JARECKE, GEORGE WALTER. Deliberations. (1976) Directed by: Mr. Fred D. Chappell. Pp. 73.

The purpose of these three pieces is to show the problems of youth coming to basic decisions about life. As the title indicates, these basic decisions are not come to without great hesitation and painful thought. The pieces are arranged chronologically; the main character of the first is a high school senior, of the second a college freshman, and of the third a young woman two years out of college.

In "Wasted Decisions", a young man must choose between obeying the wishes of his father, which are for him to quit baseball and to go to college, and his own professional baseball aspirations. In this short story it is shown that even great deliberation over a decision can go to waste in an emotional situation.

In the first chapter of a novel in progress, Beaches Last Forever, a young man must decide whether to adhere to old traditions which are strange to him, or to remain an outcast throughout his college life.

In "Katherine in Transit," which in another version was published in the Winter 1975-76 issue of the Greensboro Review, a young woman must learn to stop merely reacting to the stimuli of others and to make her own decisions regarding her own life. -

DELIBERATIONS

by

George Walter Jarecke

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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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WASTED DECISIONS

In the high school locker room everyone was watching Jackson. Jackson was the baseball player the scouts had been coming to watch all that spring; so far, Bob Moore counted, they'd played for the Pirates, Reds, Giants, White Sox and Yankees. The Baltimore Orioles were supposed to have a scout there today, but Moore knew, watching Jackson flex his leg and wince, that the man would be disappointed because Jackson's muscle pull was just bad enough to keep him from pitching and he, Moore, whom no scouts had been watching, was going to pitch instead.

"Ready?" Moore whirled around at the sound of the voice, startled. It was Herbert, the catcher. "Hey, you aren't too nervous, are you?" Herbert said, laughing. "Don't worry, these guys aren't too tough. They're just big and strong as mooses. Only four batters in the starting lineup are in the top ten in the county. It won't be too hard holding them to eight runs the first inning."

Moore sniffed loudly in disdain, then winced at the dried sweat and moldy showers. He turned back to pull the white, elastic-kneed baseball pants on, tuck his shirt in, and adjust the knees carefully over the socks, pressing his legs together to see that the pants were even. "Shit, thanks a lot. I thought catchers were supposed to relax the pitcher." He jerked his head towards the other side of the room. "Go

talk to Jackson. He's the one who needs to be relaxed. The pressure's on him. If he doesn't sign with a pro team, no one will, except maybe you, and this team's too good to have nobody sign. He's the one who should be nervous."

Herbert slapped his glove, raising red dust. "Hell. He doesn't care. No pressure on him today. If he gets three hits he'll get drafted as a shortstop. If he doesn't Baltimore will draft him as a pitcher. The other teams who've been here may want him too." Herbert sat down and leaned his head close to Moore, now trying to get his shoes on without getting his socks wet in the dirty puddles left by phys ed classes earlier. "Hey. Have you given any thought to this game? Huh?"

"About what."

"Bobby, you've won six games this year. Today is a big game. Pitch a good one today and that scout will be talking to you, and so will a lot of others. Bobby, you're a prospect, you know?"

"Herbert, it may be news to you but the six games I won were against Catholic and private schools. My grandmother could beat them. If I win today any scouts who are here will think it was luck. You and Jackson are the ones they want."

"Hell, that's Coach's fault you haven't pitched against good teams. But he has confidence in you today. He could've pitched Walsh, he's rested. But really. Look at Jackson." Moore raised his head; Jackson, solid body, thick burst of

black hair, grinning big blocks of white teeth, swinging a bat, chattering, enjoying the attention. "You know it and I know it, that jerk is going to get three hits today and he'll get drafted by someone. That's certain. But you ought to be, too. Man, you're tall, strong, good fastball, you're smart and you've got a good team spirit. You're the type teams are after, too, not just big blockheads like Jackson. Did you ever give any thought to it?"

"No. I'm not good enough. My dad would never let me try anyway. He wants me to go to college."

"Just pitch well today and we can see. Let's go out and warm up."

Joe Marine sat down on the splintery wooden bleachers trying to move himself into a comfortable position without getting stuck. He looked up, straight across the field and the intense Florida midday sun burned his forehead and eyes. The sky was an unbroken blue but for wisps of clouds over the beach. No chance for even momentary shade today. Then, two hundred yards away he saw the first two players, for Central High, he guessed, leave the locker room and begin to walk very slowly over the scrubby athletic field to the baseball diamond. Probably the pitcher and catcher, Jackson and Herbert, whom he'd come to see; one carried a catcher's mitt and the other wore a yellow plastic warm-up jacket. He hoped talking to these two today would be different from all the talking he had done so far in the south Florida high schools.

Earlier that month, Joe Marine had been pulled out of his area, Minnesota and Wisconsin and the Dakotas, and was called back to Baltimore, to the Orioles' home office.

"We're getting whipped in Florida," his boss had said. "Three prospects from there made it with the Giants and Braves last year and our reports said they didn't have a chance. Somebody isn't doing their job down there. You grew up in the south, you know the area." He'd paused, putting pudgy fingertips together, looking at Joe Marine over his glasses. "I want you to get hold of the best boys down there and tell us about them. I hate to lose the top boys. Go do a job for us."

But it was tougher than just going and doing it. The Orioles were doing well, had done well for several years, which made the job harder. Every boy he talked to hesitated, bit his lips and asked about Belanger and Baylor and Palmer; no boy wanted to sign with a team whose players were all young and performing well. If drafted by the Orioles, they all said, they'd prefer to wait a year and take their chances on another draft. No boy seemed to want to spend more than a year in the minor leagues. Perhaps Jackson and Herbert would be different.

"Nice day for a game," said Charlie Shields, sitting down next to Joe Marine and startling him. The man was big and square, an ex-high school athlete and auto mechanic whom no one liked. A Florida hick, he chewed tobacco; Joe Marine

looked absently at the juice being absorbed by the dark sand. He'd almost forgotten Shields was going to meet him till then; Charlie Shields was his bird-dog, his informant for this county's high schools. Shields did a fair job but the need for his type was growing smaller. In the years since the free-agent draft began everything had changed. Scouts no longer depended upon their network of spies to keep them up on the lives and doings of local boys. Communications and transportation had become so extensive that one scout could now adequately cover a much larger area. If that scout was good. The previous Florida scout had not been good, Marine remembered, which was why he was there.

Central, Jackson's team, had followed Jackson and Herbert out and was warming up already; Washington High was just arriving in cars and vans, in threes and fours. He recognized several of Washington's players, boys he'd already talked to the week before at a game against another team. They were big but dumb. They wanted lots of money and to be in Baltimore next month. The crowd was filling in, too, mainly laborers who worked near the high school and were sneaking an hour, but also businessmen, probably the players' fathers, and plenty of mothers with their own fold-away chairs. And some girlfriends and a few boys from the high schools. The spectators seemed tense to Marine, more nervous than for most high school games.

"What's the story for this game?" Marine asked.

"Oh, it's going to be a good one," Shields said. "It's for the county championship. These are the two best teams in the county. Northeast, Burger plays for them, you need to see him, they've been pretty good, but not like these two. Central's won the championship five of the last six years, they're a real baseball school. Funny, Central never has a good football team, they-"

"Who's supposed to win?"

"Ah, Central easy, with Jackson pitching. No contest. He ain't lost in two years. There he is, number twenty-one. Without the hat. Herbert's sixteen, with the catcher's glove."

He looked at them both quickly and looked away. Kids always put on a show warming up if there were scouts watching and he didn't like to see it. He watched Washington toss the ball back and forth, and noticed their pitcher, short and stocky, motion to a catcher and begin to warm up, fast balls popping audibly in the mitt. He looked back as Central ran out for their infield practice, then elbowed Shields in alarm; "Hey, Jackson's playing shortstop. He's not pitching today?"

Shields sat up. "Yeah, he's at short. I wonder." He got up and trotted over to the Central dugout and peeked in. Marine watched him gesture in question, sag in disappointment and trot back. "Pulled a muscle. Not bad, the kids say, but Coach Elliot wants to be careful. Elliot's a good guy, even a county championship don't mean nothing if he don't

want a kid to hurt himself." Shields in approval sounded disappointed.

"Ah, hell," Marine said, exhaling.

"Want to go? We can watch Burger at Northeast." There was nothing Marine wanted to do less than climb back in his car with Shields and take a long, hot drive to wherever the hell Northeast was.

"No. You say Jackson hits too. So let's see him hit," he said. "And the catcher, Herbert, we've been looking at him, too."

"Yeah. Herbert's fast, good arms, hits fine. He's tall and sort of lanky. You could put weight on him, too." Marine could see him fine. "Legs in good shape, been catching for eight years, through Little League. Knows the position. But the problem is, he says he-"

"I know all that," Marine said. He had the report from the other scout. Herbert ran to first in 3.5 seconds, fast for anyone, had a B plus average, and a girl named Sandy who kept him up way too late on weekends and weeknights, too. "We'll see," he said.

He looked out over the field, ignoring the boys. It was like any other of the thousand or so baseball fields Joe Marine had sat behind over the years; the chain link backstop, the pitted and sunken home plate area, the low pitching mound and infield, in the south covered with soft red clay, hard to run on or hit a ground ball through; this

particular field was lucky and had infield grass, most south Florida fields did, parched and scrubby though it was. There was no outfield fence so a ball, if hit that impossibly hard could roll all the way to the gym and locker rooms two hundred yards away. Though baseball was a big sport in south Florida, high schools never seemed to have money to keep the fields up.

Washington High took a swift infield practice--Joe Marine began to be interested, he'd forgotten Washington was that big and quick--and the game began presently. He watched Central's pitcher, Bob Moore, Shields said his name was.

This boy was tall though not as heavy as Jackson. His face seemed strained and gaunt, his cheeks hollow and pale. He had a body like a greyhound, all bone and wiry muscle. His fastball seemed pretty good. Still, these big kids from Washington, shirts bunching up on their muscled arms, would probably jump all over him. But Moore struck out the first two batters and Marine smiled, finding himself once again caught up in the game. It never mattered; even though they were just two high school teams and it was hot and the field stunk, Marine, loving baseball as he did, admitted that the game had caught his interest. The drama of the unknown Bob Moore, pitching instead of the injured star Jackson against Washington for the county championship was compelling. He almost forgot what he was there for.

After Moore struck out the last batter in the first inning he walked off quickly before the umpire could change his mind. His arm motion had felt perfect on that overhand curve; the slow backward scoop, the sudden bend of his elbow and catch of his wrist behind his ear, and the quick snap down his body at the release of the ball. It had dropped off perfectly on the outside corner, a little wide maybe, but the umpire had given it to him. That curve had gotten him through the first inning safely, his fastball hadn't felt good, maybe it would come later, but surely Washington would catch up to him by the third or fourth. He had never seen so many big people in one place. He sat down and breathed heavily, trying to relax. It was the county championship. There was a scout in the stands.

"Good inning," Herbert said. Jackson slapped him on the knee. Herbert held the scorebook. "Watkins, Anderson and Sundermeier bat for them next inning. You remember Watkins and Sundermeier from last year." He went on, tracing pitches to throw, mentioning each batter's weaknesses, but Moore hardly heard him. What Herbert had said in the locker room bothered him. Did Herbert really think he had a chance as a prospect? No scouts had talked to him. But if there was a chance. But his dad would kill him if he knew he had been talking to a scout.

"I know you, Bob Moore, you're my son," his dad had thundered over his mother's fluttery, quieting hands. "If

you have any kind of half-decent year you're going to want to be talking to scouts and they'll want to talk to you. But no boy of mine is going to fool around playing ball half his life. I've worked like hell my whole life just to be able to send you to college. You got brains but you also got opportunity. If you don't make it big in baseball then where you gonna be?" Bob Moore had sat motionless as his father had paced the kitchen floor; suddenly he stopped, leaned over the table. "Bobby, your mom and I love you," he said, his voice softening. "We want the best for you. Believe me, you're only gonna get the worst if you play." Bob Moore working his fingernails in the deep grooves of the kitchen table had felt his father's desperation and had been convinced. They had always been close; they went fishing and to the beach and his father had spent many hours crouching in the backyard catching his pitches. He loved his father, too, appreciated the sacrifice he had made and wanted to obey his father's wishes. He had given up the idea of playing ball then and there. So he hated to think now there was a chance he could make it.

"Got all that?" Herbert said, tossing the scorebook down, jerking Moore back to attention.

"Yeah. Fast balls low and away." He scraped his spikes along the cement floor of the dugout.

Herbert laughed. "Close enough." He paused, checking the straps on his shin guards.

Jackson walked by. "Keep it up, man." He winked. "Scout's up there." He moved to the end of the dugout.

"Feel better?" Herbert asked.

"Ehh." But the thick oily sweat on his arms and chest and the sun on his neck was slowly relaxing him; he felt he could almost sleep. Strange, on the bench he could nap but on the field he fought to hide his trembling; it was as though there were two different worlds.

"You did fine. Be sure to keep throwing that overhand curve, they aren't touching it now but when they do it'll be in the dirt. Don't worry about the fast ball, it'll come along, we'll use it as a waste pitch for now. Keep it up and the scout will have you in Baltimore tommorow night."

"Come on, cut the shit."

"He stayed, didn't he?"

"I didn't notice."

"Jackson did. Jackson isn't pitching but the scout's hanging around," Herbert said. Moore kept his eyes on the field.

"He stayed to see you and Jackson hit," Moore said. "He doesn't even know about me."

"You're just saying that because you think if you believed that scout was here to see you, you'd get nervous and blow up."

"No," Moore said, turning to look at Herbert, "I just hate to think there's a chance he'll talk to me because my

dad doesn't want me to play." They stared at each other.

"Really?" Herbert said. "Is that it?"

Moore nodded. "That's it."

Herbert looked back at the field. "McGuire struck out again. Three up, three down." They stood as the rest of the team trotted out to their positions. "If you think you can make it that's your decision. You gotta tell your dad to cram it. My dad wants me to play ball really bad, on the other hand. I told him to forget it." He turned and started to the plate, but Moore grabbed his arm.

"Why? Why don't you want to play?"

"I hate to travel," Herbert said.

Joe Marine saw Moore laughing as he walked to the mound for the second inning and wondered what Herbert had said to him. He could think about things like that now, early in the game when things seemed to go so slowly and there was little tension. The game would speed up in the middle and, he knew, slow down again with pitching changes, pinch-hitters and the players' own nervousness and heightened concentration in the last inning or two. Now he sighed; the first inning had seemed interminable and Moore was just beginning to pitch the second. But the second went quickly as Moore again put down the side in order, surprising him with excellent control of several types of breaking pitches to complement a good, live, sinking fastball, darting below

and beyond the reach of Washington's bats. And, in the back of his mind, Marine's irritation was relaxed by Moore's soft, soothing motion. He even smiled when, as Moore walked off, he finally realized that the smooth motion had lulled him to missing the simple fact that Moore was a complete natural, a born pitcher.

"What do you know about Moore?" he asked Shields.

"Moore? Why--wait, Jackson's up first this inning." Joe Marine watched Jackson, full of self-confidence, step in. He took a curve for a strike, then hit the next pitch, a fastball, cleanly over the pitcher's head into centerfield for a single. He had a nice swing, ran gracefully and well. Marine could tell Jackson was the athlete all the scouting reports said he was. But there was something wrong with the way he stood three feet off first, hands on hips, grinning at the pitcher as he looked over, brushing off the first base coach's instructions and warning with a nod. Somehow Joe Marine wasn't sure he liked Jackson.

"What a great kid," Shields said. "He'll go high in the draft, Joe. Orioles better plan on drafting him early or he'll be gone."

"Yeah. Is this Herbert?"

"Yeah. Watch for the hit and run. Herbert hits well to rightfield and Jackson runs good, you know that." Marine liked Herbert just as Jackson made him uneasy; he liked the way he smiled, face round and boyish, and nodded and exchanged

polite words with the other catcher before digging into the red clay and turning his attention to the pitcher. His long brown arms, thin and heavily veined, swung the bat smoothly. He liked Herbert even more as the boy drove an excellent, low curve ball into the gap in right-centerfield, scoring Jackson who had been running with the pitch. Herbert held up at second on the third base coach's warning though he could probably have made it safely to third.

"That was nice," Marine said loudly over the surprised, cheering crowd. "That was very nice."

"Yeah. See the way they work that hit and run? Old Jackson never stopped coming."

"Yeah." He had also seen Jackson slow to a trot midway between third and home, then at the plate pat the catcher on the rear, then take off his helmet and grin at the small crowd and walk slowly to the dugout. It was a punk thing to do and suddenly Joe Marine didn't like Jackson at all. "Herbert looks good."

"Nah," Shields said. "I tried to tell you before. He's not sure what he wants to do, he don't want to go to college even though he's sure got the grades, but he just don't want to play ball."

"Damn." Herbert stayed on second as the next three batters were easy outs to Washington's angry pitcher. "Catchers who run and hit are tough to find."

"So are pitchers who hit like Jackson. You could make him into a shortstop if he couldn't cut it on the mound."

"Dammit, Charlie, I know Jackson's a good athlete, all right?"

Shields, feelings hurt, said, "I just don't want the Orioles to miss a good prospect because of me. I surely don't want you to miss the good ones."

"Don't worry, you'll get your fee no matter what, I'll see to that," Marine said. "Now let me watch the game."

Shields fell silent, slumping in his seat, as the game picked up momentum for Marine through the third, the fourth, the fifth. The crowd, now grown to nearly fifty, settled down, sunning themselves and smoking, now that there appeared little chance of one team running away with it. Moore continued to impress him with his poise, his maturity and brains and pitching sense; Marine was sure Jackson couldn't have Moore's pure baseball intuition. He worked well with Herbert--he shook off few of Herbert's signs--and he had control of the game. The batters waited for him, big men, long hair waving comically under red helmets, hesitating, digging in and stepping out with hurt, puzzled looks. He mixed his pitches well, different speeds and spots, and no matter the pitch his wind-up was always the same, no hitch or dropping of shoulder to offer a hint of a solution. Meanwhile, in the fourth, Jackson got another single and Herbert another double and though no runs scored, it was almost as though the two were teasing him.

Moore sat down heavily in the Central dugout, the thought of the last fastball for the strikeout ending the sixth still filling his mind. One inning to go; he figured he could make it now, pitch the shutout for the victory.

"Way to fire, man," Jackson said, passing by.

"Haven't won yet," he said.

Herbert sat down next to him. "Bottom half of their lineup next inning. Nothing to it. Hey, your fastball's come along great. Those last three hurt to catch. Look, if you have a strong last inning, it's gonna make up that scout's mind. He's already looking pretty upset."

"Which one is he?" Moore asked.

"You still don't know? He's the one sitting next to that jerk Charlie Shields."

"With the brown sports coat? The bald one?"

"Yeah."

"Shit, he looks like someone's father."

"So how's a scout supposed to look? Speaking of fathers, how are you going to handle yours?" Herbert asked.

"Whattaya mean, handle?" Moore could see his father leaning over the kitchen table.

"How are you going to convince him that playing ball's the right thing to do?"

"I'm not." He licked his fingertips, nearly raw from the baseball seams tearing across them on breaking pitches. "I'm not going to play. And I'm on deck." Moore got up,

picked up a bat and helmet and waited to hit, feeling guilty. Everyone else had been working hard to win the championship game and his mind had been on playing pro ball and he didn't even know how many outs there were. The batter ahead of him singled and he stepped up. The third base coach gave him the bunt sign to move the runner to second. Moore, a poor hitter, was relieved and bunted the first pitch, letting the ball come to the bat, the ball bouncing just to the right of the pitcher, making the play at second difficult, and he was thrown out easily. Moore trotted off, heard Washington's catcher call the first out, and sat down next to Herbert.

"Good bunt. That just upped your bonus money a thousand."

"Cut the shit, willya?" Moore said, drawing on the jacket.

"Hey, don't get mean. I just want you to think this out. Look, you could compromise. Play ball and go to school in the off-season. Give yourself four or five years to make it, then go to school full-time if you decide to quit. But Bobby, you'll make it. You know you will." The next batter walked, putting runners on first and second. Herbert looked at him carefully, unsmiling. "Well shit, the real question is, do you want to play? Do you?"

"Yeah, I really do. Baseball's the most important thing in my life. We've played together long enough for you to know that."

"Sure," Herbert said, "but you never acted like it."

"You're the one to talk, you're a good-hitting catcher and they're tough to find. You'd make it before I would. But you said you didn't want to play. Practice what you preach."

"Whether I want to play or not doesn't matter," Herbert said. "But if you want to play the real issue is you don't want to have to talk to your dad about it. Right?"

The next batter popped up. "Ahh. I guess, yeah, that's part of it."

"That's all of it. Now if you just told your dad what you told me I bet he lets you play. Look, I finally got up the nerve and sat down with my dad and told him I wanted to stay here in town, go to junior college and get a job, maybe play ball with school. He was real nice about it. Sandy's going to be here, too, see. I'm sort of quitting to be nearer to her." He paused, looking around the crowd. "And she won't even come to the games Do you see her anywhere?" He shook his head. "Bitch. Sometimes I don't think she's worth it."

Moore watched the field, thinking. "Jesus, I don't know. Maybe if I went to school in the off-season."

"He'll go for it," Herbert said. "I know your dad, he'll go for it. And if you and Jackson sign it'll take the heat off me. Jerks like Charlie Shields won't be punching me in the ribs the rest of my life asking me why

I didn't sign. They'll have you and Jackson to brag about. If you don't sign I almost have to. And I'm not sure I want to."

"Yes you do," Moore said, suddenly angry with him. "You're such a bullshitter."

"Suit yourself," Herbert said. "Now after the game, after everyone jumps on you and you shake the coach's hand, that scout will want to talk to Jackson and he may want to talk to you but you go up to him first so he's sure you're interested. And if he's not as interested as he ought to be you sell yourself. All right?"

"Yeah. OK. But-"

"But nothing." Herbert got up. "McGuire struck out again. He better get out of that slump. OK, look. Last inning and we've only got one run to work with. Just rear back and fire and we'll do fine. Feel OK?" Moore nodded.

Joe Marine made up his mind as Moore took his warm-up pitches. "Look," he said to Shields, "what do you know about Moore?"

"Moore? You're not thinking of talking to him?"

"Sure. Why not? He's got things going for him you can't teach. Fastball, size, and he knows the game, has a flair for it. What do you know about him?"

"For one thing," Shields said slowly, "I know he doesn't want to play. He just barely came out for the team this

year."

"But he's fine now. Maybe he was just lacking confidence.

"Nah. Besides, his daddy don't want him to. He's a old cop downtown. Wants his boy in college somewhere. But anyway Moore don't want to play. Neither does Herbert. They don't want to do nothing." He shook his head. "Kids that age."

Marine sat absolutely still, watching Moore fidgeting, waiting to start and couldn't believe he didn't want to play. Kids that age, with that much talent always wanted to play. "I'm going to talk to him anyway."

"You're wasting your time," Shields said. "We should go catch Burger over at Northeast." But suddenly Washington High woke up and saw a chance to win the game as Moore walked the first batter.

"Moore's tired," Shields said. Joe Marine grunted. He hoped he wasn't, that it was just a momentary lapse. But the next batter slammed a high fastball down the line in left. The leftfielder made a fine backhanded grab to save the ball from rolling for a home run and his throw held the runners to second and third. But there were no outs, and Central's coach trotted to the mound. The crowd's silence was a gap of expectation. Marine wondered if the coach was any good, if he'd just try to settle the boy down or if, like so many high school coaches, he'd panic

and put in a new pitcher. After all, Moore still had his stuff and it was his game to win or lose. A coach would be heartless to put someone else in who could lose it just as easily. But no, he left Moore and Herbert to talk.

Herbert, his back to Joe Marine, gestured, shrugged as he talked, bent over to straighten a shin guard. Moore listened, nodding rapidly, gently fingering the ball. Then Herbert was turning and coming back to the plate and he saw Moore smiling, then grinning, then holding up his glove to hide his laughter at whatever he and Herbert had found to laugh about. And, Marine thought, whether or not he meant it, he was really laughing, and the picture provided the same sort of bewilderment for the batters that his pitching did. It was not a very subtle psychological game but Moore was right to try whatever he could at this point, for one of Washington's best hitters was waiting.

But he wasn't going to get a chance. Marine nodded approval as Herbert remained standing and held his glove out and Moore floated four pitches outside, loading the bases. Now the Central infield moved up on the infield grass, ready to force the tying run at the plate. The crowd was silent, unmoving; Joe Marine heard only the intent slapping of gloves. The confidence the Central coach had in Moore was borne out as Moore, keeping his pitches low, curve balls in the dirt, caused two easy ground balls to thesecond baseman who fired home for the outs both plays. Herbert wisely held the ball instead

of chancing a dangerous throw to first for a double play. Central's players sighed audibly and moved back off the infield grass and played for the easy last out, but Marine knew before it happened that they may as well have sat down and rested for Moore drew in one deep breath and fired three fastballs by the next batter to end the game. Herbert yelled and rushed out to grab him and seven others jumped on him from behind.

"I like the boy," Joe Marine said, nodding very fast. "I like him a lot. He has guts. I like that boy." Central's bench was on him now and the coach fought through to shake Moore's hand. "Guess I'll have a few words with him," Joe Marine said. Shields stayed seated. Joe Marine walked down and waited outside the dugout till Moore arrived. "You're Moore," he said. The boy fixed blue eyes on him, clearly excited. He smiled.

"Yes sir. Bob Moore." He offered his hand and they shook.

"My name's Joe Marine. I scout for the Baltimore Orioles. I wanted to come down and congratulate you on that game. You pitched a good one." The boy became more excited.

"Thank you. Thanks. I had a lot of help. Herbert caught a great game." He grinned.

"I should tell you I think a lot of the way you can pitch," Joe Marine said. "If I had a son I'd wanted to be

a pitcher I'd want him just like you. Your father must be a proud man. I envy him." Joe Marine saw the boy's smile fade, his eyes seem suddenly troubled. He went on. "Anyway I thought I'd ask if you were interested in playing pro ball. The Orioles are looking for good young pitchers like you."

Moore just stood. Joe Marine saw Herbert standing behind Moore a few feet, leaning against the dugout sipping a coke, trying to listen. He looked around but didn't see Jackson.

"No sir," Moore said. "I guess I'd like to play a little but not enough to work hard at it. Besides, my dad's been planning for me to go to college. But thanks for talking to me. I take that as a real compliment."

"Sure," Joe Marine said, stunned. Shields was right after all. "Sure. Best of luck, son," he said, and turned to walk away when Herbert was suddenly there, tugging at his sleeve.

BEACHES LAST FOREVER

(1)

Norman Goldman sat in the large, drafty dorm room and looked up and to the right from his desk experimentally, out the billowing yellow curtains. There was the ocean. Every day when he looked up from his desk he would be able to see the ocean. He would allow no distractions such as the ocean, however. It was given that he was here to work and work hard. It was a tough school to get into and to do well in; Troy College was known nationally as a seat of scholarship in the classics and liberal arts. Aside from the University of Miami and Barry College, Troy was the only reputable private school in Florida. Norman scoffed at Biscayne, at Rollins and Stetson. Troy was older and more established and well-recognized. His father had come here. He clasped his hands and looked into his lap. He was privileged; he was honored. He said a silent prayer that he might be worthy, that he might prove himself capable of carrying on the tradition of academic achievement and personal integrity that Troy stood for. But it was only Friday afternoon and he was already moved in. Classes wouldn't start until Monday and the upperclassmen on the hall had warned him not to buy his books till classes started so he

couldn't get a head start on studying. They all seemed friendly but he was loathe to impose. He would wait to be invited.

So he sat, crossing and moving his legs, leaning back in the chair of old blonde wood and soft yellow plastic seat. The arms and back were rounded and high; it was a comfortable chair. The room was comfortable. There were two single beds, two dressers, and two desks mirroring each other from the door into a bay window, which, he noted again with pleasure, looked out on the green ocean. A brown, dusty sofa lined the long window. The walls and door and moulding and floor were mahogany. The floors were covered in the open spaces by a worn grey shag rug. The building itself was dark grey stone imported from north Georgia sixty years before and made the school a dour prison among the pale green and pink stucco beach houses surrounding it.

The heavy brown door flew open, banging against the tall dresser. (He would have to find a rubber knob for the base of the dresser.) A suitcase was kicked through the door and Norman got up quickly. "Can I help you?" It must be his new roommate, his first.

"No." The voice froze him; in a second a tall, thin blond boy pushed another suitcase ahead of him, and carried a typewriter case and yet a third suitcase into the room. He put these down and nodded at Norman.

He took a deep breath and began. "Hello. My name is

Norman Goldman. I guess I'm your new roommate." He smiled but the corners of his mouth trembled. The fellow was eyeing him so coldly and commandingly.

"I'm Paul Stupinski." He looked around. "Which dresser is mine?"

"That one," Norman said, pointing to the left of the door, and sat down again. "Uh, where are you from?"

Stupinski left off a hard perusal of the room to fix his eyes on Norman. (Blue, Norman saw, cold icy blue and he nearly shivered though the salt air on his back was moist and hot.) "Ft. Lauderdale. This is my bed, then."

"Yeah. Ft. Lauderdale, I'm from Hollywood. We're neighbors. Where did you go to school?"

"Stranahan."

"Hey, I hope that's OK, I just went ahead and took the drawer and bed on that side, I didn't stop to think you might have a preference," he said, chuckling nervously.

"It's all right. Bathroom down the hall?"

Norman nodded. "To the right."

Stupinski nodded and left. Norman sat and waited, looking around the room yet again. Late afternoon would bounce gold off the brown and yellow in the room; they would have to get scarlet bedspreads. Too bad about the discordant grey rug, the only minor note in an otherwise mellowing symphony. Stupinski's bags were cluttering the rug now, one plaid, one brown cloth, one grey vinyl, and

the black typewriter case. Norman hoped they would all fit under the bed and wouldn't have to be lined up between the dresser and bed. The cases looked like he imagined Stupinski, from Stranahan, would be; big, tough, strong. Stranahan usually beat Norman's school, Hollywood Hills, in football. There would be an end to that here, he thought with relief. Troy had only a small basketball team and they played only junior colleges and usually lost. Waiting he was suddenly impatient for Stupinski to return.

But then he heard loud voices and heavy steps from down the hall come closer and closer and then three fellows passed the door. The nearest one glanced into the room and Norman, feeling like a small sad monkey in a zoo, smiled back. The one who glanced in suddenly reappeared, dragging the one next to him who dragged the one next to him. The three stumbled to a stop in the middle of the room and heads swivelling comically surveyed the room. Norman started to apologize for the mess but one of them stepping forward stopped him.

"Hi. I'm Barry Zaritzky." He paused as Norman watched the others examining Stupinski's bags. "What's your name?"

"Oh. Norman Goldman."

"Glad to know you, Norman. These two are David Abrams and Marty Taines." The other two hearing their names called grinned. "Are you comfortable here?"

"Yeah, sure, these are nice rooms."

"And you have one with a view. Most freshmen don't."

"Neither do most sophomores," one of the others said.

"But then Abrams is a sophomore only in terms of the fact he's been here two years."

"Anyway," Zaritzky said loudly, "I'm glad you're happy with your room. Your roommate here yet?"

"Yeah. Those are his bags. He's in the bathroom."

"Oh." Zaritzky looked over Norman's shoulder out the window. "Heckuva place to put a college, but I imagine they didn't realize they'd be in the middle of a tourist trap when they built it."

Norman smiled and turned to look out the window at the densely packed hotels and beach houses two or three hundred yards away on the beach.

"You know about leaving your doors and windows open, do you?"

"Ah, Mom," one of the others said. "Goldstein, you-"

"Goldman," Norman corrected.

"Goldman, then, you are advised of the right to have nothing to do with Zaritzky. You have the right to remain silent when he questions you. He has no official-"

"Come on," Zaritzky said. "If being helpful comes under the order of what you guys call officious, then-"

"That's something else you do, use big words nobody knows what they mean."

Zaritzky glaring at the other two saw Stupinski just

inside the doorway. "Oh. Are you Norman's roommate?"

"Yeah." They advanced on each other. "Paul Stupinski."

"Barry Zaritzky." They shook hands. Zaritzky introduced the others again.

"Hey." A head in the doorway. "You guys going to the Peg or somewhere tonight?"

"Or somewhere."

"Can me and Fischer go?"

"Martelli, you and Fischer can go to hell for all we care."

"Shit." The head in the doorway disappeared and Zaritzky yelled "Eight o'clock!" after it.

Zaritzky turned back to them. "See you all later. Oh, if you didn't notice, they're serving meals already, five to six-thirty tonight. Dining hall's on the other side of the quad."

"Yeah, thanks," Norman said. Zaritzky shook hands with them again (Stupinski taking his right hand from his pocket) and they all left. Stupinski bent to his unpacking. Norman fidgeting tried to think of something to say, then waited for Stupinski to speak, then left saying he was going for a walk around campus.

"Goldman, there's a nasty rumor about that you're from Hollywood Hills."

Norman started to answer but someone else said, "Twat's

wrong with Hollywood Hills?"

"That's it, you just said it."

"Hey, smoke me."

"Light it."

"Come on, you guys sound like a bunch of high school kids or a fraternity meeting at Florida State, not the intellectuals of Troy College on a social outing."

"By social outing you mean we're getting shit-faced."

"Martelli, you're getting shit-faced, the rest of us are getting enebriated."

"Isn't anyone getting drunk?"

"Not these heathen."

"Heathen, what do you call Miami Beach High?"

"Nu, it's all the same to those of us of the true faith."

"New Jersey, Taines? That's the true faith like Columbus High."

"That's a racial slur, good thing there weren't any niggers around to hear you say that."

"If there aren't any niggers then what's Taines?"

The voices were a loud, high mixed confusion for Norman. He settled into his seat, glad to be with them at the bar. He'd almost missed them. He had hung around downstairs in the dorm lobby at eight and they spotted him and told him to come along. Then they ran into Stupinski coming back from somewhere and dragged him along too. Now

at the bar Norman alternately leaned back and forward on his elbows on one of the two tables they had comandeered. The Square Peg was dark, noisy, and crowded. There was a juke box and couples danced in a small section at the back. There was a short enclosed bar, practically a booth, and many square tables lighted only by weak, melted red candles. The walls were covered with fishing nets, stuffed blue fish, an old gun or sword and in one corner even a crucifix. There were the usual signs; "God bless this house"; "When better women are made, Troy men will make them"; "Loiter at your own risk"; and one clearly belonging only to this bar, "Where square pegs fit into round holes." The floors were dirty vinyl and the chair legs wobbly and squeaky. After a long wait a bored thin waitress with red hair excruciatingly curled materialized.

"Unless anyone here is rich," Zaritzky said, looking up and down the table, "I assume we'll simply want pitchers of the house draft and keep it coming. All right?"

Everyone shrugged and the waitress left. Zaritzky punched the guy next to him and said something about a Rosenbluth who tried to order a mixed drink and angered everyone. Norman couldn't quite hear and leaned across the table so if Zaritzky turned his way he would notice and speak louder. Then he heard Zaritzky say that Rosenbluth left in the middle of his junior year, but Norman couldn't believe it was over a mixed drink. What was so

wrong about ordering a mixed drink, he wondered?

Then Zaritzky turned and looked right at Norman. "The big tradition is on his side, anyway. High scorer for each basketball game gets his beer bought for him after the game. Not to exceed twenty-four beers." The fellow next to Zaritzky lifted his hands gently, took sight, and flipped his wrists at an imaginary basket.

"There isn't any football team?" Stupinski asked, the first he'd spoken, and an idiot thing to ask, Norman thought, of course there was no team.

"What, you want free beer too?" the basketball player asked.

Zaritzky turned to Stupinski. "The founder would turn in his grave if we did. It was tough enough getting basketball approved I heard back in the fifties. Anyway, with a school of five hundred in the classics and liberal arts you aren't going to find many proficient football players. Did you play?"

Stupinski's eyes snaked around the room, a halfback surveying a broken downfield. "Uh huh. I played."

"You can play in the quad game," the basketball said. "Every afternoon a few of us get together for a little game."

"Where are you from?" Zaritzky asked, ignoring the basketball player. "McArthur?"

"Stranahan."

"Oh, here's the heathen, guys, from the goyische hordes of north Broward."

"Hey, watch it," said the basketball player, "he's my man, a true Polish Catholic, I bet, right?" Stupinski nodded. "Practically an Aryan. I'm going to adopt Stupinski and take care of him."

"The way Taines took care of his girlfriend last spring?" someone asked.

"What girlfriend?"

Norman joined the laughter. As the evening went on, hour on hour, he lost count of how many mugs of beer he had. He and Stupinski were sharing pitchers and he had bought two and he assumed Stupinski had bought two. Everything seemed blurred and quick and stained yellow. The conversation had been flowing over and around him all night and now he grasped at it.

"Taines," he said. "Taines, where are you from?"

"Newark, New Jersey. Nice little town, you'd like it, Norman, everybody does, has a nice reputation." Norman giggled; Taines was as drunk as he was.

"Yeah, I've heard of it. What I want to ask is, what were the women like there." Staring at Taines he was conscious of the others looking at him.

"What do you mean what were they like."

"I mean how did they feel about sex."

Taines shrugged. "Nu, like anyone else. You can

list the attitudes. You know they want it, that's A. B, they got terrible guilt feelings, like Catholics do about most stuff. C, they don't want to lose the virginity, not really."

"The issue of the tissue," the basketball player said.

Norman nodding said it was true.

"But if you mean are they any looser or more willing or whatever, well." Taines shrugged. "My guess is it's the same wherever you go. People are people, and like that."

"Very profound," said the basketball player.

Norman nodded convinced. "But do you find them loose."

Taines considered, then allowed a smile. "In their own way."

Norman could see Taines was just being evasive. He would have to take the discussion on himself. He glanced at Stupinski who was staring thoughtfully into his beer, running his finger around the glass. "In my own experience I've found that the girls at Hollywood Hills were known to be pretty loose." Everyone watched him but Stupinski and he paused. "Not that it helped me out the least little bit." They smiled at him and nervous he went on. "In fact," he said mournfully, turning his beer mug so the light caught in the indentations, "I think I can say that I undoubtedly am the only virgin at this table." They were laughing with him now; Stupinski turned to listen.

"Except for Martelli," the basketball player said, and

they looked at one of the others and laughed. Martelli was that little fellow, then, Norman figured. He half rose and leaned across the table, extending his hand.

"I want to shake the hand of another virgin," he said. "What's your excuse?" he asked, bringing more laughter. He looked at Stupinski who was watching him and smiling slightly. "But of course that's what people come to school for, isn't it? To lose their virginity? Study has nothing to do with it."

"Not in Salvation Beach, Florida," the basketball player said, and his words seemed to end the conversation. Heads bent together and murmurs were spoken low to the tables. Norman grinned at them all. They were good guys, even the ones whose names he didn't know. As long as he could handle the work--and he had little doubt about that--it was going to work out fine here. They liked him all right, he could tell from the way they looked at him.

He glanced at Stupinski quietly nodding at what Zaritzky was telling the others; neither seemed drunk. He watched Zaritzky, neatly trimmed hair in place, white shirt immaculate, gold ring on his right hand a precise band of light, his mouth working tightly, hands establishing boundaries of planes. No one had left and it occurred to him that no one would, that they were happy sitting in this loud dark place unable to hear each other, just drinking. Norman, ignored now as Taines gestured in response

to another's complaints, decided it was all right with him.

But then Stupinski got up. "I'm really getting tired," he said. "I think I'll go back."

Zaritzky sat up straight. "Uh. I don't know if everyone's ready to leave yet."

"That's all right. I don't expect you to. It's all right. I can walk back."

"It's over a mile," Taines said, a comic, rumpled buddha in dismay.

The basketball player stood up and reached over Zaritzky to grab Stupinski's shoulder. "You fat Jew, this boy is a jock. Not only is he going to walk but I bet he breaks out into a downright trot for part of the way. He hasn't been pouring beer down his fat-encrusted esophagus and-"

"Fat-encrusted esophagus?" asked Taines.

"I bet he's not only completely sober but perfectly capable of sprinting the entire distance." He looked fondly at Stupinski who looked increasingly uncomfortable under his touch. "My mad Aryan, my heathen Pole. The loneliness of the long distance runner means nothing to him."

"I'll see you all later," Stupinski said. He dropped a dollar on the table. "I don't know if I owe you, Norman, but that should cover it."

Norman protested gurgling, trying to hand the bill

back. Everyone said good-bye as Stupinski left.

Outside and blinking in the strong neon it took a second for Stupinski to remember which way to go. Then he saw the Holiday Inn to the right and knew the campus was back in that direction. The campus. He hadn't come to think of it yet as home but hoped he would soon. The fellows seemed nice enough. Abrams was a clown while Zaritzky seemed straight and serious. All of them probably smart, all from Hollywood and Miami, Jewish guys; one, Taines or Taves or something, from New Jersey. The guys at Stranahan called it Jew Jersey. He would have to remember to check the phonebook to see where the Catholic Church was. He ignored the curious glances of people he passed, bearded, slit-eyed guys; tanned, curly haired well-dressed men, thugs; he couldn't tell from the way the few garish women looked at him if they were hookers or not. He forced two old couples, the men with yellow and red blazers and the women with lacquered white hair off the sidewalk but moved aside gingerly for two dark, lank-haired bare-midriffed sullen girls.

Abruptly he turned right, away from the beach down a side street. He calculated he was about five blocks north of the college yet. He was a few blocks east, too, he realized as he came upon the bridge over the intercoastal waterway. These Florida beach cities were like the rings

around Saturn. First the wide black ocean, then the bright orange and green and white neon of the crowded beach area, restaurants and expensive stores; then the scruffy business area, marine supply stores and bait shops near the black band of the intercoastal. Over the bridge was the last ring, a rich residential area.

The houses behind thick cactuses or curved palms and circular drives were wide pastel stuccos with long picture windows. The rich grass recently watered smelled like rotten eggs. Here and there sprinklers still hissed, forgotten by their operators. Driveways held boats and big, dark cars, Cadillacs. Canals leading to the intercoastal cut the backyards in two; he could hear an occasional outboard's mutter. The whole area was frozen in the white artificial light of the street lights. He looked up into a full moon. Stupinski felt weak and deserted by the wealth. His own family had the same types of possessions, only in the diminuitive.

One car was an old beaten Volkswagen, the other a pink and grey station wagon you could see the road through the floor of. They had a rowboat and fished in the middle of a stinking, mossy canal. The green stucco was five years unpainted and the driveway asphalt cracked. The plants in front were brown and maybe dead. His father was a truck dispatcher at Port Everglades who liked the professional wrestling at the Armory and his mother's hair was never

lacquered. He wasn't ashamed of them but it made him mad. They worked as hard as anyone else. It just wasn't fair. The only fair thing that had happened was this scholarship. Stupinski figured he'd just as soon be at Florida State but going here was worth it if it made his father proud. He'd do his best. And he'd do what he could to make friends so he could be happy here with these rich boys. They were all nice enough, he told himself again.

The night was warm and windy, not the hot salt air of the afternoon, but something light and cool, exciting and daring. He'd been drinking and was on his own. He was out alone on the streets and going back to his room. He was so tense and alert from the evening that he couldn't restrain himself from running just as Abrams had said he would. He grinned. He'd show them, he'd run, he'd be tough to beat in a lot of ways. Trotting down the streets reminded him of home. Under lights like these, on nights like these, he had become a football player, throwing the ball with Steve Jarrett endlessly back and forth, up and down the street, never speaking. Sometimes till eleven or twelve. Then they'd go in and have a coke. Then a couple years after they started, maybe as high school sophomores, another guy moved into the neighborhood, Mark Cooper, a real athlete, better than he and Steve were, and he joined them too. They didn't go with a quarterback, an end, and a defensive back and compete, but lined up like a

team, a quarterback, halfback and end, or quarterback and two halfbacks. They ran plays, straight dives, pitch-outs, halfback passes and pass patterns. They ran everything, posts, slant-ins, Z patterns and bananas out of the backfield, and their favorite down and outs. Stupinski's arm grew stronger and stronger till finally he could throw even the deep outs, fifteen and twenty yards, and Steve and Mark would grin, trotting back and flipping the ball to him after the play, faces ghoulish in the white light.

Stupinski remembering now ran those patterns down these streets, looking over his shoulder for the ball and unheard cars or spectators. He ran a deep out so that he turned left and headed south again, figuring the college was close now.

For fun they would call the conference they were in. If it was Southwestern Conference the passer would lob wobbly passes short; Big Ten was bullets wildly off-target, Southeastern Conference was short to medium pretty much on target and Pacific Eight was the bomb. Sometimes they had names; Penn State's Burkhart, Bob Campbell and Ted Kwalick, Florida's Reaves and Alvarez and Durrance, Auburn's Sullivan to Beasley, Florida State's Heisman Kim Hammond to Barry Smith, Steve Tensi to Fred Biletnikoff. The boundaries were clear, wherever they needed to be. The street, the edge of the grass, the sidewalk, the end of a driveway, there was always room to make a Charley

Taylor tiptoe in-bounds catch as the others cheered. Stupinski was Ken Stabler waiting, waiting, patient in the pocket while Biletnikoff worked his way open, then drilling it in for the first down. Steve was Howard Twilley, putting a move on the street sign to freeze it where it stood and finding the seam in the middle of the zone for the clutch catch with seconds left. Mark was brilliant, making the over the shoulders catch and crashing into the parked car he knew was there all along, rolling over the top of the amazed defender and still on his feet to trot into the end zone, holding the ball high, a triumphant Paul Warfield. Or they copied the high school favorites of the time, John Sutton and Charley Trautwein and the incredible Duane Doel, who didn't make his grades at Florida and then died in a private plane crash. Stupinski slowed to a walk remembering Doel. The plane had crashed just north of Salvation Beach. He and Steve and Mark had gathered at Steve's house--in their games Steve was Duane Doel--and they sat, wondering why it had happened. Then Mark, whose father was always being transferred, moved to Minnesota and then they graduated from high school and Steve went to Florida.

Remembering all that pushed his head down and shoved his hands into each other behind his back. He shuffled, scuffing his tennis shoes through the deep grass. Then he looked up and saw the college, huge and grey, ahead of him.

Norman quit drinking when Stupinski left and was nearly sober by the time the others were ready to leave. He had a headache and was impatient and ashamed of the others who were clumsy and silly. Somehow he herded them together out the door (calling propositions at their waitress, safe in knowing she could not possibly take them seriously) and down the street to the car. Zaritzky claimed to be sober enough to drive; so, weaving wildly, they arrived back at the college.

Norman trudged, tired and dizzy from exertion, up the stairs well ahead of the others to his room. It had been fun but this was still Friday night; there was still the weekend to spend, there was still quiet Stupinski to deal with. There was registration, of course, but everyone said that took about an hour and a half, it was so organized. At his room he found the door closed and locked. Now he was a little irritated.

He unlocked the door and went in. "Paul," he said.

Stupinski stirred. "What."

"Why's the door closed."

Stupinski stirred more. "What do you mean why's the door closed. I was trying to go to sleep. It was so noisy on the hall."

Norman listened and heard nothing now that the others had gotten to their rooms. "You mean you don't know you're supposed to leave the door and window open?" He was trying

to be patient, of course Stupinski knew, everyone knew.

"No. I didn't know that. Why the hell are we supposed to leave the door open."

Norman moved away from the door and went to his bed. "Tradition. It's the tradition that people with rooms facing the ocean have to leave their windows and doors open as much as possible, especially during the late hours of the night for the benefit of everyone with closed off rooms. Lets more air through, keeps ventilation good. You didn't know that?"

"Of course not."

"I thought everyone knew that."

"I didn't."

He was being arrogant and Norman made fists. "Well. That's what my dad told me. Just one of the things people do for each other around here. My dad went here."

"Why don't they put in air-conditioning instead?"

"It would cost a mint to air-condition this place."

"So instead you have to keep your doors and windows open all hours of the night. What if there's a party going on."

"Parties after midnight are allowed only in the union."

"Oh." He looked at the door angrily, as though getting ready to shut it anyway; But then he turned over, away from Norman.

"Goodnight," Norman said.

KATHERINE IN TRANSIT

The people behind Katherine Burton pushed her into the Atlanta bus station refusing to let her turn or stop. The November air was cold. She blinked at the bright white lights, which curiously made the station look dirty. It was four a.m. and the bus had been travelling through east Georgia and South Carolina and North Carolina and points north all night and the previous day and her eyes were tired. She'd bought a ticket to Atlanta deciding it was a good enough place to stop. It seemed longer than six months since she'd left and the friends she remembered less well; still, she'd call one for a place to stay when it got late enough.

For now she would simply sit and think. She found a chair near the ticket counters facing all the other rows of blue, pink and yellow plastic chairs in the lobby leading out to the buses. Behind the ticket counters were restrooms and farther down a snack bar and a door leading to the street.

She looked around. The room was very crowded for the early hour. Standing against the wall were many blacks, silent people with paper bags; a few, men wearing dark jackets and thin ties and women with large bright hats, had suitcases; they were going long distances, to Cincinnati and Detroit and Pittsburgh.

The walls were also lined with pinball and vending machines dispensing sandwiches, cold drinks in plastic cups, candy, pastry, chewing gum. Napkins and wrappers lay on the floor like the litter of refugees. But these people didn't have the electric nervousness of refugees, just the patient poverty and helplessness. Katherine herself felt very awake and keyed up. Also against the wall, leaning against a pinball machine was a man with greased back black hair, white teeshirt with cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve, straight legged blue jeans, white socks and black loafers and he didn't just stand, he ruled, dominated, legs shoved challengingly out in front of him blocking the aisle. Behind him on either side, leaning against the machine as though if they moved it would fall, were smaller men, pop-eyed roosters with the thin black hair, the sharp features of southern Scotch-Irish farmers. One of them was scraping some dirt off his jacket with a knife. The other, the smallest of the three, kept clenching his right fist and rubbing it in his left palm as though it were sore. They were looking for a fight, Katherine thought, and she loved them for it. Their sharp-jawed leader she named Willie Joe, the little man on the left Tiny and the man on the right The Knife.

"I bet you're Church of God."

Katherine glanced back towards the seats to a man facing her two rows over and to the right. He was tall and very

thin and had short blond hair. He was probably about thirty. He had the utterly calm clear blue eyes of a lunatic. Katherine could have sworn she had seen him somewhere before. He was smiling benevolently at an old black couple. "Mother, I can tell you're Church of God from the smile on your face." His voice was loud and resonant. Katherine saw the old black woman nod briskly in agreement and say something. "God bless you," he said. "God bless you. Have faith in Christ." He looked around, smiling at the others sitting near him. "You can always tell people who are Church of God from the smiles on their face." The black couple grinned; evidently they were Church of God, Katherine thought, snickering.

Then they got up. The blond man--Katherine thought he should be a preacher whether he was or not--leaped to his feet and grabbed the old woman's suitcase and carried it to the door. Along the way he tried to take the old man's case too but his offer was politely refused. At the door he gravely shook hands with both and watched them leave. He waved out the door once. Then he walked back to his seat, smiling broadly. She thought maybe it was that she was just dizzy and confused from the travelling but the man looked terribly familiar, she was certain she knew him from somewhere. He looked first to the bald man reading sitting next to him and then to the soldier across from him, smiling, as though trying to decide who to talk to next, then suddenly

looked up and straight at Katherine. Her heart jumped as he rose and started towards her, but he walked past in long easy strides, smiling first to one side and then to another, and pushed into the men's room opposite the ticket counter.

She looked back to the lobby and noticed the man she had named The Knife leave his post beside Willie Joe and saunter past the first seats, past Katherine to the all-night snack bar just beyond the ticket counters, all the way to the other side of the station near the door. He said something to the lady behind the counter. The Knife leaned against the counter, magnificently bored. The he straightened up and grinned and nodded to a girl walking by, and turned his head to watch her go. Finally he paid the woman and brought three plastic cups back to the other two. The shorter one, Tiny, accepted his, nodded, and started to drink.

But Willie Joe, after taking a sip, just stared at his until The Knife realized he wasn't drinking. Then he indicated the cup with his hand, holding it away from his body. He said something to The Knife. Katherine strained but couldn't hear his voice. The Knife shrugged and answered, shaking his head. Willie Joe regarded The Knife more carefully and said something louder. Katherine thought she could hear him this time; his voice was high and hoarse. The Knife just looked at Willie Joe, mouth open, then

answered, looking more concerned. He reached for the cup but Willie Joe held it out of his reach, speaking a few more words. The Knife spoke more urgently, reaching again for the cup. Willie Joe brought the cup within The Knife's reach, then as The Knife got his hand on it he dropped it. The drink spilled on The Knife's jeans, splashing and dripping on the floor. It was purple, grape. Katherine clutched her suitcase; there was sure to be trouble now. She looked for a policeman. One stood over by the ticket counter, his back to the lobby, studying a timetable. The people around The Knife and Willie Joe moved away carefully; Tiny stood absolutely still, eyes fixed on Willie Joe. Katherine watched The Knife. Willie Joe's back was to her. The Knife stared at Willie Joe for a long twenty seconds as Willie Joe seemed to hold his gaze and Tiny backed away. Then The Knife moved past them, past the seats and Katherine again to the snack bar. He stood very still and said something to the women again, and brought back another drink for Willie Joe, who accepted it with a nod and threw it down in two large gulps. The crowded room seemed to settle and talk picked up. The preacher came back from the bathroom, still smiling and unaware of what had happened. Katherine sighed. That was all she needed, to witness a knifing.

Katherine opened her purse and took out her compact and looked at herself. She was a mess, her long, straight

blond hair tangled from sleeping on the bus, her eyes startled, red holes. Her blue jeans were sticky and dirty and pulled up on her legs so that her bare ankles shivered; her wool socks inside the tennis shoes were wet with perspiration and her grey sweatshirt made her feel warm but unattractive and sluttish looking. Her bra itched. But looking at her face in the compact mirror, feeling even as badly as she did, she reminded herself of her father, with the straight blond hair with the light frizz, long horse face with the hooked nose, the flirtatious brown eyes.

The last she had seen him had been at her apartment in Atlanta in May. Her family lived in Macon but after graduating from Georgia in art she got a job doing layout for an Atlanta advertising group. Her parents were divorced but her mother was still trying to serve her father papers for child support; he avoided her successfully until the morning her mother almost caught him at Katherine's apartment. Katherine had helped him escape on the condition that he send more money home now that he had steady work in television advertising. Besides, she couldn't let him be caught, he was her father and she loved him, felt close to him; she disliked her work and was lonely and felt comfortable with his friendship and advice while her mother was remote and unsympathetic. Her mother had been furious at Katherine for letting him get away, and Katherine had felt her mother's disapproval so strongly, all the way from Macon,

that she had run, like her father, north to New York City a few days after he left. He had given her his office and home phone numbers though not the addresses.

As soon as she had gotten off the bus in New York she had asked directions to public phones and had been sent up the escalator to the ground floor of the Port Authority. She had walked across the large open lobby, a little frightened of the large crowd, to the row of pay phones. She had set her suitcase down between her legs and had reached into the blue jeans pocket for the slip of paper with the phone numbers. The first two phones she had tried were out of order; finally one worked.

She dialled the office number. No one answered. The office must have closed for the day. She tried his home phone. No answer there either. He had gone out to eat, perhaps was out working on a film. She thought at first she could go to the office, she could find the address in the phonebook, but then it occurred to her if no one answered the phone at the office then no one was there. She looked in the book anyway and didn't find his name. He was unlisted. It would do her no good to go to his home either, she realized; the same thing applied. It would be his home but she wouldn't be able to get in. She tried the numbers again, fumbling nervously with the nickels. Still no answer. She wasn't sure what to do. She could wait in the Port Authority, maybe buy a newspaper from one of the newsstands

in the middle of the lobby and read, sitting on her suitcase. The noise and hurry bothered her. It was colder and less friendly than Atlanta which was bad enough as big cities went. She was hungry. She would go and get something to eat and call again.

She left the Port Authority and walked east along 41st Street. She looked for a diner or a restaurant but instead ducked into the first pay phone she saw. She was hungry and it would be dark soon. She had to get in touch with her father. The phone booth was scarred with knife-written legends, loves immortalized, initials recorded. She dialled; no one at the office; no one at home. She stood in the phone booth breathing, watching the fog expand and contract as she exhaled and inhaled. She moved first closer and then farther away from the glass and judged the difference in the effect of her breath. Then the glass became too warm and refused to react in that spot. She started to turn to another spot in the booth but someone knocked on the glass behind her and she jumped.

"I gotta make a call," a woman told her, staring, mouth open.

"Oh," Katherine gasped, and struggled to get her suitcase out of the booth. "I'm sorry." She continued along 41st and then, on a whim, turned left at a red light and walked the block to 42nd, and saw Times Square ahead of her. She had been to New York only twice before so had forgotten

where Times Square was and only knew it when she saw it. At least now she knew where she was.

But she saw that she would have to make a decision rapidly. She was going to have to find a place to stay. It was nearly five and there was always the chance that her father wouldn't be back till late, or even that he had gone out of town for a day or two. She was going to have to find a place to stay. The thought kept working at her. She wasn't sure where to find a reputable place. She was afraid to ask anyone for directions for the people seemed slippery and scowled as they slid by her. She walked towards Times Square, looking as well as she could down the avenues for places. But Times Square, that wasn't supposed to be such a good place to be around. It was so confusing. Then, looking to the right, she saw a sign. The Times Square Motor Hotel. It sounded respectable somehow, like a Howard Johnson's or a Holiday Inn. She almost ran down the grey, dirty street and walked in the entrance. There was, miraculously, she thought, a free room; or maybe it wasn't miraculous, maybe it was a terrible place and no one who was respectable stayed there. But the blond clerk didn't leer, he was just quiet and bored. She registered nervously and followed the bellboy gravely, as though to instill a dignity and propriety which might otherwise be lacking. Then, finally alone and locked in, she relaxed. She was warm, she was safe, she could stay there until her

father came to rescue her. She couldn't believe her luck. She was making her way in the biggest, nastiest city on earth.

She picked up the phone next to the bed--she was beginning to notice the phones, this one was black and squat rather than hung on a wall--and tried again to reach her father. Still no answer. She would call later. First she had to think things out. There was the possibility that her father wouldn't come home for a few days. She calculated that if she ate little (which reminded her, she was hungry) she could hold out for a week or so. It would be all right, and he was certain to come home in a few days. She became more confident and noticed the room for the first time. It wasn't bad, a little drab and small, but it seemed clean and the noise from the street wasn't bad and above all she was safe. She turned on the television. There was a baseball game on, the Mets and the Pirates. She used to like baseball, perhaps while she waited she would go out to Shea Stadium one day and see a game. Maybe even the Atlanta Braves would be in town. It occurred to Katherine, and she laughed, clapped her hands once, bouncing on the bed with relief and nervous energy, that after all she'd only been in New York twice before, that really she had never seen the town. She would take a walking tour of the greatest city on earth. It would be a nice vacation. If her father didn't show up for several days, almost a week, it would be fine.

She laughed, pushed herself back on the bed. If she only had a bottle of scotch, she thought, things would be perfect.

But all she really saw of New York were telephone booths. In movie theatres, in art galleries, in office buildings, in the UN, from Central Park to Chinatown, she explored the vast world of New York communications. She began to form preferences, to look for only certain kinds of phones. She liked the kind in office building lobbies which were attached by segmented silver metal wire to the silver plates sitting flat against the walls. She began to avoid phone booths altogether. Most of them didn't work. Also they reminded her of gangster movies where thugs were told to go to a certain phone booth at a certain time for instructions, only to be blasted by a passing black car. A boy had broken up with her once calling from a phone booth on his way out of town. There was no way a phone booth could bring her luck.

She walked around Manhattan and realized she was seeing nothing of the city. After four days she knew she couldn't stay longer. Her father simply was out of town and might not return soon. She was running out of her savings quickly. She was going to have to start something else. But what? Katherine was at a loss to know what to do. She walked the streets continually and even got to know ticket takers and doormen. This she found depressing and had to fight anxious tears. She was always hungry. She was restless and needed

to be at some kind of work. New York was the capital, the place to be for her field, but she didn't like being alone there. New York, the land of opportunity, had failed her. It was big and it was exciting but it had failed to produce her father and it had failed to welcome her, to create in her a feeling that she could live there, make a home of it.

She passed the travel agencies near Rockefeller Center and looked in the windows. Miami Beach was full of old people. Colorado, everyone loved Colorado, it was a fad. Los Angeles was so far away and smoggy and too big. Maine. Maine. There were really no big cities in Maine but there were lots of resort towns which undoubtedly put out lots of advertising. She would to go Maine. She checked out of the Times Square Motor Hotel (the blond clerk smiled and winked) and went to the Port Authority and caught a bus to Portland. But, tired of riding buses, and looking for good prospects, she got off earlier in Ogunquit Beach.

Now Katherine Burton realized that she was staring unthinkingly into the eyes of a girl opposite her. She smiled shyly in apology. But this was Atlanta and the girl smiled back.

"Are you waiting for someone?" the girl asked. "Did you just hear, a bus from New Orleans was announced. Are you waiting for someone on that bus?"

"No," Katherine said. "I-" What had she decided to do?

"I'm waiting for it to get later so I can call some friends here." It was a quarter to five.

"Oh. I hope you didn't mind me asking. You just looked like I feel. I'm waiting for my fiance. He's supposed to get in soon and I'm sort of nervous. He's coming from Memphis. He works there now, I mean he just got a job there and he's settling in, finding us a place. We're getting married in ten days."

"No wonder you're excited," Katherine said. Somehow the girl's happy apprehension set off a warning in Katherine. "Do you live in Atlanta?" The girl nodded.

"It seems so silly to say this," the girl said. "I mean I don't even know you." Katherine smiled encouragingly. The girl seemed young and fresh, friendly and trusting to be talking to a stranger in a bus station. The girl's face had no wrinkles; Katherine suspected her own was covered with them by now. "But it really feels neat to think that we're going to be spending forty years together at least. It's going to be such a good life, I can feel it."

"Mm. How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Have you been to college?"

"Oh sure, I tried it awhile, everyone does, but I just don't like school. I guess I'd rather just be married. Are you married?"

"No, I guess I never met anyone," she said, then was

angry with herself for being so apologetic, for sounding like a pitied, defeated spinster. "But I get along," she added, trying to imply mystery.

"Marriage, though," the girl countered, shaking her head. "It's sort of scary. I guess I'll just have to trust in our love, to believe that it will help us through the bad times. I'll just have to trust Charlie," she said. Katherine started. Charlie was her father's name. She still hadn't been in touch with him and he still never answered the phone in New York. She wondered if he'd been sending money home. "He's awfully smart. And he has such a good job, at least money won't be any problem for us. It's such a problem for so many young couples, it causes so many divorces. But money won't be a problem for us. We're going to get along just fine." Katherine's nerves were set off again; money wasn't the whole question, she knew that. "And my parents really like him. They never liked anyone I went with until I brought Charlie home to meet them. They love him. And I think his parents like me OK, too. Oh, I think everything's going to work out just fine, don't you?"

"Sure," Katherine said. The bus from Memphis was announced and the girl jumped out of her seat and turned to face the door. Then she turned back to Katherine.

"I'm so happy," she said, beaming.

"It's never going to work," Katherine said, unable to be quiet. "You're way too young and you don't know what

the hell you're getting into. Just because your parents like him and he has money doesn't mean everything's going to work out. Marriage is a tough thing. You couldn't even last in college, how do you think you're going to be able to run a marriage? You're just young and foolish."

The girl stared, wide-eyed, then jumped up and ran to the door to wait. Katherine, exhausted and embarrassed, watched her hug a tired, harried-looking man before he even saw her. He looked surprised and Katherine thought annoyed by her grabbing him, but the girl only looked Katherine's way triumphantly before leading the man away. But Katherine knew, she'd wanted to be in love like this silly girl. For a long time, through college and the two years earlier, she had wanted very much to be in love. In Maine, she reflected, calm again, there had been the chance. In Maine, in Ogunquit Beach, she had met Donald.

It had been an early November winter in Maine. The sky and ocean had been a deep grey and the wind had been sharp and cold and the frequent rains stinging. All the tourists had gone. Katherine had lost the job she had gotten when she had come up from New York because the job had been with the city's publicity department and they told her that in winter its functions were minimal. She liked Ogunquit Beach, especially in the summer when the beach was crowded, businessmen sneaking up from Boston for the weekend with their

families, wealthy people who owned homes in Ogunquit, and, strangest to Katherine, Canadians, their French picking at her ears as she passed them walking on fine-grained white sand or hot white concrete.

Since early summer she'd been living with a massive, shaggy man who also worked for the city. His job was permanent, as a sort of city planner. His family had always lived near Ogunquit Beach. Beyond that she knew little about him, for he never talked about his life or work.

When she lost her job in late August, she skulked about the house guiltily because she could not support herself. She realized that Donald must have foreseen this, but had said nothing to help her plan for something else. It was as though he knew she would have nothing to do and the result was that Katherine felt like a kept woman. She was angry with herself for not realizing she'd begin to feel restless and lonesome without work, for thinking she could simply sit and read and cook and wait for Donald to come home. Often she would sit and think of her father, wondering where he was. She wondered if what she had with Donald was like her parents' marriage. She wondered how what she had with Donald had ever started. He had come into her office soon after she started working in Ogunquit, had stared, thick brows quizzical, had introduced himself and practically demanded shehave dinner with him.

She had agreed, surprised, and he had turned and stalked

out. She could barely remember his name. Through the rest of the day she had thought about him, unable to work, wondering what he was like. She was living in the small apartment of another woman in her office, a white-haired, bright-eyed spinster, and he came for her there at six. He looked gorgeous, she decided, tall and broad and round-faced, immaculately dressed in a three-piece grey suit. She followed him to his car in silence. "Tell me about yourself," he commanded. He started the car and they left.

She said she was from Macon, had a B.A. in art from Georgia, had lived in Atlanta, her parents were divorced, she had a younger brother and sister, and, grinning, said that she was unmarried.

"Good," he said. "And?"

She hesitated, said she liked baseball and basketball and swimming, voted Democrat, had enjoyed New York (the scrub bush rolled away up the pike, the blue sky deepened to purple as Donald steered along with one hand, the other drumming on the seat between them) and was looking forward to getting to know New England.

"Good," he said. "And?"

And, she went on, glancing at her own worried reflection in the side window, she loved her father, was uncomfortable with her mother, loved rainy days with a good book, Browning or Robert Frost. She loved working hard and calling old friends long distance, especially after a drink or two,

and really had an awful attachment to her own past.

"Good," he said. "And?"

She took a deep breath and leaned her head back on the seat. And though she was certainly ambitious she knew she secretly had a wish to be happily married to a good man and maybe even to have a child. She didn't believe in a Judaeo-Christian God but felt some force was in charge of it all. She wanted most to feel protected and cared for. But what about him?

"I've lived in Ogunquit all my life. My people were fishermen and Republicans. Most of my friends have moved away. Here's the turn-off to Westbrook. I hope you like Chinese food."

Another weekend they went west to the Sebago Lakes region and later she moved in with him as the spinster frowned and shook her head. It turned into a lovely summer.

She and Donald worked hard and she had been tired herself and hadn't minded his silence at night. The sunsets were garish pinks and purples and the dawns seldom brought rain. The days were never the steaming, intense heat reflected off the four-lanes slicing through Atlanta. She and Donald were content and comfortable. But when she lost her job, she was alone all day and ready to talk when he came home, ready to go places, see buildings and people and lakes and forests she'd never seen before. But instead they never went north to Portland or south the couple hours

to Boston, which remained some sort of illusion, something like New York, only greener, she imagined.

There was, she began to see, no future in Ogunquit Beach. Whatever there was with Donald was not love. There was no work. She began to think that she would leave Donald, go south. But she hesitated to leave because he had been awfully good to her, let her move in, had introduced her to his friends, was letting her stay even though she had no money except her savings to pay for food, and, for all she knew, for he was never demonstrative but instead short and sometimes nasty, he might really love her, and she certainly didn't want to hurt him.

She decided instead to have a talk with him. Katherine remembered that it had been dark, late afternoon, and it was the first night in a week that he had come back to the small apartment--the charmed intimacy of summer now forbade privacy--when she expected him. She had prepared supper, a boiled roast with potatoes and onions and carrots, his favorite, and the rooms filled with the sharp, gritty, vegetable and meat gravy smells. It reminded Katherine somehow of a farm. "How did it go today?" she asked, immediately angry; her voice sounded to herself docile and without energy, and she had not wanted to be like that this time.

"OK. It always goes OK. Why do you always ask? It gets on my nerves, Katherine." Katherine was a little surprised for though he was sometimes rude he never said anything

she did or said bothered him. "Where's the paper?"

"Here." Stunned and nervous she handed it to him from the table.

"And quit acting so defeated. It's like having a damn ghost around here, you're so pale and quiet and you just skulk around."

"Well how am I supposed to act," she said. "I lost my job. I like to work, it makes me happy but there's nothing to do."

"Not my fault you lost your job," he said, hands on hips, head thrust forward belligerently, blond hair nearly in his eyes.

"But you might have told me about it, warned me so I could've planned for something else."

"Katherine, I thought you realized. This whole state's been depressed since early 1973. I thought you realized that, at least." He turned to go into the small living room.

"I don't think you love me anymore," she said, scared, alone, tears coming.

He turned back; "I never said I did. And Katherine please try not to cry. It's embarrassing." She whirled to the sink, blushing at the melodrama of her movement. What could she have done to make him so angry?

After supper, which Donald ate without conversation or thanks, he again walked the few steps from the kitchen to the living room to sit and read. He seemed to derive a

curious proprietorship from walking from one cold, wall-papered and hardwood floored room to another. There was nothing for her to do but wash the plastic pink-flowered dishes and plain square silverware. Splashing the dishes in the sudsy water she planned what she would say when she was finished. She would give it a last try, tell him everything; that she was restless and lonely and that he had made her feel cheap and foolish. She would tell him how unfeeling and inconsiderate he had been, and how he had become virtually a stranger to her.

She dried the dishes and put them up in the brown cupboard over the sink and went to the door between the kitchen and living room and leaned against the frame. The paper had collapsed against his chest, crumbled under his arms. His mouth was open, his neck craned back and he was snoring. She looked at the pink top of the inside of his mouth for a second, at his white shirt and heavy brown corduroy pants, a heavy, baggy, insensitive man, and felt defeated, disgusted, tired. She could say nothing. She stood for a minute, picking at where the wall-paper was peeling; she counted the whorls in the off-white pattern. She walked through the living room to the bedroom and pulled her suitcase from the closet and threw her clothes into it, taking more care with the few work clothes, the pantsuits and skirts. She went to the bathroom, gathered makeup, toothpaste and hair dryer and delivered all this to the suitcase. She put on the warm

coat Donald had given her, burying her guilt at taking it under her anger at the way he was treating her. Then she picked up the suitcase and carried it into the living room and picked up her purse.

"Donald," she said loudly. He started, woke, blinked at her. "I'm leaving, Donald," she said. "This is just too..." the search for an adjective failed; "it's just too dumb anymore." She rushed from the apartment house and walked, suitcase banging against her leg the few blocks to the bus station.

Katherine Burton shuddered, remembering the cold, glad now to be in the south again. She wondered what Donald thought, what arguments he might have marshalled to make her stay. But she realized his arguments must have been weak defense compared to the feelings he had to prevent him from pursuing her. She had waited at the station two hours, feet cold on the bare tile floor, white fluorescent lights exposing her, she had felt, to the scrutiny of everyone there, and Donald had not rushed in, eyes wild, mouth gasping the cold air, jacket askew, to beg her forgiveness and to plead with her to return. She had taken the first bus south.

She looked up now from the tile floor in the Atlanta bus station and couldn't believe she had gone through all that just a day and a half before. But she must not think of that anymore, she decided. There were far too many problems in her future to worry about the past. It was now

nearly five-thirty. In another hour she could call who, Barbara Atkins, of course, Barbara, they had been good friends at the University of Georgia, and she could come get her, take her back to her apartment and help her plan what to do next. But until then she would not think about it. She would just sit there in the bus station and watch the people come and go, secure in their notions that the buses would scoop them all up and set them down efficiently and cleanly at their destinations. On time. Katherine smiled.

"My favorite brand. That's my favorite brand." Katherine jerked her head towards the voice; the preacher was still there! She hadn't noticed him, thought him long gone to Valdosta or Albany or Augusta. The preacher accepted a cigarette from the bald man. Katherine couldn't believe he was still there, either, especially if he'd been sitting next to that obnoxious preacher for two hours. The bald man hesitated a second, then gave the preacher the whole pack, perhaps as payment against contact with him further, Katherine thought. But it was the wrong move; the preacher was indentured through this gift to the bald man for life. He smiled benevolently at the bald man. "God bless you," he said. "God bless you."

"I'm just trying to give it up myself," he said, smiling uneasily.

"Are you Church of God?" the preacher asked. "You

wouldn't be Church of God, would you?"

"Well, no," the bald man muttered. "No."

"I could tell you were Church of God by the smile on your face." He smiled at those around him. "You can always tell if people are Church of God by the smiles on their face." His neighbors smiled uneasily or looked away.

The bald man got up and left, walking past Katherine to the snack bar; apparently he could bear the preacher's questioning of everyone but himself. Katherine, looking past the preacher to the door, where new arrivals were coming in, saw that Willie Joe, The Knife and Tiny were still leaning against a pinball machine. Willie Joe and The Knife had apparently made up. They had their heads together conferring intently, as Tiny listened, his rodent's face fierce with concentration. Willie Joe had even allowed The Knife to unsheath his weapon and he was diligently, thoughtfully cleaning his fingernails. Katherine wondered why the had not sat down, then glanced around the room. It was crowded and there were no three seats free together. She guessed they refused to separate, that none of the three trusted the other two alone together.

But it seemed as though this were the magic hour somehow; suddenly an announcer blared the departure of several buses to Miami, to New Orleans, to Columbia, South Carolina with stops along the way but Katherine couldn't understand the names over the scratchy public address. The crowd

suddenly halved, and Willie Joe with a wave of his hand pulled the other two behind him to seats opposite the preacher.

The preacher grinned at the three and nodded furious recognition. Here was triple the fun of guessing people's religions. They looked back at him uneasily, uncertain of the intent of the flirtation. Katherine wondered what the preacher would say.

But the preacher's smile tightened, became a frown. "Don't I know you from somewhere?" he asked Willie Joe. "I'm sure I've met you somewhere before."

Willie Joe glared at the preacher, then glanced hastily at Tiny and The Knife as though for advice, but their faces reflected blank, trusting loyalty; clearly they assumed he would handle it right. He muttered something to the preacher Katherine couldn't hear.

"I'm not sure where it was," the preacher said, shaking his head unhappily. "I meet so many people, I have to travel a lot in my work, that I'm always seeing people I think I've seen somewhere before. I just don't forget people's faces, and I think I've seen yours somewhere before. I just don't forget people's faces, and I think I've seen yours somewhere, Brother."

Willie Joe turned to The Knife and Tiny again, confused and worried. He spoke; Katherine heard him this time, petulant, final; "Well mister I don't know you." That closed

the subject for him. He leaned back in his chair and The Knife and Tiny, also satisfied, leaned back with him. They nodded, pleased.

"But I know you from somewhere," the preacher persisted. "Have you never been at one of my revival meetings? I'm the Reverend Bobby Johnson." The Reverend Bobby Johnson! Katherine had seen his posters tacked to telephone poles and pasted on derelict walls in Macon. He had staged a revival outside of town which seemed fairly popular. Then, suddenly, before his stay was to have ended, he and his workers pulled out the stakes, folded the tent and left town. He didn't sneak off with advance sales but there was still speculation.

"I do the work of the Lord all over the south, for all people. I discriminate against no one, not even the lowest of the low. That's why I think I've seen you somewhere." Katherine and Willie Joe connected his last two statements in a way the preacher never thought to; he was in trouble now and didn't even know it.

Willie Joe straightened up in his seat and regarded the preacher silently for a long half minute. The preacher still smiled stupidly. Katherine thought Willie Joe was probably trying to decide if the preacher meant the insult and what he should do about it if he did.

"Ain't never been to one of your crusades," Willie Joe said slowly, "and don't never want to go." Katherine breathed a sigh of relief; Willie Joe was in a forgiving mood and

nothing would happen.

"I'm very sorry to hear that, Brother," the preacher said. "I regret to hear that very much. I'm generally regarded to do good work for the Lord. Everyone needs the Lord, Brother." Katherine thought that Willie Joe regretted that the preacher was still talking. The Knife and Tiny had long thought this matter settled and when the preacher continued talking they looked at Willie Joe, confused and anxious, as if to ask if this guy was dangerous or just a nuisance. The preacher stopped talking about the Lord for a second and looked up at the spotted plaster ceiling.

"Well, I concede that it's possible that we've never met. There are lots of people in the south." He laughed and Willie Joe crossed his arms. "That's happened a lot, I see people who are very familiar and look like people I think I know. And a lot of the time it's like I say, it's my line of work and I see a lot of people I haven't met who just remind me of people I have met. But then there's another reason why so many people look familiar. Would you like to know what it is? Would you like to know why so many people look familiar to me?"

"No," Willie Joe said, very loudly. The preacher ignored him.

"When it turns out that these people don't know me at all, like you good people, who I could have sworn I knew, then I realize that's something else going on." Willie Joe

and The Knife and Tiny had had it, Katherine could see. They hadn't known what to make of this man, all devices had failed to shut him up; now he was going to have to be shut up, they all seemed to feel that now.

"Mister," Willie Joe said earnestly, one last attempt, "we don't want to know nothing about why you think you know us. We know you think you know us but we don't know you at all and there ain't nothing more to be said. Now will you stop bothering us? We got some planning to do."

"Brother," the preacher said, "I know you don't think you know me and I understand that. I just said that it was possible we have never met. But that's the wonderful thing, see, about seeing people who look familiar even though you don't know them. When something like that happens, you know what I assume?"

"Shut up," said Willie Joe, giving the preacher one last chance. The three got to their feet; Katherine saw that there was going to be trouble. She looked for the policeman. He was standing at the snack bar, joking with the woman behind the counter.

"What I assume is, we're all brothers in Christ-" he started talking faster, thinking they were going to leave "-all part of one family, and it's just natural that we should all seem familiar to each other. And since we're all part of one family, real brothers, I was wondering if you could help out a brother in trouble, a brother down on

his luck with a couple dollars." He smiled brightly at them but this was the last straw. The Knife took out his knife and the three surrounded him. "Hey Brothers," he said, realizing finally that their intent was hostile, "peace to you all in Christ, Brothers, God bless you," he said, "have faith in Christ," he said louder, but Katherine, horrified, saw The Knife and Tiny grab him by the arms and lead him out the door, with Willie Joe leading the way. The preacher's last cries reached the policeman, whom Katherine pointed in the direction the four had gone.

Katherine grabbed her suitcase and walked very quickly in the direction opposite, past the ticket counter and snack bar and out the other door. To her left was a row of pay phones. She would call Barbara Atkins, even though it was still early and Barbara would probably be asleep. Of course first she would have to get her number. She put a dime in the slot and dialled, waited. "Do you have a number for Barbara Atkins please? In Decatur, I think."

"Just a minute please." She waited, poised to memorize. "I'm sorry, I don't see a number under that name."

"Really?"

"I'm sorry, no."

"Thank you." She hung up and retrieved the dime. She pushed her suitcase off to the side, out of the way, and squatted on it. Now what. There was nothing to keep her in Atlanta and nothing to make her go. She couldn't go to

Macon and face her mother after all this time. She sat and watched the orange sun rise higher. It would be eight soon. She thought idly about nothing, the sun, the preacher, Barbara Atkins, the kind of work she wanted to do. Something quiet, somewhere small. Not in Atlanta, but somewhere easier to take. She realized then the best thing to do. She would go back to the advertising company here in Atlanta and ask them for a job but she hoped they wouldn't have one and instead could recommend another town, in the south but like Ogunquit, where she could find some advertising work. She would go and make a beginning on her own. That was exactly what she would do. Now she had a plan. She got up and seized her suitcase firmly.