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1:40 left...stole it went right by me...faster faster... can't catch him...down seven...quick...nice lead...got it...right...left...plant...up...under the basket...on his numbers...two.

-**Nice pass, man.**"

Five now...shit gotta stop him...gainin' on him...faster faster...get his dribble...hit it hard...off his leg...yeah out of bounds! Hurry...gimme the ball...Sandusky wigglin' four...foul line pick...turnin' - bounce it to him.

-**nice shot.**"

Down three...get back...gonna stall...they don't need to shoot...settin' up screen.

-**I got him.**"

Go for the ball...hand in his face...dumb shot...bricked it...shouldna shot it...Billy's rebound...gotta chance...nice pass...got it...fast faster...Mick's down court...lead 'em a little...Aww!...hard foul...prick didn't call it...our ball...Sandusky wants the two my play...set up out here...pick set...cut...got it...squared up plant...bank...yeah!...00:09...okay okay I see ya.

- **Time out, ref.**"

No waitin' losin' by one...goin' to the double-team steal it or foul.  
Listen.

**-“Everybody, sit down and listen. We’re goin’ man-to-man with a double on the ball on the in-bounds pass. Don’t cover the passer on the throw-in. Jim, you play the double don’t show it though, play like you’re playin’ the passer before he throws it in, then switch off quick and foul if you can’t steal it. If there’s a foul and he misses the foul we get it to Jim and get downcourt. Jim, you take the shot unless you see somebody open under the basket. No switches on the throw-in, stay with your man. If your man’s throwin’ the ball in switch to Jim’s man - number 4. Any questions?”**

No questions we know what we gotta do - get a quick steal...put it on me...steal it or foul him...no me stuff...all about winnin’ or losin’...but he put it on me...gotta put it on somebody...wants me to shoot it glad it’s me...what it’s all about...gotta win it now...HANDS IN!

**- “Let’s do it. Yeah yeah team.”**

Settin’ up a line gonna break different ways.

**-“Everybody get your man! Billy you got 4. I got the ball.”**

He’s bouncin’ it in - left - flick it away...yeah go baby...no no fuckin’ way.

**-“No way, ref. I never touched him.”**

**“Number 15 on the wrist one and one for number 18. Quiet son, or he’ll be shootin’ a technical.”**

Stick your whistle up your ass was a clean steal never fuckin’ touched him bad call!...woulda won it...went right to Mick...had an easy layup...Sandusky’s pissed, not sayin’ anything...referee’s a pain in the ass...treats you like a little kid...son this, son that...make the right call, man, and don’t fuck with me...calm down calm down we still gotta chance if he misses...looks nervous...gotta be...I’d be...didn’t take a deep breath, gonna miss it man...yeah!

**-“Mick, over here.”-**

Got it...half-court...00:05 left no time to set it up...go for the basket...get past him...can’t...stayin’ zone...00:03...slow down slow it all out...no sound...nobody yellin’...just rim...one more dribble...square up plant...forehead...flick wrist...what’s that?...blind couldn’t see wanted more time needed more time felt right though...nice spin real nice spin...looks good it’s goin’ in...**be**

***good be good Johnny be good just like ringin' the  
bell...yeah yeah yeah!***

Jim Collins' yellow-flecked feline blue eyes widened as the ball slithered through the net and the scoreboard changed to:

**VISITOR 55 HOME 56**

**TIME 0:00**

The referee standing at centercourt waved his hands over his head signaling the end of the game.

"Great shot, man."

"Way to go, baby."

"I dig it, I dig it".

The royal blue-and-white clad basketball team of Annunciation High School ran from the court champions of the Philadelphia Holiday Basketball Festival "Cool" was king and the control of emotion was the emotion shown in December, 1959.

In the locker room Coach George Sandusky rubbed Collins' close-cropped black hair and patted him on the back.

"One helluva clutch shot."

"Thanks, coach."

The shower room ritual went by in a blur of hot water, soap, and wise-assing teammates. Afterwards supine on the locker room bench, Jim remembered all the times he had practiced making the game-winning shot in a darkening playground, an unlit gym or outside his house under the streetlight. All that for the feeling of watching the numbers on the scoreboard change with no time left for anyone to undo what he had done. A quiet calmness came over him like it did after communion on Sunday morning. For a few moments his complacency ran deeper than the complacencies of the peignoir. Finally he got up from the bench and dressed in khakis, a navy blue turtleneck, and a red James Dean jacket.

Gliding into the night with Sandusky's congratulations echoing in his ears he said hello to three whispering, giggling girls outside the locker room door. A blue and white bullet-nosed 1954 Ford waited at the curb for him. The air in the car was warm and heavy, laden with the smell of burning tobacco from the butt that had just been flicked out the window. His father, a big broad-shouldered man, sat hunched over the wheel.

"I'm glad ya made that last one. When ya missed those fouls earlier I was sure ya were goin' to be the goat. Ya had that

guy, number 7, in your hip pocket.” Gerry Collins didn’t look at his son and spoke matter-of-factly brooking no disagreement. He had learned basketball in the church hall cages of the 30’s and when Jim was five taught him to dribble and shoot at a basket hung on the side of their cellar stairs.

“Yeah, I know. I should’na had to make that shot. We shoulda been way ahead by then.” Jim wanted a cigarette to soothe his nervousness - a nervousness that came on him whenever he talked to his father about what happened in the games he played.

“Well, I’m glad you did. It won’t hurt for the Big 5 coaches to see it in the paper tomorrow.” Pride resonated in Gerry’s voice.

“I hadn’t thought about that.” Jim slid further down in his seat pleased by the thought that Diane would read about him in the newspaper tomorrow.

“Yer gonna save me a lotta money when ya get that scholarship. I never had the chance yer gonna have.” Gerry said. “They’ll be offerin’ more than tuition and that means a lot. Who knows what Chamberlain got for goin’ to Kansas? Everybody figured Temple had him all the way. Nobody that good had ever left the city before. Ya can never tell what a nigger’s gonna do though. He just took the money and ran.” “Nigger” felt like sandpaper rubbing an open wound on Jim’s skin. He turned to the empty street and wished his father hadn’t seen the game.

“Don’t put me in Wilt’s class. I’ve never seen anybody that big, that good. He just goes over everybody.”

Chamberlain had dominated the Narberth Summer League and Philadelphia’s best college players while Wilt was still in high school. Nobody could stop him. The word from the neighborhood bookies was that Kansas gave Wilt a car and let him date white girls to get him to leave the city to play ball. Gerry had no doubts that the bookies were right.

“Just remember what happened when he played West Catholic in the city championship. It’s a team game and one guy can’t beat five no matter how good he is. West Catholic stopped him from gettin’ the ball.” He parked the car in front of their Osage Avenue row house that he had once described as ‘a brick cigar box dropped by a drunk golfer’ because it had been built on an old municipal golf course. Entering the house Jim cast his

eyes to the kitchen floor numbing his feelings like he had learned from Dean in his favorite movie - "Rebel Without a Cause." His mother stood absent-mindedly at the kitchen sink with a fork in her hand.

"They won by a point, Jim made the winning shot."

"He did, did he? That's a blessing. Wha' can I fix ya to eat, lad?" His mother spoke in an Irish brogue occasionally, even though she was a second generation Irish-American woman born in Philadelphia.

"Somethin' quick. I wanna meet the guys at Dinger's."

Jim hung his jacket on the door. The kitchen had the same linoleum floor and white cabinets on the wall as all the other houses on Osage Avenue.

"Always in a rush. You spend a lotta money on meals you could eat at home. Sit down and I'll make a sandwich. Howse about a Butter Burger?" Marcia, his mother asked.

"All right." Jim said and agreed to eat the frozen beef and congealed margarine sandwich that was customary on game nights. Eating in silence broken now and then by Marcia's questions about the game, Jim and Gerry answered tersely, occasionally looking from their sandwiches to each other for agreement. Jim finished, got up from the table, kissed his mother, and grabbed his jacket.

"See ya Ma, Dad. I'll be home around 1. Can I have the car?"

"No. Be back around midnight." Gerry looked up for a second and took a bite from his sandwich.

"How about tomorrow night?" Jim asked without hesitating.

"We'll talk about it later". Gerry mumbled through his food.

Opening the kitchen door onto the landing they shared with the Kaplan family next door Jim bounced down the black cast-iron steps to the alley between his row of houses and the next row. An emaciated tree stood sentinel-like on the corner of 61<sup>st</sup> Street. Under a streetlight in the middle of the block a basket and backboard was nailed to the streetlight pole. Jim nodded to the basket where he practiced after dinner every night during the winter and hastened his pace to ward off the chill. He hadn't argued about the missed foul shots, but he was still pissed at his father for bringing them up. His father had a way of taking

something good and turning it bad. At least Coach Sandusky had congratulated him and left it at that.

He entered Dinger's squinting at the fluorescent lights hung from the ceiling. In the front of the store on the left a white metal and glass cold-cut case was filled with meats and cheeses. The cold-cut case butted up against a white Formica service counter for wrapping the food. On the other side there were white shelves stocked with bread, rolls, and snacks. Several red leather booths, a Formica soda fountain lined with red leather and chrome stools, and a grill for cooking, and a pinball machine filled out the back of the store.

Jim lit a cigarette as he walked toward the pinball machine. It stood under a still cloud of smoke and was the setting for a mélange of half-eaten hamburgers and French fries. Quietly assuming Dean's air of cool detachment he took his place at the rear of the black leather motorcycle or royal-blue corduroy jackets lettered in white across the back with **Annunciation** watching Reds Hennigan playing pinball with intense nonchalance – legs crossed at the ankles, arms fully extended with his middle fingers loosely touching the flipper buttons. Reds shook the machine to speed the ball as it ricocheted off the bumpers and made a last second save to keep the ball in play. A resounding **BOCKKK** announced a free replay and he turned from the machine pushing to one of the booths until he saw Jim and twisted his arm behind his back.

"Hey, numb nut."

Simultaneously Peanuts Hopkins put Jim in a headlock.

"Leggo of me." Jim responded in mock pain. They laughed, pushing him into one of the red leather booths.

"61st and Callowhill here we come. Gonna celebrate. Diane'll want ya all to herself for winnin' the tournament, but it ain't gonna happen. Awww Jimmy." Peanuts falsettoed and grabbed Jim by the crotch.

"She's home tonight, hadda stay home to be ready for the SAT's tomorrow. Ya got no competition, who's drivin', man?" Jim looked at Peanuts.

"Just cross my palm with some cash for gas and I'm all yours." Peanuts said.

"How many points did you have, man?" Reds asked.

"I'm not sure." Jim knew he had 21 points - 8 field goals and 5 of 7 foul shots.

"Only ones that mattered were the last ones. Man I'da been shittin' if I had to take that shot." Peanuts said. Peanuts was Jim's best friend. They had grown up together and were both in junior year at Annunciation.

"I was lookin' for somebody open under the basket, but they had jammed everything up. There wasn't any time. They gave me the shot so I had to take it." Jim said.

"Yeah, yeah, we saw man. It was cool. You takin' SAT's tomorrow?"

Reds held out his hand palm up. Jim slid his hand across it palm down.

"No man. April when the season's over. Yer forgettin' I gotta another year before I'm the big man on campus like you."

Hennigan was a senior with a football scholarship to Notre Dame. A seventy-yard last-minute touchdown run on Thanksgiving against the neighborhood's public high school had clinched it for him. He was the leader of the Annunciation crowd and wore a leather jacket styled after the one Brando wore in "The Wild One." They rose from the booth and headed toward the door with Georgie Lozinak and Steve Naddeo following them. Georgie and Steve were permanent on the beer runs as the only 19-year-olds still attending Annunciation.

"How're things in Denmark? Little better tonight. I heard about it from your buddy." Joe Aldinger, Dinger's owner, said to Jim and pointed at Peanuts. He was a slightly built middle-aged man with a black pencil-thin mustache and slicked-back hair.

"Everything's cool." Jim said pushing through the front door.

"What was the shit about Denmark all about?" Peanuts asked.

"About a week ago I came in here and Dinger told me I had a Hamlet complex. Hamlet's from Denmark, man, you dig?" Jim had run out of his house that night. He hadn't told Dinger why.

"Dinger thinks he's so cool. I think he's a real jerkoff. Plenty of room." Peanuts snickered and opened the door of a wood-paneled red Chevrolet station wagon. "My old man borrowed my Merc so I got his. Probably steppin' out on Mom."

Jim sat between Peanuts and Reds in the front seat. Georgie and Steve were in the back. It was a short drive to Sam's. Peanuts parked the car in the middle of the block and turned off the engine. Taking money from his pocket, Reds turned to the back seat and handed it to Steve.

"Here's three bucks. Get us six quarts of Ortlieb's. Jim, yer not payin' tonight."

"They only sell us four quarts a piece. We'll get eight. OK, Georgie?" Steve opened the curbside door.

"Yeah, we'll be back in a couple. Later." Georgie said.

Peanuts, Jim and Reds watched them go into the side entrance with yellow neon lettering - "*Ladies Welcome*". In a few minutes they were back empty-handed.

"They got a new bartender. He asked for our driver's license. I told 'em we forgot to bring 'em 'cause we walked over. He wouldn't sell us the beer." Steve said, slumping into his seat.

"That's bullshit. After all the money we spent in there. How about South Philly?" Peanuts leaned over Jim and the steering wheel asking Reds.

"Let's wait a while. Maybe somebody we know'll come by." Reds rolled down the window and leaned back putting his arm and elbow where the window disappeared into the door.

"I can do without the beer." Jim said, wishing Diane wasn't taking SAT exams. She wanted him to come by her house after the game, but he hadn't because his father didn't let him have the car.

"Yeah, yeah, we dig. Ya jes don wanna us to get ya drunk. No way, Jimmy boy, yer ass is ours tonight." Peanuts said and squeezed Jim's thigh above the knee.

"Lay off, man. That hurt."

Peanuts was the group clown and good for a laugh most of the time. Jim wasn't laughing his thigh felt like it was in a vise.

"There's Stickney's brother. Give me the money." Reds quickly opened the door taking the money Steve handed him and walked to the corner. Two men were crossing the street. They talked briefly before Reds handed them the bills. Both of them went into Sam's and Reds waited with his hands in his pockets, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. A few minutes later the two men came out with four brown paper bags and the three of them walked to the car.

"Big party, tonight heh? Not so long ago we were doin' the same thing." Pete Stickney said, sticking his head in the car, looking around, and laughing before he walked away.

"These babies are good and cold." Steve put the bags of beer on the floor in the back seat.

Peanuts drove onto 63rd Street, turned to the left and five minutes later parked across the street from the Silver Creek Playground.

"Let's go man, go. Gimme three of them cold bqbies. Whose got the key?" Peanuts turned to Steve and Georgie and waited impatiently.

"Cool it, man. I got the key. It's covered, ya dig." Steve bent over, opening the beer bottles on the floor and handing three bottles to Peanuts. Peanuts gave one to Jim and one to Reds.

Jim drank deeply hating the bloated feeling it left in his stomach. He was in no mood to drink the two quarts of beer that were expected of him.

"Ahh man, this is what I've been waitin' for - a cold Ortlieb's." Peanuts threw his head back mocking a TV commercial. His bottle was half-empty when he took it from his mouth.

**"Here's a request for Jim from Diane. You are the daddio of daddios for putting it in the basket. The Monotones with Charles Patrick singing lead. Go pappa go!"**

"Oh Jimmy." Peanuts turned up the radio and grabbed Jim's leg again. Everyone began to sing with the Monotones:

**Tell me, tell me, tell me  
Oh, who wrote the book of love  
I've got to know the answer  
Was it someone from up above?  
I love you, love you darlin'  
Baby, you know I do  
I've got to read this book of love  
To find out why it's true."**

"Man, you two are getting serious." Reds said draining the last drops from his bottle.

"Not really, we just both dig that song." Jim's blushing face couldn't be seen in the darkness. Peanuts took the bottle from Jim's hands.

"Aw man, yer not drinkin'. Come on, our baby's gotta drink his bottle. Open up now, drink yer ba-ba." Peanuts squirmed his way from behind the wheel and sat on Jim's lap laughing. With his hand and forearm he tilted Jim's head back so that he could pour the beer into Jim's mouth.

"Get the fuck off me, man, I don't feel like it tonight. Leave me alone." Jim said laughing at first, then became angry the longer Peanuts straddled him.

"Leave him alone, man. We'll get him later, when Diane's around." Reds dug his elbow into Peanuts' ribs.

"Yeah, yer right, man. I'll get him at tomorrow night's party." Peanuts slid back behind the wheel.

Jim only drank a half quart of his beer while the others drank the rest. It was about 1 AM when they left their parking spot across from Silver Creek. On the way home Peanuts pulled over and got out of the car. He dragged a red wagon from the sidewalk, dropped the tailgate and took a seat in the wagon.

"Hey man what're ya doin'?" Jim yelled from the car.

"Come here." He waved to Jim to get out of the car. Jim walked over to the wagon. Peanuts gave him the wagon handle.

"Lay down in the back there." Peanuts pointed at the empty cargo space in the back of the station wagon.

"Reds, you drive this damn piece of shit and keep goin' faster until I yell 'chicken'. Winner's the one who goes the fastest before he yells chicken."

Reds took the wheel and drove while Jim held onto the wagon handle from the back of the car. The handle began to shake and bob as Reds picked up speed.

"Hey man, I don't know how long I can hold onto this." He yelled to Peanuts as the wagon bounced high in the air from a bump in the street. Peanuts bounced about two feet above the wagon and settled back down with a thud that almost turned the wagon over.

"Chicken." He yelled and Reds stopped the car.

"How fast, man?" Peanuts walked to the driver's door.

"33 miles an hour." Reds said.

"Who's next?" Peanuts looked in the car. They were silent.

"C'mon Georgie." Peanuts opened the back door and waited.

"No man, yer nuts. Ya almost flew outta that fucker and got hurt like I did last week. I ain't doin' no more of that shit." Georgie said, sinking further into his seat.

"No takers, heh. Okay, ya fuckin' pussies, I guess it's over. Take us home, man. Sometimes I think chicken's how he got killed." Peanuts got back in the front of the car on the passenger side.

"What are you talkin' about?" Reds looked from Jim to Peanuts.

"Dean." Peanuts said and fell asleep.

"He thinks that Dean was playin' chicken with another car but they didn't move like he figured they would. It was too late when he swerved. We hadn't even seen 'Rebel' yet. I couldn't fall asleep the night I saw it. It was too close to the truth." Jim said.

Reds drove in silence before dropping Jim off at his corner on 61<sup>st</sup> Street. The house was dark. Jim groped his way up the stairs to his room and flicked the light on next to his bed, lighting a small room with college pennants, grade school basketball trophies, a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, a forty-five record player, and a Blaupunkt table radio. He turned on the radio and lay on the bed with his hands clasped under his head.

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Wasn't nervous, didn't think about how I felt, just shot it... guess that's why it went in...less ya think the better. Old man never told me that...found that out myself...all those times shootin', pretendin' there was no time left...just concentrate on the shot nothin' else.

Felt like I was flyin' in the air takin' the ball to the basket droppin' it in the net. Didn't feel anything, didn't feel the ground, felt like I could be whatever I wanna be. What I've been waitin' for ever since I started. All he said was shoulda made the foul shots...fuck him.

No sense callin' her now she's sleepin'. Wanna do it right with her, not like Angie and me under the boards in Wildwood. Can't get her pregnant what happens then have to have the kid drop outta school. Wouldn't be all bad, we could run away from all the shit here. She won't goes to school with a bunch of rich bitches...first time I saw her with them in those fuckin' Villa Saint Mary uniforms at 69th street comin' through that tunnel couldn't believe it...blue blazer, blue skirt, white blouse, white socks, saddle shoes looked like they just escaped from the convent...hurry up girls the May Procession starts in a minute...better go to confession and tell the priest you kissed your boy friend...she's smart though knows how dumb it all is. Never would have gotten to read Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Salinger without her book list...guess it ain't all bad...tough school...makes me feel dumb sometimes...but she's changin' me got me listenin' to my music readin' her books dressin' ivy...took a lotta shit for the khakis and white bucks. Peanuts wanted my Dean jacket said I couldn't wear it with white bucks...fuck him made up my own style.

Too late to call her...96.5 Joel Dorn theme song's cool Round Midnight Milt Jackson and the MJQ.

See what's goin' on with Holden... ..ah man not what shoulda happened...winds up in a fuckin' sanitarium. Funny weird kid...made me laugh...didn't seem crazy to me...just wanted to be the catcher.

Da da da da da dum di da da dum di da da da dum...Waltz for Debby...beautiful...playin' with Peaches in the alley when we was little...wonder where she lives now? Music's so pretty could

cry sometimes...how can anyone write somethin' so beautiful?...like a reverie...like Yeats' Second Coming...falcon goin' round and round...**round and round I go down and down I go**...whole other tune. When did they waltz?...turn of the century...people felt like Evans then...nobody feels like him...nothin' feels like his music...lucky he put his feelings into that song...like a waterfall...little girl will always know the song is for her. Hope it makes her happy. Wish I had a sister, wish...

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Mmm sun's out maybe it's warm outside...hope it's late...she's finished at 12...cool, almost 12...slept a long time. Piss boner don't make a mess keep hands off it showered last night...splish splash ain't takin' a bath, ain't no party goin' on.

Paper's on the table there's the Sports section guess he left it there...picture...**THIS ONE IS A WINNER!**...never been in the paper before flashbulb almost blinded me...read it later. Saint Joe's Villanova at the Palestra tonight, Sandusky said he'd take me - no way gotta be with Diane tonight...**I wonder wonder who who wrote the book of love**...maybe we're writin' it...felt weird everybody singin' that song.....

Really quiet down here...wonder where they are? Hope they didn't fight again...can't take much more can't stand up to him though, beat the shit out of me if I did. Pisses me off...can't do any better than makin' the last shot and he's bitchin' about missin' foul shots...never be good enough for him...get to the pros and he'll still be bitchin'...won't matter then doesn't matter now don't need to listen anymore. **THIS ONE IS A WINNER!**...lot more where that came from...keep on doin' it without thinkin' about it...block it all out and it'll be alright.

A bowl on the kitchen table held a note from his mother. She and his father had gone shopping. Jim was pleased to be alone, ate some cereal, and left the bowl in the sink.

It was only a five-minute walk to the Hynes family's Dutch Colonial home on Silver Creek Boulevard - an oak tree-lined street with a city park on one side. Diane's father answered Jim's knock on the door and led him into the living room that spanned the house from front to back. A large fireplace with a white Colonial mantle stood between two sets of French doors opening onto both ends of an screened-in porch. The wall opposite the fireplace held a built-in bookcase stocked with Einstein, Milne, Auden, Yeats, Eliot, Service, Dickinson, Hemingway, and engineering textbooks.

"Sit down. How'd you guys do last night, Jim?" Diane's father sat down on the couch.

"We won, Mister Hynes." Jim said.

"What was the score?"

"55-54, 54-53 somethin' like that." Jim couldn't remember the actual score.

"Real close game. How did you do?"

"Good, I made a couple of mistakes, but overall played well." Jim squirmed on the sofa where he and Diane made out on the weekend.

"That's not how I heard it. I ran into George Sandusky this morning. He said you made a shot with no time left and won the ball game. Congratulations." Mister Hynes got up from the couch and patted Jim on the shoulder. Jim blushed self-consciously.

"I'll tell Diane you're here. She's v-e-r-r-r-y disappointed she wasn't there for all the excitement. Are you eating dinner with us tonight?"

"I don't think so there's a party tonight, and I'm expected home for dinner." Jim welcomed the dinner invitation. He enjoyed dinner with Diane and her family.

The living room filled with exuberance with Diane rushing down the stairs. She wore a pair of faded Levi's, bottoms turned up over saddle shoes, and a white blouse. At 5'6", she was fair-skinned with silver-green eyes. She smiled at Jim and brushed strands of her blond hair away from her face. Sometimes Jim thought it was an affectation, regardless she always had an effect on him. Pride surged through him as he thought of her as his

steady girl with something other than pride surging in his most male body part.

“Joann called me last night from the drive-in. She told me all about last night. Everybody was talking about you. I called Georgie Woods and asked him to play “Book of Love” for you. Did you hear it?” She said and took his hand.

“Yeah I heard it. Thanks for the dedication. It was kinda weird. We were drinkin’ beer across the street from the playground and we all started singin’ along with the Monotones.”

“Drinking at the playground’s very cool. I can see the headline now - star ballplayer lands in jail on big night. I know it’s hard to talk about what you did without sounding like a bullshitter, but I want to know how it felt. I mean I’m not going to talk about taking the SAT exam.” Diane feigned petulance and pounded him on the chest in mockery of the beach-party girls she loathed. Jim laughed.

“No, we’re not surfer girl. It felt good, real good to make that shot but it wasn’t like a surprise, if ya know what I mean. I’ve practiced makin’ it and I’m expected to make it. But when everybody was yellin’ and the clock was runnin’ down, it was pretty strange. I was nervous but it’s hard to talk about it. It was just another game, if ya did anything besides study you’d have an idea of what it’s like. On the playground the first to get 16 baskets wins. Somebody always makes the last shot and the game’s over. The difference between playing on the playground and last night is the game clock. I was lookin’ at the clock wishin’ I had more time, but I didn’t so I had to shot before time ran out, on the playground I can take my time.”

“You make it sound so, so easy.”

“It’s what the game is about. Somebody has to win and somebody has to lose.” Jim said, remembering the Celtics were playing the Knicks on TV and he wanted to watch Bob Cousy.

“Are you driving tonight?” Diane asked him.

“I’m not sure. I’ll know when I get home. If I don’t have the car, Peanuts’ll pick us up.”

They held hands as they walked to the door.

“Why are you leaving? You just got here?” Diane said, confused.

“I don’t know, I thought ya were goin’ out or somethin’.”

Diane went into the kitchen and took a couple of Cokes from the refrigerator. She pointed to one kitchen chair and sat down in another.

"Are you still reading Catcher in the Rye?" She asked.

"Nah, I finished it last night. Holden Caulfield is cool."

Diane cleared the hair from her eyes. "He was so real I kept forgetting that he was just a character in a book and not a friend. I really wanted to meet him."

Jim's cat eyes met hers. "Until I read him talkin' about feeling lonely I thought I was the only guy that felt that way. It made me realize that we're all pretty much the same. He wound up unhappy and laughin' at it all. I guess that's why he was put away. It bothered me."

"He wanted to be the catcher for his brother. I think he's gonna be fine and get out of there and go back to school. Maybe being crazy isn't all that bad." Diane's eyes were gleaming.

"Yeah, probably. What about tomorrow? What d'ya wanna do?" Jim said realizing the irony of Holden Caulfield. Holden wanted to be a catcher but needed to be caught.

"If it snows, let's go sledding in the park."

"Yeah, that might be fun." Jim looked at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was just three o'clock. "See ya at 7:15?"

"Fine." Diane walked to the door holding Jim's hand. "Is everything OK?"

"Yeah. I'm kinda tired from last night. Gonna take a nap."

The house was still empty when Jim flipped on the TV and dialed in the game. New York was one of the slowest teams in the NBA. Madison Square Garden's baskets were hung with long tapered nets that held the ball in the basket before the ball bounced to the floor giving the Knicks a chance to get back on defense against quicker teams. Still the Knicks lost more games than they won every year.

"The Celtics could've won that game by 20 points if they wanted. They kept it close 'cause it was on television. Cousy slowed down the fast break to keep it close. It's all Jews - the TV networks, the NBA, Jews run it all. Ever since Joe Jackson and that Jew bastard fixed the World Series, pro sports is one big fix." His father came into the living room for the last few minutes of the game the Celtics won 129-124.

"How come nobody knows about it?" Jim kept the edginess from creeping into his voice.

"Because everybody's in. Don't ya understand, they're all makin' money on it - the owners, the players, the refs and the TV ads?"

His father's certainty made Jim even more edgy.

"That's unbelievable." Jim went into the kitchen and put away the groceries.

"That McCloy woman didn't even speak to me, she's got some nerve, walkin' in the store aisle and not sayin' hello. She thinks she deserves special attention because she's a widow. I hope I never see her again." His mother said cooking dinner.

"Ma, I don't think she even knows who ya are."

The McCloy family had become arch enemies when they moved into one of the Dutch Colonials on Silver Creek Boulevard. Mick McCloy became Jim's major competition as the team's playmaker. Jim's father was angry because he thought Jim had won the spot the year before. He became angrier when Liam McCloy, a Notre Dame grad, took the whole team to Franklin Field for the Penn - Notre Dame game and invited the parents to the Union League for dinner after the game. Gerry thought it was a father's plot to win Mick Jim's spot on the team. When Liam died from a heart attack at the start of the season no condolences were expressed by the Collins family and Jim was the only one of the family at the funeral.

Marsha set pork chops, mashed potatoes, and string beans on the table.

"Dad, can I have the car tonight?" Jim asked.

"Yeah, as long as ya bring it back in one piece," his father said. Softening his voice he turned to Marcia. "I'm thinkin' of joining a car pool to get to work. Elaine Reidy's puttin' one together."

"Yer goin' to drive to work with her every day?" His mother frowned.

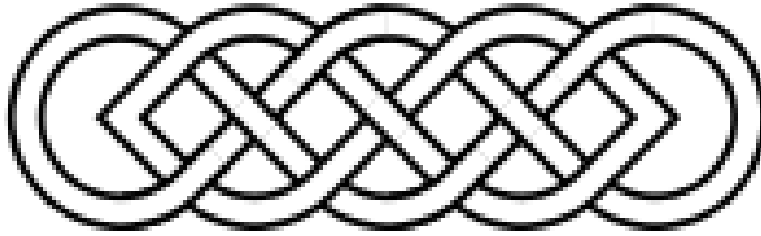
"I have to change. Dinner was good, Ma."

He turned on the radio in his room. Jocko Henderson's 'Rock It Ship' show was Philly's most popular black R&B program. Jocko played the week's top songs on Saturday night. After the number one song, Jim took a 45RPM record from a brown paper sleeve, put it on the red and gray plastic spindle of his record player and turned up the volume to drown out the

argument going on downstairs. Johnnie and Joe sang "Over the Mountain" three times while he lay on his bed yearning for a place and time other than the here and now.

... ..  
**Over the mountain cross the sea there's a girl waitin' waitin' for me da da da da da da...ain't no mountains between us but there might as well be I'm from Annunciation she's a Villa girl...first you say you will and then you won't then you say you do and then you don't undecided now so whatta are ya gonna do?...**said she wanted to do it then she changed her mind last week...better hurry up and go get her...want her so bad it hurts...can't talk to Reds and Peanuts like I talk to her...sometimes I think she understands me better than I understand myself... like she really knows who I am who I wanna be. Don't know who I wanna be how does she? That's the thing about girls they see us different than we see ourself maybe they see us the way we wanna be not the way we are if she saw how I really am she'd be scared. I'm always on the edge ready to run ready to get away from the hell that's goin' on downstairs...**nobody knows the trouble I seen.**

Still fightin' down there...can't do anything to stop it wish the fuck I could oh I could if I got mad enough take him out only thing to do is get outta here like Reds is...he'll be playin' for the fightin' irish I'm livin' with the fightin' irish...**over the mountain across the sea there's a girl awaitin' for me.** Check the mirror - white bucks, khakis, madras shirt, v-neck sweater...cool ivy leaguer in the mirror nobody sees real me... different from last year - pegged pants, blue suede shoes...**stay off of my blue sued shoes...**they'll be cuttin' on me all night...doesn't matter as long as we dig it, she digs it, I dig it...**one two three o'clock gonna rock around the clock tonight gonna rock until the broad daylight...**

*ii*

Mary Doyle, Marcia's mother, raised Jim during the war while Gerry was in the Army Air Corp and Marcia worked as a secretary to make ends meet. Marcia named her son after her father and Mary still called him Little Jim even though he towered over her husband. She told Mrs. Kaplan once in an over-the-windowsill chat, "I'm spoiling Little Jim rotten to forget all the terrible things that are happening in the world."

Raising Little Jim softened the war's sting for the Doyle's. Their only son Kevin was in the Marines on one of the embattled islands in the Pacific. They had survived the Depression with money earned from Mary working long days in a laundry. Big Jim, as he was called before the Depression, lost his clothing store and was out of work for five years, sitting in the basement making, selling and drinking bootleg whiskey. When he finally found a job as a cotton buyer traveling the Southeast he was no longer the dapper clothing store proprietor Mary had married. The Depression had changed a quick-to-smile boyish prankster into a quiet, penurious porch-sitting cigar-smoker. Big Jim spent the summers during the War sitting hunched over his radio, blowing smoke rings for Little Jim, listening to the cellar-dwelling Phillies' lose their games. He explained the history of the game to his toddler grandson to divert his mind from the fear of his

son's capture by the Japanese on the God-forsaken name-forgotten Pacific island where he was fighting. Mary also used Little Jim to escape her fear of the anticipated condolence visit from the Department of Defense to deliver the news of Kevin's death. Each Sunday night she and Big Jim urged Little Jim to mimic Walter Winchell's opening - "Good Evening Mister and Misses America and all the ships at sea" - hysterically laughing at his three-year old precociousness while listening to Winchell's analysis as though it were a Papal encyclical. The Doyle's bonded with their grandson stronger than they had with their own children. It was a bond that grew out of their fear for a child in the world of their experience where wars and depression were more common than peace and prosperity.

While Gerry was away Marcia's nightmares began. They were an unspoken ordeal among home-front wives; in Marcia's case the dreams were signs of how threatened she felt over losing the only man she had ever loved. But when the war ended and the nightmares didn't Marcia began seeing a psychiatrist. Besides the nightmares Marcia was fixated that she was going bald and that Gerry was seeing another woman. At the end of the third session the shrink told Marcia that she resented how close her mother was with Little Jim. When she told her Mary became furious. Mary Doyle hadn't finished high school and knew nothing of Freud, but knew her bond with Little Jim was a bond of love that was strong and true. No head doctor could tell her to undo that bond. Marcia's psychiatric treatment eventually led to electroshock therapy and a glazed look in her eyes. Her mother couldn't accept what went on behind the doors of the psychiatrist's office, especially that her love for Little Jim was the source of Marcia's problems. When she told Big Jim about it he agreed and they said the rosary on their knees every night for three months for the Blessed Mother's intervention. When Marcia told them she was putting her faith in God and wasn't going back to the psychiatrist their prayers were answered.

Much later Marcia told her mother she suspected Gerry had been involved with someone else while he was in the army. Marcia tended to imagine things, so Mary discounted the possibility. She knew that her daughter resented her husband for volunteering for the service when he could have stayed home

and supported his family. The war had been hard on everyone and in time she thought Marcia would get back to herself. When Marcia told her about a letter she had found from another woman to Gerry Mary couldn't decide if it was fantasy or real, especially without seeing the letter. She didn't want to believe that her son-in-law was a womanizing bastard who left his wife and son at home and found another woman. She never discussed Gerry's suspected infidelity with Big Jim because she knew he would have demanded the truth and she didn't want to gamble that the truth was what they wanted to hear.

Gerry originally joined the Army with the mixed motives of an intelligent man who wanted more out of life than his high school education would get him. The able-bodied men of America were fighting to free the world from the Nazi's terror and it bothered him that he wasn't going to be one of them because he was married with a child. He saw enlistment as a chance to make good as an officer and pilot in the Army Air Corps. His younger brother had pulled it off by passing a test and he wasn't as smart or tough as Gerry. He explained to Marcia that he had to go to keep his job, because when the war was over, the returning vets would get all the jobs and he'd lose his if he hadn't been in the service doing his part. He left home believing that he would receive an officer's commission and in three months he'd be flying a plane. He didn't count on flunking the physical for flight school because of less than perfect vision. He was assigned to a communications unit as a wireman. First, he went to Biloxi, Mississippi for training and then to Madison, Wisconsin to test airplane radio equipment before it was shipped for installation in the fighter planes he had expected to fly.

Deeply disappointed he began hanging out at a local bar in Madison and heard about a job opening at a meat packing plant on the late shift from one of the regulars. Since the testing work was being done according to a shift schedule, Gerry could take the job for extra money. He knew Marcia was having a tough time at home working while his mother-in-law took care of Little Jim, so he didn't hesitate to make some extra money and send it home.

Most of the packing plant's employees were women. When they found out that Gerry was a soldier he became a target for their flirtation. He never thought of himself as an object of female desire. He was introverted and shy with woman but every day at the plant he was being told how tall, dark, and handsome he was. When he overheard Ellen Dean's joke about how fitting it was that he worked in a packing plant because he was "a **real** piece of meat she'd love to pack on her bed" he made it a point to get to know her. Ellen was the best-looking girl in the plant and for several days he wondered what it would be like in that bed. Finally one night as they were leaving work he asked Ellen if she wanted to join him for something to eat. She told him that she and a friend were going to stop at a local bar and he could join them.

Two nights later he found out what it was like to be in Ellen's bed and so began their intensely passionate affair. Both of them were certain when the war ended, the affair would end. They knew it, feared it, and liked it. Until the war ended there was nothing to do but enjoy the mutually fierce sex.

They didn't count on Ellen's husband getting killed in the Battle of the Bulge. Ellen was inconsolable. The guilt of cheating on her man hadn't bothered her until she'd been told that he'd been killed. Until then she knew he was coming back and when he did she'd be his just like she had been before he left. When she found out that he wasn't coming back, she was overwhelmed. She told Gerry how much he had trusted her and now he was going to be buried in his hometown with her shackled up with another guy. She kicked Gerry out the night she learned he had been killed, then called three times the next day to explain to him the sorrow, remorse, joy, and pleasure of her infidelity. She made him stay away for a while to keep their relationship a secret from her family and the neighbors. About a month after the funeral, she asked Gerry to return to her bed.

As the end of the war approached they clung to each other like two prisoners awaiting execution. Finally to break the tension one weekend they picnicked, drank and copulated as if it were Bastille Day. Gerry's discharge notice came the next week

and he didn't tell Ellen. He called her with an excuse that he wasn't able to see her the next weekend and left Madison.

Marcia kept a newspaper photo of the scene in Philadelphia's 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station that was repeated in train stations all over the country in October of 1945 framed in the living room. The Inquirer had published the picture in the Sunday magazine article about Philadelphia's soldiers returning to their families. It was a picture of Gerry, Marcia and Little Jim meeting in the train station. The newspaper photographer had seen her holding Little Jim near the Information Desk just before Little Jim climbed down from her arms and ran to his Daddy. Gerry picked him up and swung him around in the air and held him close. When Marcia ran to Gerry the photographer took the shot. The photo looked like all the other homecomings that took place that morning - a man holding his son and wife in his arms with sunlight streaming through the station windows. Gerry was back but he never became the sanctuary Marcia needed him to be.

Gerry had tried to write a farewell letter to Ellen more times than he could remember. Each time he wasn't satisfied and tore it up, eventually concluding that no farewell was the best choice. He did not count on Ellen taking matters into her own hands. During one of their nights together they had talked about how they would contact each other if they needed to. Gerry gave Ellen his mother's home address. Two weeks after he returned home, his mother gave him a letter postmarked Madison, Wisconsin. He pocketed it, stunned by the flood of emotions at the sight of Ellen's scribbled handwriting on the envelop. The letter broke the emotional dam he had built in order to leave without saying goodbye. He read the six page letter on the subway on his way to work. Ellen spared no words to express her anger at his betrayal. What bothered him most was that she had bottom-lined him as a coward. She had no idea how much he battled with himself over how to say goodbye before he finally rationalized that it didn't make any difference since they both had known it was going to end anyway. But her repeated "coward", "no good bastard", and "fucking liar" had an emasculating effect on him. He got off the subway and called Madison. His call awakened her and her husky sleep-filled voice sounded vulnerable and seductive. He hung up the phone choosing not to

hear her vulnerable seductiveness change into anger when she heard his voice. At work he spent the day thinking of what he wanted to say to her on the phone. At the end of the day he stopped for the courage of a double scotch and placed another call. There was a long moment of silence after he said hello when Ellen answered, then her invective began and he couldn't get a word in edgewise. She only stopped ranting at him when the operator broke in to tell them they had a minute left. Right away Gerry said he was sorry, she was right, he had been a bastard, but he felt that his choice was better than any other he could have made when it came to breaking it off between them.

"Fuck you, you no good pussy-lickin' snake. I won't be as easy to shed as your uniform. You'll be hearin' from me plenty." Ellen hung up.

Gerry was stunned by her threat and hoped it was an empty one, but from the emotion in her voice he feared that she wanted to make him pay for leaving without a word. He was right. His mother gave him a letter a week for months. They weren't as long as the first one, but full of expletives and loathing for the animal she had chosen him to be in that week's letter. After a couple of months, the missives were less frequent. Overall there were about twenty letters in his footlocker in the attic.

He put the first one in his jacket pocket and forgot it was there. Marcia found it when she was cleaning out the hall closet. She didn't think twice about taking it from his pocket and leaving it on the kitchen table. As the day went on her curiosity about who might be writing from Madison got the best of her and she decided to read the letter. She read it and sat on the stairs in the living room recalling the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station homecoming and the month he had been back from Madison. She realized that what her nightmares had been telling her was true. It hadn't been the same between them and it had nothing to do with her wartime anxiety or the lack of passion when they were in bed together. Marcia knew from that day on she and Gerry were not the same couple who used to slow-dance on Steel Pier as Frank Sinatra sang "I'll never smile again until I smile at you."

She didn't tell Gerry about finding the letter but the nightmares became more frequent. During the war she had dreamed of Gerry lying in a pool of his own blood in a battlefield foxhole but after the war she dreamed of her own death. It recurred over and over. She was locked in her mahogany china closet wearing her wedding dress. Just as she was about to suffocate she'd wake up screaming and Gerry tried soothing her with soft whispers, but she always turned away and stared at the Blessed Virgin hung on the bedroom wall.

It wasn't long before she began accusing him of imaginary infidelities never mentioning the letter she had found. Unrelentingly, she went at him with a harpy's fury invigorated by his silence. Her intensity showed Gerry the uselessness of a response. Finally one day, after listening quietly with arms crossed, he had enough. "Are you finished yet or are ya goin' to go on forever? Because if ya are, I'll close your mouth for ya". He spoke softly and gritted his teeth, hands clenched in a fist at his side.

"I'll finish when I want and I'll never be finished with you - you, son of a bitch." It was the first time she used profanity on him and she coupled it with trying to scratch his face like a cat. He grabbed her hand and punched her on the bicep. She would have keeled to the floor except that he held her other hand in his.

"Had enough? That oughta shut ya up for a while." He looked down with a pitiless sneer as she knelt at his feet.

"You stinkin' pig. Go ahead, hit me again, it's the only bang you'll ever get from me." Marcia spit in his face.

Gerry slapped her just above the eye, as Little Jim toddled into the living room. He ran to protect his mother, grabbing his father's leg and pushing him away from her. Gerry didn't resist and Marcia got up from the floor.

"Little Jim, I said somethin' real bad. Yer father got mad and told me to be quiet, but I wouldn't. That's why he hit me, to stop me from sayin' it again."

Marcia put her arm around Little Jim and pulled him to her, so he couldn't see the welt over her eye.

“Yeah Jimmy, I jes’ wanted yer ma to stop bein’ mean; I didn’ mean to hurt her.” Gerry said, slumping into a chair.

It was the opening act in a Greek play that had an uninterrupted run for more than 12 years. Gerry and Marcia spoke a script of pretense and prevarication behind tragedy’s masks of father and mother while feigning ignorance of the psychic and physical beatings they were inflicting on each other and Little Jim.



*iii'*

**Someday we'll build a house on a hilltop high just we two...** Shearing plays so cool can't believe he's blind...looks nice and warm in there with the light shining through the doors...I like those doors with panes of glass. Feels different here used to think everybody's house was like mine - everybody pissed, frownin', arguin'...not like that here...how do ya know?...maybe here is just different and mine's the way everybody is who's livin' on Osage Avenue?...emergency on, radio off...maybe it's just havin' a lot of money, livin' here, and goin' to private school that's different wouldn't go if I could...didn't take the scholarship exam for the Prep hadda baseball game the day they gave the exam and invited me to the open house...threw it hard that day...take the key out...wasn't leavin' everybody in the neighborhood to go to prep school with a bunch of pussies...beat us last year though, they'll be tough to beat this year...played against some of 'em in eighth grade...turn off the lights...**gonna have some fun tonight...**

Jim rang the doorbell. Kyle, Diane's brother, opened the door without a word.

"How's it goin', Kyle?" Jim followed him and sat down on the sofa.

"Cool." Kyle sat on the floor in front of the television in the corner.

"Hi, Jim. Who's winning?" Mister Hynes joined them. He sat next to Jim on the sofa.

"Penn 6 - 0, Dad. Brown stinks." Kyle said.

"Give me a break, Kyle. Brown's my alma mater, Jim. I've got some tickets for the game tonight, are you interested in them?" Dan took four tickets from his shirt pocket.

"Yes sir. Villanova and St. Joe are playin' in the second game." Jim said without thinking of how Diane would feel about missing most of the party. The winner of the game would be the odds-on favorite to win the Philadelphia Big Five college championship.

"Second row behind the team bench. Brown's coach and I were fraternity brothers. We had lunch today and he gave me the tickets but Mrs. Hynes and I have a party to go to. I thought you might want them." Mr. Hynes said.

"I don't think I can use all four, but if Diane wants to go we can use two. We're goin' to a party too, but we could go after the game."

Diane bounded down the stairs in a Scotch-plaid pleated skirt, white blouse, dark green sweater, and penny loafers.

"Hi, yer Dad's got some tickets for the Villanova - St. Joe game tonight. Ya wanna go?" Jim said.

"What about the party?" She frowned.

"We can go after the game. We'll get there by 11." Jim looked nonchalant, but he very much wanted to hear Diane say she wanted to go to the game.

"OK, let's go. I've never been to the Palestra." She had been curious about the University of Pennsylvania's gymnasium and the Big 5 ever since Jim told her he wanted to play there for Saint Joe's college.

"We'll have to hurry. It's tough to park down there."

"I need my gloves." Diane hurried back upstairs.

"Have you ever seen a Big 5 game?" Jim asked, calculating how long it would take them to get to the game while trying to appear interested in Mr. Hynes' answer.

“No, only Penn and Brown at Franklin Field. I don’t qualify as a Big 5 fan on that basis, do I Jim?” Dan said.

“Probably not, sir. We’ll get there around the time the Penn game is over...I mean the Brown game. Thanks for the tickets.” Jim smiled at Diane coming back downstairs, gloves in hand.

“You’re welcome. You kids be back by one.”

“Yeah thanks a lot, Dad.” Diane smirked at her father. She knew he gave them the tickets because he didn’t want them spending too much time at a party.

Jim drove to the vacant railroad lot he knew from the trips to the Palestra with his father. It only took fifteen minutes. He parked the car by the rail yard at the unpronounceable Schuylkill River that separated downtown Philadelphia from the University of Pennsylvania. He thought to himself the grimness of the rail yard was a long way from Villa St. Mary on a dark cold winter night for Diane, so he took her by the hand.

“Just up the steps that’s Walnut Street.”

Jim pointed to a black forged steel stairway that ascended to a well-lighted sidewalk above. A damp northerly wind blew full off the river with the hint of snow. They hurried with their heads tucked into their turned-up collars to ward off the cold and turned south on 33rd Street into a cluster of walkers overhung by the vapors of their scarf-muffled conversations. Vendors hawked warm roasted peanuts and soft pretzels across the Federalist campus that dated back to Ben Franklin. The crowd slowed when it reached an illuminated brick facing and large plate glass panels configured into a colonial arch. Jim pulled Diane behind him in his rush to get inside as the milk-white mist of their breathing evaporated into the chilly ether outside the Palestra.

Inside vision momentarily blurred with the change in light and temperature as they queued up to hand over the tickets to a pot-bellied man chewing an unlit cigar butt and wearing a red blazer that matched one color of Penn’s Red-and-Blue. The ticket-takers were on stipend from the University as the favored athletes from Penn’s football heydays in the forties. Their jobs were almost as hard to get as the diplomas they had never gotten while representing the Red-and-Blue before the Ivy League was formed and made it unfashionable to exploit athletes.

A tiled hallway wound beneath the grandstand seats that surrounded the basketball court. Thirty years of dried sweat and rubbing liniment scented the warm air with the smell of competition in the circle of trophy cases of memorabilia. Stone-faced, lantern-jawed athletes were posed in team daguerreotypes and photographs from the turn of the century to the 40's. The pictures showed the athletic teams whose members were either the sons of upstate Pennsylvania coal miners or Philadelphia Main Line executives.

"This is like going through the catacombs to the Coliseum." Diane said noticing a Kirk Douglas as Demetrius look-alike on Penn's 1939 football team. They turned into another walkway and entered the lower grandstand. She was stunned by the sound and fury raging at courtside.

"**THE HAWK IS DEAD...THE HAWK IS DEAD**" was the chant of the Villanova students in the stands on the other side of the court. "**THE HAWK WILL NEVER DIE...THE HAWK WILL NEVER DIE**" came in response from the St. Joe student section.

Jim and Diane sat down just as Brown threw the ball inbounds. Diane huddled on the wooden grandstand bench and wrapped her hands lightly under Jim's left arm and biceps.

"Why are Villanova's and St. Joe's fans yelling so much while the other game is still going on?"

"That's the way it is here when there's a City Series game. The two schools waitin' to play start cuttin' on each other. It's all part of the Big 5." Jim said.

The red lights on the scoreboard showed that a little more than 3 minutes were left in the game. Penn was winning easily.

A wing-flapping hawk led the male cheerleaders in crimson sweaters and gray slacks onto the court to a rousing cheer from the all-male St. Joe student body on their side of the gym. St. Joe's mascot wore a bedraggled feather outfit and stood at the side of the court flapping his wings incessantly. Villanova's students regarded the Hawk mascot as a symbol of lunacy and the rival student body as a motley crew of escapees from a Jesuit asylum. On the other hand St. Joe's students viewed Villanova's Main Line campus as the playground for the wealthy bastard sons of St. Augustine.

A sudden roar went up when Villanova's wildcat mascot led ten blue-and-white warmup-suited players onto the court. The noise level rose again when St. Joe's crimson and silver team followed the hawk onto the court for pre-game drills. Diane tightened her grip on Jim's arm; for her the Palestra had become the Plains of Troy.

The teams finished warming up and the cheerleaders of both schools took to the court as the hawk and the wildcat engaged in a mock battle. The P.A. announcer introduced the players' unheard names into the fevered pandemonium of nine thousand screaming voices.

Jim sat hunched over and watched everything - the coaches, players, referees, even the scoring table just to his right where white placards with red numbers for personal fouls showed the number of the player's fouls. The pace and quality of the game became inversely related - the faster the pace, the fewer shots were made. The opening minutes were a hyperactive melée with both teams making mistakes and turnovers. It took almost two minutes before either team made a basket. Villanova's first basket was celebrated with rolls of blue and white toilet paper thrown from the stands. The game had to be stopped several minutes until the court was cleared. The game's eventual rhythm was established after five minutes of misplay. Neither team was superior with one then the other taking the lead. As the quality of the game climbed the crowd's frenzy threatened to shatter the glass panes in the Palestra's outer wall and roof. The first half ended with exhaustion etched in the players' sweating faces and echoed by the fans' straining voices.

"Ya want somethin'?" Jim got up from his seat and stretched his back.

"I could use a drink." Diane said.

He took her hand and they walked back under the grandstand to the outer hallway. The liniment and sweat scent had been replaced by the smell of burning tobacco from the groups of smokers standing against the wall. Jim went to the window of a service counter and returned with two containers of orange drink. They stood close to each other in the midst of the murmur of the crowd and its unintelligible conversations. Young men walked back and forth in search of friends or trying to make it with the college girls who had come without a date. Jim reached inside his sweater to get a cigarette from his shirt

pocket, but he didn't put the cigarette in his mouth, instead he crumpled it in his pocket.

"Jim, I thought you couldn't make it." Coach Sandusky said, stopping in front of them with another player from Annunciation.

"Hi, coach. Hi, Mick. This is my girl, Diane. She's why I couldn't come to the game with ya. We were goin' to a party but her Dad had a couple of tickets to the game so we decided to come here instead." Jim said.

"Hi, Diane. Nice to meet you. I talked to your Dad this morning. You know we both went to Brown, don't you?" Sandusky said.

"Hello, sir. No I didn't." She said.

"He was two years ahead of me. Looks like it'll go down to the wire. Have fun." Sandusky and Mick rejoined the crowd walking the hallway.

"That was close." Jim said.

"What do you mean?"

"I almost got caught smokin'. Let's go back." Jim showed her the shreds of tobacco in his pocket and stuck them in his empty orange-drink container.

The second half began with both teams playing to their potential. The lead was never more than five points and the crowd noise got louder as it exhorted one team then the other as the ball changed hands. With seven minutes left in the game St. Joe's coach called for a time out. The team sat on the bench directly in front of Jim and Diane. Jim leaned over as close as he could to hear the coach tell his team to switch to pressure basketball - playing all over the court in a pressing defense where four players set up a two by two player zone defense in Villanova's backcourt and one player defended the frontcourt against breakaway baskets. He told his smallest player to remember that Villanova's playmaking guard always went to his right with his dribble and he should play him that way then go for the steal if it was there. Pressure basketball was risky, but it was a trademark for this often out-manned, but rarely out-hustled team. St. Joe's had won many games against more talented teams with the strategy. He sent his team back onto the court and took a position kneeling on one knee at the bench hollering instructions as his players played out his tactics. In the final seven minutes St Joe's forced five turnovers and converted them

into easy baskets. They won the game by five points. In the game's last minute the St. Joe student body hoarsely sang an off-key "**When The Hawks Go Flyin' In**" to the tune of "**When the Saints Go Marchin' In**".

Leaving the court, Bobby Galli, a St. Joe player waved at Jim. He came over to the stands and motioned to Jim to come down onto the court. They had played together in the Ocean City Summer League. Jim congratulated him on the victory and introduced Diane. Bobby congratulated Jim for making last night's game-winning shot saying he saw the picture in the morning paper. He called to a couple of St. Joe's players and introduced them saying that Jim might be playing with them in a couple of years. Diane was impressed at being introduced to the in-crowd of Big 5 college basketball.

After talking with some of the team for 5 minutes or so they were among the last of the crowd to leave the building. The noise and emotion of the last ninety minutes had been replaced by a quiet malodorous hallway of discarded hot dog wrappers, drink cartons, and cigarette butts. Having made their way to the street the promise of snow was about to be kept as they joined the groups of men walking hands jammed in pockets or couples walking hand-in-hand. Jim held Diane's hand tightly and bought a bag of soft pretzels from a vendor.

"So I'm your girl, heh?" Diane said squeezing his hand. "I didn't know your picture was in the paper."

"Yeah, I guess." He squeezed back and smiled. "I have the paper at home. I remember somethin' flashin' in my eyes when I took the shot...blinded me for a second. They were really great seats your Dad had. St. Joe's won the game when they went to the zone press." Jim chomped on his pretzel mumbling through the dried bits; the dough was hard from being in the cold.

"Jim, I don't know what you're talking about, but I'll find your picture and cut it out." Diane huddled closer.

"The coach made a move in the second half that's called a zone press. He wrote a book about it called, "Pressure Basketball." He changed defenses and it worked."

The cold had permeated their bodies by the time they reached the car and they shivered until the heater kicked in. It was just after 11. Jim drove quickly through the deserted sidewalks of Philadelphia that W.C. Fields claimed were rolled-up

at 9PM and parked in front of Peanuts' house where they could hear Little Richard screeching "Long Tall Sally" from the basement. They could hear the song because the front door was open and went inside. There were about ten couples drinking, dancing, talking or necking in the basement. Peanuts, glass in hand, staggered up to them. The sweet smell of bourbon on Peanuts' breath almost sickened him as Peanuts flung his arm around Jim's shoulders.

"Hey, man, where ya been? Never mind, ya don' have to answer."

"We went to the Palestra to see Villanova - St. Joe." Jim said.

"Thash bullshit. The two of you were in the backseat on Karakung Drive. Diane was givin' ya her congrashulayshuns for las' night." Peanuts' grip tightened where Jim's neck and shoulder met. He almost toppled the two of them onto the blonde sitting on the couch.

"You tryin' to kill me? Don't pay any attention to him, he's intoxicated. There's drinks behind the bar. You two want somethin'? Get me one will ya, Jim?" Sheila, the blonde on the couch, giggled. She was Peanuts' steady girl and dangled an empty glass in front of her. She was platinum blonde, blue-eyed, with a curvaceous body that most of the neighborhood had seen from the street beneath her bedroom window.

"Sure, Sheila. I'm havin' a beer. How about you, little girl of mine?" Jim took Sheila's glass as he turned to Diane.

"Get me a coke. Thanks. Hi, Joann." Diane called to Joann Ryan across the room. "Where's Reds?" She asked.

"He went to get some beer."

Joann was Reds' girl. She went to Annunciation Girls, the sister school to Annunciation Boys. Jim came back with Diane's drink and joined the gang listening to the low-powered black AM radio station playing rhythm and blues.

"**Hail, Hail, Rock and Roll!**" Peanuts sang along with Chuck Berry.

"Hey baby, ya never sing like that when yer sober. Yer only good when yer drunk." Sheila was now lying on the sofa - her earlier pretense of sobriety melted with the ice cubes in the glass on the floor beside her.

Jim walked over to Diane and Joann.

"I want to leave. We'll never get out of here if we wait around for Reds and the beer." Diane whispered in his ear.

"Okay", he whispered back. "We're cuttin' out." He spoke to no one in particular, and picked their coats off the arm of the sofa. Just then, Reds came down the stairs, carrying an opened case of beer.

"Hey, man. Where you goin'?" The party's just startin'." Reds said.

"We went to the Palestra - St. Joe - Villanova. I'm beat man." Jim said.

"Oh, man, yer full of it. You've never been beat that ya couldn't party. Diane's changin' you, you better be careful. Be cool, man." Reds laughed and gave Jim skin. Jim returned the favor and led Diane to the car.

Snow had begun to fall. The damp wind from earlier on had quieted. Cotton-like snowflakes drifted soundlessly through the beams of the streetlights. What had been a not-so-silent night had become a reminder of Frost's "miles to go before I sleep." Jim and Diane were becalmed by the change in the city's streets as the bullet-nosed Ford, the only moving object on Silver Creek Boulevard, rolled its snow-crunching way home.

"I'm glad we left. The snow's pretty. I never feel like gettin' drunk when everybody's already drunk, ya know what I mean?" Jim said.

"Yes, when I see how everyone is when they're drunk I know I'm goin' to be like them and it messes me up. I'm glad Peanuts isn't always like that. Do you think they'll go out tonight?" Diane said looking out the car window.

"They probably won't drive. Reds is pretty cool makin' sure things don't get out of control." Jim said. The tire tracks spoiled the unmarked snow in Diane's driveway before he braked to a stop.

"I hope you're right. Peanuts was in no shape to go out." Diane put her key in the front door and unlocked it. The only light that was on came from the upstairs hallway.

"I'm home." Diane spoke softly to the empty stairway.

"There's some ham and cheese in the fridge. Don't forget the lights when you come up." The invisible voice was welcoming.

Jim sat in the kitchen watching Diane make ham-and-cheese sandwiches. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until

she gave him one. In the living room a few burning embers were left in the fireplace and Jim threw fresh wood on the fire. In a few minutes the flames were blazing and Diane opened the curtains on the French doors to give them a view of the snow falling outside and took a spot on the floor in front of the fireplace.

"I've read a lotta good stuff since we've been goin' out together. I owe ya." Jim said sitting beside her.

"How and when are you going to pay up?" Diane tilted her head teasingly.

"Right now." Jim put his arm around her shoulder. Cuddling against him, Diane's green eyes and golden hair were lustered by the firelight. The noise of crackling knots in the fresh burning wood amplified the silence of the snowfall and they began to kiss innocently until tongues touching, passion overwhelmed innocence. Surrendering herself to his heightened desire Diane freed her breasts from her bra and Jim's lips sought her erect nipples. Suddenly Diane pushed him away.

"I'm sorry, I can't do this." She got up and walked to one of the French doors fixing her clothes.

"I never wanted you like this before." Jim's cock was hard and hurting. He rolled on his back and put his hands behind his head without blaming her for stopping.

Diane was sensitive, intelligent and thoughtful. A virgin, she feared having sex, but her fear lacked the shame of sex she had been taught by the nuns; hers was a fear that sex might have a consequence she didn't want. Kneeling beside Jim she stroked his eyebrows and kissed his eyelids, then led him to one of the French doors. A white coverlet was being spread over the city as though Mother Nature were inviting it to become the kingdom in a never-to-be-told fairy tale.

"Jim, I want you too." She hugged him like a sister with her head on his chest. "Why don't you stay here tonight?"

It was the first time Jim had heard 'I want you' from a girl. Maybe she asked him to stay because she wanted to give herself to him. He almost asked, but stopped himself.

"I can't. I have to get the car home." He said.

"Why not call home and tell them you're stuck in the snow. We could sit here and watch all night." Diane looked up at him, her eyes glistening.

"My father will want to come and get the car. He won't want to leave the car here all night. I better go." He said thinking

she didn't want him to stay to do what she was afraid to do. Maybe he was wrong, maybe he should stay; there might not be another night like this and it wasn't just the snow he was thinking about. Nevertheless, he put on his jacket and kissed her gently. There was a new sweetness between them as they left the living room. They kissed again at the front door; Diane soft and submissive in his arms he felt the hardness between his legs again. Stopping their kiss, he brought Diane's hands from his face to his sides to halt the sex rising in his body and whispered.

"Good night, amapola, my pretty little flower."

She smiled at the term of endearment Jim used once during the summer singing "Amapola" to her as they sat on the boardwalk watching the ocean. She squeezed his hands to let him know that restraint was hard for her too, tugged at the collar of his red jacket and said.

"Good night, James Dean."

Jim stepped into the wind-driven snow where his lingering hard-on shriveled and the rest of him fought the bone-chilling air with an athlete's resistance. He backed out of the driveway onto Silver Creek Boulevard and headed for Osage Avenue. A few blocks before getting there the car skidded on an ice patch toward a huge oak tree. Pressing the brakes in a near panic he stopped a foot or two short of the tree. With a grateful look at the dashboard St. Anthony statuette he slowly righted the car and made it on home.

The lights were still on in the house when he walked in. Hoping his parents had forgotten to turn them out, he hung his jacket on the kitchen door. There were broken plates and glasses scattered on the floor - evidence of another act in the family drama. His mother sat sobbing on the living room sofa while his father was slumped in a chair with his arms folded across his chest. Jim winced at the large black and blue mark on his mother's right arm. She was pressing an ice bag to her left cheek as well.

"Oh, fuck me, not again. I can't stand this shit." Jim's emotion broke like waves pounding against a seawall. The wretched look in his mother's eyes made his stomach churn while anger torqued through the rest of him.

"No more of that language. Your mother started up again about me cheatin' on her, then she started throwin' the

dishes. I hit her and she stopped.” His father spoke in the matter-of-fact way that angered Jim even more.

“Your father didn’t mean it. It’s all over now. I’ll be all right.” The ice bag slipped from his mother’s hand. Her left eye was badly swollen.

“Yer both fuckin’ nuts. Why don’t ya fuckin’ kill each other and be done with it.” Jim said, his anger resident in his two hands clenched into fists against his legs.

“I won’t have ya talkin’ like that in here, now cut it out”. His father tried to calm him.

Marcia got up from the sofa touching Jim’s face for reassurance and forgiveness. He didn’t forgive or reassure; he pushed her hand away and reached for the door. She put her hand on his wrist to stop him from opening the door.

“Please Jim, don’t leave. This is no time to be leavin’.”

Jim looked at her without emotion. There were tears streaming down her face. He tried to lift her hand from his wrist. His mother tightened her grip. Jim twisted her arm and she fell to her knees. She looked at her arm rubbing it with the other hand.

“You hurt me.”

“I didn’t mean to. He’s the one who hurt ya. I was just tryin’ to get outta here.”

“Both of ya just sit down.” His father joined them at the door.

“Sorry, Mom, but I gotta get outta here. ” Jim reached for the door handle again. His father grabbed his hand.

“Lay the fuck off.”

“No yer not.” His father grunted, jamming him against the wall. Jim fiercely pushed back, knocking his father over the chair by the door. Marcia moved away from them. Gerry got to his feet and swung his forearm against Jim’s neck, knocking him down. Jim curled into the fetal position his mother wailing.

“Oh my God, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph - you’ve hurt him.”

She moved to where Jim lay, but stopped short as Gerry bent over, grabbing Jim by the shoulder and upper arm.

“Get up, yer not hurt, yer actin’ like a candy ass.”

Jim lay limp.

“Leave me alone. Jus’ git yer fuckin’ hands off me, motherfucker.”

He stayed on the floor and kicked his father half-heartedly. His father kicked back. The sound of cartilage being torn popped in Jim's rib cage. Reacting with savage revenge Jim bent into a low crouch and surged straight ahead, lowering his right shoulder into his father's stomach and toppling him onto the hardwood floor. He had closed his eyes but he heard a sickening sound as his father's head slammed on the floor. He opened his eyes to a pool of blood forming on the floor beneath his father. He touched his own face to see if he was bleeding. Looking at his hand he realized the blood was his father's and he looked into his father's eyes. There was nothing but a lifeless stare. Jim got to his feet looking for movement. "Now I'm a fuckin' bad ass just like ya taught me." He said seeing his father's dead body on the floor.

"Gerry, Gerry, are you all right?" Marcia bent over the body and saw what Jim had seen.

Jim finally opened the door, stepped outside and hesitated; he needed his jacket. His mother was hysterical sobbing over his father's body. He didn't go back inside, instead he ran into the heavy snowfall with no destination in mind.

... ..

Fuck him! He was such a motherfucker to do that to her no matter what she said to him...I can't believe I killed the motherfucker didn't mean to. Snow was so beautiful at Diane's now it's a fucking nightmare...I'm so cold tears are fuckin' cold on my face...she was so beat up and he was so goddam righteous...why why why...why are they like that? Why doesn't God stop it? Why do I even care? Wanted me to forget all about it like all the other times...pretend nothin' happened until she wakes up screamin' in the middle of the night rememberin' our family secret, rememberin' gettin' beat up...all they want to do is pretend...pretend we're deaf dumb and blind pretend it doesn't hurt...**oh yes they're the great pretenders**...no matter what she said, what she did, it's wrong...musta punched her hard in the face to make it swell like that her fuckin' arm was all messed up to...would've ended just like all the others did be a truce for a week her face all puffed up black and blue marks buy her somethin' tell her he's sorry...none of us ever looks each other in the eye never see the truth just hide it all...hide from the pain hide the secret hide from yourself won't have to hide now everybody'll know now.

Ribs are killin' me gotta stop...can't gotta keep goin'...where am I gonna go? Shoulda stayed at Diane's and called home like she said...wouldn't have made me leave with her like that. Never know what he mighta said ain't sayin' nothin' now. I'm in real trouble now never been in this kinda trouble.

Just go get Diane and leave...don't belong here anyway with all their rosaries, masses, novenas, their faith, hope and charity...fuckin' joke...nothin' but fights at home and she's spendin' all that time at the church thinkin' he's cheatin' on her. What a crock of shit! Sweater's gettin' wet, I'm cold where the fuck am I? Across from Diane's snow all over me shoulda gotten my jacket when I left...she's sleepin' warm in her bed...like to get in bed with her...fat chance...wake her up and run away. Not right my problem not hers my father not hers. Not the girl over the mountain anyway woulda done it tonight if she was...afraid of havin' a baby never know what might happen never figured this

would. Better get away from here and decide where I'm goin' what I'm gonna do how I'm gonna do it.  
Snow's a pain in the ass...kick it the fuck outta here...kick everything the fuck outta here...he's dead and I'm fucked. I'd still be fucked if he was alive couldn't live there anymore couldn't pretend anymore...**Ooh ooh yes we're the great pretenders**...just playin' around pretendin' it's all ok when it's not. Go back help her out...sometimes seems like she knows what she's doin' and sometimes she's like she's totally nuts...crazy ideas about him cheatin' on her...who'd wanna live with a mean motherfucker like him whether he was or not? Fixed that - won't have to live with him anymore me neither. No hope for me unless I can get away from here get a new ID like a criminal in the movies.