capable."

So next morning that's what she did, went and saw Roseman. After a half hour in front of her vanity mirror drawing and having to redraw dark lines along her eyelids that each time went ragged or wavered violently before she could take the brush away. She'd been up most of the night, after another three-in-the-morning phone call, its announcing bell clear cardiac terror, so out of nothing did it come, the instrument one second inert, the next

screaming. It brought both of them instantly awake and they lay, joints unlocking, not even wanting to look at each other for the first few rings. She finally, having nothing she knew of to lose, had taken it. It was Dr. Hilarius, her shrink or psychotherapist. But he sounded like Pierce doing a Gestapo officer.

"I didn't wake you up, did I," he began, dry. "You sound so frightened. How are the pills, not working?"

"I'm not taking them," she said.

"You feel threatened by them?"

"I don't know what's inside them."

"You don't believe that they're only tranquilizers."

"Do I trust you?" She didn't, and what he said next explained why not.

"We still need a hundred-and-fourth for the bridge." Chuckled aridly. The bridge, die Brucke, being his pet name for the experiment he was helping the community hospital run on effects of LSD-25, mesca-line, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives. The bridge inward. "When can you let us fit you into our schedule?"

"No," she said, "you have half a million others to choose from. It's three in the morning."

"We want you." Hanging in the air over her bed she now beheld the well-known portrait of Uncle that appears in front of all our post offices, his eyes gleaming unhealthily, his sunken yellow cheeks most violently rouged, his finger pointing between her eyes. I want you. She had never asked Dr. Hilarius why, being afraid of all he might answer.

"I am having a hallucination now, I don't need drugs for that."

"Don't describe it," he said quickly. "Well. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about." "Did I call you?"

"I thought so," he said, "I had this feeling. Not telepathy. But rapport with a patient is a curious thing sometimes."

"Not this time." She hung up. And then couldn't get to sleep. But would be damned if she'd take the capsules he'd given her. Literally damned. She didn't want to get hooked in any way, she'd told him that. "So," he shrugged, "on me you are not hooked? Leave then. You're cured."

She didn't leave. Not that the shrink held any dark power over her. But it was easier to stay. Who'd know the day she was cured? Not him, he'd admitted that himself. "Pills are different," she pleaded. Hilarius only made a face at her, one he'd made before. He was full of these delightful lapses from orthodoxy. His theory being that a face is symmetrical like a Rorschach blot, tells a story like a TAT

picture, excites a response like a suggested word, so why not. He claimed to have once cured a case of hysterical blindness with his number 37, the "Fu-Manchu" (many of the faces having like German symphonies both a number and nickname), which involved slanting the eyes up with the index fingers, enlarging the nostrils with the middle fingers, pulling the mouth wide with the pinkies and protruding the tongue. On Hilarius it was truly alarming. And in fact, as Oedipa's Uncle Sam hallucination faded, it was this Fu-Manchu face that came dissolving in to replace it and stay with her for what was left of the hours before dawn. It put her in hardly any shape to see Roseman.

But Roseman had also spent a sleepless night, brooding over the Perry Mason television program the evening before, which his wife was fond of but toward which Roseman cherished a fierce ambivalence, wanting at once to be a successful trial lawyer like Perry Mason and, since this was impossible, to destroy Perry Mason by undermining him. Oedipa walked in more or less by surprise to catch her trusted family lawyer stuffing with guilty haste a wad of different-sized and colored papers into a desk drawer. She knew it was the rough draft of *The Profession v. Perry Mason*, *A Not-so-hypothetical Indictment*, and had been in progress for as long as the TV show had been on the air.

"You didn't use to look guilty, as I remember," Oedipa said. They often went to the same group therapy sessions, in a car pool with a photographer from Palo Alto who thought he was a volleyball. "That's a good sign, isn't it?"

"You might have been one of Perry Mason's spies," said Roseman. After thinking a moment he added, "Ha, ha."

"Ha, ha," said Oedipa. They looked at each other. "I have to execute a will," she said.

"Oh, go ahead then," said Roseman, "don't let me keep you."

"No," said Oedipa, and told him all.

"Why would he do a thing like that," Roseman puzzled, after reading the letter.

"You mean die?"

"No," said Roseman, "name you to help execute it."

"He was unpredictable." They went to lunch. Roseman tried to play footsie with her under the table. She was wearing boots, and couldn't feel much of anything. So, insulated, she decided not to make any fuss.

"Run away with me," said Roseman when the coffee came.

"Where?" she asked. That shut him up.

Back in the office, he outlined what she was in for: learn intimately the books and the business, go through probate,

collect all debts, inventory the assets, get an appraisal of the estate, decide what to liquidate and what to hold on to, pay off claims, square away taxes, distribute legacies . . .

“Hey,” said Oedipa, “can’t I get somebody to do it for me?”

“Me,” said Roseman, “some of it, sure. But aren’t you even interested?”

“In what?”

“In what you might find out.”

As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix. And had also gently conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair. When it turned out to be Pierce she’d happily pulled out the pins and curlers and down it tumbled in its whispering, dainty avalanche, only when Pierce had got maybe halfway up, her lovely hair turned, through some sinister sorcery, into a great unanchored wig, and down he fell, on his ass. But dauntless, perhaps using one of his many credit cards for a shim, he’d slipped the lock on her tower door and come up the conchlike stairs, which, had true guile come more naturally to him, he’d have done to begin with. But all that had then gone on between them had really never escaped the confinement of that tower. In Mexico City they somehow wandered into an exhibition of paintings by the beautiful Spanish exile Remedios Varo: in the central painting of a triptych, titled “Bordando el Manto Terrestre,” were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried. No one had noticed; she wore dark green bubble shades. For a moment she’d wondered if the seal around her sockets were tight enough to allow the tears simply to go on and fill up the entire lens space and never dry. She could carry the sadness of the moment with her that way forever, see the world refracted through those tears, those specific tears, as if indices as yet unfound varied in

important ways from cry to cry. She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there’d been no escape. What did she so desire escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else? ❶

❶
Who’s there?

II

SHE LEFT KINNERET, then, with no idea ② she was moving toward anything new. Mucho Maas, enigmatic, whistling “I Want to Kiss Your Feet,” a new recording by Sick Dick and the Volkswagens (an English group he was fond of at that time but did not believe in), stood with hands in pockets while she explained about going down to San Narciso for a while to look ③ into Pierce’s books and records and confer with Metzger, the co-executor. Mucho was sad to see her go, but not desperate, so after telling him to hang up if Dr. Hilarius called and look after the organo in the garden, which had contracted a strange mold, she went.

San Narciso lay further south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts—census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, ④ shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway. But it had been Pierce’s domicile, and headquarters: the place he’d begun his land speculating in ten years ago, and so put down the plinth course of capital on which everything afterward had been built, however rickety or grotesque, toward the sky; and that, she supposed, would set the spot apart, give it an aura. But if there was any vital difference between it and the rest of Southern California, it was invisible ⑤ on first glance. She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and

②
Nay, answer me: stand,
and unfold yourself.

③
Long live the king!

④
Bernardo?

⑤
He.

she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl ⑥ of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit ⑦ could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. Smog hung all round the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful; she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. She suspected that much. She thought of Mucho, her husband, trying to believe in his job. ⑧ Was it something like this he felt, looking through the soundproof glass at one of his colleagues with a headset clamped on and cueing the next record with movements stylized as the handling of chrism, censer, chalice might be for a holy man, yet really tuned in to the voice, voices, the music, its message, surrounded by it, digging it, as were all the faithful it went out to; did Mucho stand outside Studio A looking in, knowing that even if he could hear it he couldn't believe in it?

She gave it up presently, as if a cloud had approached the sun or the smog thickened, and so broken the "religious instant," whatever ⑨ it might've been; started up and proceeded at maybe 70 mph along the singing blacktop, onto a highway she thought went toward Los Angeles, into a neighborhood that was little more than the road's skinny right-of-way, lined by auto lots, escrow services, drive-ins, small office buildings ⑩ and factories whose address numbers were in the 70 and then 80,000's. She had never known numbers to run so high. It seemed unnatural. To her left appeared a prolonged scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence ⑪ topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers: soon an entrance whizzed by, two sixty-foot missiles on either side and the name YOYODYNE lettered conservatively on each nose cone. This was San Narciso's big source of employment, the Galactronics ⑫ Division of Yoyodyne, Inc., one of the giants of the aerospace industry. Pierce, she happened to know, had owned a large block

of shares, had been somehow involved in negotiating an understanding with the county tax assessor to lure Yoyodyne here in the first place. It was part, he explained, of being ⑬ a founding father.

Barbed wire again gave way to the familiar parade of more beige, prefab, cinderblock office machine distributors, sealant makers, bottled gas works, fastener factories, warehouses, and whatever. Sunday ⑭ had sent them all into silence and paralysis, all but an occasional real estate office or truck stop. Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point ⑮ become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing ⑯ the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. But were Oedipa some single melted crystal of urban horse, L.A., really, would be no less turned on for her absence.

Still, when she got a look at the next motel, she hesitated a second. A representation in painted sheet metal of a nymph holding a white ⑰ blossom towered thirty feet into the air; the sign, lit up despite the sun, said "Echo Courts." The face of the nymph was much like Oedipa's, which didn't startle her so much as a concealed blower system ⑱ that kept the nymph's gauze chiton in constant agitation, revealing enormous vermilion-tipped breasts and long pink thighs at each flap. She was smiling a lip-sticked and public smile, not quite a hooker's but nowhere near that of any nymph pining away with love ⑲ either. Oedipa pulled into the lot, got out and stood for a moment in the hot sun and the dead-still air, watching the artificial windstorm overhead toss gauze in five-foot excursions. Remembering her idea about a slow whirlwind, words she couldn't hear.

The room would be good enough for the time she had to stay. Its door opened on a long courtyard with a swimming pool, whose surface ⑳ that day was flat, brilliant with sunlight. At the far end stood a fountain, with another nymph. Nothing moved. If people lived behind the other doors or watched through the windows gagged ㉑ each with its roaring air-conditioner, she couldn't see them. The manager, a drop-out named Miles, maybe 16 with a Beatle ㉒ haircut and a lapelless, cuffless, one-button mohair suit, carried her bags and sang to himself, possibly to her:

⑥ You come most carefully upon your hour.

⑦ 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

⑧ For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.

⑨ Have you had quiet guard?

⑩ Not a mouse stirring.

⑪ Well, good night. If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

⑫ I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

⑬ Friends to this ground.

⑭ And liegemen to the Dane.

⑮ Give you good night.

⑯ O, farewell, honest soldier: Who hath relieved you?

⑰ Bernardo has my place. Give you good night.

⑱ Holla! Bernardo!

⑲ Say, What, is Horatio there?

⑳ A piece of him.

㉑ Welcome, Horatio: welcome, good Marcellus.

㉒ What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?

MILE'S SONG

TOO FAT TO FRUG,
 THAT'S WHAT YOU TELL ME ALL THE TIME,
 WHEN YOU REALLY TRY'N' TO PUT ME DOWN, BUT I'M HIP,
 SO CLOSE YOUR BIG FAT LIP, YEAH, BABY,
 I MAY BE TOO FAT TO FRUG, BUT AT LEAST I AIN'T TOO SLIM TO SWIM.

23
 I have seen nothing.

24
 Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy, and will not let belief take hold of him touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us: therefore I have entreated him along with us to watch the minutes of this night; that if again this apparition come, he may approve our eyes and speak to it.

25
 Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

26
 Sit down awhile; and let us once again assail your ears, that are so fortified against our story what we have two nights seen.

27
 Well, sit we down, and let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

28
 Last night of all, when yond same star that's westward from the pole had made his course to illume that part of heaven where now it burns, Marcellus and myself, the bell then beating one,—

"It's lovely," 23 said Oedipa, "but why do you sing with an English accent when you don't talk that way?"

"It's this group I'm in," Miles explained, "the Paranoids. We're new yet. 24 Our manager says we should sing like that. We watch English movies a lot, for the accent."

"My husband's a disk jockey," Oedipa trying to be helpful, "it's only a thousand-watt station, but if you had anything like a tape I could give it to him to plug." Miles closed the door behind them and started in with the shifty eye. "In return for what?" Moving in on her. "Do you want what I think you want? This is the Payola Kid here, you know." Oedipa picked up the nearest weapon, which happened to be the rabbit-ear antenna off the TV in the corner. "Oh," said Miles, stopping. 25 "You hate me too." Eyes bright through his bangs.

"You are a paranoid," Oedipa said. "I have a smooth young body," said Miles, "I thought you older chicks went for that." He left after shaking her down for four bits for carrying the bags. 26

That night the lawyer Metzger showed up. He turned out to be so good-looking that Oedipa thought at first They, somebody up there, were putting her on. It had to be an actor. He stood at her door, behind him the oblong pool shimmering silent in a mild diffusion of light from the nighttime sky, saying, "Mrs. Maas," like a reproach. His enormous eyes, lambent, extravagantly lashed, smiled out at her wickedly; 27 she looked around him for reflectors, microphones, camera cabling, but there was only himself and a debonair bottle of French Beaujolais, which he claimed to've smuggled last year into California, this rollicking lawbreaker, past the frontier guards.

"So hey," he murmured, "after scouring motels all day to find you, I can come in there, can't I?" 28

Oedipa had planned on nothing more involved that evening than watching Bonanza on the tube. She'd shifted into stretch denim slacks and a shaggy black sweater, and had her hair all the way down. She knew she looked pretty good. "Come in," she said, "but I only have one glass."

"I," the gallant Metzger let her know, "can drink out

of the bottle." He came in and sat on the floor, 29 in his suit. Opened the bottle, poured her a drink, began to talk. It presently came out that Oedipa hadn't been so far off, thinking it was an actor. Some twenty-odd years ago, Metzger had been one of those child movie stars, performing under the name of Baby Igor. "My mother," he announced bitterly, "was really out to kasher me, boy, like a piece of beef 30 on the sink, she wanted me drained and white. Times I wonder," smoothing down the hair at the back of his head, "if she succeeded. It scares me. You know what mothers like that turn their male children into."

"You certainly 31 don't look," Oedipa began, then had second thoughts.

Metzger flashed her a big wry couple rows of teeth. "Looks don't mean a thing any more," he said. "I live inside my looks, and I'm never sure. The possibility haunts me."

"And how often," Oedipa inquired, now aware it was all words, "has that line of approach 32 worked for you, Baby Igor?"

"Do you know," Metzger said, "Inverarity only mentioned you to me once." "Were you close?" "No. I drew up his will. Don't you want to know what he said?"

"No," said Oedipa, and snapped on the television set. Onto the screen bloomed the image of a child of indeterminate sex, its bare legs pressed awkward together, its shoulder-length curls mingling with the shorter hair of a St Bernard, whose long tongue, 33 as Oedipa watched, began to swipe at the child's rosy cheeks, making the child wrinkle up its nose appealingly and say, "Aw, Murray, come on, now, you're getting me all wet."

"That's me, that's me," cried 34 Metzger, staring, "good God."

"Which one?" asked Oedipa. "That movie was called," Metzger snapped his fingers, "Cashiered."

"About you and your mother." "About this kid and his father, 35 who's drummed out of the British Army for cowardice, only he's covering up for a friend, see, and to redeem himself he and the kid follow the old regiment to Gallipoli, where the father somehow builds a midget submarine, and every week 36 they slip through the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmara and torpedo the Turkish merchantmen, the father, son, and St Bernard. The dog sits on periscope watch, and barks if he sees anything."

Oedipa was pouring wine. "You're kidding." "Listen, listen, here's where I sing." And sure enough, the child, and dog, and a merry old Greek fisherman who had appeared

29
 Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again! us hear Bernardo speak of this.

30
 In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

31
 Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

32
 Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.

33
 Most like: it harrows me with fear and wonder.

34
 It would be spoke to.

35
 Question it, Horatio.

36
 What art thou that usurp'st this time of night, together with that fair and warlike form in which the majesty of buried Denmark did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!

37
It is offended.

from nowhere with a zither, 37 now all stood in front of phony-Dodecanese process footage of a seashore at sunset, and the kid sang.

BABY IGOR'S SONG

'GAINST THE HUN AND THE TURK, NEVER ONCE DO WE SHIRK, MY DADDY, MY DOGGIE AND ME.

THROUGH THE PERILOUS YEARS, LIKE THE THREE MUSKETEERS, WE WILL STICK JUST AS CLOSE AS CAN BE. SOON OUR SUB'S PERISCOPE'LL AIM FOR CONSTANTINOPLE, AS AGAIN WE SET HOPEFUL TO SEA;

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH, FOR THOSE BOYS ON THE BEACH, JUST MY DADDY, MY DOGGIE AND ME.

Then there was a musical bridge, featuring the fisherman and his instrument, 38 then the young Metzger took it from the top while his aging double, over Oedipa's protests, sang harmony.

Either he made up the whole thing, Oedipa thought suddenly, or he bribed the engineer over at the local station to run this, it's all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, plot. O Metzger. "You didn't sing along," he observed. "I didn't know," Oedipa smiled. On came a loud 39 commercial for Fangoso Lagoons, a new housing development west of here.

"One of Inverarity's interests," Metzger noted. It was to be laced by canals with private landings for power boats, a floating social hall in the middle of an artificial lake, at the bottom of which lay restored galleons, imported from the Bahamas; Atlantean fragments of columns and friezes from the Canaries; real human skeletons 40 from Italy; giant clamshells from Indonesia—all for the entertainment of Scuba enthusiasts. A map of the place flashed onto the screen, Oedipa drew a sharp breath, Metzger on the chance it might be for him looked over. But she'd only been reminded of her look downhill this noontime. Some immediacy 41 was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead. . .

Before she was ready for it, back came Cashiered. The little submarine, named the "Justine" after the dead mother, was at the quai, singling up all lines. A small crowd was seeing it off, among them the old fisherman, and his daughter, a leggy, ringletted nymphet who, should there be a happy ending, would end up with Metzger; an English

38
See, it stalks away!

39
Stay! speak, speak!
I charge thee, speak!

40
'Tis gone, and will
not answer.

41
How now, Horatio!
You tremble and look
pale: is not this some-
thing more than fantasy?
What think you on't?

missionary nurse with a nice build on her, who would end up with Metzger's father; and even a female sheepdog with eyes for Murray the St Bernard.

"Oh, yeah," Metzger said, "this is where we have trouble in the Narrows. It's a bitch because of the Kephez minefields, but Jerry has also recently hung this net, this gigantic net, woven out of cable 2 1/2 inches thick."

Oedipa refilled her wine glass. 42 They lay now, staring at the screen, flanks just lightly touching. There came from the TV set a terrific explosion. "Mines!" cried Metzger, covering his head and rolling away from her. "Daddy," blubbered the Metzger in the tube, "I'm scared." The inside of the midget sub was chaotic, the dog galloping to and fro scattering saliva that mingled with the spray from a leak in the bulkhead, which the father was now plugging with his shirt. "One thing we can do," announced the father, "go to the bottom, try to get under the net."

"Ridiculous," said Metzger. "They'd built a gate in it, so German U-boats 43 could get through to attack the British fleet. All our E class subs simply used that gate."

"How do you know that?"

"Wasn't I there?"

"But," began Oedipa, then saw how they were suddenly out of wine.

"Aha," said Metzger, from an inside coat pocket producing a bottle of tequila.

"No lemons?" 44 she asked, with movie-gaiety. "No salt?"

"A tourist thing. Did Inverarity use lemons when you were there?"

"How did you know we were there?" She watched him fill her glass, growing more anti-Metzger as the level rose.

"He wrote it off that year as a business expense. I did his tax stuff."

"A cash nexus," brooded Oedipa, "you and Perry Mason, two of a kind, it's all you know about, you shysters."

"But our beauty lies," 45 explained Metzger, "in this extended capacity for convolution. A lawyer in a courtroom, in front of any jury, becomes an actor, right? Raymond Burr is an actor, impersonating a lawyer, who in front of a jury becomes an actor. Me, I'm a former actor who became a lawyer. They've done the pilot film of a TV series, in fact, based loosely on my career, starring my friend Manny Di Presso, a one-time lawyer who quit his firm to become an actor. Who in this pilot plays me, an actor become a lawyer reverting periodically to being an actor. The film is in an air-conditioned vault at one of the

42
Before my God, I might
not this believe without
the sensible and true
avouch of mine own eyes.

43
Is it not like the king?

44
As thou art to thyself:
such was the very armour
he had on when he the
ambitious Norway com-
bated; so frown'd he once,
when, in an angry parle,
he smote the sledded
Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.

45
Thus twice before, and
jump at this dead hour,
With martial stalk hath he
gone by our watch.

46

In what particular thought
to work I know not;
But in the gross and
scope of my opinion,
This bodes some strange
eruption to our state.

Hollywood studios, light 46 can't fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly."

"You're in trouble," Oedipa told him, staring at the tube, conscious of his thigh, warm through his suit and her slacks. Presently:

"The Turks are up there with searchlights," he said, pouring more tequila, watching the little submarine fill up, "patrol boats, and machine guns. You want to bet on what'll happen?"

"Of course not," said Oedipa, "the movie's made." He only smiled back. "One of your endless repetitions."

"But you still don't know," 47 Metzger said. "You haven't seen it." Into the commercial break now roared a deafening ad for Beaconsfield Cigarettes, whose attractiveness lay in their filter's use of bone charcoal, the very best kind.

"Bones of what?" wondered Oedipa.

"Inverarity knew. He owned 51% of the filter process."

"Tell me."

"Someday. Right now it's your last chance to place your bet. Are they going to get out of it, or not?"

She felt drunk. It occurred to her, for no reason, that the plucky trio might not get out after all. She had no way to tell how long the movie had to run. She looked at her watch, but it had stopped. "This is absurd," she said, "of course they'll get out."

"How do you know?"

"All those movies had happy endings."

"All?"

"Most."

"That cuts down the probability," he told her, smug.

She squinted at him through her glass. "Then give me odds."

"Odds would give it away."

"So," she yelled, maybe a bit rattled, "I bet a bottle of something. Tequila, all right? That you didn't make it." Feeling the words had been conned out of her.

"That I didn't make it." He pondered. "Another bottle tonight would put you to sleep," he decided. "No."

"What do you want to bet, then?" She knew. Stubborn, they watched each other's eyes for what seemed five minutes. She heard commercials chasing one another into and out of the speaker of the TV. She grew more and more angry, perhaps juiced, perhaps only impatient for the movie to come back on.

"Fine then," she gave in at last, trying for a brittle voice, "it's a bet. Whatever you'd like. That you don't make it.

47

Good now, sit down, and
tell me, he that knows,
why this same strict and
most observant watch so
rightly toils the subject
of the land, and why such
daily cast of brazen can-
non, and foreign mart for
implements of war;
Why such impress of
shipwrights, whose sore
task does not divide the
Sunday from the week;
what might be toward,
that this sweaty haste
foth make the night
joint-labourer with the
day: who is't that can
inform me?

That you all turn to carrion for the fish at the bottom of the Dardanelles, your daddy, your doggie, and you."

"Fair enough," drawled 48 Metzger, taking her hand as if to shake on the bet and kissing its palm instead, sending the dry end of his tongue to graze briefly among her fate's furrows, the changeless salt hatchings of her identity. She wondered then if this were really happening in the same way as, say, her first time in bed with Pierce, the dead man. But then the movie came back.

The father was huddled in a shell hole on the steep cliffs of the Anzac beachhead, Turkish shrapnel flying all over the place. Neither Baby Igor nor Murray the dog were in evidence. "Now what the hell," said Oedipa.

"Golly," Metzger said, "they must have got the reels screwed up."

"Is this before or after?" she asked, reaching for the tequila bottle, a move that put her left breast in the region of Metzger's nose. The irrepressibly comic Metzger made cross-eyes before replying, "That would be telling."

"Come on." She nudged his nose with the padded tip of her bra cup and poured booze. "Or the bet's off."

"Nope," Metzger said.

"At least tell me if that's his old regiment, there."

"Go ahead," said Metzger, "ask questions. But for each answer, you'll have to take something off. We'll call it Strip Botticelli."

Oedipa had a marvelous idea: "Fine," she told him, "but first I'll just slip into the bathroom for a second. Close your eyes, turn around, don't peek." On the screen the "River Clyde," a collier carrying 2000 men, beached at Sedd-el-Bahr in an unearthly silence. "This is it, men," a phony British accent was heard to whisper. Suddenly a host of Turkish rifles on shore opened up all together, and the massacre began.

"I know this part," Metzger told her, his eyes squeezed shut, head away from the set. "For fifty yards out the sea was red with blood. They don't show that." Oedipa skipped into the bathroom, which happened also to have a walk-in closet, quickly undressed and began putting on as much as she could of the clothing she'd brought with her: six pairs of panties 49 in assorted colors, girdle, three pairs of nylons, three brassieres, two pairs stretch slacks, four half-slips, one black sheath, two summer dresses, half dozen A-line skirts, three sweaters, two blouses, quilted wrapper, baby blue peignoir and old Orion muu-muu. Bracelets then, scatter pins, earrings, a pendant. It all seemed to take hours to put on and she could hardly walk when she

48

That can I; at least, the
whisper goes so. Our
last king, whose image
even but now appear'd
to us, was, as you know,
by Fortinbras of Norway,
thereto prick'd on by
a most emulate pride,
dared to the combat
in which our valiant
Hamlet – for so this
side of our known world
esteem'd him – did slay
this Fortinbras; who
by a seal'd compact,
well ratified by law and
heraldry, did forfeit, with
his life, all those his lands
which he stood seized
of, to the conqueror:
against the which, a
moieties competent was
gaged by our king; which
had return'd to the
inheritance of Fortinbras,
had he been vanquisher;
as, by the same covenant,
and carriage of the
article design'd, his fell
to Hamlet. Now, sir, young
Fortinbras, of unimproved
mettle hot and full, hath
in the skirts of Norway
here and there shark'd
up a list of lawless
resolutes, for food and
diet, to some enterprise
that hath a stomach in't;
which is no other – as it
doth well appear unto our
state – but to recover of
us, by strong hand and
terms compulsory,
those foresaid lands
so by his father lost:
and this, I take it, is
the main motive of our
preparations, the source
of this our watch and
the chief head of this
post-haste and romage in
the land.

49

I think it be no other but
e'en so: well may it sort
that this portentous
figure comes armed
through our watch; so
like the king that was
and is the question of
these wars.

50

A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye. In the most high and palmy state of Rome, a little ere the mightiest Julius fell, the graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets; as stars with trains of fire and dews of blood, disasters in the sun; and the moist star upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse: and even the like precurse of fierce events, as harbingers preceding still the fates and prologue to the omen coming on, have heaven and earth together demonstrated unto our climatures and countrymen. – But soft, behold! Lo, where it comes again!

I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion! If thou hast any sound, or use of voice, speak to me: if there be any good thing to be done, that may to thee do ease and grace to me, speak to me:

If thou art privy to thy country's fate, which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O, speak! Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life extorted treasure in the womb of earth, for which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death, speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.

51

Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

52

Do, if it will not stand.

was finished. **50** She made the mistake of looking at herself in the full-length mirror, saw a beach ball with feet, and laughed so violently she fell over, taking a can of hair spray on the sink with her. The can hit the floor, something broke, and with a great outburst of pressure the stuff commenced atomizing, propelling the can swiftly about the bathroom. Metzger rushed in to find Oedipa rolling around, trying to get back on her feet, amid a great sticky miasma of fragrant lacquer. “Oh, for Pete’s sake,” he said in his Baby Igor voice. The can, hissing malignantly, bounced off the toilet and whizzed by Metzger’s right ear, missing by maybe a quarter of an inch. Metzger hit the deck and cowered with Oedipa as the can continued its high-speed caroming; from the other room came a slow, deep crescendo of naval bombardment, machine-gun, howitzer and small-arms fire, screams and chopped-off prayers of dying infantry. She looked up past his eyelids, into the staring ceiling light, her field of vision cut across by wild, flashing overflights of the can, whose pressure seemed inexhaustible. She was scared but nowhere near sober. The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she wasn’t fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment, at whatever clip it was doing, a hundred miles an hour. “Metzger,” she moaned, and sank her teeth into his upper arm, through the sharkskin. Everything smelled like hair spray. The can collided with a mirror and bounced away, leaving a silvery, reticulated bloom of glass to hang a second before it all fell jingling into the sink; zoomed over to the enclosed shower, where it crashed into and totally destroyed a panel of frosted glass; thence around the three tile walls, up to the ceiling, past the light, over the two prostrate bodies, amid its own whoosh and the buzzing, distorted uproar from the TV set. She could imagine no end to it; yet presently the can did give up in mid-flight and fall to the floor, about a foot from Oedipa’s nose. She lay watching it.

“Blimey,” **51** somebody remarked. “Coo.” Oedipa took her teeth out of Metzger, looked around and saw in the doorway Miles, the kid with the bangs and mohair suit, now multiplied by four. It seemed to be the group he’d mentioned, the Paranoids. **52** She couldn’t tell them apart, three of them were carrying electric guitars, they all had their mouth open. There also appeared a number of girls’ faces, gazing through armpits and around angles of knees. “That’s kinky,” said one of the girls.

“Are you **53** from London?” another wanted to know: “Is that a London thing you’re doing?” Hair spray hung like fog, glass twinkled all over the floor. “Lord love a duck,” **54** summarized a boy holding a passkey, and Oedipa decided this was Miles. Deferent, he began to narrate for their entertainment a surfer orgy he had been to the week before, involving a five-gallon can of kidney suet, a small automobile with a sun roof, and a trained seal.

“I’m sure this pales by comparison,” said Oedipa, who’d succeeded **55** in rolling over, “so why don’t you all just, you know, go outside. And sing. None of this works without mood music. Serenade us.”

“Maybe later,” invited one of the other Paranoids shyly, “you could join us in the pool.”

“Depends how hot it gets in here, gang,” winked jolly Oedipa. The kids filed out, after plugging extension cords into all available outlets in the other room and leading them in a bundle out a window. Metzger helped her stagger to her feet. “Anyone for Strip Botticelli?” In the other room the TV **56** was blaring a commercial for a Turkish bath in downtown San Narciso, wherever downtown was, called Hogan’s Seraglio. “Inverarity owned that too,” Metzger said. “Did you know that?”

“Sadist,” **57** Oedipa yelled, “say it once more, I’ll wrap the TV tube around your head.”

“You’re really mad,” he smiled.

She wasn’t, really. She said, “What the hell didn’t he own?”

Metzger cocked an eyebrow at her. “You tell me.”

If she was going to she got no chance, for outside, all in a shuddering deluge of thick guitar chords, the Paranoids had broken into song. Their drummer had set up precariously on the diving board, the others were invisible. Metzger came up behind her with some idea of cupping his hands around her breasts, but couldn’t immediately find them because of all the clothes. **58** They stood at the window and heard the Paranoids singing.

SERENADE

AS I LIE AND WATCH THE MOON ON THE LONELY SEA, WATCH IT TUG THE LONELY TIDE LIKE A COMFORTER OVER ME, THE STILL AND FACELESS MOON FILLS THE BEACH TONIGHT WITH ONLY A GHOST OF DAY, ALL SHADOW GRAY, AND MOONBEAM WHITE.

AND YOU LIE ALONE TONIGHT, AS ALONE AS I;

53

’Tis here!

54

’Tis here!

55

’Tis gone!

We do it wrong, being so majestic, to offer it the show of violence; for it is, as the air, invulnerable, and our vain blows malicious mockery.

56

It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

57

And then it started like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons. I have heard, the cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat awake the god of day; and, at his warning, whether in sea or fire, in earth or air, the extravagant and erring spirit hies to his confine: and of the truth herein this present object made probation.

58

It faded on the crowing of the cock. Some say that ever ’gainst that season comes wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrated, the bird of dawning singeth all night long; and then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad; the nights are wholesome; then no planets strike, no fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, so hallow’d and so gracious is the time.

LONELY GIRL IN YOUR LONELY FLAT, WELL, THAT'S WHERE IT'S AT, SO HUSH YOUR LONELY CRY.

HOW CAN I COME TO YOU, PUT OUT THE MOON, SEND BACK THE TIDE?

THE NIGHT HAS GONE SO GRAY, I'D LOSE THE WAY, AND IT'S DARK INSIDE. NO, I MUST LIE ALONE, TILL IT COMES FOR ME; TILL IT TAKES THE SKY, THE SAND, THE MOON, AND THE LONELY SEA. AND THE LONELY SEA . . . ETC. [FADE OUT.]

59

So have I heard and do in part believe it. But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill: break we our watch up; and by my advice, let us impart what we have seen to-night unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life, this spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him. do you consent we shall acquaint him with it, as needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

"Now **59** then," Oedipa shivered brightly.

"First question," Metzger reminded her. From the TV set the St Bernard was barking. Oedipa looked and saw Baby Igor, disguised as a Turkish beggar lad, skulking with the dog around a set she took to be Constantinople.

"Another early reel," she said hopefully.

"I can't allow that question," Metzger said. On the doorsill the Paranoids, as we leave milk to propitiate the leprechaun, had set a fifth of Jack Daniels.

"O boy," said Oedipa. She poured a drink. "Did Baby Igor get to Constantinople in the good submarine 'Justine'?"

"No," said Metzger. Oedipa took off an earring. "Did he get there in, what did you call them, in an E Class submarine?"

"No," said Metzger. Oedipa took off another earring.

"Did he get there overland, **60** maybe through Asia Minor?"

"Maybe," said Metzger. Oedipa took off another earring.

"Another earring?" said Metzger. "If I answer that, will you take something off?" "I'll do it without an answer," roared Metzger, shucking out of his coat. Oedipa refilled her glass, Metzger had another snort from the bottle. Oedipa then sat five minutes watching the tube, forgetting she was supposed to ask questions. Metzger took his trousers off, earnestly. The father seemed to be up before a court-martial, now.

"So," she said, "an early reel. This is where he gets cashiered, ha, ha."

"Maybe it's a flashback," Metzger said. "Or maybe he gets it twice." Oedipa removed a bracelet. So it went: the succession of film fragments on the tube, the progressive removal of clothing that seemed to bring her no nearer nudity, the boozing, the tireless shivaree, of voices and guitars from out by the pool. Now and then a commercial would come in, each time Metzger would say, "Inverarity's," or "Big block of shares," and later settled for nodding and smiling. Oedipa would scowl back, growing more

and more certain, while a headache **61** began to flower behind her eyes, that they among all possible combinations of new lovers had found a way to make time itself slow down. Things grew less and less clear. At some point she went into the bathroom, tried to find her image in the mirror and couldn't. She had a moment of nearly pure terror. Then remembered that the mirror had broken and fallen in sink. "Seven years' bad luck," she said aloud. "I'll be 35." She shut the door behind her and took the occasion to blunder, almost absently, into another slip and skirt, as well as a long-leg girdle and a couple pairs of knee socks. It struck her that if the sun ever came up Metzger would disappear. She wasn't sure if she wanted him to. She came back in to find Metzger wearing only a pair of boxer shorts and fast asleep with a harden and his head under the couch. She noticed also a fat stomach the suit had hidden. On the screen New Zealanders and Turks were impaling one another on bayonets. With a cry Oedipa rushed to him, fell on him, began kissing him to wake him up. His radiant eyes flew open, pierced her, as if she could feel the sharpness somewhere vague between her breasts. She sank with an enormous sigh that carried all rigidity like a mythical fluid from her, down next to him; so weak she couldn't help him undress her; it took him 20 minutes, rolling, arranging her this way and that, as if she thought, he were some scaled-up, short-haired, poker-faced little girl with a Barbie doll. She may have fallen asleep once or twice. She awoke at last to find herself getting laid; she'd come in on a sexual crescendo in progress, like a cut to a scene where the camera's already moving. Outside a fugue of guitars had begun, and she counted each electronic voice as it came in, till she reached six or so and recalled only three of the Paranoids played guitars; so others must be plugging in.

Which indeed they were. Her climax and Metzger's, when it came, coincided with every light in the place, including the TV tube, suddenly going out, dead, black. It was a curious experience. The Paranoids had blown a fuse. When the lights came on again, and she and Metzger lay twined amid a wall-to-wall scatter of clothing and spilled bourbon, the TV tube revealed the father, dog and Baby Igor trapped inside the darkening "Justine," as the water level inexorably rose. The dog was first to drown, in a great crowd of bubbles. The camera came in for a close-up of Baby Igor crying, one hand on the control board. Something short-circuited then and the grounded Baby Igor was electrocuted, thrashing back and forth and screaming

61

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death the memory be green, and that it us befitted to bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom to be contracted in one brow of woe, yet so far hath discretion fought with nature that we with wisest sorrow think on him, together with remembrance of ourselves. Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, the imperial jointress to this warlike state, have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, - with an auspicious and a dropping eye, with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, in equal scale weighing delight and dole, - taken to wife: nor have we herein barr'd your better wisdoms, which have freely gone with this affair along. For all, our thanks. Now follows, that you know, young Fortinbras, holding a weak supposal of our worth, or thinking by our late dear brother's death our state to be disjoint and out of frame, collegued with the dream of his advantage, he hath not fail'd to pester us with message, importing the surrender of those lands lost by his father, with all bonds of law, to our most valiant brother. So much for him. Now for ourself and for this time of meeting: thus much the business is: we have here writ to Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, - who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears of this his nephew's purpose, - to suppress his further gait herein; in that the levies, the lists and full proportions, are all made out of his subject: and we here dispatch you, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand, for bearers of this greeting to old Norway. Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

60

Let's do't, I pray; and I this morning know where we shall find him most conveniently.

62

In that and all things will
we show our duty.

horribly. Through one of those Hollywood distortions in probability, the father was spared electrocution so he could make a farewell speech, apologizing to Baby Igor and the dog for getting them into this and regretting that they wouldn't be meeting in heaven: 62 "Your little eyes have seen your daddy for the last time. You are for salvation; I am for the Pit." At the end his suffering eyes filled the screen, the sound of incoming water grew deafening, up swelled that strange 30's movie music with the massive sax section, in faded the legend THE END.

Oedipa had leaped to her feet and run across to the other wall to turn and glare at Metzger. "They didn't make it!" she yelled. "You bastard, I won."

"You won me," Metzger smiled.

"What did Inverarity tell you about me," she asked finally.

"That you wouldn't be easy."

She began to cry.

"Come back," 63 said Metzger. "Come on."

After awhile she said, "I will." And she did.

63

We doubt it nothing:
heartily farewell.

And now, Laertes, what's
the news with you? You
told us of some suit;
what is't, Laertes? You
cannot speak of reason
to the Dane, and loose
your voice: what wouldst
thou beg, Laertes, That shall
not be my offer, not thy asking? The
head is not more native to the heart, the hand
more instrumental to the mouth, than is the throne of
Denmark to thy father. What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

III

THINGS THEN DID not delay in turning curious. If one object behind her discovery of what she was to label the Tristero System or often only The Tristero (as if it might be something's secret ⁶⁴ title) were to bring to an end her encapsulation in her tower, then that night's infidelity with Metzger would logically be the starting point for it; logically. That's what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. As if (as she'd guessed that first minute in San Narciso) there were revelation in progress all around her. Much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left, his substitute often for her thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time: savannahs teeming ⁶⁵ with elands and gazelles, galleons sailing west into the void, Hitler heads, sunsets, cedars of Lebanon, allegorical faces that never were, he could spend hours peering into each one, ignoring her. She had never seen the fascination. The thought that now it would all have to be inventoried and appraised was only another headache. No suspicion ⁶⁶ at all that it might have something to tell her. Yet if she hadn't been set up or sensitized, first by her peculiar seduction, then by the other, almost offhand things, what after all could the mute stamps have told her, remaining then as they would've only ex-rivals, cheated as she by death, about to be broken up into lots, on route to any number of new masters?

It got seriously under way, this sensitizing, either with the letter from Mucho or the evening she and Metzger

64

My dread lord, your leave
and favour to return to
France; from whence
though willingly I came
to Denmark, to show my
duty in your coronation,
yet now, I must confess,
that duty done, my
thoughts and wishes
bend again toward
France and bow them to
your gracious leave and
pardon.

65

Have you your
father's leave?
What says Polonius?

66

He hath, my lord, wrung
from me my slow leave by
laboursome petition, and
at last upon his will I seal'd my
hard consent: I do beseech you,
give him leave to go.

drifted into a strange bar known as The Scope. Looking back she forgot which had come first. The letter itself had nothing much **67** to say, had come in response to one of her dutiful, more or less rambling, twice-a-week notes to him, in which she was not confessing to her scene with Metzger because Mucho, she felt, somehow, would know. Would then proceed at a KCUF record hop to look out again across the gleaming gym floor and there in one of the giant keyholes inscribed for basketball see, groping her vertical backstroke a little awkward opposite any boy heels might make her an inch taller than, a Sharon, Linda or Michele, seventeen and what is known as a hip one, whose velveted eyes ultimately, statistically would meet Mucho's and respond, and the thing would develop then groovy as it could when you found you couldn't get statutory rape really out of the back of your law-abiding head. She knew the pattern because it had happened a few times already, though Oedipa had been most scrupulously fair about it, mentioning the practice only once, in fact, another three in the morning and out of a dark dawn sky, asking if he wasn't worried about the penal code. "Of course," said Mucho after awhile, that was all; but in his tone of voice she thought she heard more, something between annoyance and agony. She **68** wondered then if worrying affected his performance. Having once been seventeen and ready to laugh at almost anything, she found herself then overcome by, call it a tenderness she'd never go quite to the back of lest she get bogged. It kept her from asking him any more questions. Like all their inabilities to communicate, this too had a virtuous motive.

It may have been an intuition that the letter would be newsless inside that made Oedipa look more closely at its outside, when it arrived. At first she didn't see. It was an ordinary Muchoesque envelope, swiped from the station, ordinary airmail stamp, to the left of the cancellation a blurb put **69** on by the government, REPORT ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR POSTMASTER. Idly, she began to skim back through Mucho's letter after reading it to see if there were any dirty words. "Metzger," it occurred to her, "what is a pots-master?"

"Guy in the scullery," replied Metzger authoritatively from the bathroom, "in charge of all the heavy stuff, canner kettles, gunboats, Dutch ovens . . ."

She threw a brassiere in at him and said, "I'm supposed

to report all obscene mail to my pots-master."

"So they make misprints," Metzger said, "let them. As long as they're careful about not pressing the wrong button, you know?"

It may have been that same evening that they happened across The Scope, a bar out on the way to L.A., near the Yoyodyne plant. **70** Every now and again, like this evening, Echo Courts became impossible, either because of the stillness of the pool and the blank windows that faced on it, or a prevalence of teenage voyeurs, who'd all had copies of Miles's passkey made so they could check in at whim on any bizarre sexual action. This would grow so bad Oedipa and Metzger got in the habit of dragging a mattress **71** into the walk-in closet, where

Metzger would then move the chest of drawers up against the door, remove the bottom drawer and put it on top, insert his legs in the empty space, this being the only way he could lie full length in this closet, by which point he'd usually lost interest in the whole thing.

The Scope proved to be a haunt for electronics assembly people from Yoyodyne. The green neon sign outside ingeniously depicted the face of an oscilloscope tube, over which flowed an ever-changing dance of Lissajous figures. Today seemed to be payday, and everyone inside to be drunk already. Glared at all the way, Oedipa and Metzger found a table in back. A wizened bartender wearing shades **72** materialized and Metzger ordered bourbon. Oedipa, checking the bar, grew nervous. There was this je ne sais quoi about the Scope crowd: they all wore glasses and stared at you, silent. Except for a couple-three nearer the door, who were engaged in a nose-picking contest, seeing how far they could flick it across the room. **73**

A sudden chorus of whoops and yibbles burst from a kind of juke box at the far end of the room. Everybody quit talking. The bartender tiptoed back, with the drinks.

"What's happening?" **74** Oedipa whispered.

"That's by Stockhausen," the hip graybeard informed her, "the early crowd tends to dig your Radio Cologne sound. Later on we really swing. We're the only bar in the area, you know, has a strictly electronic music policy. Come on around Saturdays, starting midnight we have your Sinewave Session, that's a live get-together, fellas come in just to jam from all over the state, San Jose, Santa Barbara, San Diego"

67

Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine, and thy best graces spend it at thy will! But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son, -

68

A little more than kin, and less than kind.

69

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

70

Not so, my lord; I am too much 'i' the sun.

71

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. Do not for ever with thy veiled lids seek for thy noble father in the dust: thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

72

Ay, madam, it is common.

73

If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

74

Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.' 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, nor customary suits of solemn black, nor windy suspiration of forced breath, no, nor the fruitful river in the eye, nor the dejected 'havior of the visage, together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, that can denote me truly: these indeed seem, for they are actions that a man might play; but I have that within which passeth show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe.

“Live?” Metzger said, “electronic music, live?”

“They put it on the tape, here, live, fella. We got a whole back room full of your audio oscillators, gunshot machines, contact mikes, everything man. That’s for if you didn’t bring your ax, see, **75** but you got the feeling and you want to swing with the rest of the cats, there’s always something available.”

“No offense,” said Metzger, with a winning Baby Igor smile.

A frail young man in a drip-dry suit slid into the seat across from them, introduced himself as Mike Fallopian, and began proselytizing for an organization known as the Peter Pinguid Society.

“You one of these right-wing nut outfits?” inquired the diplomatic Metzger.

Fallopian twinkled. “They accuse us of being paranoids.”

“They?” inquired Metzger, twinkling also.

“Us?” asked Oedipa.

The Peter Pinguid Society was named for the commanding officer of the Confederate man-of-war “Disgruntled,” who early in 1863 had set sail with the daring plan of bringing a

task force around Cape Horn to attack San Fran-

cisco and thus open a second front in the War For

Southern Independence. Storms and scurvy

managed to destroy or dis-

courage every vessel in this

armada except the game little

“Disgruntled,” which showed up off

the coast of California about a year later.

Unknown, however, to Commodore Pin-

guid, Czar Nicholas II of Russia had dispatched

his Far East Fleet, four corvettes and two clippers,

all under the command of one Rear Admiral Popov, to

San Francisco Bay, as part of a ploy to keep Britain and France from (among other things) intervening on the side

of the Confederacy. Pinguid could not have chosen a worse time for an assault on San Francisco. Rumors were abroad that winter that the Reb cruisers “Alabama” and “Sum-

ter” were indeed on the point of attacking the city, and the Russian admiral had, on his own responsibility, issued

his Pacific squadron standing orders to put on steam and clear for action should any such attempt develop. The

cruisers, however, seemed to prefer cruising and nothing more. This did not keep Popov from periodic reconnoi-

ting. What happened on the 9th March, 1864, a day now

held sacred by all Peter Pinguid Society members, is not too clear. Popov did send out a ship, either the corvette “Bogatir” or the clipper “Gaida-mak,” to see what it could see. Off the coast of either what is now Carmel-by-the-Sea, or what is now Pismo Beach, around noon or possibly toward **76** dusk, the two ships sighted each other. One of them may have fired, if it did then the other responded; but both were out of range so neither showed a scar afterward to prove anything. Night fell. In the morning the Russian ship was gone. But motion is relative. If you believe an excerpt from the “Bogatir” or “Gaidamak”’s log, forwarded in April to the General-Adjutant in St Petersburg and now somewhere in the Krasnyi Arkhiv, it was the “Disgruntled” that had vanished during the night.

“Who cares?” Fallopian shrugged. “We don’t try to make scripture out of it. Naturally that’s cost us a lot of support in the Bible Belt, where we might’ve been expected to go over real good. The old Confederacy.

“But that was **77** the very first military confrontation between Russia and America. Attack, retaliation, both projectiles deep-sixed forever and the Pacific rolls on. But the ripples from those two splashes spread, and grew, and today engulf us all.

“Peter Pinguid was really our first casualty. Not the fanatic our more left-leaning friends over in the Birch Society **78** chose to martyrize.”

“Was the Commodore killed, then?” asked Oedipa.

Much worse, to Fallopian’s mind. After the confrontation, appalled at what had to be some military alliance between abolitionist Russia (Nicholas having freed the serfs in 1861) and a Union that paid lip-service to abolition while it kept its own industrial laborers in a kind of wage-slavery, Peter Pinguid stayed in his cabin for weeks, brooding.

“But that sounds,” objected Metzger, “like he was against industrial capitalism. Wouldn’t that disqualify him as any kind of anti-Communist figure?”

“You think like a Bircher,” Fallopian said. “Good guys and bad guys. You never get to any of the underlying truth. Sure he was against industrial capitalism.

So are we. Didn’t it lead, inevitably, to Marxism?

Underneath, both are part of the same creeping horror.” “Industrial anything,” hazarded Metzger.

“There you go,” nodded Fallopian.

“What happened to Peter Pinguid?” Oedipa wanted to know.

“He finally resigned his commission. Violated his

75

’Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, to give these mourning duties to your father: but, you must know, your father lost a father; that father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound in filial obligation for some term to do obsequious sorrow: but to persevere in obstinate condolence is a course of impious stubbornness; ’tis unmanly grief; it shows a will most incorrect to heaven, a heart unfortified, a mind impatient, an understanding simple and unschool’d: for what we know must be and is as common as any the most vulgar thing to sense, why should we in our peevish opposition take it to heart? Fie! ’tis a fault to heaven, a fault against the dead, a fault to nature, to reason most absurd; whose common theme is death of fathers, and who still hath cried, from the first corse till he that died to-day, ’his must be so.’ We pray you, throw to earth this unprevailing woe, and think of us as of a father: for let the world take note, you are the most immediate to our throne; and with no less nobility of love than that which dearest father bears his son, do I impart toward you. For your intent in going back to school in Wittenberg, it is most retrograde to our desire: and we beseech you, bend you to remain here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye, our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

76

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet: I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

77

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

78

Why, ’tis a loving and a fair reply; be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come; this gentle and enforced accord of Hamlet sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof, no jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day, but the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, and the king’s rouse the heavens all bruit again, re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

upbringing and code of honor. Lincoln and the Czar had forced him to. That's what I meant when I said casually. He and most of the crew **79** settled near L.A.; and for the rest of his life he did little more than acquire "wealth."

"How poignant," Oedipa said. "What doing?"

"Speculating in California real estate," said Fallopian. Oedipa, halfway into swal-

79

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt thaw and resolve itself into a dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two: so excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother that he might not beteem the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on: and yet, within a month – let me not think on't – frailty, thy name is woman! – a little month, or ere those shoes were old with which she follow'd my poor father's body, like Niobe, all tears: – why she, even she – O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason, would have mourn'd longer – married with my uncle, my father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules: within a month: ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes, she married. O, most

wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not nor it cannot come to good: nut break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

80

Hail to your lordship!

81

I am glad to see you well: Horatio, – or I do forget myself.

82

The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

lowing part of her drink, sprayed it out again in a glittering cone for ten feet easy, and collapsed in giggles.

"Wha," said Fallopian. "During the drought that year you could've bought lots in the heart of downtown L. A. for .63 apiece."

A great shout went up near the doorway, bodies flowed toward a fattish pale young man who'd appeared carrying a leather mailsack over his shoulder.

"Mail call," people **80** were yelling. Sure enough, it was, just like in the army. The fat kid, looking harassed, climbed up on the bar and started calling names and throwing envelopes into the crowd. Fallopian excused himself and joined the others.

Metzger had taken out a pair of glasses and was squinting through them at the kid on the bar. "He's wearing a Yoyodyne badge. What do you make of that?"

"Some inter-office mail run," Oedipa said.

"This time of night?"

"Maybe a late shift?" **81** But Metzger only frowned. "Be back," Oedipa shrugged, heading for the ladies' room.

On the latrine wall, among lipsticked obscenities, she noticed the following message, neatly indited in engineering lettering:

"Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE **82** only, Box 7391, L. A." WASTE? Oedipa wondered. Beneath the notice, faintly in pencil, was a symbol she'd never seen before, a loop, triangle and trapezoid, thus:

[...]

It might be something sexual, but she somehow doubted it. She found a pen in her purse and copied the address and symbol in her memo book, thinking: God, hieroglyphics. When she came out Fallopian was back, and had this funny look on his face.

"You weren't **83** supposed to see that," he told them. He had an envelope. Oedipa could see, instead of a postage stamp, the handstruck initials PPS.

"Of course," said Metzger. "Delivering the mail is a government monopoly. You would be opposed to that."

Fallopian gave them a wry smile. "It's not as rebellious as it looks. We use Yoyodyne's inter-office delivery. On the sly. But it's hard to find carriers, we have a big turnover. They're run on a tight schedule, and they get nervous. Security people over at the plant know something's up. They keep a sharp eye out. De Witt," pointing at the fat **84** mailman, who was being hauled, twitching, down off the bar and offered drinks he did not want, "he's the most nervous one we've had all year."

"How extensive is this?" asked Metzger.

"Only inside our San Narciso chapter. They've set up pilot projects similar to this in the Washington and I think Dallas chapters. But we're the only one in California so far. A few of your more affluent **85** type members do wrap their letters around bricks, and then the whole thing in brown paper, and send them Railway Express, but I don't know. . ."

"A little like copping out," Metzger sympathized.

"It's the principle," Fallopian agreed, sounding defensive. "To keep it up to some kind of a reasonable volume, each member has to send at least one letter a week through the Yoyodyne system. If you don't, you get fined." He opened his letter and showed Oedipa and Metzger.

Dear Mike, it said, how are you? Just thought I'd drop you a note. How's your book coming? Guess that's all for now. See you at The Scope.

"That's how it is," Fallopian confessed bitterly, "most of the time."

"What book did they mean?" asked Oedipa.

Turned out Fallopian was doing a history of private mail delivery in the U.S., attempting to link the Civil War to the postal reform movement that had begun around 1845. He found it beyond simple coincidence that in of all years 1861 the federal government should have set out on a vigorous suppression of those independent mail routes still surviving the various Acts of '45, '47, '51 and '55, Acts all designed to drive any private competition into financial ruin. He saw it all as a parable of power, its feeding, growth and systematic abuse, though he didn't go into it that far with her,

83

Sir, my good friend; I'll change that name with you: and what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio? Marcellus?

84

My good lord –

85

I am very glad to see you. Good even, sir. But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

that particular night. All Oedipa would remember about him at first, in fact, were his slender build and neat Armenian nose, and a certain affinity of his eyes for green neon.

So began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero. Or rather, her attendance at some unique performance, prolonged **86** as if it were the last of the night, something a little extra for whoever'd stayed this late. As if the breakaway gowns, net bras, jeweled garters and G-strings of historical figuration that would fall away were layered dense as Oedipa's own street-clothes in that game with Metzger in front of the Baby Igor movie; as if a plunge toward dawn indefinite black hours long would indeed be necessary before The Tristero could be revealed in its terrible nakedness. Would its smile, then, be coy, and would it flirt away harmlessly backstage, say good night with a Bourbon **87** Street bow and leave her in peace? Or would it instead, the dance ended, come back down the runway, its luminous stare locked to Oedipa's, smile gone malign and pitiless; bend to her alone among the desolate rows of seats and begin to speak words she never wanted to hear?

The beginning of that performance was clear enough. It was while she and Metzger were waiting for ancillary letters to be granted representatives in Arizona, Texas, New York and Florida, where Inverarity had developed real **88** estate, and in Delaware, where he'd been incorporated. The two of them, followed by a convertibleful of the Paranoids Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard and their chicks, had decided to spend the day out at Fangoso Lagoons, one of Inverarity's last big projects. The trip out was uneventful except for two or three collisions the Paranoids almost had owing to Serge, the driver, not being able to see through his hair. He was persuaded to hand over the wheel to one of the girls. Somewhere beyond the batten-tening, urged sweep of three-bedroom houses rushing by their thousands across all the dark beige hills, some-

how implicit in an arrogance **89** or bite to the smog the more inland somnolence of San Narciso did lack, lurked the sea, the unimaginable Pacific, the one to which all surfers, beach pads, sewage disposal schemes, tourist incursions, sunned homosexuality, chartered fishing are irrelevant, the hole left by the moon's tearing-free and monument to her exile; you could not hear or even smell this but it was there, something tidal began to reach feelers in past eyes and eardrums, perhaps to arouse fractions of brain current your

most gossamer microelectrode is yet too gross for finding. Oedipa had believed, long before leaving Kinneret, in some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California (not, of course, **90** for her own section of the state, which seemed to need none), some unvoiced idea that no matter what you did to its edges the true Pacific stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth. Perhaps it was only that notion, its arid hope, she sensed as this forenoon they made their seaward thrust, which would stop short of any sea.

They came in among earth-moving machines, a total absence of trees, the usual hieratic geometry, and eventually, shimmying for the sand roads, down in a helix to a sculptured body of water named Lake In-verarity. Out in it, on a round island of fill among blue wavelets, squatted the social hall, a chunky, ogived and verdigrised, Art Nouveau reconstruction of some European pleasure-casino. Oedipa fell in love with it. The Paranoid element piled out of their car, **91** carrying musical instruments and looking around as if for outlets under the trucked-in white sand to plug into. Oedipa from the Impala's trunk took a basket filled with cold egg-plant parmigian' sandwiches from an Italian drive-in, and Metzger came up with an enormous Thermos of tequila sours. They wandered all in a loose pattern down the beach toward a small marina for what boat owners didn't have lots directly on the water.

"Hey, blokes," yelled Dean or perhaps Serge, "let's pinch a boat."

"Hear, hear," cried the girls. **92** Metzger closed his eyes and tripped over an old anchor. "Why are you walking around," inquired Oedipa, "with your eyes closed, Metzger?"

"Larceny," **93** Metzger said, "maybe they'll need a lawyer." A snarl rose along with some smoke from among pleasure boats strung like piglets along the pier, indicating the Paranoids had indeed started someone's outboard. **94** "Come on, then," they called. Suddenly, a dozen boats away, a form, covered with a blue polyethylene tarp, rose up and said, "Baby Igor, I need help."

"I **95** know that voice," said Metzger.

"Quick," said the blue tarp, "let me hitch a ride with you guys."

"Hurry, hurry," called the Paranoids.

"MannyDiPresso," **96** said Metzger, seeming less than delighted.

"Your actor/lawyer friend," Oedipa recalled.

86

A truant disposition,
good my lord.

87

I would not hear your
enemy say so, nor shall you
do mine ear that violence,
to make it truster of your own
report against yourself: I know
you are no truant. But what is
your affair in Elsinore? We'll
teach you to drink deep ere
you depart.

88

My lord, I came to see
your father's funeral.
own report

89

I pray thee, do not mock me,
fellow-student; I think it was to see
my mother's wedding.

90

Indeed, my lord, it follow'd
hard upon.

91

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the
funeral baked meats did
coldly furnish forth the
marriage tables. Would I
had met my dearest foe
in heaven or ever I had
seen that day, Horatio!

My father! – methinks I see my
father.

92

Where, my lord?

93

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

94

I saw him once; he was a
goodly king.

95

He was a man, take him
for all in all, I shall not
look upon his like again.

96

My lord, I think I saw him
yesternight.

97
Saw? who?

98
My lord, the king your father.

99
The king my father!

100
Season your admiration for awhile with an attent ear, till I may deliver, upon the witness of these gentlemen, this marvel to you.

101
For God's love, let me hear.

102
Two nights together had these gentlemen, Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch, in the dead vast and middle of the night, been thus encounter'd. A figure like your father, armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe, appears before them, and with solemn march goes slow and stately by them: thrice he walk'd by their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes, within his truncheon's length; whilst they, distilled almost to jelly with the act of fear, stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me in dreadful secrecy impart they did; and I with them the third night kept the watch; where, as they had deliver'd, both in time, form of the thing, each word made true and good, the apparition comes: I knew your father; these hands are not more like.

"Not so loud, hey," said Di Presso, skulking as best a polyethylene cone can along the landing towards them. "They're watching." 97 With binoculars." Metzger handed Oedipa aboard the about-to-be-hijacked vessel, a ly-foot aluminum trimaran known as the "Godzilla II," and gave Di Presso what he intended to be a hand also, but he had grabbed, it seemed, only empty plastic, and when he pulled, 98 the entire covering came away and there stood Di Presso, in a skin-diving suit and wraparound shades.

"I can explain," he said.

"Hey," yelled a couple voices, faintly, almost in unison, from up the beach 99 a ways. A squat man with a crew cut, intensely tanned and also with shades, came out in the open running, one arm doubled like a wing with the hand at chest level, inside the jacket.

"Are we on camera?" asked Metzger dryly.

"This is real," chattered Di Presso, "come on." The Paranoids 100 cast off, backed the "Godzilla H" out from the pier, turned and with a concerted whoop took off like a bat out of hell, nearly sending Di Presso over the fantail. Oedipa, looking back, could see their pursuer had been joined by another man about the same build. Both wore gray suits. She couldn't see if they were holding anything like guns.

"I left my car on the other side of the lake," Di Presso said, "but I know he has somebody watching." 101

"Who does," Metzger asked.

"Anthony Giunghierrace," replied ominous Di Presso, "alias Tony Jaguar."

"Who?" 102

"Eh, sfacim'," shrugged Di Presso, and spat into their wake.

The Paranoids were singing, to the tune of "AdesteFideles":

Hey, solid citizen, we just pinched your bo-boat, Hey, solid citizen, we just pinched your boat. . . grabassing around, trying to push each other over the side.

Oedipa cringed out of the way and watched

Di Presso. If he had really played the part of Metzger in a TV pilot film as Metzger claimed, the casting

had been typically Hollywood: 103 they didn't look or act a bit alike.

"So," said Di Presso, "who's Tony Jaguar. Very big in Cosa Nostra, is who."

"You're an actor," 104 said Metzger. "How are you in with them?"

"I'm a lawyer again," Di Presso said. "That pilot will never be bought, Metz, not unless you go out and do something really Darrowlike, spectacular. Arouse public interest, maybe with a sensational defense."

"Like what."

"Like win the litigation I'm bringing against the estate of Pierce Inverarity." 105 Metzger, as much as cool Metzger could, goggled. Di Presso laughed and punched Metzger in the shoulder. "That's right, good buddy."

"Who wants what? You better talk to the other executor too." He introduced Oedipa, 106 Di Presso tipping his shades politely. The air suddenly went cold, the sun was blotted out. The three looked up in alarm to see looming over them and about to collide the pale green social hall, its towering pointed windows, wrought-iron floral embellishments, solid silence, air somehow of waiting for them. Dean, the Paranoid at the helm, brought the boat around neatly to a small wooden dock, everybody got out, Di Presso heading nervously for an outside staircase. "I want to check on my car," he said. Oedipa and Metzger, carrying picnic stuff, followed 107 up the stairs, along a balcony, out of the building's shadow, up a metal ladder finally to the roof. It was like walking on the head of a drum: they could hear their reverberations inside the hollow building beneath, and the delighted yelling of the Paranoids. Di Presso, Scuba suit glistening, scrambled up the side of a cupola. Oedipa spread a blanket and poured booze 108 into cups made of white, crushed, plastic foam. "It's still there," said Di Presso, descending. "I ought to make a run for it."

"Who's 109 your client?" asked Metzger, holding out a tequila sour. "Fellow who's chasing me," allowed Di Presso, holding

"Who's 109 your client?" asked Metzger, holding out a tequila sour.

"Fellow who's chasing me," allowed Di Presso, holding

103
But where was this?

104
My lord, upon the platform where we watch'd.

105
Did you not speak to it?

106
My lord, I did; but answer made it none: yet once methought it lifted up its head and did address itself to motion, like as it would speak; but even then the morning cock crew loud, and at the sound it shrunk in haste away, and vanish'd from our sight.

107
'Tis very strange.

108
As I do live, my honour'd lord, 'tis true; and we did think it writ down in our duty to let you know of it.

109
Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me. hold you the watch to-night?

the cup between his teeth so it covered his nose and looking at them, arch.

110
We do, my lord.

"You ran from 110 clients?"

Oedipa asked. "You flee ambulances?"

111
Arm'd, say you?

"He's been trying to borrow money," Di Presso said, "since I told him I couldn't get an advance against any settlement in this suit." 111

"You're all ready to lose, then," she said.

"My heart isn't in it," Di Presso admitted, "and if I can't even keep up payments on that XKE I bought while temporarily insane, how can I lend money?"

112
Arm'd, my lord.

"Over 30 112 years," Metzger snorted, "that's temporary."

"I'm not so crazy I don't know trouble," Di Presso said, "and Tony J. is in it, friends. Gambling mostly, also talk he's been up to show cause to the local Table why he shouldn't be 113 in for some discipline there. That kind of grief I do not need."

113
From top to toe?

Oedipa glared. "You're a selfish schmuck."

114
My lord, from head to foot.

"All the time 114 Cosa Nostra is watching," soothed Metzger, "watching. It does not do to be seen helping those the organization does not want helped."

"I have relatives in Sicily," said Di Presso, in comic broken English. Paranoids and their chicks appeared against the bright sky, from behind 115 turrets, gables, ventilating ducts, and moved in on the eggplant sandwiches in the basket. Metzger 116 sat on the jug of booze so they couldn't get any. The wind had risen.

115
Then saw you not his face?

116
O, yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.

"Tell me about the lawsuit," Metzger said, trying with both hands to keep his hair in place.

117
What, look'd he frowningly?

"You've 117 been into Inverarity's books," Di Presso said. "You know the Beaconsfield filter thing." Metzger made a non-committal moue.

"Bone charcoal," Oedipa remembered.

118
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

"Yeah, well Tony Jaguar, 118 my client, supplied some bones," said Di Presso, "he alleges. Inverarity never paid him. That's what it's about."

"Offhand," Metzger said, "it doesn't sound like Inverarity. He was scrupulous about payments like that. Unless it was a bribe. 119 I only did his legal tax deductions, so I wouldn't have seen it if it was. What construction firm did your client work for?"

119
Pale or red?

"Construction firm," squinted Di Presso.

Metzger looked around. 120 The Paranoids and their chicks may have been out of earshot. "Human bones, right?" Di Presso nodded yes. "All right, that's how he got them. Different highway outfits in the area, ones Inverarity had bought into, they got the contracts. All drawn up in most kosher fashion, Manfred. If there was 121 payola in there, I doubt it got written down."

120
Nay, very pale.

121
And fix'd his eyes upon you?

"How," inquired Oedipa, "are road builders in any position to sell bones, pray?"

"Old cemeteries have to be ripped up," Metzger explained. 122 "Lake in the path of the East San Narciso Freeway, it had no right to be there, so we just barrelled on through, no sweat."

122
Most constantly.

"No bribes, no freeways," Di Presso shaking his head. "These bones came from Italy. A straight sale. Some of them," waving out at the lake, "are down there, to decorate the bottom 123 for the Scuba nuts. That's what I've been doing today, examining the goods in dispute. Till Tony started chasing, anyway. The rest of the bones were used in the R&D phase of the filter program, back around the early '50's, way before cancer.

124 Tony Jaguar says he harvested them all from the bottom of Lago di Pieta."

123
I would I had been there.

124
It would have much amazed you.

"My God," Metzger said, soon as this name registered. "GI's?"

"About a company," said Manny Di Presso. Lago di Pieta was near the Tyrrhenian coast, somewhere between Naples and Rome, and had been the scene of a now ignored (in 1943 tragic) battle of attrition in a minor pocket developed during the advance on Rome. 125 For weeks, a handful of American troops, cut off and without

125
Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?

communications, huddled on the narrow shore of the clear and tranquil lake while from the cliffs that tilted vertiginously over the beach Germans hit them day and night with plunging, enfilading fire. The water of the lake was too cold to swim: 126 you died of exposure before you could reach any safe shore. There were no trees to build

126
While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

rafts with. No planes came over except an occasional Stuka with strafing in mind. It was remarkable that so few men held out so long. They dug in as far as the rocky beach would let them; they sent small raids up the cliffs that mostly never came back, but did succeed in taking out a machine-gun, once. Patrols looked for routes out, but those few that

127

Longer, longer.

returned had found nothing. They did what they could to break out; failing, they clung to life as long as they could. But they died, every one, dumbly, without a trace or a word. One day the Germans came down from the cliffs, and their enlisted men put all the bodies that were on the beach into the lake, along with what weapons and other material were no longer of use to either side.

128

Not when I saw't.

Presently the bodies sank; and stayed where they were till the early '50's, when Tony Jaguar, who'd been a corporal in an Italian outfit attached to the German force at Lago di Pieta and knew about what was at the bottom, decided along with some colleagues to see what he could salvage. All they managed to come up with was bones. Out of some murky train of reasoning, which may have included the observed fact that American tourists, beginning then to be plentiful, would pay good dollars for almost anything; and stories about Forest Lawn and the American cult of the dead; possibly some dim hope that Senator McCarthy, and others of his persuasion, in those days having achieved a certain ascendancy over the rich cretini from across the sea, would somehow refocus attention on the fallen of WW II, especially ones whose corpses had never been found; out of some such labyrinth of assumed motives, Tony Jaguar decided he could surely unload

129

His beard was grizzled - no?

his harvest of bones on some American someplace, through his contacts in the "family," known these days as Cosa Nostra. He was right. An import-export firm bought the bones, sold them to a fertilizer enterprise, which may have used one or two femurs for laboratory tests but eventually decided to phase entirely into menhaden instead and transferred the

130

It was, as I have seen it in his life, a sable silver'd.

131

I will watch to-night; perchance 'twill walk again.

remaining several tons to a holding company, which stored them in a warehouse outside of Fort Wayne, Indiana, for maybe a year before Beaconsfield got interested.

"Aha," Metzger leaped. "So it was Beaconsfield bought them. Not Inverarity. The only shares he held were in Osteolysis, Inc., the company they set up to develop the filter. Never in Beaconsfield itself."

"You know, blokes," remarked one of the girls, a long-waisted, brown-haired lovely in a black knit leotard and pointed sneakers, "this all has a most bizarre resemblance to that ill, ill Jacobean revenge play we went to last week."

132

His beard was grizzled - no?

"The Couriers," said Miles, "she's right. The same kind of kinky thing, you know. Bones of lost battalion in lake, fished up, turned into charcoal"

"They've been listening," screamed Di Presso, "those kids. All the time, somebody listens in, snoops; they bug your apartment, they tap your phone."

"But we don't repeat what we hear," said another girl. "None of us." Beaconsfields anyway. We're all on pot." Laughed Leonard the drummer now reached his beach robe and produced a fistful of cigarettes and distributed them among his chums. Metzger closed his eyes, turned his head, muttering, "Possession."

133

I warrant it will.

"Help," said Di Presso, looking back with a wild eye and open mouth across the lake. Another runabout had appeared and was headed toward them. Two figures in gray suits crouched behind its windshield. "Metz, I'm running for it. If he stops by here, don't bully him, he's my client." And he disappeared down the ladder. Oedipa with a sigh collapsed on her back and stared through the wind at the empty blue sky. Soon she heard the "Godzilla II" starting up.

134

If it assume my noble father's person, I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape and bid me hold my peace. I pray you all, if you have hitherto conceal'd this sight, let it be tenable in your silence still; and whatsoever else shall hap to-night, give it an understanding, but no tongue: I will requite your loves. So, fare you well: upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve, I'll visit you.

"Metzger," it occurred to her, "he's taking the boat? We're marooned."

So they were, until well after the sun had set and Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard and their chicks, by holding up the glowing roaches of their cigarettes like a flipcard section at a football game to spell out alternate S's and O's, attracted the attention of the Fangoso Lagoons Security Force, a garrison against the night made up of one-time cowboy actors and L. A. motorcycle cops. The time in between had been whiled away with songs by the Paranoids, and juicing, and feeding pieces of eggplant sandwich to a flock of not too bright seagulls who'd mistaken Fangoso Lagoons for the Pacific and hearing the plot of The Courier's Tragedy, by Richard Wharfing related near to unintelligible by eight memories unlooping progressively

regions as strange to map as their rising coils and clouds of pot smoke. It got so confusing that next day Oedipa decided to go see the play itself, and even conned Metzger into taking her.

The Courier's Tragedy was being put on by a San Narciso group known as the Tank Players, the Tank being a small arena theatre located out between a traffic analysis firm and a wildcat transistor outfit that hadn't been there last year and wouldn't be this coming but meanwhile was under-selling even the Japanese and hauling in loot by the steamshovelful. Oedipa and a reluctant Metzger came in on only a partly-filled house. Attendance did not swell by the time the play started. But the costumes were gorgeous and the lighting imaginative, and though the words were all spoken in Transplanted Middle Western Stage British, Oedipa found herself after five minutes sucked utterly into the landscape of evil

Richard Wharfinger had fashioned for his 17th-century audiences, so preapocalyptic, death-wishful, sensually fatigued, unprepared, a little poignantly, for that abyss of civil war that had been waiting, cold and deep, only a few years ahead of them.

Angelo, then, evil Duke of Squamuglia, has perhaps ten years before the play's opening murdered the good Duke of adjoining Faggio, by poisoning the feet on an image of Saint Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, in the court chapel, which feet the Duke was in the

Out in a bloody rain to feed our fields Amid the Maenad roar of nitre's song And sulfur's cantus firmus.

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Ruefully, because the henchman, a likeable schemer named Ercole, is secretly involved with dissident elements in the court of Faggio who want to keep Niccold alive, and so he contrives to stuff a young goat into the cannon instead, meanwhile smuggling Niccolò out of the ducal palace disguised as an elderly procuress.

This comes out in the first scene, as Niccolò confides his history to a friend, Domenico. Niccolò is at this point grown up, hanging around the court of his father's murderer, Duke Angelo, and masquerading as a special courier of the Thurn and Taxis family, who at the time held a

postal monopoly throughout most of the Holy Roman Empire. What he is trying to do, ostensibly, is develop a new market, since the evil Duke of Squamuglia has steadfastly refused, even with the lower rates and faster service of the Thurn and Taxis system, to employ any but his own messengers

in communicating with his stooge Pasquale over in neighboring Faggio. The real reason Niccold is waiting around is of course to get a crack at the Duke.

Evil Duke Angelo, meanwhile, is scheming to amalgamate the duchies of Squamuglia and Faggio, by marrying off the only royal female available, his sister Francesca, to Pasquale the Faggian usurper. The only obstacle in the way of this union is that Francesca is Pasquale's mother-her illicit liaison with the good ex-Duke of Faggio being one reason Angelo had him poisoned to begin with. There is an amusing scene where Francesca delicately seeks to remind her brother of the social taboos against incest. They seem to have slipped her mind, replies Angelo, during the ten years he and Francesca have been having their affair. Incest or no, the marriage must be; it is vital to

135

135

135

136

Your loves, as mine to you: farewell.

136

My father's spirit in arms! all is not well; I doubt some foul play: would the night were come! Till then sit still, my soul: foul deeds will rise, though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

136

137

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137

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Our duty to your honour.

137

My necessaries are embark'd: farewell: and, sister, as the winds give benefit and convoy is assistant, do not sleep, but let me hear from you.

139

For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour, hold it a fashion and a toy in blood, a violet in the youth of primy nature, forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting, The perfume and suppliance of a minute; No more.

138

Do you doubt that?

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his long-range political plans. The Church will nev-
tion it, says Francesca. So, says Duke Angelo, I will bribe a
cardinal. He has begun feel-
ing his sister up the dialo-
at her neck; the gue
modulates into
figures of intem-
desire, and the scene ends
the couple collapsing onto a
The act itself closes with
nico, to whom the naive
started it off by spill-
secret, trying to get
Duke Angelo and
his dear friend.
Duke, of course,
his apartment busy
ing off a piece, and the
Domenico can do is
administrative assis-
who turns out to be the
Ercole who once saved the
young Niccol6 and aided
escape from Faggio. This
presently confesses to
Domenico, though
only after having
enticed that informer
foolishly bend-
ing over and put-
his head into a curi-
black box, on the pre-
of showing him a
nographic diorama.
A steel vise promptly
clamps onto the faithless Dome-
co's head and the box muffles
cries for help. Ercole binds
hands and feet with
let silk cords, lets
know who it is he's
afoul of, reaches
the box with a
of pincers, tears out Domenico's tongue, stabs him a couple
times, pours into the box a beaker of aqua regia, enumerates
a list of other goodies, including castration, that Domenico
will undergo before he's allowed to die, all amid

No more but so?
the revered
perate
with
divan.
Dome-
Niccol6
ing his
in to see
betray
The
is in
knock-
best
a n
tant
same
life of
his
he
into
ting
ous
text
por-
ni-
his
his
scar-
him
run
into
pair
Think it no more; for nature,
crescent, does not grow alone
in thews and bulk, but, as this
temple waxes, the inward service
of the mind and soul grows wide
withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
and now no soil nor cautel doth
besmirch the virtue of his will:
but you must fear, his greatness
weigh'd, his will is not his own;
for he himself is subject
to his birth: he may not,
as unvalued persons do,
carve for himself; for on his
choice depends the safety
and health of this whole
state; and therefore must
his choice be circumscribed
unto the voice and yielding
of that body whereof he is the
head. Then if he says he loves
you, it fits your wisdom so far to
believe it as he in his particular
act and place may give his saying
deed; which is no further than
the main voice of Denmark goes
withal. Then weigh what loss your
honour may sustain, if with too
credent ear you list his songs,
or lose your heart, or your
chaste treasure open to
his unmaster'd importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my
dear sister,
And keep you in the rear
of your affection, out of the
shot and danger of desire. The
chariest maid is prodigal enough,
if she unmask her beauty to the
moon: virtue itself 'scapes not
calumnious strokes: the canker
galls the infants of the spring,
too oft before their buttons be
disclosed, and in the morn and
liquid dew of youth contagious
blastments are most imminent. be
wary then; best safety lies in fear:
youth itself rebels, though none
else near.

142 as, tongueless attempts to pray, agonized strug-
gles from the victim. 141 With
the tongue impaled on his rapier Ercole runs to a burn-
ing torch set 141 in the wall, sets
the tongue aflame and waving it around like a madman
concludes the act by screaming,
Thy pitiless unmanning is most meet,
Thinks Ercole the zany Paraclete.
Descended this malign, Unholy Ghost,
Let us begin thy frightful Pentecost. The lights went
out, and in the quiet somebody across the arena from
Oedipa distinctly said, "Ick." Metzger said, "You want to
go?" 142
"I want to see about the bones," said Oedipa. She had
to wait till the fourth act. The second was largely spent
in the protracted torture and 142 eventual murder
of a prince of the church who prefers martyrdom
to sanctioning Francesca's marriage to her son. The
only interr- 142 uptions come when
Ercole, spying on the cardinal's agony, dispatches cour-
riers to the good-guy element back in Faggio who have
it in for Pasquale, telling them to spread the word that
Pasquale's planning to marry his mother, calculating this
ought to rile up public opinion some; and ano- 142
ther scene in which Niccol6, passing the time of day with one
of Duke Angelo's couriers, hears the tale of the Lost
Guard, a b- 142 ody of some fifty
hand-picked knights, the flower of Faggian youth,
who once rode as protection for the good Duke.
One day, out on manoeuvres near the frontiers
of Squa- 142 muglia, they
all vanished without a trace, and shortly after-
ward the good Duke got poisoned. Honest Niccol6, who always
has difficulty hiding his feelings, observes that if the two
events turn out to be at all connected, and can be traced
t- 142 o Duke Angelo, boy, the Duke
better watch out, is all. The other courier, one Vittorio,
takes offense, vowing in an asi- 142
de to report this treasonable talk to Angelo at the first
opportunity. Meanwhile, back in the torture room, the
cardinal is now being forced to bleed into a chalice and
consecrate his own blood, not to God, but to Satan. They
142 142 also
cut off his big toe, and he is made to hold it up like a Host
and say, "This is my body," the keenwitted Angelo observ-
ing that it's the first time he's told anything like the
truth in fifty years of systematic lying. Altogether, a most

anti-clerical scene, perhaps intended as a sop to the Puritans of the time (a useless gesture since none of them ever went to plays, regarding them for some reason as immoral).

I shall the effect of this good watchman to my heart. But, good my brother, do not, as some ungracious pastors do, show me the steep and thorny way to heaven; whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine, upon the path of dalliance tread the rede.

The third act takes place in the court of Faggio, and is spent murdering Pasquale, as the culmination of a coup stirred up by the Duke's agents. While a battle rages in the streets outside the palace, Pasquale is locked up in his patrician hothouse, holding an orgy. Present at the merrymaking is a fierce black performing ape, brought

back from a recent voyage to the Indies. Of course it is somebody in an ape suit, who at a signal leaps on Pasquale from a chandelier, at the same time as half a dozen female impersonators who have up to now been lounging around in the guise of dancing girls also move in on the usurper from all parts of the stage. For about ten minutes the vengeful crew proceed to maim, strangle, poison, burn, stomp, and and otherwise have at Pasquale, while he describes intimately his varied sensations for our enjoyment. He dies finally in extreme agony, and in marches one Gennaro, a complete nonentity, to proclaim himself interim head of state till the rightful Duke, Niccol6, can be located.

There was an intermission. Metzger lurched into the undersized lobby to smoke, Oedipa headed for the ladies' room. She looked idly around for the symbol she'd seen the other night in The Scope, but all the walls, surprisingly, were blank. She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for.

Act IV of The Courier's Tragedy discloses evil Duke Angelo in a state of nervous frenzy. He has learned about the coup in Faggio, the possibility that Niccol6 may be alive somewhere after all. Word has reached him that Gennaro is levying a force to invade Squamuglia, also a rumor that the Pope is about to intervene because of the cardinal's murder. Surrounded by treachery on all sides, the Duke has Ercole, whose true role he still does not suspect, finally summon the Thurn and Taxis courier, figuring he can no longer trust his own men. Ercole brings in Niccol6 to await the Duke's friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. This above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. Farewell:

pleasure. Angelo takes out a quill, parchment and ink, explaining to the audience but not to the good guys, who are still ignorant of recent developments, that to forestall an invasion from Faggio, he must assure Gennaro with all haste of his good intentions. As he scribbles he lets drop a few disordered and cryptic remarks about the ink he's using, implying it's a very special fluid indeed. Like:

This pitchy brew in France is "encre" hight; In this might dire Squamuglia ape the Gaul, For "anchor" it has ris'n, from deeps untold.

And:

The swan has yielded but one hollow quill, The hapless mutton, but his tegument; Yet what, transmuted, swart and silken Hows Between, was neither plucked nor harshly flayed, But gathered up, from wildly different beasts. All of which causes him high amusement. The message to Gennaro completed and sealed, Niccol6 tucks it in his doublet and takes off for Faggio, still unaware, as is Ercole, of the coup and his own impending restoration as rightful Duke of Faggio. Scene switches to Gennaro, at the head of a small army, on route to invade Squamuglia. There is a lot of talk to the effect that if Angelo wants peace he'd better send a messenger to let them know before they reach the frontier, otherwise with great reluctance they will hand his ass to him. Back to Squamuglia, where Vittorio, the Duke's courier, reports how Niccol6 has been talking treason. Somebody else runs in with news that the body of Domenico, Niccol6's faithless friend, has been found mutilated; but tucked in his shoe was a message, somehow scrawled in blood, revealing Niccolo's true identity.

Angelo flies into an apoplectic rage, and orders Niccol6's pursuit and destruction. But not by his own men. It is at about this point in the play, in fact, that things really get peculiar, and a gentle chill, an ambivalence, guilty, begins to creep in among the words. Heretofore the naming of names has gone on either literally or as metaphor. But now, as the Duke gives his fatal command, a new mode of expression takes over. It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance. Certain things, it is made clear, will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown onstage; though it is difficult to imagine, given the excesses of the preceding acts, what these things could possibly be. The Duke does not, perhaps may not, enlighten us. Screaming at Vittorio he is explicit enough about who shall not pursue Niccol6: his own bodyguard he describes to their faces as vermin, zanies, poltroons. But who then will the pursuers be? Vittorio knows: every flunky in the court, idling around in

their Squamuglia livery and exchanging Significant Looks, knows. It is all a big in-joke. The audiences of the time knew. Angelo knows, but does not say. As close as he comes does not illuminate:

Let him that vizard keep unto his grave, That vain usurping of an honour'd name; We'll dance his masque as if it were the truth, Enlist the poniards swift of Those who, sworn To punctual vendetta never sleep, Lest at the palest whisper of the name Sweet Niccolò hath stol'n, one trice be lost. In bringing down a fell and soulless doom Unutterable.

Back to Gennaro and his army. A spy arrives from Squamuglia to tell them Niccolò's on the way. Great rejoicing, in the midst of which Gennaro, who seldom converses, only orates, begs everybody remember that Niccolò is still riding under the Thurn and Taxis colors. The cheering stops. Again, as in Angelo's court, the curious chill creeps in. Everyone onstage (having clearly been directed to do so) becomes aware of a possibility. Gennaro, even less enlightening than Angelo was, invokes the protection of God and Saint Narcissus for Niccolò, and they all ride on. Gennaro asks a lieutenant where they are; turns out it's only a league or so from the lake where Faggio's Lost Guard were last seen before their mysterious disappearance.

Meanwhile, at Angelo's palace, only Ercole's string has run out at last. Accosted by Vittorio and half a dozen others, he's charged with the murder of Domenico. Witnesses parade in, there is the travesty of a trial, and Ercole meets his end in a refreshingly simple mass stabbing.

We also see Niccolò, in the scene following, for the last time. He has stopped to rest by the shore of a lake where, he remembers being told, the Faggian Guard disappeared. He sits under a tree, opens Angelo's letter, and learns at last of the coup and the death of Pasquale. He realizes that he's riding toward restoration, the love of an entire dukedom, the coming true of all his most virtuous hopes. Leaning against the tree, he reads parts of the letter aloud, commenting, sarcastic, on what is blatantly a pack of lies devised to soothe Gennaro until Angelo can muster his own army of Squamuglians to invade Faggio. Offstage there is a sound of footpads. Niccolò leaps to his feet, starting up one of the radial aisles, hand frozen on the hilt of his sword. He trembles and cannot speak, only stutter, in what may be the shortest line ever written in blank verse: "T-t-t-t. . ." As if breaking out of some dream's paralysis, he begins, each step an effort, to retreat. Suddenly, in lithe and terrible silence, with dancers' grace, three

figures, long-limbed, effeminate, dressed in black tights, leotards and gloves, black silk hose pulled over their faces, come capering on stage and stop, gazing at him. Their faces behind the stockings are shadowy and deformed. They wait. The lights all go out.

Back in Squamuglia Angelo is trying to muster an army, without success. Desperate, he assembles those flunkies and pretty girls who are left, ritually locks all his exits, has wine brought in, and begins an orgy.

The act ends with Gennaro's forces picked up by the shores of the lake. An enlisted man comes on to report that a body, identified as Niccolò by the usual amulet placed round his neck as a child, has been found in a condition too awful to talk about. Again there is silence and everybody looks at everybody else. The soldier hands Gennaro a roll of parchment, stained with blood, which was found on the body. From its seal we can see it's the letter from Angelo that Niccolò was carrying. Gennaro glances at it, does a double-take, reads it aloud. It is no longer the lying document Niccolò read us excerpts from at all, but now miraculously a long confession by Angelo of all his crimes, closing with the revelation of what really happened to the Lost Guard of Faggio. They were surprise every one massacred by Angelo and thrown in the lake. Later on their bones were fished up again and made into charcoal, and the charcoal into ink, which Angelo, having a dark sense of humor, used in all his subsequent communications with Faggio, the present document included.

But now the bones of these Immaculate Have mingled with the blood of Niccolò. And innocence with innocence is join'd, A wedlock whose sole child is miracle: A life's base lie, rewritten into truth. That truth it is, we all bear testament, This Guard of Faggio, Faggio's noble dead.

In the presence of the miracle all fall to their knees, bless the name of God, mourn Niccolò, vow to lay Squamuglia waste. But Gennaro ends on a note most desperate, probably for its original audience a real shock, because it names at last the name Angelo did not and Niccolò tried to:

He that we last as Thurn and Taxis knew Now recks no lord but the stiletto's Thurn, And Tacit lies the gold once-knotted horn. No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow, Who's once been set his trye with Trysterò.

Trysterò. The word hung in the air as the act ended and all lights were for a moment cut; hung in the dark to puzzle Oedipus at Thebes, but not yet to exert the power over her it was to.

The fifth act, entirely an anticlimax, is taken up by the bloodbath Gennaro visits on the court of Squamuglia. Every mode of violent death available to Renaissance man, including a lye pit, land mines, a trained falcon with envenom'd talons, is employed. It plays, as Metzger remarked later, like a Road Runner cartoon in blank verse. At the end of it about the only character left alive in a stage dense with corpses is the colorless administrator, Gennaro.

According to the program, The Courier's Tragedy had been directed by one Randolph Driblette. He had also played the part of Gennaro the winner. "Look, Metzger," Oedipa said, "come on backstage with me."

"You know one of them?" said Metzger, anxious to leave.

"I want to find out something. I want to talk to Driblette."

"Oh, about the bones." He had a brooding look.

Oedipa said, "I don't know. It just has me uneasy. The two things, so close."

"Fine," Metzger said, "and what next, picket the VA.? March on Washington? God protect me," he addressed the ceiling of the little theatre, causing a few heads among those leaving to swivel, "from these lib, overeducated broads with the soft heads and bleeding hearts. I am 35 years old, and I should know better."

"Metzger," Oedipa whispered, embarrassed, "I'm a Young Republican."

"Hap Harrigan comics," Metzger now even louder, "which she is hardly old enough to read, John Wayne on Saturday afternoon slaughtering ten thousand Japs with his teeth, this is Oedipa Maas's World War II, man. Some people today can drive VW's, carry a Sony radio in their shirt pocket. Not this one, folks, she wants to right wrongs, 20 years after it's all over. Raise ghosts. All from a drunken hassle with Manny Di Presso. Forgetting her first loyalty, legal and moral, is to the estate she represents. Not to our boss in uniform, however gallant, whenever they died."

"It isn't that," she protested. "I don't care what Beconsfield uses in its filter. I don't care what Pierce bought from the Cosa Nostra. I don't want to think about them. Or about what happened at Lago di Pietra, or cancer. . . ." She looked around for words, feeling helpless.

"What then?" Metzger challenged, getting to his feet, looming. "What?"

"I don't know," she said, a little desperate. "Metzger, don't harass me on my side."

"Against whom?" inquired Metzger, putting on shades.

"I want to see if there's a connection. I'm curious."

"Yes, you're curious," Metzger said. "I'll wait in the car, OK?"

Oedipa watched him out of sight, then went looking for dressing rooms; circled the annular corridor outside twice before settling on a door in the shadowy interval between two overhead lights. She walked in on soft, elegant chaos, an impression of emanations, mutually interfering, from the stub-antennas of everybody's exposed nerve endings.

A girl removing fake blood from her face motioned Oedipa on into a region of brightly-lit mirrors. She pushed in, gliding off sweating biceps and momentary curtains of long, swung hair, till at last she stood before Driblette, still wearing his gray Gennaro outfit. "It was great," said Oedipa. "Feel," said Driblette, extending his arm. She felt. Gennaro's costume was gray flannel. "You sweat like hell, but nothing else would really be him, right?"

Oedipa nodded. She couldn't stop watching his eyes. They were bright black, rounded by an incredible network of lines, like a laboratory maze for studying intelligence in tears. They seemed to know what she wanted, even if she didn't.

"You came to talk about the play," he said. "Let me discourage you. It was written to entertain people. Like horror movies. It isn't literature, it doesn't mean anything. Wharfinger was no Shakespeare." "Who was he?" she said. "Who was Shakespeare. It was a long time ago." "Could I see a script?" She didn't know what she was looking for, exactly. Driblette motioned her over to a file cabinet next to the one shower.

"I'd better grab a shower," he said, "before the Drop-The-Soap crowd get here. Scripts're in the top drawer."

But they were all purple, Dittoedworn, torn, stained with coffee. Nothing else in the drawer. "Hey," she yelled into the shower. "Where's the original? What did you make these copies from?"

"A paperback," Driblette yelled back. "Don't ask me the publisher. I found it at Zapf's Used Books over by the freeway. It's an anthology, Jacobean Revenge Plays. There was a skull on the cover."

"Could I borrow it?"

"Somebody took it. Opening night parties. I lose at least half a dozen every time." He stuck his head out of the shower. The rest of his body was wreathed in steam, giving his head an eerie, balloon-like buoyancy. Careful,

staring at her with deep amusement, he said, "There was another copy there. Zapf might still have it. Can you find the place?"

Something came to her viscera, danced briefly, and went. "Are you putting me on?" For awhile the furrowed eyes only gazed back.

"Why," Driblette said at last, "is everybody so interested in texts?"

"Who else?" Too quickly. Maybe he had only been talking in general.

Driblette's head wagged back and forth. "Don't drag me into your scholarly disputes," adding "whoever you all are," with a familiar smile. Oedipa realized then, cold corpse-fingers of grue on her skin, that it was exactly the same look he'd coached his cast to give each other whenever the subject of the Trystero assassins came up. The knowing look you get in your dreams from a certain unpleasant figure. She decided to ask about this look.

"Was it written in as a stage direction? All those people, so obviously in on something. Or was that one of your touches?"

"That was my own," Driblette told her, "that, and actually bringing the three assassins onstage in the fourth act. Wharfinger didn't show them at all, you know."

"Why did you? Had you heard about them somewhere else?"

"You don't understand," getting mad. "You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but" a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head" in here. That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? They're rote noises to hold line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor's memory, right? But the reality is in this head. Mine. I'm the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also."

But she couldn't let it quite go. "What made you feel differently than Wharfinger did about this, this Trystero." At the word, Driblette's face abruptly vanished, back into the steam. As if switched off. Oedipa hadn't wanted to; say the word. He had managed to create around it the same aura of ritual reluctance here, offstage, as he had on.

"If I were to dissolve in here," speculated the voice out of the drifting steam, "be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too. You, that

part of you so concerned, God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish. The only residue in fact would be things Wharfinger didn't lie about. Perhaps Squamuglia and Faggio, if they ever existed. Perhaps the Thurn and Taxis mail system. Stamp collectors tell me it did exist. Perhaps the other, also. The Adversary. But they would be traces, fossils. Dead, mineral, without value or potential.

"You could fall in love with me, you can talk to my shrink, you can hide a tape recorder in my bedroom, see what I talk about from wherever I am when I sleep. You want to do that? You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it." He fell silent. The shower splashed.

"Driblette?" Oedipa called, after awhile.

His face appeared briefly. "We could do that." He wasn't smiling. His eyes waited, at the centres of their webs.

"I'll call," said Oedipa. She left, and was all the way outside before thinking, I went in there to ask about bones and instead we talked about the Trystero thing. She stood in a nearly deserted parking lot, watching the headlights of Metzger's car come at her, and wondered how accidental it had been.

Metzger had been listening to the car radio. She got in and rode with him for two miles before realizing that the whimsies of nighttime reception were bringing them KCUF down from Kinneret, and that the disk jockey talking was her husband, Mucho.

IV

THOUGH SHE SAW Mike Fallopian again, and did trace the text of *The Courier's Tragedy* a certain distance, these follow-ups were no more disquieting than other revelations which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into *The Tristero*.

For one thing, she read over the will more closely. If it was really Pierce's attempt to leave an organized something behind after his own annihilation, then it was part of her duty, wasn't it, to bestow life on what had persisted, to try to be what Driblette was, the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her? If only so much didn't stand in her way: her deep ignorance of law, of investment, of real estate, ultimately of the dead man himself. The bond the probate court had had her post was perhaps their evaluation in dollars of how much did stand in her way. Under the symbol she'd copied off the latrine wall of *The Scope* into her memo book, she wrote *Shall I project a world? If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations and trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross. Anything might help.*

It was some such feeling that got her up early one morning to go to a Yoyodyne stockholders' meeting. There was nothing she could do at it, yet she felt it might redeem her a little from inertia. They gave her a round white visitor's badge at one of the gates, and she parked in an enormous

lot next to a quonset building painted pink and about a hundred yards long. This was the Yoyodyne Cafeteria, and scene of her meeting. For two hours Oedipa sat on a long bench between old men who might have been twins and whose hands, alternately (as if their owners were asleep and the moled, freckled hands out roaming dream-landscapes) kept falling onto her thighs. Around them all, Negroes carried gunboats of mashed potatoes, spinach, shrimp, zucchini, pot roast, to the long, glittering steam tables, preparing to feed a noontide invasion of Yoyodyne workers. The routine business took an hour; for another hour the shareholders and proxies and company officers held a Yoyodyne songfest. To the tune of Cornell's alma mater, they sang:

HYMN

HIGH ABOVE THE L. A. FREEWAYS, AND THE TRAFFIC'S WHINE,
STANDS THE WELL-KNOWN GALACTRONICS BRANCH OF YOYODYNE.
TO THE END, WE SWEAR UNDYING LOYALTY TO YOU, PINK PAVILIONS
BRAVELY SHINING, PALM TREES TALL AND TRUE.

Being led in this by the president of the company, Mr. Clayton ("Bloody") Chiclitz himself; and to the tune of "Aura Lee":

GLEE

BENDIX GUIDES THE WARHEADS IN, AVCO BUILDS THEM NICE.
DOUGLAS, NORTH AMERICAN, GRUMMAN GET THEIR SLICE. MARTIN
LAUNCHES OFF A PAD, LOCKHEED FROM A SUB; WE CAN'T GET
THE R&D ON A PIPER CUB. CONVAIR BOOSTS THE SATELLITE INTO
ORBITS ROUND; BOEING BUILDS THE MINUTEMAN, WE STAY ON THE
GROUND. YOYODYNE, YOYODYNE, CONTRACTS FLEE THEE YET. DOD
HAS SHAFTED THEE, OUT OF SPITE, I'LL BET.

And dozens of other old favorites whose lyrics she couldn't remember. The singers were then formed into platoon-sized groups for a quick tour of the plant.

Somehow Oedipa got lost. One minute she was gazing at a mockup of a space capsule, safely surrounded by old, somnolent men; the next, alone in a great, fluorescent murmur of office activity. As far as she could see in any direction it was white or pastel: men's shirts, papers, drawing boards. All she could think of was to put on her shades for all this light, and wait for somebody to rescue her. But nobody noticed. She began to wander aisles among light

blue desks, turning a corner now and then. Heads came up at the sound of her heels, engineers stared until she'd passed, but nobody spoke to her. Five or ten minutes went by this way, panic growing inside her head: there seemed no way out of the area. **49** Then, by accident (Dr. Hilarius, if asked, would accuse her of using subliminal cues in the environment to guide her to a particular person) or howsoever, she came on one Stanley Koteks, who wore wire-rim bifocals, sandals, argyle socks, and at first glance seemed too young to be working here. As it turned out he wasn't working, only doodling with a fat felt pencil this sign.

"Hello there," Oedipa said, arrested by this coincidence. On a whim, she added, "Kirby sent me," this having been the name on the latrine wall. It was supposed to sound conspiratorial, but came out silly.

"Hi," said Stanley Koteks, deftly sliding the big envelope he'd been doodling on into an open drawer he then closed. Catching sight of her badge, "You're lost, huh?"

She knew blunt questions like, what does that symbol mean? would get her nowhere. She said, "I'm a tourist, actually. A stockholder."

"Stockholder." He gave her the once-over, hooked with his foot a swivel chair from the next desk and rolled it over for her. "Sit down. Can you really influence policy, or make suggestions they won't just file in the garbage?"

"Yes," lied Oedipa, to see where it would take them.

"See," Koteks said, "if you can get them to drop their clause on patents. That, lady, is my ax to grind."

"Patents," Oedipa said. Koteks explained how every engineer, in signing the Yoyodyne contract, also signed away the patent rights to any inventions he might come up with.

"This stifles your really creative engineer," Koteks said, adding bitterly, "wherever he may be."

"I didn't think people invented any more," said Oedipa, sensing this would goad him. "I mean, who's there been, really, since Thomas Edison? Isn't it all teamwork now?" Bloody Chiclitz, in his welcoming speech this morning, had stressed teamwork.

"Teamwork," Koteks snarled, "is one word for it, yeah. What it really is is a way to avoid responsibility. It's a symptom of the gutlessness of the whole society."

"Goodness," said Oedipa, "are you allowed to talk like that?"

Koteks looked to both sides, then rolled his chair closer. "You know the Nefastis Machine?" Oedipa only widened

her eyes. "Well this was invented by John Nefastis, who's up at Berkeley now. John's somebody who still invents things. Here. I have a copy of the patent." From a drawer he produced a Xeroxed wad of papers, showing a box with a sketch of a bearded Victorian on its outside, and coming out of the top two pistons attached to a crankshaft and flywheel.

"Who's that with the beard?" asked Oedipa. James Clerk Maxwell, explained Koteks, a famous Scotch scientist who had once postulated a tiny intelligence, known as Maxwell's Demon. The Demon could sit in a box among air molecules that were moving at all different random speeds, and sort out the fast molecules from the slow ones. Fast molecules have more energy than slow ones. Concentrate enough of them in one place and you have a region of high temperature. You can then use the difference in temperature between this hot region of the box and any cooler region, to drive a heat engine. Since the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have put any real work into the system. So you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion.

"Sorting isn't work?" Oedipa said. "Tell them down at the post office, you'll find yourself in a mailbag headed for Fairbanks, Alaska, without even a FRAGILE sticker going for you."

"It's mental work," Koteks said, "But not work in the thermodynamic sense." He went on to tell how the Nefastis Machine contained an honest-to-God Maxwell's Demon. All you had to do was stare at the photo of Clerk Maxwell, and concentrate on which cylinder, right or left, you wanted the Demon to raise the temperature in. The air would expand and push a piston. The familiar Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge photo, showing Maxwell in right profile, seemed to work best.

Oedipa, behind her shades, looked around carefully, trying not to move her head. Nobody paid any attention to them: the air-conditioning hummed on, IBM typewriters chiggered away, swivel chairs squeaked, fat reference manuals were slammed shut, rattling blueprints folded and refolded, while high overhead the long silent fluorescent bulbs glared merrily; all with Yoyodyne was normal. Except right here, where Oedipa Maas, with a thousand other people to choose from, had had to walk uncoerced into the presence of madness.

"Not everybody can work it, of course," Koteks, having warmed to his subject, was telling her. "Only people with

the gift. 'Sensitives,' John calls them."

Oedipa rested her shades on her nose and batted her eyelashes, figuring to coquette her way off this conversational hook: "Would I make a good sensitive, do think?"

"You really want to try it? You could write to him. He only knows a few sensitives. He'd let you try." Oedipa took out her little memo book and opened to the symbol she'd copied and the words Shall I project a world? "Box 573," said Koteks. "In Berkeley."

"No," his voice gone funny, so that she looked up, too sharply, by which time, carried by a certain momentum of thought, he'd also said, "In San Francisco; there's none" and by then knew he'd made a mistake. "He's living somewhere along Telegraph," he muttered. "I gave you the wrong address."

She took a chance: "Then the WASTE address isn't good any more." But she'd pronounced it like a word, waste. His face congealed, a mask of distrust. "It's W.A.S.T.E., lady," he told her, "an acronym, not 'waste,' and we had best not go into it any further."

"I saw it in a ladies' John," she confessed. But Stanley Koteks was no longer about to be sweet-talked.

"Forget it," he advised; opened a book and proceeded to ignore her.

She in her turn, clearly, was not about to forget it. The envelope she'd seen Koteks doodling what she'd begun to think of as the "WASTE symbol" on had come, she bet, from John Nefastis. Or somebody like him. Her suspicions got embellished by, of all people, Mike Fallopian of the Peter Pinguid Society.

"Sure this Koteks is part of some underground," he told her a few days later, "an underground of the unbalanced, possibly, but then how can you blame them for being maybe a little bitter? Look what's happening to them. In school they got brainwashed, like all of us, into believing the Myth of the American Inventor Morse and his telegraph, Bell and his telephone, Edison and his light bulb, Tom Swift and his this or that. Only one man per invention. Then when they grew up they found they had to sign over all their rights to a monster like Yoyodyne; got stuck on some 'project' or 'task force' or 'team' and started being ground into anonymity. Nobody wanted them to invent only perform their little role in a design ritual, already set down for them in some procedures handbook. What's it like, Oedipa, being all alone in a nightmare like that? Of course they stick together, they keep in touch. They can always tell when they come on

another of their kind. Maybe it only happens once every five years, but still, immediately, they know.”

Metzger, who'd come along to The Scope that evening, wanted to argue. “You're so right-wing you're left-wing,” he protested. “How can you be against a corporation that wants a worker to waive his patent rights. That sounds like the surplus value theory to me, fella, and you sound like a Marxist.” As they got drunker this typical Southern California dialogue degenerated further. Oedipa sat alone and gloomy. She'd decided to come tonight to The Scope not only because of the encounter with Stanley Koteks, but also because of other revelations; because it seemed that a pattern was beginning to emerge, having to do with the mail and how it was delivered.

There had been the bronze historical marker on the other side of the lake at Fangoso Lagoons. On this site, it read, in 1853, a dozen Wells, Fargo men battled gallantly with a band of masked marauders in mysterious “black uniforms. We owe this description to a post rider, the only witness to the massacre, who died shortly after. The only other clue was a cross, traced by one of the victims in the dust. To this day the identities of the slayers remain shrouded in mystery.

A cross? Or the initial T? The same stuttered by Niccol6 in The Courier's Tragedy. Oedipa pondered this. She called Randolph Driblette from a pay booth, to see if he'd known about this Wells, Fargo incident; if that was why he'd chosen to dress his bravos all in black. The phone buzzed on and on, into hollowness. She hung up and headed for Zapf's Used Books. Zapf himself came forward out of a wan cone of 15-watt illumination to help her find the paperback Driblette had mentioned, Jacobean Revenge Plays.

“It's been very much in demand,” Zapf told her. The skull on the cover watched them, through the dim light.

Did he only mean Driblette? She opened her mouth to ask, but didn't. It was to be the first of many demurs.

Back at Echo Courts, Metzger in L.A. for the day on other business, she turned immediately to the single mention of the word Trystero. Opposite the line she read, in pencil, Cf. variant, 1687 ed. Put there maybe by some student. In a way, it cheered her. Another reading of that line might help light further the dark face of the word. According to a short preface, the text had been taken from a folio edition, undated. Oddly, the preface was unsigned. She checked the copyright page and found that the original hardcover had been a textbook, Plays of Ford, Webster,

Toumeur and Wharfinger, published by The Lectern Press, Berkeley, California, back in 1957. She poured herself half a tumbler of Jack Daniels (the Paranoids having left them a fresh bottle the evening before) and called the L.A. library. They checked, but didn't have the hardcover. They could look it up on inter-library loan for her. “Wait,” she said, having just got an idea, “the publisher's up in Berkeley. Maybe I'll try them directly.” Thinking also that she could visit John Nefastis.

She had caught sight of the historical marker only because she'd gone back, deliberately, to Lake Inverarity one day, owing to this, what you might have to call, growing obsession, with “bringing something of herself” even if that something was just her presence to the scatter of business interests that had survived Inverarity. She would give them order, she would create constellations; next day she drove out to Vesperhaven House, a home for senior citizens that Inverarity had put up around the time Yoyodyne came to San Narciso. In its front recreation room she found sunlight coming in it seemed through every window; an old man nodding in front of a dim Leon Schlesinger cartoon show on the tube; and a black fly browsing along the pink, dandruffy arroyo of the neat part in the old man's hair. A fat nurse ran in with a can of bug spray and yelled at the fly to take off so she could kill it. The cagy fly stayed where it was. “You're bothering Mr. Thoth,” she yelled at the little fellow. Mr. Thoth jerked awake, jarring loose the fly, which made a desperate scramble for the door. The nurse pursued, spraying poison. “Hello,” said Oedipa.

“I was dreaming,” Mr. Thoth told her, “about my grandfather. A very old man, at least as old as I am now, 91. I thought, when I was a boy, that he had been 91 all his life. Now I feel,” laughing, “as if I have been 91 all my life. Oh, the stories that old man would tell. He rode for the Pony Express, back in the gold rush days. His horse was named Adolf, I remember that.”

Oedipa, sensitized, thinking of the bronze marker, smiled at him as granddaughterly as she knew how and asked, “Did he ever have to fight off desperados?”

“That cruel old man,” said Mr. Thoth, “was an Indian killer. God, the saliva would come out in a string from his lip whenever he told about killing the Indians. He must have loved that part of it.”

“What were you dreaming about him?” “Oh, that,” perhaps embarrassed. “It was all mixed in with

a Porky Pig cartoon.” He waved at the tube. “It comes into your dreams, you know. Filthy machine. Did you ever see the one about Porky Pig and the anarchist?”

She had, as a matter of fact, but she said no. “The anarchist is dressed all in black. In the dark you can only see his eyes. It dates from the 1930’s. Porky Pig is a little boy. The children told me that he has a nephew now, Cicero. Do you remember, during the war, when Porky worked in a defense plant? He and Bugs Bunny. That was a good one too.”

“Dressed all in black,” Oedipa prompted him.

“It was mixed in so with the Indians,” he tried to remember, “the dream. The Indians who wore black feathers, the Indians who weren’t Indians. My grandfather told me. The feathers were white, but those false Indians were supposed to burn bones and stir the boneblack with their feathers to get them black. It made them invisible in the night, because they came at night. That was how the old man, bless him, knew they weren’t Indians. No Indian ever attacked at night. If he got killed his soul would wander in the dark forever. Heathen.”

“If they weren’t Indians,” Oedipa asked, “what were they?”

“A Spanish name,” Mr. Thoth said, frowning, “a Mexican name. Oh, I can’t remember. Did they write it on the ring?” He reached down to a knitting bag by his chair and came up with blue yam, needles, patterns, finally a dull gold signet ring. “My grandfather cut this from the finger of one of them he killed. Can you imagine a 91-year-old man so brutal?” Oedipa stared. The device on the ring was once again the WASTE symbol.

She looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the centre of some intricate crystal, and said, “My God.”

“And I feel him, certain days, days of a certain temperature,” said Mr. Thoth, “and barometric pressure. Did you know that? I feel him close to me.”

“Your grandfather?”

“No, my God.”

So she went to find Fallopian, who ought to know a lot about the Pony Express and Wells, Fargo if he was writing a book about them. He did, but not about their dark adversaries.

“I’ve had hints,” he told her, “sure. I wrote to

Sacramento about that historical marker, and they’ve been kicking it around their bureaucratic morass for months. Someday they’ll come back with a source book for me to read. It will say, ‘Old-timers remember the yam about,’ whatever happened. Old-timers. Real good documentation, this Californiana crap. Odds are the author will be dead. There’s no way to trace it, unless you want to follow up an accidental correlation, like you got from the old man.”

“You think it’s really a correlation?” She thought of how tenuous it was, like a long white hair, over a century long. Two very old men. All these fatigued brain cells between herself and the truth.

“Marauders, nameless, faceless, dressed in black. Probably hired by the Federal government. Those suppressions were brutal.”

“Couldn’t it have been a rival carrier?”

Fallopian shrugged. Oedipa showed him the WASTE symbol, and he shrugged again.

“It was in the ladies’ room, right here in The Scope, Mike.”

“Women,” he only said. “Who can tell what goes on with them?”

If she’d thought to check a couple lines back in the Wharfinger play, Oedipa might have made the next connection by herself. As it was she got an assist from one Genghis Cohen, who is the most eminent philatelist in the L.A. area. Metzger, acting on instructions in the will, had retained this amiable, slightly adenoidal expert, for a percent of his valuation, to inventory and appraise Inverarity’s stamp collection.

One rainy morning, with mist rising off the pool, Metzger again away, the Paranoids off somewhere to a recording session, Oedipa got rung up by this Genghis Cohen, who even over the phone she could tell was disturbed.

“There are some irregularities, Miz Maas,” he said. “Could you come over?”

She was somehow sure, driving in on the slick freeway, that the “irregularities” would tie in with the word Trystero. Metzger had taken the stamp albums to Cohen from safe-deposit storage a week ago in Oedipa’s Impala, and then she hadn’t even been interested enough to look inside them. But now it came to her, as if the rain whispered

it, that what Fallopien had not known about private carriers, Cohen might.

When he opened the door of his apartment/office she saw him framed in a long succession or train of doorways, room after room receding in the general direction of Santa Monica, all soaked in rain-light. Genghis Cohen had a touch of summer flu, his fly was half open and he was wearing a Barry Goldwater sweatshirt also. Oedipa felt at once motherly. In a room perhaps a third of the way along the suite he sat her in a rocking chair and brought real homemade dandelion wine in small neat glasses.

"I picked the dandelions in a cemetery, two years ago. Now the cemetery is gone. They took it out for the East San Narciso Freeway."

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward it is only this signal, really dress, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. In the space of a sip of dandelion wine it came to her that she would never know how many times such a seizure may already have visited, or how to grasp it should it visit again. Perhaps even in this last second but there was no way to tell. She glanced down the corridor of Cohen's rooms in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this.

"I have taken the liberty," Genghis Cohen was saying, "of getting in touch with an Expert Committee. I haven't yet forwarded them the stamps in question, pending your own authorization and of course Mr. Metzger's. However, all fees, I am sure, can be charged to the estate."

"I'm not sure I understand," Oedipa said.

"Allow me." He rolled over to her a small table, and from a plastic folder lifted with tweezers, delicately, a

U. S. commemorative stamp, the Pony Express issue of 1940, .03 henna brown. Celled. "Look," he said, switching on a small, intense lamp, handing her an oblong magnifying glass.

"It's the wrong side," she said, as he swabbed the stamp gently with benzine and placed it on a black tray.

"The watermark."

Oedipa peered. There it was again, her WASTE symbol, showing up right of center.

"What is this?" she asked, wondering how much time had gone by.

"I'm not sure," Cohen said. "That's why I've referred it, and the others, to the Committee. Some friends have been around to see them too, but they're all being cautious. But see what you think of this." From the same plastic folder

he now tweezed what looked like an old German stamp, with the figure in the centre, the word Freie along the right-hand margin end Thum und Taxis.

"They were," she remembered from the Wharfinger play, "some kind of private couriers, right?"

"From about 1300, until Bismarck bought them out in 1867, Miz Maas, they were the European mail service. This is one of their very few adhesive stamps. But look in the corners." Decorating each corner of the stamp, Oedipa saw a horn with a single loop in it. Almost like the WASTE symbol. "A post horn," Cohen said; "the Thurn and Taxis symbol. It was in their coat of arms."

And Tacit lies the gold once-knotted horn, Oedipa remembered. Sure. "Then the watermark you found," she said, "is nearly the same thing, except for the extra little doojigger sort of coming out of the bell."

"It sounds ridiculous," Cohen said, "but my guess is it's a mute."

She nodded. The black costumes, the silence, the secrecy. Whoever they were their aim was to mute the Thurn and Taxis post horn.

"Normally this issue, and the others, are unwater-

marked," Cohen said, "and in view of other details the hatching, number of perforations, way the paper has aged it's obviously a counterfeit. Not just an error."

"Then it isn't worth anything."

Cohen smiled, blew his nose. "You'd be amazed how much you can sell an honest forgery for. Some collectors specialize in them. The question is, who did these? They're atrocious." He flipped the stamp over and with the tip of the tweezers showed her. The picture had a Pony Express rider galloping out of a western fort. From shrubbery over on the right-hand side and possibly in the direction the rider would be heading, protruded a single, painstakingly engraved, black feather. "Why put in a deliberate mistake?" he asked, ignoring if he saw it the look on her face. "I've come up so far with eight in all. Each one has an error like this, laboriously worked into the design, like a taunt. There's even a transposition U. S. Potsage, of all things."

"How recent?" blurted Oedipa, louder than she needed to be.

"Is anything wrong, Miz Maas?" She told him first about the letter from Mucho with a cancellation telling her report all obscene mail to her potsmaster.

"Odd," Cohen agreed. "The transposition," consulting a notebook, "is only on the Lincoln .04. Regular issue, 1954. The other forgeries run back to 1893."

"That's 70 years," she said. "He'd have to be pretty old." "If it's the same one," said Cohen. "And what if it were as old as Thurn and Taxis? Omedio Tassis, banished from

Milan, organized his first couriers in the Bergamo region around 1290."

They sat in silence, listening to rain gnaw languidly at the windows and skylights, confronted all at once by the marvellous possibility.

"Has that ever happened before?" she had to ask.

"An 800-year tradition of postal fraud. Not to my knowledge."

Oedipa told him then all about old Mr. Thoth's signet ring, and the symbol she'd caught Stanley Koteks doodling, and the muted horn drawn in the ladies' room at The Scope.

"Whatever it is,"

he hardly needed to say, "they're apparently still quite active."

"Do we tell the government, or what?"

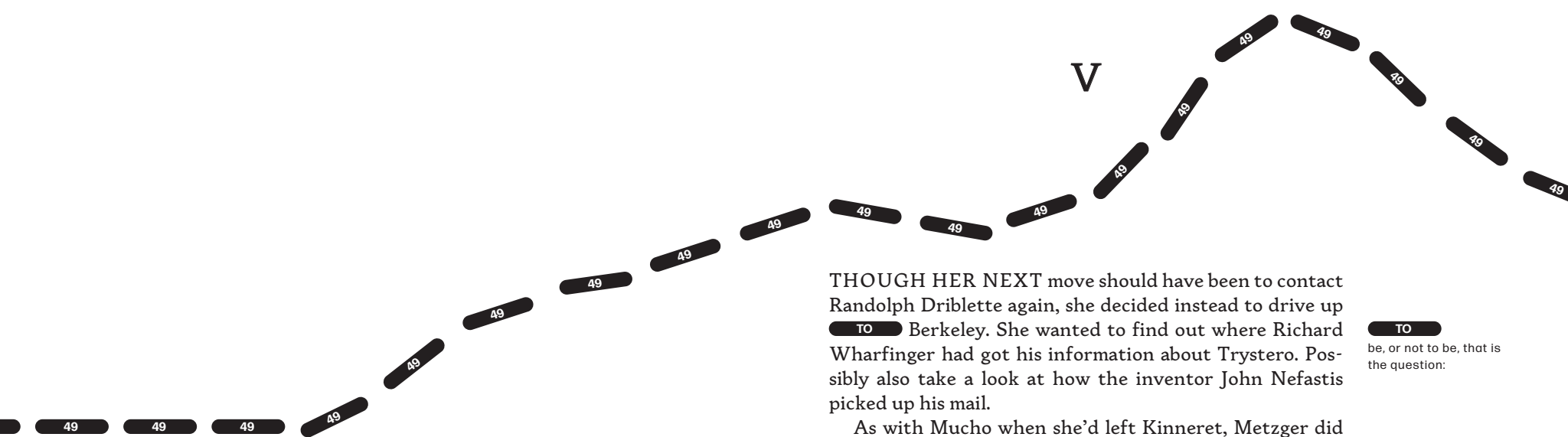
"I'm sure they know more than we do."

He sounded nervous, or suddenly in retreat. "No, I wouldn't. It isn't our business, is it?"

SHE ASKED HIM ABOUT THE initials W.A.S.T.E., BUT IT WAS SOMEHOW TOO LATE. SHE'D LOST HIM. HE SAID NO, BUT SO ABRUPTLY OUT OF PHASE now with her own thoughts HE COULD EVEN HAVE BEEN lying. HE poured dandelion wine. HER MORE

"It's clearer now," he said, rather formal. "A few months ago it got quite cloudy. You see, in spring, when the dandelions begin to bloom again, the wine goes through a fermentation. As if they remembered."

No, thought Oedipa, sad. As if their home cemetery in some way still did exist, in a land where you could somehow walk, and not need the East San Narciso Freeway, and bones still could rest in peace, nourishing ghosts of dandelions, no one to plow them up. As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine.



THOUGH HER NEXT move should have been to contact Randolph Driblette again, she decided instead to drive up **TO** Berkeley. She wanted to find out where Richard Wharfinger had got his information about Trystero. Possibly also take a look at how the inventor John Nefastis picked up his mail.

As with Mucho when she'd left Kinneret, Metzger did not seem desperate at her going. She debated, driving north, **WHETHER** to stop off at home on the way to Berkeley or coming back. As it turned out she missed the exit for Kinneret and that solved it. She purred along up the east side of the bay, presently climbed into **THE** Berkeley hills and arrived close to midnight at a sprawling, many-leveled, German-baroque hotel, carpeted in deep green, going in for curved corridors and ornamental chandeliers. A sign in the lobby said WELCOME CALIFORNIA CHAPTER AMERICAN DEAF-MUTE ASSEMBLY. Every light in the place burned, alarmingly bright; a truly ponderable silence occupied the building. A clerk popped up from behind the desk where he'd been sleeping and began making sign language at her. Oedipa considered giving him the finger to see what would happen. But she'd driven straight through, and all at once the fatigue of it had caught up with her. The clerk took her to a room with a reproduction of a Remedios Varo in it, through corridors gently curving as the streets of San Narciso, utterly silent. She fell asleep almost at once, but kept waking from a nightmare about something in the mirror, across from her bed. Nothing specific, only a possibility, nothing she could see. When

TO
be, or not to be, that is
the question:

WHETHER
'tis nobler in the mind to
suffer

THE
slings and arrows of
outrageous fortune,

she finally did settle into sleep, she dreamed that Mucho, her husband, was making love to her on a soft white beach that was not part of any California she knew. When she woke in the morning, she was sitting bolt upright, staring into the mirror at her own exhausted face.

She found the Lectern Press in a small office building on Shattuck Avenue. They didn't have Plays of Ford, Webster, Tourneur and Wharfinger on the premises, but did take her check for \$12.50, gave her the address of their warehouse in Oakland and a receipt to show the people there. By the time she'd collected the book, it was afternoon. She skimmed through to find the line that had brought her all the way up here. And in the leaf-fractured sunlight, froze.

No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow, an the couplet, Who once has crossed the lusts of Angela. " " she protested aloud. " 'Who's once been set his tryst with Trysterero.'" The pencilled note in the paperback had mentioned a variant. But the paperback was supposed to be a straight reprint of the book she now held. Puzzled, she saw that this edition also had a footnote:

According only to the Quarto edition (1687). The earlier Folio has a lead inserted where the closing line should have been. D'Amico has suggested that Wharfinger may have made a libellous comparison involving someone at court, and that the later 'restoration' was actually the work of the printer, Inigo Barfstable. The doubtful 'Whitechapel' version (c. 1670) has This tryst **OR** odious awry, O Niccolo,' which besides bringing in a quite graceless Alexandrine, is difficult to make sense of syntactically, unless we accept the rather unorthodox though persuasive argument of J.-K. Sale that the line is really a pun on 'This trysterero dies irae. . .' This, however, it must be pointed out, leaves the line nearly as corrupt as before, owing to no clear meaning for the word trysterero, unless it be a pseudo-Italianate variant on triste (= wretched, depraved). But the 'White-chapel' edition, besides being a fragment, abounds in such corrupt **AND** probably spurious lines, as we have mentioned elsewhere, and is hardly to be trusted.

Then where, Oedipa wondered, does the paperback I bought at Zapf's get off with its "Trysterero" line? Was there yet another edition, besides the Quarto, Folio, and "Whitechapel" fragment? The editor's preface, signed this time, by one Emory Bortz, professor of English at Cal, mentioned none. She spent nearly an hour more, searching through all the footnotes, finding nothing.

"Dammit," she yelled, started the car and headed for the Berkeley campus, to find Professor Bortz.

She should have remembered the date on the book 1957. Another world. The girl in the English office informed Oedipa that Professor Bortz was **NO** longer with the faculty. He was teaching at San Narciso College, San Narciso, California.

Of course, Oedipa thought, wry, where else? She copied the address and walked away trying to remember who'd put out the paperback. She couldn't.

It was summer, a week-end in mid-June; no time for any campus Oedipa knew of to be jumping, yet this one was. She came downslope from Wheeler Hall, through Sather Gate into a plaza seeming with corduroy denim, bare legs, blonde hair, horn-rims, bicycle spokes in the sun, bookbags, swaying card tables, long paper petitions dangling to earth, posters for undecipherable FOM's, YAF's, DC's, suds in the fountain, students in nose-to-nose dialogue. She moved through it carrying her fat book, attracted, unsure, a stranger, wanting to feel relevant but knowing how much of a search among alternate universes it would take. For she had undergone her own educating at a time of nerves, blandness and retreat among not only her fellow students but also most of the visible structure around and ahead of them, this having been a national reflex to certain pathologies in high places only death had had the power to cure, and this Berkeley was like no somnolent Siwash out of her own past at all, but more akin to those Far Eastern or Latin American universities you read about, those autonomous culture media where the most beloved of folklores may be brought into doubt, cataclysmic of dissents voiced, suicidal of commitments chosen the sort that bring governments down. But it was English she was hearing as she crossed Bancroft Way among the blonde children and **THE** muttering Hondas and Su-zukis; American English. Where were Secretaries James and Foster and Senator Joseph, those dear daft numina who'd mothered over Oedipa's so temperate youth? In another world. Along another pattern of track, another string of decisions taken, switches closed, the faceless pointsmen who'd thrown them now all transferred, deserted, in stir, fleeing the skip-tracers, out of their skull, on horse, alcoholic, fanatic, under aliases, dead, impossible to find ever again. Among them they had managed to turn the young Oedipa into a rare creature indeed, unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts.

OR
to take Arms against a
Sea of troubles,

AND
by opposing end them: to
die, to sleep

NO
more; and by a sleep, to
say we end

THE
heart-ache, and the thou-
sand natural shocks

She pulled the Impala into a gas station somewhere along a gray stretch of Telegraph Avenue and found in a phone book the address of John Nefastis. She then drove to a pseudo-Mexican apartment house, looked for his name among the U. S. mailboxes, ascended outside steps and walked down a row of draped windows till she found his door. He had a crewcut and the same underage look as Koteks, but wore a shirt on various Polynesian themes and dating from the Truman administration.

Introducing herself, she invoked the name of Stanley Koteks. "He said you could tell me whether or not I'm a 'sensitive'."

Nefastis had been watching on his TV set a bunch of kids dancing some kind of a Watusi. "I like to watch young stuff," he explained. "There's something about a little chick **THAT** age."

"So does my husband," she said. "I understand."

John Nefastis beamed at her, simpatico, and brought out his Machine from a workroom in back. It looked about the way the patent had described it. "You know how this works?"

"Stanley gave me a kind of rundown." He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy. The word bothered him as much as "Trystero" bothered Oedipa. But it was too **DEVOUTLY** technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said **TO** lose entropy. But somehow the loss was offset by the information the Demon gained about what molecules were where.

"Communication is the key," cried Nefastis. "The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind. There are untold billions of molecules in that box. The Demon collects data on each and every one. At some deep psychic level he must get through. The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling. On the secular level all we can see is one piston, hopefully moving. One little movement, against all that massive complex of information, destroyed over and over with each power stroke."

"Help," said Oedipa, "you're not reaching me."

"Entropy is a figure of speech, then," sighed Nefastis, "a metaphor. It connects the world of thermo-dynamics to the world of in-**FOR**mation flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true."

"But what," she felt like some kind of a heretic, "if the Demon exists only because the two equations look alike? Because of the metaphor?"

Nefastis smiled; impenetrable, calm, a believer. "He existed for Clerk Maxwell long before the days of the metaphor."

But had Clerk Maxwell been such a fanatic about his Demon's reality? She looked at the picture on the outside of the box. Clerk Maxwell was in profile and would not meet her eyes. The forehead was round and smooth, and there was a curious bump at the back of his head, covered by curling hair. His visible eye seemed mild and noncommittal, but Oedipa wondered what hangups, crises, spookings in the middle of the night might be developed from the shadowed subtleties of his mouth, hidden under a full beard.

"Watch the picture," said Nefastis, "and concentrate on a cylinder. Don't worry. If you're a sensitive you'll know which one. Leave your mind open, receptive to the Demon's message. I'll be back." He returned to his TV set, which was now showing cartoons. Oedipa sat through two Yogi Bears, one Magilla Gorilla and a Peter Potamus, staring at Clerk Maxwell's enigmatic profile, waiting for the Demon to communicate.

Are you there, little fellow, Oedipa asked the Demon, or is Nefastis putting me on. Unless a piston moved, she'd never know. Clerk Maxwell's hands were cropped out of the photograph. He might have been holding a book. He gazed away, into some vista of Victorian England whose light had been lost forever. Oedipa's anxiety grew. It seemed, behind the beard, he'd begun, ever so faintly, to smile. Something in his eyes, certainly, had changed . . .

And there. At the top edge of what she could see: hadn't the right-hand piston moved, a fraction? She couldn't look directly, the instructions were to keep her eyes on Clerk Maxwell. Minutes passed, pistons remained frozen in place. High-pitched, comic voices issued from the TV set. She had seen only a retinal twitch, a misfired nerve cell. Did the true sensitive see more? In her colon now she was afraid, growing more so, that nothing would happen. Why worry, she worried; Nefastis is a nut, forget it, a sincere nut. The true sensitive is the one that can share in the man's hallucinations, that's all.

FOR
in that sleep of death,
what dreams may come,

THAT
Flesh is heir to? 'Tis a
consummation

DEVOUTLY
to be wished. To die,
to sleep,

TO
sleep, perchance to
Dream; aye, there's
the rub,

How wonderful they might be to share. For fifteen minutes more she tried; repeating, if you are there, whatever you are, show yourself to me, I need you, show yourself. But nothing happened.

"I'm sorry," she called in, surprisingly about to cry with frustration, her voice breaking, "It's no use." Nefastis came to her and put an arm around her shoulders.

"It's OK," he said. "Please don't cry. Come on in on the couch. The news will be on any minute. We can do it there."

"It?" said Oedipa. "Do it? What?"

"Have sexual intercourse," replied Nefastis. "Maybe there'll be something about China tonight. I like to do it while they talk about Viet Nam, but China is best of all. You think about all those Chinese. Teeming. That profusion of life. It makes it sexier, right?"

"Gah," Oedipa screamed, and fled, Nefastis snapping his fingers through the dark rooms behind her in a hippy-dippy, oh-go-ahead-then-chick fashion he had doubtless learned from watching the TV also.

"Say hello to old Stanley," he called as she pattered down the steps into the street, flung a babushka over her license plate and screeched away down Telegraph. She drove more or less automatically until a swift boy in a Mustang, perhaps unable to contain the new sense of virility his auto gave him, nearly killed her and she realized that she was on the freeway, heading irreversibly for the Bay Bridge. It was the middle of rush hour. Oedipa was appalled at the spectacle, having thought such traffic only possible in Los Angeles, places like that. Looking down at San Francisco a few minutes later from the high point of the bridge's arc, she saw smog. Haze, she corrected herself, is what it is, haze. How can they have smog in San Francisco? Smog, according to the folklore, did not begin till farther south. It had to be the angle of the sun.

Amid the exhaust, sweat, glare and ill-humor of a summer evening on an American freeway, Oedipa Maas pondered her Trystero problem. All the silence of San Narcisothe calm surface of the motel pool, the contemplative contours of residential streets like rakings in the sand of a Japanese gardenhad not allowed her to think as leisurely as this freeway madness.

For John Nefastis (to take a recent example) two kinds of entropy, thermodynamic and informational, happened, say by coincidence, to look alike, **WHEN** you wrote them down as equations. Yet he had made his mere coincidence respectable, with the help of Maxwell's Demon.

Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God

WHEN
we have shuffled off this
mortal coil.

knew how many parts; more than two, anyway. With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, a to hold them together.

She knew a few things about it: it had opposed the Thurn and Taxis postal system in Europe; its symbol was a muted post horn; sometime before 1853 it had appeared in America and fought the Pony Express and Wells, Fargo, either as outlaws in black, or disguised as Indians; and it survived today, in California, serving as a channel of communication for those of unorthodox sexual persuasion, inventors who believed in the reality of Maxwell's Demon, possibly her own husband, Mucho Maas (but she'd thrown Mucho's letter long away, there was no way for Genghis Cohen to check the stamp, so if she wanted to find out for sure she'd have to ask Mucho himself).

Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, **OR** it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with the dead man's estate. Here in San Francisco, away from all tangible assets of that estate, there might still be a chance of getting the whole thing to go away and disintegrate quietly. She had only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. She got off the freeway at North Beach, drove around, parked finally in a steep side-street among warehouses. Then walked along Broadway, into **THE** first crowds of evening.

But it took her no more than an hour to catch sight of a muted post horn. She was moseying along a street full of aging boys in Roos Atkins suits when she collided with a gang of guided tourists come rowdy-dowing out of a Volkswagen bus, on route to take in a few San Francisco nite spots. "Let me lay this on you," a voice spoke into her ear, "because I just left," and she found being deftly pinned outboard of one breast this big cerise ID badge, reading Hi! MY NAME Is Arnold Snarb! AND I'M LOOKIN' FOR A GOOD TIME! Oedipa glanced around and saw a cherubic face vanishing with a wink in among natural shoulders and striped shirts, and away went Arnold Snarb, looking for a better time.

Somebody blew on an athletic whistle and Oedipa found herself being herded, along with other badged citizens, toward a bar called The Greek Way. Oh, no, Oedipa thought, not a fag joint, no; and for a minute tried to fight out of the human surge, before recalling how she had decided to drift tonight.

"Now in here," their guide, sweating dark tentacles into his tab collar, briefed them, "you are going to see the members of the third sex, the lavender crowd this city by the Bay is so justly famous for. To some of you the experience may seem a little queer, but remember, try not to act like a bunch of TOURISTS. If you get propositioned it'll all be in fun, just part of the gay night life to be found here in famous North Beach. Two drinks and when you hear the whistle it means out, on the double, regroup right here. If you're well behaved we'll hit Finocchio's next." He blew the whistle twice and the tourists, breaking into a yell, swept Oedipa inside, in a frenzied assault on the bar. When things had calmed she was near the door with an unidentifiable drink in her fist, jammed against somebody tall in a suede sport coat. In the lapel of which she spied, wrought exquisitely in some pale, glimmering alloy, not another cerise badge, but a pin in the shape of the Trystero post horn. Mute and everything.

All right, she told herself. You lose. A game try, all one hour's worth. She should have left then and gone back to Berkeley, to the hotel. But couldn't.

"What if I told you," she addressed the owner of the pin, "that I was an agent of Thurn and Taxis?"

"What," he answered, "some theatrical agency?" He had large ears, hair cropped nearly to his scalp, acne on his face, and curiously empty eyes, which now swiveled briefly to Oedipa's breasts. "How'd you get a name like Arnold Snarb?"

"If you tell me where you got your lapel pin," said Oedipa. "Sorry."

She sought to bug him: "If it's a homosexual sign or something, that doesn't bother me."

Eyes showing nothing: "I don't swing that way," he said. "Yours either." Turned his back on her and ordered a drink. Oedipa took off her badge, put it in an ashtray and said, quietly, trying not to suggest hysteria. "Look, you have to help me. Because I really think I am going of my head."

"You have the wrong OUTFIT, Arnold. Talk to your clergyman."

"I use the U. S. Mail because I was never taught any different," she pleaded. "But I'm not your enemy. I don't want to be."

"What about my friend?" He came spinning around on the stool to face her again. "You want to be that, Arnold?"

"I don't know," she thought she'd better say.

He looked at her, blank. "What do you know?"

She told him everything. Why not? Held nothing back. At the end of it the tourists had been whistled away and he'd bought two rounds to Oedipa's three.

"I'd heard about 'Kirby,'" he said, "it's a code name, nobody real. But none of the rest, your Sinophile across the bay, or that sick play. I never thought there was a history to it."

"I think of NOTHING but," she said, and a little plaintive.

"And," scratching the stubble on his head, "you have nobody else to tell this to. Only somebody in a bar whose name you don't know?"

She wouldn't look at him. "I guess not."

"No husband, no shrink?"

"Be," Oedipa said, "but they don't know."

"You can't tell them?"

She met his eyes' void for a second after all, and shrugged.

"I'll tell you what I know, then," he decided. "The pin I'm wearing means I'm a member of the IA. That's Inamorati Anonymous. An inamorato is somebody in love. That's the worst addiction of all."

"Somebody is about to fall in love," Oedipa said, "you go sit with them, or something?"

"Right. The whole idea is to get to where you don't need it. I was lucky. I kicked it young. But there are sixty-year-old men, believe it or not, and women even older, who wake up in the night screaming." "You hold meetings, then, like the AA?" "No, of course not. You get a phone number, an answering service you can call. Nobody knows anybody else's name; just the number in case it gets so bad you can't handle it alone. We're isolates, Arnold. Meetings would destroy the whole point of it."

"What about the person who comes to sit with you? Suppose you fall in love with them?"

"They go away," he said. "You never see them twice. The answering service dispatches them, and they're careful not to have any repeats."

How did the post horn come in? That went back to their founding. In the early '60's a Yoyodyne executive living near L.A. and located someplace in the corporate root-system above supervisor but below vice-president, found himself, at age 39, automated out of a job. Having been since age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death, trained to do absolutely nothing but sign his name to specialized memoranda he could not begin to understand and to take blame for the running-amok of specialized programs that

failed for specialized reasons he had to have explained to him, the executive's first thoughts were naturally of suicide. But previous training got the better of him: he could not make the **DECISION** without first hearing the ideas of a committee. He placed an ad in the personal column of the L.A. Times, asking whether anyone who'd been in the same fix had ever found any good reasons for not committing suicide. His shrewd assumption being that no suicides would reply, leaving him automatically with only valid inputs. The assumption was **FALSE**. After a week of anxiously watching the mailbox through little Japanese binoculars his wife had given him for a going-away present (she'd left him the day after he was pink-slipped) and getting nothing but sucked **STUFF** through the regular deliveries that came each noon, he was jolted out of a **BOOZY**, black-and-white dream of jumping off The Stack into rush-hour traffic, by an insistent banging at the door. It was late on a Sunday afternoon. He **OPENED** his door and found an aged bum with a knitted water cap on his head and a hook for a hand, who presented him with a bundle of letters and loped away without a word. Most of the letters were from **SUICIDES** who had failed, either through business or last-minute cowardice. None of them, however, could offer any compelling reasons for staying alive. Still the executive dithered: spent another week with pieces of paper on which he would list, in columns headed "pro" and "con," reasons for and against taking his Brody. He found it impossible, in the absence of some **TRIGGER**, to come to any clear decision. Finally one day he noticed a front page story in the **TIMES**, complete with AP wirephoto, about a Buddhist monk in Viet Nam who had set himself on fire to protest government **POLICIES**. "Groovy!" cried the executive. He went to the garage, siphoned all the gasoline from his Buick's tank, put on his green Zachary All suit with the vest, stuffed all his letters from unsuccessful suicides into a coat pocket, went in the kitchen, sat on the floor, proceeded to **DOUSE** himself good with the gasoline. He was about to make the farewell **FLICK** of the wheel on his faithful **ZIPPO**, which had seen him through the Normandy hedgerows, the Ardennes, Germany, and post-war America, when he heard a key in the front door, and **VOICES**. It was his wife and some man, whom he soon recognized as the very efficiency expert at **IBM** who had caused him to be replaced by an IBM 7094. Intrigued by the irony of it, he sat in the kitchen and listened, leaving his necktie dipped in the **GASOLINE** as a sort of wick. From what he could gather, the efficiency expert wished to have

sexual intercourse with the wife on the Moroccan rug in the living room. The wife was not unwilling. The executive heard **LEWD** laughter, zippers, the thump of shoes, heavy breathing, moans. He took his tie out of the gasoline and started **SNIGGER**. He **CLOSED** the top on his Zippo. "I hear laughing," his wife said presently. "I smell gasoline," said the efficiency expert. Hand in hand, naked, the two proceeded to the kitchen. "I was about to do the Buddhist **MONK** thing," explained the executive. "Nearly three weeks it takes him," marvelled the efficiency expert, "to decide. You know how long it would've taken the IBM 7094? Twelve microseconds. **NO** wonder you were replaced." The executive threw back his head and laughed for a solid ten minutes, along toward the middle of which his wife and her friend, alarmed, retired, got dressed and went out looking for the **POLICE**.

The executive undressed, showered and hung his suit out on the line to **DRY**. Then he noticed a curious thing. The stamps on some of the letters in his suit pocket had turned almost white. He realized that the **GASOLINE** **MUST** have dissolved the printing ink. So, he peeled off a stamp and saw suddenly the image of the muted post horn, the skin of his hand showing clearly through the watermark. "A sign," he whispered, "is what it is." If he'd been a **RELIGIOUS** man he would have fallen to his **KNEES**. As it was, he only declared, with great solemnity: "My big mistake was **LOVE**. From this day I swear to stay off of love: hetero, homo, bi, dog or cat, car, every kind there is. I will found a society of isolates, dedicated to this purpose, and this sign, revealed by the same gasoline **THAT** almost destroyed me, will be its emblem." And he did.

Oedipa, by now rather drunk, said, "Where is he now?" "He's anonymous," said the anonymous inamorato. "Why not write to him through your **WASTE** system? Say 'Founder, IA.'"

"But I don't **KNOW** how to use it," she said.

"Think of it," he went on, also drunk. "A whole underworld of suicides who **FAILED**. All keeping in touch through that secret delivery system. What do they tell each other?" He **SHOOK** his head, **SMILING**, stumbled off his stool and headed off to take a leak, disappearing into the dense crowd. He didn't come back.

Oedipa sat, feeling as alone as she ever had, now the only woman, she saw, in a room full of drunken **MALE** homosexuals. Story of my life, she thought, Mucho won't talk to me, Hilarius won't listen, Clerk Maxwell didn't even look at me, and this group, God knows. Despair came over her,

MUST
give us pause. There's the respect

THAT
makes Calamity of so long life:

as it will when nobody around has any sexual relevance to you. She gauged the spectrum of feeling out there as running from really violent hate (Asian-looking kid hardly out of his teens, with frosted shoulder-length hair tucked behind his ears and pointed cowboy boots) to dry speculation (a hornrimmed SS type who stared at her legs, trying to figure out if she was in drag), none of which could do her any good. So she got up after awhile and left The Greek Way, and entered the city again, the infected city.

And spent the rest of the night finding the image of the Trystero post horn. In Chinatown, in the dark window of a herbalist, she thought she saw it on a sign among ideographs. But the streetlight was dim. Later, on a sidewalk, she saw some of them in chalk, 20 feet apart. Between them a complicated array of boxes, some with letters, some with numbers. A kids game? Places on a map, dates from a secret history? She copied the diagram in her memo book. When she looked up, a man, perhaps a man, in a black suit, was standing in a doorway half a block away, watching her. She thought she saw a turned-around collar but took no chances; headed back the way she'd come, pulse thundering. A bus stopped at the next corner, and she ran to catch it.

She stayed with buses after that, getting off only now and then to walk so she'd keep awake. What fragments of dreams came had to do with the post horn. Later, possibly, she would have trouble distinguishing the real and dreamed.

At some indefinite passage in night's horrid score, it also came to her that she would be safe, that something, perhaps only her linearly falling drunkenness, would protect her. The city was here, as made up and checked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels massed together in shameless municipal hickeys, out on the skin for all but tourists to see. Nothing of the night's could touch her; nothing did. The recognition of symbols was to be enough, without trauma as well perhaps to attenuate it or even jar it altogether loose from her memory. She was meant to remember. She faced that possibility as she might the toy street from a high balcony, roller-coaster ride, feeding-time among the beasts at a zoo any death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture. She touched the edge of its voluptuous field, knowing it would be lovely beyond the seams simply to submit to

it; that not gravity's pull, laws of ballistics, feral ravening promised more delight. She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic word, the cry that might abolish the night.

In Golden Gate Park she came on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were the dreaming gathering. But that the dream was really no different from being awake, because in the mornings when they got up they felt tired, as if they'd been up most of the night. When their mothers thought they were out playing they were curled in cupboards of neighbors' houses, in platforms up in trees, in secretly-hollowed nests inside hedges, sleeping, making up for these hours. The night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community. They knew about the post horn, but nothing of the chalked game had been seen on the sidewalk. You used only one image and it was jump-rope game, a little girl explained: you stepped alternately in the loop, the bell, and the mute, while your girlfriend sang:

Tristoe, Tristoe, one, two, three, Turning taxi from across the sea. . . Thurn and Taxis, you mean? They'd never heard it that way. Went on warming their hands at an invisible fire. Oedipa, to retaliate, stopped believing in them.

In an all-night Mexican greasy spoon off 24th, she found a piece of her past, in the form of one Jesus Arrabal, who was sitting in a corner under the TV set, idly using his bowl of opaque soup with the foot of a chicken. "Hey," he greeted Oedipa, "you were the lady in Mazatlan." He beckoned her to sit.

"You remember everything," Oedipa said, "Jesus; even tourists. How is your CIA?" Standing not for the agency you think, but for a clanderous Mexican outfit known as the Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas, traced back to the time of the Flores Magón brothers and later briefly allied with Zapata.

"You see. In exile," waving his arm around at the place. He was part-owner here with a yucateco who still believed in the Revolution. Their Revolution. "And you. Are you still with that gringo who spent too much money on you? The oligarchist, the miracle?" "He died."

THE insolence of Office, and the spurns

THAT patient merit of th'unworthy takes,

FOR who would bear the Whips and Scorns of time,

THE Oppressor's wrong, the proud man's Contumely,

THE pang of dispised Love, the Law's delay,

"Ah, por ecito." They had met Jesus Arrabal on the beach. He had previously announced an anti-government rally. Nobody had showed up. So he fell to talking to Inverano, the enemy he must, to be true to his faith, learn. Pierce, because of his neutral manners in the presence of ill-will, had nothing to tell Arrabal; he played the rich, obnoxious gringo so perfectly that Oedipa had seen gooseflesh creep along the anarchist's forearms, due to the Pacific breeze. Soon as Pierce went off to sport in the surf, Arrabal asked her if he was real, or a spy, or making fun of him. Oedipa didn't understand.

"Don't know what a miracle is. But what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into this one. Most of the time we coexist peacefully, but when we do touch there's catalysm. Like the church we hate, anarchists also believe in another world. Where revolutions break spontaneous and leaderless, and the soul's talent for consensus allows the masses to work together without effort, automatic as the body itself. And yet, seeing if any of it should ever really happen. Well, if I would also have to cry. An anarchist miracle. Like your friend. He is too exactly and without flaw the thing we fight. In Mexico the privilegiado is always, to a finite percentage, redeemed one of the people. Unmiraculous. But your friend, unless he's joking, is as terrifying to me as a Virgin appearing to an Indian."

In the years intervening, Oedipa had remembered Jesus because he had talked about Pierce and she hadn't. As if he were, in some unsexual way, competition. Now, drinking thick lukewarm coffee from a clay pot on the back burner of the yucatan's stove and listening to Jesus talk conspiracy, she wondered if, without the miracle of Pierce to reassure him, Jesus might not have quit his CIA eventually and gone over to everybody else to the majority prizes and never had to go into exile.

The dead man, like Max's Demon, was the link between feature and coincidence. Without him neither she nor Jesus would be exactly here, exactly now. It was enough, a coded warning. What, tonight, was chance? So her eyes did fall presently onto an ancient rolled copy of the anarcho-sindicalist paper Regeneracion. The date was 1904 and there was no stamp next to the cancellation, only the handstruck image of the post horn.

"They arrive," said Arrabal. "Have they been in the mails that long? Has my name been substituted for that of a member who's died? Has it really taken sixty years? Is it a reprint? Idle questions, I am a footsoldier. The

higher levels have their reasons." She carried this thought back out into the night with her.

Down at the city beach, long after the pizza stands and rides had closed, she walked unmolested through drifting, dark cloud of delinquents in summer jackets with the post horn stitched on in thread that looked pure silver in what moonlight there was. They had all been smoking, snuffing or injecting something, and perhaps did not see her at all.

Riding among an exhausted crowd of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts all over the city, she scratched on the back of a seat, shining her in the brilliant smoky interior, the post horn with the legend DEATH. Unlike WASTE, somebody had troubled to write in, in pen ink: DON'T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN.

Somewhere near Fillmore she found the symbol tacked to the bulletin board of a laundromat, among other scraps of paper offering cheap ironing and baby sitters. If you know what this means, the note said, you know where to find out more. Around the odor of chlorine bleach rose heavenward, like an incense. Machines chugged and clogged fiercely. Except for Oedipa the place was deserted, and the fluorescent bulbs seemed to glow with a whiteness, to which everything their light touched was dedicated. It was a Negro neighborhood. Was The Horn so dedicated? Would it Antagonize The Horn to ask? Who could she ask?

In the buses all night she listened to transistor radios playing songs in the lower stretches of the Top 100, that would never become popular, whose melodies and lyrics would perish as if they had never been sung. A Mexican girl, trying to hear one of these through snarling static from the bus's motor, hummed along as if she would remember it always, tracing post horns and hearts with a fingernail, in the haze of the breath on the window.

But at the airport Oedipa, feeling invisible, had dropped on a poker game. His steady loser entered each loss neat and conscientious in a little balance-book decorated inside with scribbled post horns. "I'm averaging a 99.375 percent return, fellas," she heard him say. The others, strangers, looked at him, some blank, some annoyed. "That's averaging it over 23 years," he went on, trying a smile. "Always just that little percent on the wrong side of breaking even. Twenty-three years. I'll never get ahead of it. Why don't you quit?" Nobody answering.

In one of the latrines was an advertisement by AC-DC, standing for Alameda County Death Cult, along with a box number and post horn. Once a month they were to choose

WHEN he himself might his Quietus make

WITH a bare Bodkin? Who would Fardels bear.

TO grunt and sweat under a weary life.

BUT that the dread of something after death,

THE undiscovered country, from whose bourne

NO traveller returns, puzzles the will,

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some victim from among the innocent, the virtuous, the socially integrated and well-adjusted, using him sexually, then sacrificing him. Oedipus did not copy the number.

Catching a TWA flight to Miami was an uncoordinated boy who planned to slip at night into aquarium and open negotiations with the dolphins, who would succeed man. He was kissing his mother passionately goodbye using his tongue. "I'll write you, ma," he kept saying. "Write WASTE," he said, "remember. The government will open it if you use the other dolphins," she advised him. "I love you, ma," he said. "Love dolphins," she advised him. "Write by WASTE."

So it went. Oedipus played the voyeur. Among her other encounters were a facially-deformed welder who cherished his ugliness, a wild roan who night who missed the light before birth as certain outcasts do the dear tuning blankness of the community; a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby fat of one cheek who kept going through the aisles of a cafeteria search for a different person, deliberately as others might the music of birth, dedicated not to continuity but to some kind of interregnum; an aging night watchman nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap, who had trained his virtuoso stomach to accept also lotions, air-fresheners, fabrics, tobaccos and waxes in a hopeless attempt to assimilate it all, all the promise, productivity, betrayal, ulcers, before it was too late; and even her voyeur, who lunged outside of the city's all-light windows, searching for work, knowing when the electric image of a rat, aimless doodling, species of withdrawal, as current L-CAL, which there was some how always the past horn. She grew so expectant that perhaps she did not see it quite as often. A couple of times she would really have been enough. Or too much.

She busrode and walked on into the lightning moment, giving herself up to a fatalism rare for her. Where was the Oedipus who'd driven her up here from San Narciso? That optimistic baby had come on so like the private eye in a long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was wit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound rules, to solve any great mystery.

But the private eye sooner or later had to get on. This night's profusion of post horns, this malignant, deliberate replication, was their way of beating. They knew her pressure points, and the ganglia of her optimism, and one by one, pinch by precision pinch, they were immobilizing her.

Last night, she might have ordered what she wanted apart from the couple she never communicated by WASTE system. By sunrise she could legitimately what undergrounds didn't. If miracles were, as Jesus Arbal had postulated years ago on the beach at Mazatlán, intrusions into this world from another, a kiss of cosmic balls, then so must be each of the night's post horns. There were a good many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate with the U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them, of difference to the power of the vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their vote, a vacuized, private space they could not have with an un-published, unsuspected world.

Just before the morning hour, she got out of a jitney whose ancient driver ended each day in the red downtown on Howard Street, began to walk toward the Embarcadero. She knew she looked terrible, black with eye-liner and mascara, mouth tasting of old bones and coffee. Through a doorway, on the stair leading up into the disinfected, ant-smelling twilight of a rooming house she saw an old man huddled shaking with grief she couldn't hear. Both hands, smoke-white, covered his face. On the back of the left hand she made out the most horrible tattooed in old ink now beginning to blur and read. On the back of the right hand she saw the shadows and ascended, shaking, a staircase on each one of them was three steps from him the hands flew, and his wrecked face, and the terror of eyes glowing in burst veins, stopped her.

"Can I help?" She was shaking, tired. "My wife's frayed gray shirt, wide tie, no hat, left her. So long ago, don't remember. Now this is for her." He gave her a letter that looked like it had been carrying it around for years. "Drop it in the," and he held up a tabo and stared into her eyes, "you know. I can't go out there. It's too far now, I had a bad night."

"I know," she said. "But I'm not in town. I don't know where it is."
"Under the freeway." He waved her on in the direction she'd been going. "Always like. You'll see it." The eyes closed. Cammed each night out of that safe furrow the bulk of this city's waking each sunrise again set virtuously

THE CRYING OF LOT 49

soils had he turned, what concen-
 ? What voices overheard, flinders of
 mpsed among the wallpaper's stained
 lit to rotate in the air over him, pre-
 tt he or a friend must have sleep some-
 s to en among the flaming, secret salt
 ars by the insatiable stuffing of a mattress
 vestiges of every nightmare sweat, help-
 g bladder, MEMORY, ASLEEP, SOME, COMPUTER
 ke the memory bank to a computer of the
 s overcome all a chance by a need to touch him,
 uld not believe in him, or would not remember
 exhausted, ONLY KNOWING, NOT, SHE
 e came through the steps and sat, took the man
 ASLEEP, LAST, SPEND, SHE, wet-
 ms, actually hold him, gazing. She
 own the stairs, back into the room. "I
 gainst her chest and saw that he was crying again. "I
 ardly breathed but tears came as if being pumped. "I
 t help," she whispered, rocking him, "I can't help." It
 s already too many times to Fresno.
 "Is that him?" KNOWING, OF, BEHIND, MEMORY
 The sailor?"
 "He has STEPS, BRING, SHE
 "Can you bring him up OK? That's his name." She turned
 and saw an even older man, shorter, wearing a tall Hom-
 burg hat and smiling at them. "I'd help you but I got a lit-
 tle arthritis."
 "Does he have to come up here?"
 "Where else, lady?"
 She didn't know how to let go of him for a moment, reluc-
 tant as if he were a child, and LOOKING, GO, TALKING
 "Come on, she said. She reached out the tattooed hand
 and she took that, and that was how they went the rest
 the way up that flight, and then the two more: hand
 hand, very slowly for the man with arthritis. "Said he was
 "He disappeared last night," he told her. "Said he was
 going looking for his old lady. It's a thing he DOES, off and
 on." They later GO, warren, rooms and corridors, lit by
 low-watt bulbs, separated by beaverboard partitions. The
 man followed them stiffly. At last he said, "Here." The
 room were another suit, a couple of religious
 A picture of a saint, changing well-wa-
 ter lamps. Another bulb, dead.
 She ran through then a
 landlord of this
 new suit

Act V

fare to Fresno
 hand, while she
 felt it go away, as
 "Just mail the
 She looked and saw
 a jet flying by the
 dome stood a tiny figure
 stretched. Oedipa wasn't
 to be on top of the Capit
 like that.
 "Please," the sailor said, "G
 stay here." SHE, ASLEEP, SOME
 gave him the ten "Spend i
 "Remember your friends," said
 the ten.
 "Bitch," the sailor. "Why didn
 gone?" COMPUTER, SHE, OR
 Oedipa watched the sailor. "Why didn
 against the mattress, NOT, SPEND
 "Give me a cigarette, P
 you got one." KNOWING, SHE
 Would it be to buy? "Ramirez," she sailor.
 Who isn't?" said Ramirez, SHE, going to die.
 She remembered John Nefastis, talking TALKING
 machine, and massive FLARED, constructions of information
 When this mattress flared, BEHIND, CODED
 Viking's funeral: the stored, CODED
 set of men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had
 been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress
 burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just
 discovered that irreversible process. It as if she had just
 think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hal-
 lucination belonging just to the sailor, because she had held
 hear no further trace of. KNEW, GO
 him, that he suffered DT's. Behind the initials she had held
 phor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing
 mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can li
 the true paranoiac whose HE, DREAMER
 ul or threatening about the cer
 DREAMER, HE, whose all is orga
 word, or truth all act in
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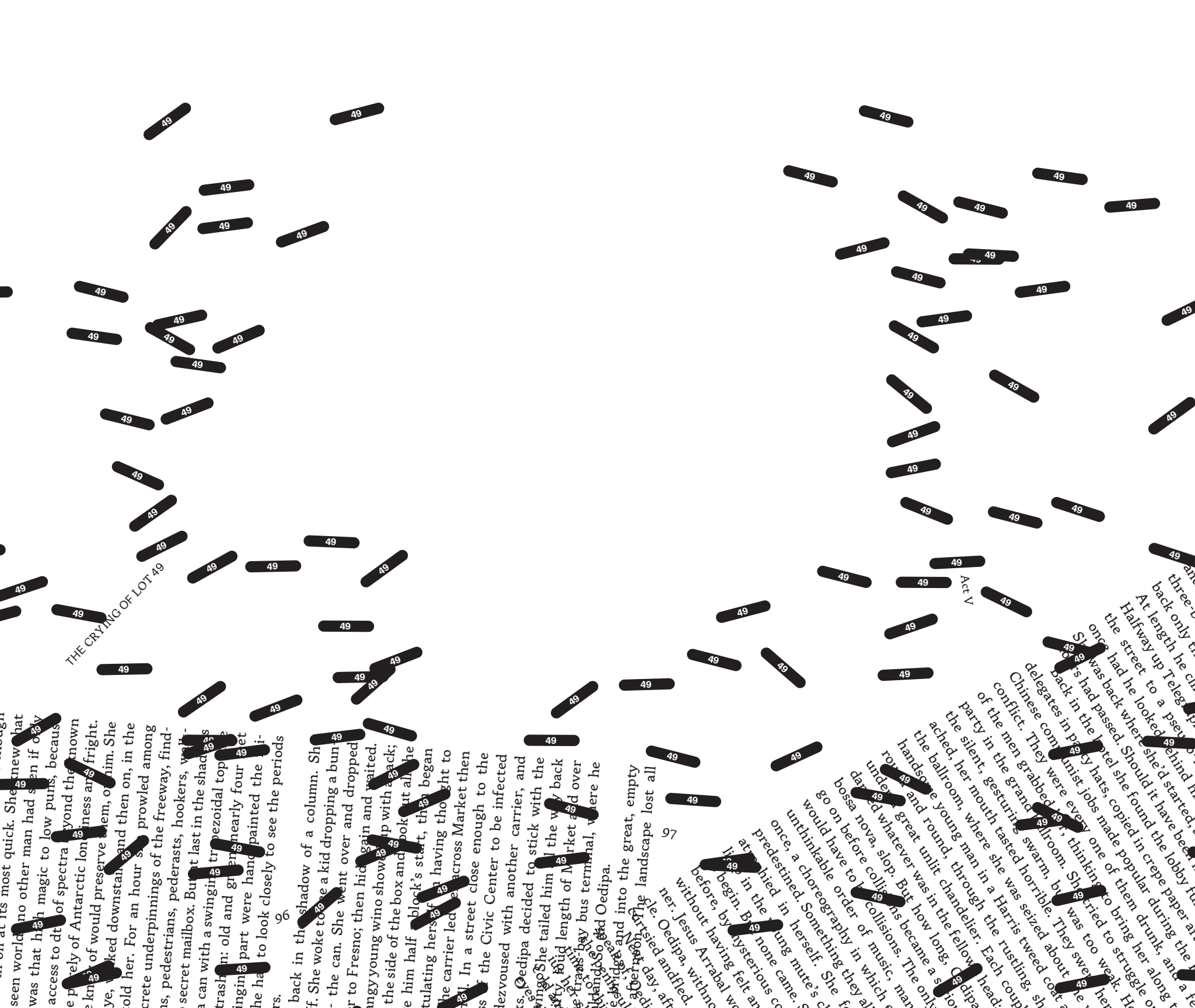


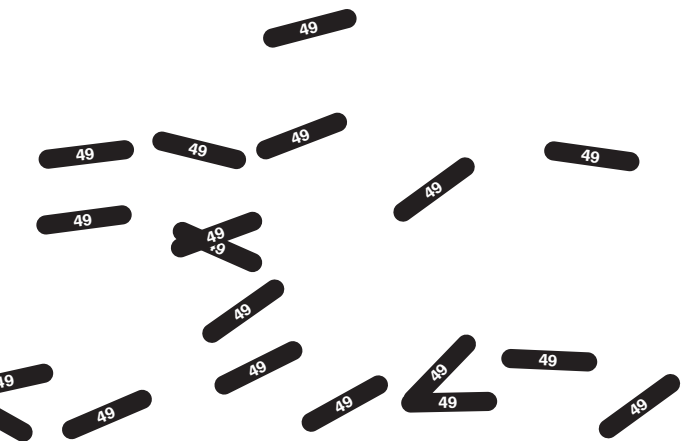
seen world... no other man had seen if only
was that high magic to low puns, because
access to the of spectra beyond the known
eople of Antarctic loneliness and fright.
I know of would preserve them, of him. She
Ye, walked down stairs, and then on, in the
old her. For an hour she prowled among
concrete underpinnings of the freeway, find-
as, pedestrians, pederasts, hookers, work-
secret mailbox. But at last in the shadows
a can with a swinging trapezoidal top
trash can: old and green, nearly four feet
ing in part were hand-painted the li-
he had to look closely to see the periods
s.

back in the shadow of a column. She
f. She woke to see a kid dropping a bun
- the can. She went over and dropped
y to Fresno; then hic again and waited.
ungy young wino showed up with a pack;
the side of the box and took out all the
e him half block's start, then began
tulating herself in having thought to
The carrier led her across Market then
ed. In a street close enough to the
ss of the Civic Center to be infected
devooused with another carrier, and
s. Oedipa decided to stick with the
wings. She tailed him all the way back
city. Only a few hundred length of Market
se trains' bay bus terminal, where he
rked and So had Oedipa.

and into the great, empty
curtained. The landscape lost all
cle. Oedipa, without
ner. Jesus Arrabal, without
without having felt an
begin. But none came.
at, in the lung mute's c
predestined. Something they al
once. a choreography in which
would have to be collisions. The onl
go on before collisions. The onl
bosonova, slop. But how long
under great unlit chandelier. Each coup
dared whatever was in the fellow head
handsome young man in a Harris tweed
the ballroom, where she was seized about
of the silent, gesturing swarm. They
party in the grand ballroom. She
conflict. They were every one of them
Chinese communist jobs made popular during
delegates in party hats, copied in crepe paper at
back in the lobby. She'd started, and a
She had passed. Should it have been
one? She had passed. Should it have been
back in the lobby. She'd started, and a

THE CRYING OF LOT 49





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u.” She knew he had wanted
 en sent to do?” He crossed
 stuck out his tongue tenta-
 you could talk me out of a
 ercely. “What else do any
 s little tentacle, don’t let
 e pharmacists poison it
 dear, for when you lose
 e others. You begin to
 You aren’t going to
 hey,” he said.
 nd Hitler Hilarius
 olmen approached
 billy clubs they
 bulances backed
 osition, causing
 s filthy names,
 ring crowds a
 cho inside it,
 er past snap-
 low. “Hi.”
 nt, but only
 ile? Oedipa
 he mike in
 elf.” Then

“Israelis,” Oedipa said, “con
 aren’t any, he’s crazy.” Cops
 awhile. They told her to stay a
 was legal action. At length sh
 and followed Mucho back to
 the one-to-six shift on the ai
 In the hallway outside
 room, Mucho upstairs in th
 Qedipa encountered the pr
 “Sure glad you’re back,” he
 her first name.
 “Oh?” said Oedipa, “and
 “Frankly,” confided Pu
 hasn’t been himself.”
 “And who,” said Oedip
 because Punch was right, “
 Punch cowered. “Chubby C
 the lobby, “the Righteous F
 “All of the above,” said
 “Mrs. Maas.”
 “Oh, call me Edna. Wh
 “Behind his back,” Pu
 ing him the Brothers N. F
 else can I put it? Day by
 more generic. He enters
 suddenly full of people,
 bly of man.”
 “It’s your imaginati
 smoking those cigaret
 again.”
 “You’ll see. Don’t m
 Who else worries abou
 She sat alone then c
 ing to Mucho’s colleag
 records. Mucho ca
 serenity about him sh
 shoulders and have a
 were gone, “Wait,”
 hall. She scrutinized
 cences, auras.
 They had some tim
 town to a pizzeria an
 the fluted gold lens
 “How are you gett
 nothing,” she said. “
 could tell that when

"That's pretty good," Oedipa said. She couldn't figure the expression on his face.

"It's extraordinary," said Mucho, "everything's been wait. Listen." She heard nothing unusual. "There are seventeen violins on that cut," Mucho said, "and one of them I can't tell where he was because it's monaural here, damn." It dawned on her that he was talking about the Muzak. It has been seeping in, in its subliminal, unidentifiable way since they'd entered the place, all strings, reeds, muted brass.

"What is it," she said, feeling anxious. "His E string," Mucho said, "it's a few cycles sharp. - He can't be a studio musician. Do you think somebody could do the dinosaur bone bit with that one string, Oed? With just his set of notes on that cut. Figure out what his ear is like, and then the musculature of his hands and arms, and eventually the entire man. God, wouldn't that be wonderful." "Why should you want to?" "He was real. That wasn't synthetic. They could dispense with live musicians if they wanted. Put together all the right overtones at the right power levels so it'd come out like a violin. Like I..." he hesitated before breaking into a radiant smile, "you'll think I'm crazy, Oed. But I can do the same thing in reverse. Listen to anything and take it apart again. Spectrum analysis, in my head. I can break down chords, and timbres, and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonics, with all their different loudnesses, and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once." "How can you do that?"

"It's like I have a separate channel for each one," Mucho said, excited, "and if I need more I just expand. Add on what I need. I don't know how it works, but lately I can do it with people talking too. Say 'rich, chocolate goodness.'"

"Rich, chocolate, goodness," said Oedipa. "Yes," said Mucho, and fell silent. "Well, what?" Oedipa asked after a couple minutes, with an edge to her voice.

"I noticed it the other night hearing Rabbit do a commercial. No matter who's talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. Pick your zero point and you can make them all the same."

wild suspicion. "Is this what Punch means when he says you're coming on like a whole roomful of people?" "That's what I am," said Mucho, "right. Everybody is." He gazes at her, perhaps having had his vision of consensus as a result of orgasms, face now smooth, amiable, at peace. She knows him. Panic started to climb out of a dark recess of her head. "Whenever I put the headset on now," he continued, "I really do understand what I find there in those kids sing about 'She loves you,' yeah well, yes she does, she's any number of people, all over time, back through time, different colors, sizes, ages, shapes, tastes from death, but she loves. And the 'you' is everybody. And herself. Oedipa, the human voice, you know, a flipping miracle." His eyes brimming, reflecting light off of beer.

"Baby," she said, helpless, knowing of nothing to do for this, and afraid for him.

He put a little clear plastic bottle on the table. She stared at the pills in it, and then at him. "That's LSD?" she said. Mucho smiled back at her. "That's LSD?" she said. Mucho smiled back at her.

"Hilarious. He broadened his program to include LSD." "Look then," Oedipa said, trying to get it. "How long has it been, that you've been using it?" Knowing.

"But there may be a chance you're not remembering." "Oed," looking at her puzzled, "you know, 'how long has it been, that you've been using it?'"

It's not like you're some hophead. You're good. Because you hear and see things that taste like you never could. Because you're a pattern out across a million lives and a million lives too." He had this patient, moaning mouth that they say something, they say something, they say something.

"Oh, goodo." Flipping her mouth, "No nightmares any more, whoever she is, she's your friend, they need all the sleep you know, they need all the sleep."

"There's no girl, Oed. Let me tell you that I used to have all the time in the world to be with you, but now that I could never even think of you, it doesn't bother me now. It doesn't bother me now. In the lot, that's what scares me about a normal day's business, there'd be the sign. V"

THE CRYING OF LOT 49

Automobile Dealers' Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering."

She remembered. Now he would never be spooked again, not as long as he had the pills. She could not quite get it into her head that the day she'd left him for San Narciso was the day she'd seen Mucho for the last time. So much of him already had dissipated.

"Oh, listen," he was saying, "Oed, dig." But she couldn't even tell what the tune was.

When it was time for him to go back to the station, he nodded toward the pills. "You could have those."

She shook her head no.

"You're going back to San Narciso?"

"Tonight, yes."

"But the cops."

"I'll be a fugitive." Later she couldn't remember if they'd said anything else. At the station they kissed goodbye, all of them. As Mucho walked away he was whistling something complicated, twelve-tone. Oedipa sat with her forehead resting on the steering wheel and remembered that she hadn't asked him about the Trys-tero cancellation on his letter. But by then it was too late to make any difference.

VI

WHEN SHE GOT back to Echo Courts, she found Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard arranged around and on the diving board at the end of the swimming pool with all their instruments, so composed and motionless that some photographer, hidden from Oedipa, might have been shooting them for an album illustration.

“What’s happening?” said Oedipa.

“Your young man,” replied Miles, “Metzger, really put it to Serge, our counter-tenor. The lad is crackers with grief.”

“He’s right, missus,” said Serge. “I even wrote a song about it, whose arrangement features none other than me, and it goes like this.”

SERGE’S SONG

WHAT CHANCE HAS A LONELY SURFER BOY
FOR THE LOVE OF A SURFER CHICK,
WITH ALL THESE HUMBERT HUMBERT CATS
COMING ON SO BIG AND SICK?
FOR ME, MY BABY WAS A. WOMAN,
FOR HIM SHE’S JUST ANOTHER NYMPHET;
WHY DID THEY RUN AROUND, WHY DID SHE PUT ME DOWN,
AND GET ME SO UPSET?
WELL, AS LONG AS SHE’S GONE AWAY-YAY,
I’VE HAD TO FIND SOMEBODY NEW,
AND THE OLDER GENERATION
HAS TAUGHT ME WHAT TO DO
I HAD A DATE LAST NIGHT WITH AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD,
AND SHE’S A SWINGER JUST LIKE ME,

SO YOU CAN FIND US ANY NIGHT UP ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD,
IN BACK OF P.S. 33 (OH, YEAH),
AND IT'S AS GROOVY AS IT CAN BE.

"You're trying to tell me something," said Oedipa.

They gave it to her then in prose. Metzger and Serge's chick had run off to Nevada, to get married. Serge, on close questioning, admitted the bit about the eight-year-old was so far only imaginary, but that he was hanging diligently around playgrounds and should have some news for them any day. On top of the TV set in her room Metzger had left a note telling her not to worry about the estate, that he'd turned over his executorship to somebody at Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus, and they should be in touch with her, and it was all squared with the probate court also. No word to recall that Oedipa and Metzger had ever been more than co-executors.

Which must mean, thought Oedipa, that that's all we were. She should have felt more classically scorned, but had other things on her mind. First thing after unpacking she was on the horn to Randolph Driblette, the director. After about ten rings an elderly lady answered. "I'm sorry, we've nothing to say."

"Well who's this," Oedipa said.

Sigh. "This is his mother. There'll be a statement at noon tomorrow. Our lawyer will read it." She hung up. Now what the hell, Oedipa wondered: what had happened to Driblette? She decided to call later. She found Professor Emory Bortz's number in the book and had better luck. A wife named Grace answered, backed by a group of children. "He's pouring a patio," she told Oedipa. "It's a highly organized joke that's been going on since about April. He sits in the sun, drinks beer with students, lobs beer bottles at seagulls. You'd better talk to him before it gets that far. Maxine, why don't you throw that at your brother, he's more mobile than I am. Did you know Emory's done a new edition of Wharfinger? It'll be out" but the date was obliterated by a great crash, maniacal childish laughter, high-pitched squeals. "Oh, God. Have you ever met an infanticide? Come on over, it may be your only chance."

Oedipa showered, put on a sweater, skirt and sneakers, wrapped her hair in a studentlike twist, went easy on the makeup. Recognizing with a vague sense of dread that it was not a matter of Bortz's response, or Grace's, but of The Trystero's.

Driving over she passed by Zapf's Used Books, and was alarmed to find a pile of charred rubble where the

bookstore only a week ago had stood. There was still the smell of burnt leather. She stopped and went into the government surplus outlet next door. The owner informed her that Zapf, the damn fool, has set fire to his own store for the insurance. "Any kind of a wind," snarled this worthy, "it would have taken me with it. They only put up this complex here to last five years anyway. But could Zapf wait? Books." You had the feeling that it was only his good upbringing kept him from spitting. "You want to sell something used," he advised Oedipa, "find out what there's a demand for. This season now it's your rifles. Fella was in just this forenoon, bought two hundred for his drill team. I could've sold him two hundred of the swastika armbands too, only I was short, dammit."

"Government surplus swastikas?" Oedipa said. "Hell no." He gave her an insider's wink. "Got this little factory down outside of San Diego," he told her, "got a dozen of your, say, they can sure turn them old armbands out. You'd be amazed how that little number's selling. I took some space in a couple of the girlie magazines, and I had to hire two extra last week just to take care of the mail."

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"What's your name?" Oedipa said. "Winthrop Tremaine," replied the spirited entrepreneur, "Winner, for short. Listen, now we're getting up an arrangement with one of the big ready-to-wear outfits in L.A. to see how SS uniforms go for the fall. We're working it in with the back-to-school campaign, lot of 37 longs, you know, teenage kid sizes. Next season we may go all the way and get out a modified version for the ladies. How would that strike you?"

"I'll let you know," Oedipa said. "I'll keep you in mind." She left, wondering if she should've called him something, or tried to hit him with any of a dozen surplus, heavy, blunt objects in easy reach. There had been no witnesses. Why hadn't she?

You're chicken, she told herself, snapping her seat belt. This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl. She drove savagely along the freeway, hunting for Volkswagens. By the time she'd pulled into Bortz's subdivision, a riparian settlement in the style of Fangoso Lagoons, she was only shaking and a little nauseous in the stomach.

She was greeted by a small fat girl with some blue substance smeared all over her face. "Hi," said Oedipa, "you must be Maxine."

"Maxine's in bed. She threw one of Daddy's beer bottles at Charles and it went through the window and Mama spanked her good. If she was mine I'd drown her."
 "Never thought of doing it that way," said Grace Bortz, materializing from the dim living room. "Come on in." With a wet washcloth she started to clean off her child's face. "How did you manage to get away from yours today?"
 "I don't have any," said Oedipa, following her into the kitchen.

Grace looked surprised. "There's a certain harassed style," she said, "you get to recognize. I thought only kids caused it. I guess not."

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Emory Bortz lay half in a hammock, surrounded by three graduate students, two male, one female, all sodden with drink, and an astounding accumulation of empty beer bottles. Oedipa located a full one and seated herself on the grass. "I would like to find out," she presently plunged, "something about the historical Wharfinger. Not so much the verbal one."

"The historical Shakespeare," growled one of the grad students through a full beard, uncapping another bottle. "The historical Marx. The historical Jesus."

"He's right," shrugged Bortz, "they're dead. What's left?" "Words."

"Pick some words," said Bortz. "Them, we can talk about."
 "No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow," quoted Oedipa, "Who's once been set his tryst with Trystero." Bortz blinked at her. "And how," he said, "did you get into the Vatican library?"

Oedipa showed him the paperback with the line in it. Bortz, squinting at the page, groped for another beer. "My God," he announced, "I've been pirated, me and Wharfinger, we've been Bowdlerized in reverse or something." He flipped to the front, to see who'd re-edited his edition of Wharfinger. "Ashamed to sign it. Damn. I'll have to write

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the publishers. K. da Chingado and Company? You ever heard of them? New York." He looked at the sun through a page or two. "Offset." Brought his nose close to the text. "Misprints. Gah. Corrupt." He dropped the book on the grass and looked at it with loathing. "How did they get into the Vatican, then?"

"What's in the Vatican?" asked Oedipa.

"A pornographic Courier's Tragedy. I didn't get to see it till '61, or I would've given it a note in my old edition."

"What I saw out at the Tank Theatre wasn't pornographic?"

"Randy Driblette's production? No, I thought it was typically virtuous." He looked sadly past her toward a stretch of sky. "He was a peculiarly moral man. He felt hardly any responsibility toward the word,

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really; but to the invisible field surrounding play, its spirit, he was always intensely. If anyone could have called up for a historical Wharfinger you want, it'd've been him. Nobody else I ever knew was so author, to the microcosm of that world. I have surrounded Wharfinger's living. "But you're using the past tense. I remember your heart pounding, remembering the phone.

"Hadn't you heard?" They Death glided by, shadowless, and on the grass.

"Randy walked into the room a week ago," the girl told her finally, "and he'd read all along. "In his Gennaro this is a wake."

"I tried to call him the other day. Oedipa could think of to say that. "It was right after they published Courier's Tragedy," Bortz

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ver-
tiginous sense of flutter-
ing out over an abyss, she asked what
she'd come there to ask. "What
was Trystero?"

"One of several brand new areas," said
Bortz, "that opened up after I did that edi-
tion in '57. We've since come across some
interesting old source material. My updated
edition ought to be out, they tell me, next
year sometime. Meanwhile." He went look-
ing in a glass case full of ancient books

"Here," producing one with a dark brown
peeling calico cover, he said Bortz. "I
keep my Wharfinger's, and that is
the kids can't be Italian for Thurn and Taxis.
I've been. "I can't read this," Oedipa said.

Rich-
Wharfinger have to
h them?" asked Oedipa
they do a dirty version of
I'm too young to read
I found

a moral example. They were no books
theatre. It was their way of putting
ay entirely away from them, into
better way to damn it eternally when
change the actual words. Remember that
ans were utterly devoted, like litera-
s, to the Word."

But the line about Trystero isn't dirty,
e scratched his head. "It fits, surely,
'hallowed skein of some God's
. But even that can't ward, or guard,
nobody who has an appointment with
ystero. I mean, say you only talked
out crossing the lusts of Angelo, hell,
ere'd be any number of ways to get
ut of that. Leave the country. Ange-
's only a man. But the brute Other,
hat kept the non-Scurvhamite uni-
erse running like clockwork, that
was something else again. Evidently
they felt Trystero would symbolize
the Other quite well."

122 She had nothing more
then to put it off
with. Again
with the
light,

"Was Trystero trying to set up shop in England?" Bortz said.
"You can spot a mouth like that a mile off," Bortz said. "Even in the cold,
word to get to England, the king about to lose his head. A set-up."
those days. Look at England, the king about to lose his head. A set-up."
The leader of the brigands, after collecting the mail sacks, had pulled Blobb from the coach and addressed
fierce beasts of the Low Countries, led by the Prot
black way. From obscure philatelic journals furnished her by Genghis Cohen, an ambiguous footno
blobb's original clues, Oedipa was able to fit together this account of how the c

[Large black redaction block]

In 1577, the northern provinces of the Low Countries, led by the Prot
William of Orange, had been struggling nine years for independence
lic Spain and a Catholic Holy Roman Emperor. In late December, Ora
master of the Low Countries, entered Brussels in triumph, having
there by a Committee of Eighteen. This was a junta of Calvinist fan
that the Estates-General, controlled by the privileged classes, r
resented the skilled workers, had lost touch entirely with th
Committee set up a kind of Brussels-Commune. They contro
dictated all decisions of the Estates-General, and threw
ers of high position in Brussels. Among these was Le
of Taxis, Gentleman of the Emperor's Privy Chamb
Buysinghen, the hereditary Grand Master of the F
Countries, and executor of the Thurn and Taxis
was replaced by one Jan Hinckart, Lord of Oha
ene: Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y C
lman, perhaps an honest rebel, a
artist. Tristero claimed to
the Spanish and le
d true lord
thing

back again for the Emperor in March, 1585, Tristero...
of the time, from one quarter or another, his life was in danger. Still, in...
rt was dispossessed by Farnese, and Leonard I, the Thurn and Taxis Grand Master, re...
ery of strong Protestant leanings in the Bohemian branch of the family, the Emperor, Rudolph II, had...
ly into the red.

ve been some vision of the continent-wide power...
own system. He seems to have been highly unstable, apt at any time to appear at a public function and begin a speech. His co...
belonged to Ohain by right of conquest, and Ohain belonged to Tristero by right of blood. He styled himself El Des...
back for his followers, black to symbolize the only thing that truly belonged to them in their exile: the night. S...
and a dead badger with its four feet in the air (some said that the name Taxis came from the Italian tass...
couriers wore). He began a sub rosa campaign of obstruction, terror and depredation along the Thur...
spent the next several days in and out of libraries and earnest discussions with Emory Bortz and...
to everyone else she knew. The day after reading Blobb's Peregrinations she, who...
demerit, watched the mother, spectral in afterglow,...

'd given her the news of his death. Had they been in love...
an known why? No one could begin to trace it. A hundred hangups, permitted...
e and place, who knew. Changing the script had no clearer motive than his suicide...
eely penetrated, as if the light winged thing had actually made it...
yrrinth, adding those two lines...
nk of the primal blood the Pacific. She waited for the winged...
he called. The signal echoing down twisted miles of brain circuitry...
But as with Maxwell's Demon, so now. Either she could...
Beyond its origins, the libraries told her nothing...
Dutch independence. To find the rest, she had to...
seemed to turn into a species of cute game. He...
for Thurn and Taxis must have its reflection in...
should have appeared in print only around...
dies irae" overcome his reluctance? How had...
way into the Folio? Whence had the...
have been some crisis inside Tristero...
taking... of Dr. Blobb.

But should Bortz have...
scented dusk, dark hist...
wife Alexandrine...
She retired in 1645...
male heir, Lamoral II...
tem had appeared. P...
down their Thurn an...
How, Bortz asked...
the great moment fina...
conservative opinion w...
There might

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She found

before he died?"

her. But like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility.

alous."

ing if not compassionate. "You ought," quietly, "really, you ought to think about it. Write it down."

that you've got. At least that."

cold

What else, after that?"

ever was going soundlessly smash, its net

santly. "Right?"

ood up

e," Cohen protested.

Used Books

W.A.S.T.E. carriers

X number of American

bribing of librarians

breathe in a vacuum

measured

once so shy

famous

Thurn and Taxis

fellow aristocrats, to help

held in Milan, arguments raged for a week, lifelong enmities were created, families divided

At a convention

*Their entire emphasis now
"What about that stamp of Cohen's? We Await Silent
Tristero's Empire."*

1893 Columbian Exposition Issue

now reduced to handling anarchist

the Jura, preparing

watchmakers of

*postal reform that had meant the beginning of the end for
private carriers, the head of a Pony Express rider at the
lower left was set at a disturbing angle unknown among
the living. The deep vio*

All the Tris-

tero refugees

1845 the U. S. government

*on the tattooed sailor's letter in San Francisco.
"Well, it's interesting," she said, "if the article's legiti-
mate."
"That ought to be easy enough to check out." Bortz gaz-
ing straight into her eyes. "Why don't you?"
The toothaches got worse*

1849-50

Other immigrants come to America looking for
freedom from tyranny

A new book bidder has appeared on the scene, whom neither I nor any of the firms in the area have heard of before. That hardly ever happens." "A what?"

Cohen explained how there

book" would be bidding.
"Then how do you know he's a stranger?" "Word gets around. He's being super-secretive working through an agent, C. Morris Schrift, a very reputable, good man. Morris was in touch with the auctioneers yesterday to tell them his client wanted to examine

name or anything else about him. Except that as far as Morris knew, he was an outsider. So being a conservative house, naturally, they apologized and said no."

"What do you think?" said Oedipa, already knowing pretty much.

"That our mysterious bidder may be from Tristero," Cohen said. "And saw the description of the lot in the auction catalogue. And

put in a station call to The Greek Way in San Francisco, gave the musical voice that answered a description of the acned, fuzz-headed Inamorato Anonymous she'd talked to there and waited, inexplicable tears beginning to build up pressure around her eyes. Half a minute of clinking glasses, bursts of laughter, sounds of a juke box. Then he came on.

"This is Arnold Snarb," she said, choking up.

"I was in the little boys' room," he said. "The men's room was full."

She told him, quickly, using up no more than a minute, what she'd learned about The Tristero, what had happened to Hilarius, Mucho, Metzger, Driblette, Fallopian. "So you are," she said, "the only one I have. I don't know your name, don't want to. But I have to know whether they arranged it with you. To run into me by accident, and tell me your story about the post horn. Because it may be a practical joke for you, but it stopped being one for me a few hours ago. I got drunk a

face toward the sea. But she'd lost her bearings. She turned, pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American continuity of crust and mantle. Pierce Inverarity was really dead.

She walked down a stretch of railroad track next the highway. Spurs ran off here and there into factory property. Pierce may have owned these factories too. But did it matter now if he'd owned all of San

draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago,

to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America.

Might Oedipa Maas yet be his heiress; had that been in the will, in code, perhaps without Pierce really knowing, having been by then too seized by some headlong expansion of himself, some visit, some lucid instruction? Though she could never again call back any image of the dead man to dress up, pose, talk to and make answer, neither would she lose a new compassion for the cul-de-sac he'd tried to find a way out of, for the enigma his efforts had created.

Though he had never talked business with her, she had known it to be a fraction of him that couldn't come out even, would carry forever beyond any decimal place she might name; her love, such as it had been, remaining incommensurate with his need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being. "Keep it bouncing," he'd told her once, "that's all the secret, keep it bouncing." He must have known, writing the will, facing the spectre, how the bouncing would stop. He might have written the testament only to harass a one-time mistress, so cynically sure of being wiped out he could throw away all hope of anything more. Bitterness could have run that deep in him. She just didn't know. He might himself have discovered The Tristero, and encrypted that in the will, buying into just enough to be sure she'd find it. Or he might even have tried to survive death, as a paranoia; as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved. Would that breed of perversity prove at last too keen to be stunned even by death, had a plot finally been devised too elaborate for the dark Angel to hold at once, in his humorless vice-president's head, all the possibilities of? Had something slipped through and Inverarity by that much beaten death?

Yet she knew, head down, stumbling along over the cinderbed and its old sleepers, there was still that other chance. That it was all true. That Inverarity had only died, nothing else. Suppose, God, there really was a Tristero then and that she had come on it by accident. If San Narciso and the estate were really no different from any other town, any other estate, then by that continuity she might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entranceways, a hundred alienations, if only she'd looked. She stopped a minute between the steel rails, raising her head as if to sniff the air. Becoming conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on knowing as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky how these tracks ran on into others, others,

knowing they laced, deepened, authenticated the great night around her. If only she'd looked. She remembered now old Pullman cars, left where the money'd run out or the customers vanished, amid green farm flatnesses where clothes hung, smoke lazed out of jointed pipes.

Were the squatters there in touch with others, through Tristero; were they helping carry forward that 300 years of the house's disinheritance? Surely they'd forgotten by now what it was the Tristero were to have inherited; as perhaps Oedipa one day might have. What was left to inherit? That America coded in Inverarity's testament, whose was that? She thought of other, immobilized freight cars, where the kids sat on the floor planking and sang back, happy as fat, whatever came over the mother's pocket radio; of other squatters who stretched canvas for lean-tos behind smiling billboards along all the highways, or slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even, daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman's tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages. She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night, zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination. And the voices before and after the dead man's that had phoned at random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless among the dial's ten million possibilities for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word. How many shared Tristero's secret, as well as its exile? What would the probate judge have to say about spreading some kind of a legacy among them all, all those nameless, maybe as a first installment? Oboy. He'd be on her ass in a microsecond, revoke her letters testamentary, they'd call her names, proclaim her through all Orange County as a redistributionist and pinko, slip the old man from Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMinus in as administrator de bonis non and so much baby for code, constellations, shadow-legatees. Who knew? Perhaps she'd be hounded someday as far as joining Tristero itself, if it existed, in its twilight, its aloofness, its waiting. The

waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew. She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth. In the songs Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard sang was either some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty (as Mucho now believed) or only a power spectrum. Tremaine the Swastika Salesman's reprieve from holocaust was either an injustice, or the absence of a wind; the bones of the GI's at the bottom of Lake Inverarity were there either for a reason that mattered to the world, or for skin divers and cigarette smokers. Ones and zeroes. So did the couples arrange themselves. At Vesperhaven House either an accommodation reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, or only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia.

Next day, with the courage you find you have when there's nothing more to lose, she got in touch with C. Morris Schrift, and inquired after his mysterious client.

"He decided to attend the auction in person," was all Schrift would tell her. "You might run into him there." She might.

The auction was duly held, on a Sunday afternoon, in perhaps the oldest building in San Narciso, dating from before World War II. Oedipa arrived a few minutes early, alone, and in a cold lobby of gleaming redwood floorboards and the smell of wax and paper, she met Genghis Cohen, who looked genuinely embarrassed.

"Please don't call it a conflict of interests," he drawled earnestly. "There were some lovely Mozambique triangles I couldn't quite resist. May I ask if you've come to bid, Miz Maas."

"No," said Oedipa, "I'm only being a busybody."

"We're in luck. Loren Passerine, the finest auctioneer in the West, will be crying today."

"Will be what?"

"We say an auctioneer 'cries' a sale," Cohen said.

"Your fly is open," whispered Oedipa. She was not sure what she'd do when the bidder revealed himself. She had only some vague idea about causing a scene violent enough to bring the cops into it and find out that way who the man really was. She stood in a patch of sun, among brilliant rising and falling points of dust, trying to get a little warm, wondering if she'd go through with it.

"It's time to start," said Genghis Cohen, offering his arm. The men inside the auction room were tall, thin, and had pale, cruel faces. They watched her come in, trying each to conceal his thoughts. Loren Passerine, on his podium, hovered like a puppet-master, his eyes bright, his smile practiced and relentless. He stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I'm surprised you actually came. Oedipa sat alone, toward the back of the room, looking at the napes of necks, trying to guess which one was her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof. An assistant closed the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun. She heard a lock snap shut; the sound echoed a moment. Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote cult; perhaps to a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot

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AND LOSE THE NAME OF ACTION. SOFT YOU NOW,

BE ALL MY SINS REMEMBER'D.

