

Maleficium

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I

Listen: Good things, things that do no harm are not the things to watch. They don't require the alert art. Disaster, folly, the precarious equilibrium of being, the inertial contradictions of phenomena, these, collectively, are a delicate situation to be understood and in part manipulated. Many have no capacity for such nuance. I say this to you only because I know that you and I are in perfect accord.

1.

Larry, who worked with me at Wackward Chemical Co. — through some mishap — got blood poisoning that made it necessary for his doctors to amputate one of his arms. Everyone that knew of it made it his business to say condoling things about Larry to somebody: to mention a visit that had been made to the hospital to see Larry — exactly that!

I could hear them in my mind, "You're gonna be alright, Larry," or "Your job's waitin for ya, Larry," or "Don't let it get ya down, Larry," or "That's nothin' today, Larry. There's jobs for everybody."

Larry with a fake arm! I could advise Larry at the shop how he might do such and such a thing. If he disagreed with me I could turn from him and think, "The one-armed liability! He's lucky to be getting advice." Bless them, they do likewise his "friends" would. The thing now? Tempt Larry back. He might consider too deeply. Refuse to hope. Refuse to come back to work.

I could talk about remote tragedies at lunch counters to somebody or other, but not about Larry's tragedy. I couldn't pause over a cup of coffee, with the look of a second-hand Samaritan, shaking my head condolingly for a "poor Larry." (Frankly, nothing as wholly commiserate as this had happened at Wackward Chemical Co. during my employment.)

Suddenly I knew why Larry's tragedy had dulled for me: *It was the source of joy to too many. Everybody was happily commiserating the misery of Larry.* They drank so deeply of the thrill of the misery of Larry that I couldn't bear to hear about Larry. I took my lunch box to fling full at a fool who said, "Did you hear about poor Larry?"

Pity got possession of me. But a horrible pity. I would transform pity into mercy. I resolved to put an end to their insidious joy.

At the hospital I sat somewhat retired while a "friend" of Larry extended that ghastly sympathy.

"Now you're gonna be alright, Larry. And just don't let it worry ya. We're raisin' money at the factory an' you'll have that arm back before ya know."

He had no way of knowing — this "friend" of Larry's — how I thought more than once of strangling the dirty truth out of him. My fingers knarled. More than ever I knew that the Larrys had to be saved from them. I thought of their intended pleasure. — raising money at the factory! A mechanical arm purchased with their contributions! Their insidious glee was responsible for my agony. I hated them with a vengeance too severe to be endured.

Unpackaging a cigarette, it dropped accidentally. Leaning down to pick it up I realized that Larry's "friend" had departed. There was depression, abysmal depression in Larry's face that thrilled you — well, thrilled me then.

"Larry" I said, coming forward — and I thought I saw veil over his weary features that look of contemptuous boredom that says, "No more pity, please." If that look meant anything, I could offer Larry the courage he could use.

"Larry you've been made into a circus. You're their Barnum & Bailey, Larry. Will you come back to work and let them tack a mechanical arm on you bought with their money? Larry, I know. They mean to torment you. Let me encourage you. You know what you must do. *I understand, Larry.*"

The eyes of Larry were more cheerful. The lines of his face rounder.

"The others wouldn't give me courage," he said. "Thanks."

When Larry, a brave man died by his own hand in an intelligently handled death, every compassion in the book was expressed. *But there was that disappointment, that note of irritation.* Truthfully, I can say that THEY were *unhappy* about the death of Larry.

2

Mother:

If they ask, tell them I am doing excellently well. I haven't found it true that this particular occupation is unrenumerative. I am, as I say, doing well, all considered, and I have several very large issues at stake. I cannot advantageously continue to make use of this stolen car. Somehow it might lead to the owner, who, to be precise, mother, is dead. I believe his murder was done Tuesday, exactly four days ago.

I have decided — though you disapprove — to credit myself to a margin in the subsidiary field of rape. I know an exceedingly decent young lady for whom I am certain I can make it an experience. I'm not content to make her just another activity in my profession, but rather more toward art.

This aside, I have a murder to commit next month. The man is a recluse. I don't quite know how I shall go about it yet. I have labored with the thought of changing the character of my killings. I'm so clean and deliberate and uniform. Certainly this endangers me, I thought perhaps I would — oh — do a specialty: cut off his head or something out of character.

I have to close, mother. A friend is coming to visit me. He has done, oh, several murders, expertly.

LOVE

When I speak of Frank, Frank and his wife, Vickie, I say Oh why of course my wife and I think the world of them. Something happen bad to Vickie and Frank? I should hope not. They'd give you their last dollar, those two (they have all their first ones). No, seriously, I'd give my right arm for Frank and Vickie. Wouldn't we, honey? I'm talking about Frank and Vickie. Wouldn't we give our left legs for them? Leave the dishes a minute **GODDAMN IT AND LISTEN** — our left legs, wouldn't we give them for Vickie and Frank? **WHADDYA MEAN, "NO!"?**

My wife hasn't forgiven them yet.

You see, we needed money desperately and I said, "Frank — I was just wondering — well, I'm short of pay. I—"

Frank thinks deep. When he stood up at his desk you could see this.

"Gee, I'd like lettin' you — right now, however, well —."

Honey, what did you call Frank — a shit-head or somethin'? I've told honey about temper. Anyway, Frank's not tight. That's one thing now. Frank and Vickie would give you —

" — their toilet paper."

Honey, you're wrong about Vickie and Frank. For example: I headed home from the office day before yesterday to catch the Rapid Transit. My Buick's on the bum. Frank's car's a swell job. When he passed me by — a beautiful car wash job — he leaned once and leaned again and waved warmly, friendly like and was gone. So what if he lives a few doors down? Honey thinks he should've — what should he have done, dear? Look, Frank's tired at a day's end. I tell you, he'd give his right eye for us. Here is what it is about Frank if you really want to know: he's forgetful. Who isn't now?

Take the time I kept feeling in my pocket for a cigarette.

"Got a cigarette on you, Frank? I asked when I found that I was all out of them.

" — o sure," he said. I don't know how long it takes to be sure but it appeared as if Frank was about to be all day at it.

"Do I have any?" he asked himself. You know how you ask yourself? He was all out, "All out, I guess," he said.

What do you say, dear? Honey, anybody's mind can slip up on a thing like that. He forgot he had a pack until he forgot and brought it out — no, until he forgot he'd said he did not have one — no, that's — that isn't exactly —

Honey, don't you have to have more faith in people? **CHEAP ASS SONS-OF-BITCHES ARE NOT LIKE FRANK.**

I have at hand the largely fascinating business of dying. I wonder if you have had the notion of “dying” as an art? I know, your preoccupation is the encouragement of living. Good for you!

Personally speaking, I wouldn't spend five minutes to cure myself of a disease that gave me no pain. I scarcely accept the responsibility of any thing such as disease. What is it for in terms of nature — (other uses aside) —? Dignity, such as that quality is — if it is — in a Monism, demands that I refuse to be serious about a disease because, then, I might otherwise have to acknowledge or in any case, face a universe of seeming purposelessness. Evidence of a decided lack of dignity is the wholesale willingness of many people to go about armless, legless, and, were it possible, headless even in the wake of some operation intended to cure. Either I am a successful piece of machinery successfully functioning in the perfection of a creative principle, or I am not. I don't choose to go about rationalizing half successful experiment on the part of either physician or creative principle. When pain is beyond drugging, the thing to do is to take (in some wholly sympathetic company) a poison of euthanasial dispensation.

My sister explained that my health was of the utmost importance to her. If you know anything of relatives — I am certain you do — you know that when your health is of importance to them in a way that is in any way propitious to you, you are usually of some use to them or strategically influential in that matter as in contrast, say, to your dying by which you leave a fortune for them, then, of course, it's not so much your health but rather your lack of it that's important to them.

Oh, but really I shouldn't say this. Ada — coming to think of it — didn't feel that I was propitious (*that* propitious) to her welfare. Our parents had left Ada and me a little money. As the older of the two of us I was executor of the funds. The funds, however, were low. Unless somebody somewhere could name us, through a tortured ancestry, his or her only living heirs, I would be forced to find a job.

“No!” I said to Ada, “No, I won't work.”

“This is the twentieth century. Everybody works.”

“Don't, under any circumstances now or ever, impose on me, Ada, trivial realities.”

A feeling of joy was given to Ada because I consented to an appointment with Cadding, the family physician. Going about happy about little trivial matters is Ada's idea of anybody who is anybody.

My reasons for seeing a doctor were my own. Reason, yes, some reasoning I still had, made the matter of a job a pertinent one nonetheless. Suppose I succumbed to the tubercle bacillus in, say, two years? I could forget a job in the meantime. I'd be spared the rather unpleasant direct difficult act of a suicide and yet would be doing so by letting the germ consume me — if germs can be said to do that. I would forget it until doom. I could be administered an anesthetic in a final agony.

I shunned sleep — reduced nutrition. As I approached anemia, I met a consumption patient who had not yet been admitted to a hospital. I made myself the unsuspected object of his coughs. I breathed deeply of his atmosphere of phlegm and expectoration. Then I made the appointment to see the doctor.

If just plush could cure anybody Cadding's office could have done it. He was a boisterous extrovert if ever there were such extroverts! He came booming out of his X-ray room with a chart:

"I'm going to be very plain spoken," he began loudly. "You don't like doctors, I know."

"Well, then?"

"Take hold of yourself. When I explain it won't be easy. Ready? You're a very sick, very negatively —"

"For drama I'll go to a playhouse. Say what you have to."

" — very dangerously anemic and — "

"In so many words, I have pulmonary effacement, evidence of action of the tubercle bacillus?"

"You know? You've let it go as far?"

"How far?"

"A sanitarium for you!"

"This'll cost your usual exorbitant fee?"

"Are you crazy? You're contagious."

"Then arrange for my home treatment."

I'm dying. I've been in bed for months. I am coming upon the end soon. Ada of course, has wept and prayed. The simpler more inane dictates of her nature necessitate it. I don't think she'll survive my death. She has made of my carefully planned finish a miserable psychic landscape of haunted crevices, shadows and what not. She entertains the sad notion that death is some penalty. My composure exceeds her. How can I die peaceably? How can I, a selfish, wicked soul, die peaceably under divine law? And then she asks the question that most galls her: How could I have wished to die and leave my poor sister? At this imploration I am to collapse in a welter of religious idiocies, summon the priests, perhaps; ask for various forms of absurd forgiveness. To be sure, I do not consider these even a minute. I ask Ada for the evening newspaper.

I do have one desire: That on my death, total war will break out. I could die stupendously justified knowing that as I would take my last breath a bacteria war was on: that at the very moment of my death a new devastating explosive would deliver, say, London, from many hopeless traditions and put an end to cultural dilemmas in America.

I'd never known anything so horrid as twelve o'clock noon in a factory. Hardly anything depressed me as much as this. Of course I was "jest aroun'" with the rest of the fellas, regular, with wife and kids. You know. I didn't let on that twelve o'clock noon in a factory depressed me. Know what I mean? You Know. Everybody had to think I was a right guy, regular, with wife and kids. I didn't have any wife and kids, but I *was* a right guy. I am still a right guy. IT'S JUST THAT I COULD NOT STAND TWELVE O'CLOCK' NOON IN A FACTORY. There ought to have been something independent about it. Wasn't anything independent about it. It was the way the assistants around the office described it, "Chow time, buddy," that drug me

Four factory whistles expressed drably and simultaneously twelve o'clock noon. Have you ever listened to four factory whistles express, drably and simultaneously, twelve o'clock noon for an industry? Ever listened in a stupor to the sound of the noonday traffic and that hell of a crowd as it goddamns in to the street and pitches a bitch?

I spent noon at a cheap hell of a counter in a lunch diner. Joe had horny hands. You understand that as deplorable? I just could barely stand Joe's horny helluva hands waiting for a cup of coffee over a cheap lunch counter. He said sexy things to Margy — Margy the waitress. I was so embarrassed. I ventured saying 'em once only because I simply couldn't risk not ever saying 'em. But I can hardly think of Margy's whoredom and my being blur beside her and Joe without desp air.

I think I should mention the old porter (one of the helluva crowd) of singularly old standing. I don't mean that he was of any standing, really, any real considerable standing, that is. The bum. He was all clock-work. He had "arrived", as the saying goes, if that saying goes in this regard: that he was a perfect employee and so deserving of that esteem associated with having pleased a boss for so many years (and that is seriously classified as esteem by some). He had that you've-got-to-learn-to-work-your-ass-off effect: he had, you see, mastered it so. Having heard a timing bell at a special hour for years he'd collected a large — and I mean formidable — history of associations with it. He loved to behold our general response to that bell then criticize that response, this being to imply how inept the new generation is and how apt his was.

You can realize, can't you, how this sort of thing simply wracked me and all my composure? Certainly he worked hard and had taken care of a sizable family from what I'd heard; creditable, I suppose, from what I hear. But he didn't "hafta" do a little extra cleaning before the office girls got back from lunch each day.

It was the supererogatory insubordination that you simply had to remark about or burst or have ulcers.

Mr. Steller, the boss.

"Good morning," he said when he came in each day at nine o'clock. Actually, I hoped (and the others did too) that he never would come in.

Let me tell you, he got condescending with me:

"Say," he said, I hear you're studying photography? That's a good field. Yes, indeed. (But I had not asked him anything about the field.) Keep at that."

"I intend to," I said.

"You know, we had a fellow who became a great photographer — used to work here." (That may have been to say wonders, I supposed.) "Gotta watch you," he continued, "we may be coming to you oneday."

Infinitely encouraging. Infinitely.

Now listen: Do what I tell you. You do want to murder your wife or your husband? I've just seen them. They're on their respective lounges or sofas downstairs. They're unsuspecting and asinine. Quick, into quiet shoes — be brief! Those are perfect — no, the brown ones. Yeah. Great. Now open — cautiously, now — professional instinct tells me we would best leave the tablelamp aglow — open the room door quietly. Very, very, very, — VERY. The damn door's so noisy? Why's that? Okay. Into the hall with you. Good. The hall all Druid with hush. There, upon the wall over a stairway, reflection from the light below — not without somebody's innocence, eh? Along here, and don't brush any of the tables or anything that rattles. So far, so good. Think: that bastard husband or that bitch who inhibits you.

Forgot the what? Who said anything about a pistol? Who's doing the planning? Let's keep it at that.

Now, a deep breath and don't ask me what for? All I know is that when the body undertakes a thing like this that needs the complete, stark co-operation of the brain, a deep breath has to be taken.

There is the husband or the wife, whichever one, all locked up in what each may be doing — reading a book, say. Homicide (especially where each would be involved) is as remote to them as the Carpathian Mountains are to you. See we might accomplish this? The victim has a drink of some kind. Spike it with arsenic. Did you bring any? No. Hardly a surprise though. I have to tell *you* everything. Expect a drink beside victims reading a book. You're crummy at murder. Bludgeoning's out! Give me that, for Christ's sake! Carefully, then, leave it lying down. Don't let it bump.

When the victim begins to idly turn pages it's yawning time: then a glance at the clock. Then:

“Am I sleepy! Many more pages to this chapter? YAWWWWWWWWWWW nnnn —.”

Pull that cord from that drape by the window. We'll have to strangle the victim. It's too about bedtime. (Anybody out to instruct professionally in murder! You wouldn't believe how dumb —). Pssst! You haven't unwound that? (This character attended a college?) MY qualifications for this? Say, list-UN, don't worry your head about that. I'll take the cord. Why gas? The cord'll do. Besides, the victim is about to doze. What kind of an art is turning on some gas? What expertise? Absolutely not — come on, YOU, in cuckoo land, come over here!

The victim's neck relaxed upon the sofa's back. HERE, TAKE THE NECK! QUICK! HOLD! TWIST IT UP! KEEP IT TIGHT! I'LL DO WHATEVER I CAN WITH THE HANDS! WHAT'S THE MATTER! The goddamn cord is unravelling! I *am* binding them — the hands! Stuff something in the shrieking mouth. KEEP THAT TIGHT! YOU HAVE LET IN BREATH! You're the worst! That window with a vine outside — in Heaven's name, will you bring it? Bring the vine! The cord is broken! Stop! What's the matter with me? Here's a pillow. Perfectly convenient, You've got me goin'. OOh!

That's THAT. I've taught murder for years and you're the worst!

Evelyn had quite the job as secretary in a large office downtown. Evelyn was my wife. Bills, recreation, progress of one sort or another in our married life depended on Evelyn — of course, temporarily. I had several very extraordinary things on the fire.

“Wasting time” is not the way that *I* describe the playing of cards. I am sure to be made president of the local Society of Card Players. Believe it or not —Evelyn doesn’t —that organization has a treasury and pays its officers, well — something anyway. In the meantime, the nearby Neighborhood House has enlarged its jackpot. Fridays I play Presto.

My head had begun to ache about five o’clock. I have to take Bysol. My headaches, you see, come up all of a sudden for, oh, some reason. Worry I imagine. Our doctor can go cure the horses for my money (Evelyn would laugh since I haven’t any money).The only thing that man knows about medicine is how to charge for it.

Suddenly, Evelyn came in and announced, “I’m through working. I’ve quit the job!”

I have to take Bysol.

“I’m through with it if it’s the last thing I do,” continued Evelyn.

Evelyn couldn’t be saying what I thought I heard.

“I’m through with working,” she said fluffing her hair and moving briskly about — a horrifying briskness.

I said, “You mean you’ve quit?”

She closed the bedroom door after her.

God knows how she thought we would eat. Common sense would have made it clear to anybody that to quit so lucrative a job was folly — no, stupidity! It would take all the strength I had to bring Evelyn to her senses.

I believe I spent the valuable part of an entire day wracking my brains for something of a solution to the problem of the unemployment of Evelyn. I had to conclude that it was stubbornness in Evelyn’s case.

I made no bones about my mood next evening. I crashed about, slammed the doors, jangled objects that jangled.

(If anything could unnerve a guilty woman these things could do it.)

On a table were letters, bills, reminders for unpaid bills, threats from bill collectors. And she replied, splashing around in her bath water:

“Honey, there’s a letter from your club on the table.”

“I see on this table bills, bills!”

“Awful situation, honey. I don’t know what we’ll do.”

Sustenance gone and she talked of it like *that*. How in Heaven’s name — !

“Evelyn, what about supper?”

“There isn’t any. Wait until I can talk. I’ll be out in a little while.”

On the table was the letter from the Society of Card players. I supposed this the final word on the voting Tuesday for the club's presidency. Oh, for Christ's sake! Davidson to that office! I was furious.

I dressed hurriedly. Evelyn had certainly shown herself to be lacking in serious ambitions. Wouldn't you say so? Wouldn't you now?

I was late for Presto at the nearby Neighborhood House.

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I've experienced pleasant effects today. No, no, not to you pleasant, no. I mean pleasant corroboration of my predictions. Why cannot these things be pleasant to you? I did not say they couldn't be. I said they weren't. Judge for yourself:

The daughter of the woman across the street killed herself. I have a mind as to why — just a minute: that looks like the ambulance there now. Getting her body, heh heh —. Anyway — ah, there's mothAH: beside herself as they say, grief, etc.

You see, as a young girl in grade school Kathy had a family that exaggerated her. Children, you know: Kathy's people take her to California summers; Kathy's daddy is the director of — well, whatever he's director of — just a minute: they are bringing down her body. Kathy's dead body, now, how about that? She managed it, they say, with considerably little poison. I don't trust poison personally. Get the pills, the barbiturates, to induce the one and only profound sleep.

So! When Kathy's reputation as the child given what she wished when she wished it, grew, she, Kathy knew but that she wished thus and so. She became the little shit. I saw her occasionally pass by. MothAH, too, is shitty if you ask:

“ — AHnd we intend to send our Kathy to good schools. AHnd I — ”

One watched Kathy as the years passed her. One did but the boys didn't, you see. Was she pretty? You would've had to, Oh, violate the meaning of the word “pretty.” Features? They were, say, featuristic. Hair? I would *say* hair, yes. Expression, well — warm weather is a cumin in —. Of Kathy's contours commonly denoting sex appeal? Somethin' about her buns: that is, she had, in truth, no appreciable ass.

— just a minute: there is the doctor. Sedatives for mothAH.

So! Kathy's daddy went on directing and mothAH did so find the house in need of a new décor annually, Oh, and they would be gone the summer — yes, there would *still* be a summer without them. They may be back by the end of August and that would be chiefly, the salvation of August.

Barbara Dodd's daddy drove a truck. Barbara Dodd was Kathy's best friend in case you are wondering, MothAH didn't approve. Barbara had what it takes — that I've-got- somethin' look. Kathy dressed to death (very dead according to the boys). Barbara threw on somethin' and *man!* Kathy troubled phones with,

“Hi, this is Kathy.”

(Much inquiring among the fellas, “Who's “at? WHICH Kathy? Not THAT Kathy? Pssst! No! Sh! Cripes! Ugh!”)

“Barbara seldom had to call anybody. Calls *came* rather:

“Babs? Hi. This is Rick.”

(Much inquiry among the fellas, “Who's “at? Barbara? How'd you get on so much time, man?! Lemme dig! Fabulous!”)

Barbara scarcely ever had money. Fellas said she didn't need any she was so cool.

Kathy has money? She has got to have it, man.”

“Mother,” said Kathy, “in typing I do sixty words a minute to Babs' fifty. Babs got a scholarship. Mother, Evans saw her. He's taking *her* to dinner, to the dance! Mother I can't get anywhere with anybody. Mother! Mother!!

“Kathy, dear, guess what?”(MothAH)

“Daddy is taking us with him when he visits Canada, We'll show Babs”

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I don't know why it is — though I do really — but people don't believe you are busily at work unless you're bumping about physically. Would you believe — and I know you would not — would you believe (but then I ought not even ask you good people), would you believe that there are persons, reasonable, sane persons who question my being busy? Question it outright. Yep. They seem to feel that I am not hard at work. Where do they get that stuff? I put such people in their places! — sometimes, that is. I say, “Listen here, I have indefatigable mental activity going on all the time. Indefatigable! That means that when I'm lying in bed I'm the same as a man hauling coal, a steelworker making steel, a rail splitter (— do they still have rail splitters? —), well, whatever they have.

When you observe me seeming to watch the birds from my window, don't think for one moment that that is really what I am doing. That busy, indefatigable mind I spoke of makes me as if I were a man with a lunchpail — which reminds me.

There are those so filled with the Protestant ethic that they would rather have you earn ten dollars a week as long as you hit the sidewalk at eight each morning rather than have you earn a thousand a week by using your brain if you — and you can laugh — sit down doing it.

Where do they get that stuff?

Nothing do I hate more than rain that doesn't arrive. Thursday, though clouds expanded and though I sat in indefatigable anticipation of it, rain did not arrive. Why did I want rain to arrive? I wanted the damp, the depressing, the uncomfortable for those who do me even imagined injustice. Had somebody done me imagined injustice? No, but they would.

Rain, then, did not arrive. Mrs. Case's washing continued to hang in a kind of unspotted joy on a leisurely line. It hung thus even though I had waited patiently six hours or so for its disaster. Even the children commenced to play in the schoolyard near by: they were unstained, undriven off. I think a drop or two fell. I did not mean a drop or two. I required tremendous splashing and slop.

Effie, the child next door, seven years old, played in her backyard and did so by dragging her dog by its broken leg. I COULD NEVER MAKE IT CLEAR TO YOU, I SUPPOSE, WHY I LEAPED INTO THAT YARD, SEIZED EFFIE AND DETERMINEDLY BROKE HER ARM. Yes, yes, yes, I know you think I went to extremes. That isn't the matter particularly.

Effie shrieked, of course, not to mention her mother's inhuman contribution:

"What you doin' to my baby?!!!"

She came cramming out of doors — Effie's mother — with the ferocity of a bear. I imagine that even bears do less.

How did I know that the justice of it would be unacceptable?

"Officer, this child drug the dog by its broken leg," I said. Any reasonably sane person could understand. I couldn't make them understand. "Officer I had to — " (I have not as yet met an intelligent officer) " — let us examine the situation objectively," I said. "Effie now, entirely without upbringing, dragging the dog by its broken leg, isn't it a certainty, officer, that — no, listen, it stands to reason that I knew how to deal with a — that isn't the issue. When I say creative justice — you see, you cannot reason with th' — I'd as soon as reason with Effie —."

"Let Effie alone!" the mother screamed. "Officer, he's crazy!"

I wouldn't have wanted to meddle anybody, but there was a baby standing in the middle of Roxbury Street. Yes, I mind my business. How should I know, for crying out loud? Maybe his mother was asleep or preoccupied or maybe she was in bed with somebody. Say, you may not grasp this, but I do not happen to like babies. Ye Gods!

Of course he was — he seemed to have found something there and wasn't moving one peg. What would you expect? I doubt if anybody had even taken a look. Oh I think a woman motorist did rather startlingly look. That was all.

Admittedly, a big hauling truck did turn a corner. Fortunately, it was a truck. Truck drivers unavoidably see kids, they say. I'm forever reading in the daily paper how truck drivers swerve to keep from crushing kids on bicycles. It's common knowledge that truck drivers — Oh, killed, yes, yes, many of them — poor men — have, i.e., died thus. (Of course, this just might have been a drowsy truck driver.) The truck? A truck I like that? My! A baby would be pulverized. No, nothing came of it — I had the intuitive feeling that he'd make it — the baby would. He *did*. Next thing I knew he was across the street. Play babies cheap, eh heh?

Yeah, yeah you would think somebody would. Nobody. For pete's sake, he *did* start back, big as you'd please. Yeah, I remember because I had resumed packing some books. The telephone rang and I stepped to get the receiver and saw him through the window, his diapers loose, while he wobbled along Roxbury. I thought, Is that kid crazy?

A car came suddenly. Was that driver hot:

"Hey kid! Get the hell outta there!"

They're dime a dozen anyway — babies are. Are you going to hand out that "human life is sacred"? Well don't. Just don't shit me!

I'm one of matrimony's warmest advocates. I don't mean that I'm married. That would be too advocative. I mean that when others marry, I heartily commend their audacity.

I went upstairs in the apartment house in which my friend kept residence and knocked on his matrimonial door. I owed him money that I had (some would say commendably) resolved to pay.

The door was opened and a woman stood there.

"I wondered if — are you Dorothy?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm Dorothy."

(She was Dorothy — dumpy, perfectly homely.)

"I wonder," I said, "if I might say a word to Willy?"

Unceremoniously she excused herself and with slip hanging she hurried into another room. I remained by the door with vague feelings of finality about the respectably married.

Taking note of what there was noteworthy, I gathered that an apartment of the type of this one was occupied for cheap rent. The upstairs of some boarded off attic or somethings is scarcely desirable when you're alone, free and unattached, but when you're accoutred — offspring, bills, bad smells and wife with an inability to apply the contraceptive — they must be a danger to sanity.

Dorothy returned and with her a somehow shocking assortment of babies: a little boy, two girls about seven or eight and in her arms a mean looking version of an infant.

"My iron was scorching. I remember you. You're Mr. — of the birthday party."

"Yes, of the birthday party."

"Willy — a — isn't here."

"I owe him some money," I said.

The baby in arms made ominous contortions of his mouth to yell. Dorothy — and poor dear, she actually (you wouldn't believe it of me) actually had my sympathy among the urinal smells and all — had possibly been feeling the adversities of a husband's small pay.

I said, "You tell Willy, when he gets back, that I'll —"

She interrupted, "Mr — I'd like to, but — really, well — here, it's this way: Willy isn't here and won't be around for — well, for a few days anyway."

I realized that "a few days" was not altogether the case. I kept thinking, unkindly I confess, *You can't blame poor Willy. Who of sound mind and body could've found Dorothy of any but a transient interest?*

The baby in arms began to shriek with the seeming sinister purpose of frazzling the nerves of anybody. It was hungry sounding.

"Of course," she said, "he may come back. Was it — was it much — the loan, I mean?"

I said, "Nothing frightful. About twelve dollars." (It was five dollars.)

"No offense, Mr — but I sometimes wonder how Willy thinks he can afford to lend. My God!"

A petulant hint. I rode slipshod over it.

"Should I see Willy he'll probably ask me for it. I try desperately to keep my record clear in such things."

"You *could* leave it, maybe — that is, Willy's so unpredictable."

Downright pleasure got possession of me, "I *could*. Where does Willy hang out? Did he ever say?"

"Oh he was mum on that," she said gladly.

"I think I know one place, "I said as I disheartened her. "Look then, you tell him if you should happen to — well, if you see him, that I'm looking for him to pay him his money."

You shouldn't have had to miss seeing her as she said, realizing, of courses that there was nothing either of us could or would do.

"I'll tell him, Mr —."

I waved a little goodbye at the baby — an excruciating baby.

There was snow. So great was this snow's proportions that the people seemed to be having a hard time of it in a way that was rather contemptible.

Now then my neighbors got out and shovelled the snow. I didn't intend to shovel the snow. LET IT LIE! (Besides, I abhorred the fools.)

My neighbors did not greatly approve of my letting the snow lie thick and impassible. So came an official authoritatively talking to me of responsibility. Everything possible to know about responsibility, I knew.

He talked on, which became very infuriating. I could hardly maintain my self-possession, my mind. He left, finally.

For an hour or so I raged. I wrung my hands. I had to keep stalking about. I was terribly, utterly, furiously angry!

I couldn't possibly remove the snow — not possibly! I must, for principle, suffer being arraigned in court. Anything else would have been outrageous to me. Had I shovelled the snow, my friends and friends' friends would have been able to define me temporarily. I would probably have had to suffer somebody's conviviality. I was aware of this also: I would have let snow, through men, exercise over me powers of a distrusted source! Can you understand now? Responsibility I knew!

Suddenly I saw old Jeff Clyde, the neighborhood beloved sot. They said that he had had two heart attacks so far, but, according to himself, "Wasn't fixin' to stop his drinkin'."

Can you call it anything but genius?! I mean the capacity to bring about the mean? To give myself the exquisite pleasure of the pain of others who do me even imagined injustice?

Now old Jeff Clyde: I'd make him my instrument for neighborhodd remorse. Make me contemptible with snow, would they? Impose trivial responsibility on me, eh? Have friends and friends' friends define me, would they? Have me suffer somebody's conviviality? *Let snow, through them, exercise over me the power of distrusted sources, would they?*

I said, "Go shovel the snow, Jeff. I'll buy you beer and whiskey in quantities you haven't had this year!"

Such a promise was enough to make old Jeff Clyde shovel snow until Doomsday. And as he would shovel, I would watch — watch for him to gasp, to lean on the shovel suddenly, look up, look stark and with God's help of me, fall down dead.

Old Jeff Clyde dead. And why? For snow; for the contemptible snow about which an official came to me talking about responsibility.

Let me do without excessive sunlight, will you? Summer sunlight, to be specific, that hot phenomenon destructive of inhibition. It may be, of course, i.e., I may be less sensitive to them, but I ask: How much more than less clothing worn in summer are “human values?” How much more than this woman I behold, dressed lightly, so to put it, who, of ponderous ass, made hippopotami similarly summery? “Human values” there without doubt.

I shouldn’t have indulged the sordid desire for a soda. “Human values” in that. You cannot see how it is that a soda is sordidly desirable? I was reduced to it by heat.

“Coming up, sir,” the jerk said.

(I have never sat in a public place but that another body has come and sat next to me. It is to be expected, I know. Nonetheless, it is repetitious. I sat upon a bench in a public park yesterday. I had sat but a single instant when the repetitious came and sat by me. Repetition: In music, yes, but in hands, legs, lips, et al., no. And as I am on the subject: mankind in harsh sunlight? Have you noticed? Broken up distorted phenomena. Immediate deconstruction in the lines of the countenance?)

“Fine day, eh?”

(talking to me?) He said, and to the soda jerk, “How’s about it? Got any a that whatsname ya had yesterday?”

“Whatsname?” the soda jerk asked.

“That lemon stuff.” FIZZ” somethin’? I had one yesterday.”

“Fizz Cool?”

“Fizz Cool! I love Fizz Cool.”

(He lov’d Fizz Cool. He was convivial in my direction — a tenth rate conviviality and he wanted me to participate.)

“Hot today, eh?” he said,

(You can understand, can’t you, how hard it is for a Relativist?)

I studied him a moment. He was miserably exuberant, having, in addition, prohibitively artifactual hands: overt perspiration; a mouth with tongue leaping in it; eyes wet with nature’s chemicals to keep them rolling; shoes with — as usual — feet in them for walking — or just a million years emergent protoplasm?

Nausea of no mean dimension appropriated me! I leaned onto the counter — it wasn’t all fault of his — too sick to be! I was recovering, but just in time to detect Fizz Cool leaping along his gullet!!!

I threw myself upon him. Repetition! Lips, backs, legs, buttocks, cheeks — oh Christ!!!

Oh, dear — I’m quiet now – forgive me, I – I cracked up a minute there –

Let me tell you this of food: I abhor its meaning.

Don't let my replenished table fool you — Lottie, have the behind of the chicken squarely in view — I'm having guests — Lottie, honey, where is the sauce for spoiled octopus? — Isn't it the sociable thing to do: to have friends in for food and conversation? Of course — Lottie! I said set ten places —. Lottie helps me here — the asparagus is for me, Lottie, and here place half-cooked turkey. I want it to be particularly corpse — like. Feces au creme goes here, Lottie, (I had to prepare a little special something myself.). Oh and Lottie, see that a roll of Northern is down the hail. You know. — Mack, honey! Mack, baby! I'm calling Mack. Lottie get Mack, will you.

I think my guests arrive — Lottie don't let me have to choke you into understanding. I said wear soiled, repulsive paraphernalia. HOW ARE YA, MRS. HUMOLT? YOUR DAUGHTER? MY, MY, — I'm about ready to serve, now, Lottie. MR.ELDSON! YOU TOO, DOTTIE? PHILBERT! YOU HAVE NOT BEEN DISAPPOINTING. AGNES! NOT YOU? — Lottie, see to it that each one's butt's in comfortable chair. — LESTER AND — NO! — LILY! (Lottie, Mrs. Carleton urinates on arrival. Show her the bath.) GLENDON! I am as excited as — BETTY! RICHARD! (Lottie, Mrs. Landerson needs refreshing.)— wonderful people! Oh, oh I am beside myself!

Mrs. Glendon's dugs looking much fun for baby. Mr. Humolt's trousers with delineated penis. Perfect honeys each and every one, even Agnes, who — when account is taken of both her carnivorously ready incisors and face of equal insult — appears less protoplasmic, though — you know — that is, to see this — a wonder possesses one — that is, it does me: What's it for — human? or does it matter? — doesn't ever strike you that way perhaps? Lottie, get Mack.

Eat as much as you like, loves. Did I explain Mack? Too late. Here he is everybody. Mack, honey! Now Mrs. Eldson. Mack's enormous but friendly. Eat on, everybody. Mack loves people. Oh, I — ho! — have not succeeded in keeping Mack off the center of the dinner table. He, Mack, cannot distinguish — Lester, he's got your chicken bones! — Mack! Mack! Here, Mack! Lottie, move Philbert's coffee away from Mack. Mack don't — his legs and antenna and tail fuss so — look to the soup! No, no I would as soon kill you, Richard, as I would Mack. I suppose I should explain. I neglected to tell you, everybody: Mack eats at table. Mack's COSMIC. He is the object process at summation, having reached a re-constituted complex with the contemporary discovery of the variability of matter. In some ways, Mack is as human as you and I

Go, Agnes? Going, all? Lottie, here, went to the trouble to prepare — going, Humolt? Richard? — trouble enough for Lottie. Every dish mixed by her filthy fingers. How often did you stop while cooking, Lottie, and sit on the commode? How often was cooking material dropped on the floor? How often had you to kill the centipede, the roach with bare hand, to name but a few unavoidsabilities?

Lottie, lovey, it is late. I have to take Lottie back.

Loved guests, Oh ye all, I neglected to tell you: Lottie, love, what do they call you out at psycho?

I'm to understand that my wife's to have a baby. Did I— well, yes, frankly, I did reason with her. No, I'll have you know, that she insists — must have a baby.

I said, "Mind is made up? No abortion?"

"I have no control now," she said.

No control now. Has no control *now*. My, my, my! I may as well retire.

I ascend the stairs. Dangerous rug scuff on them. I must tell her so, because, you see, in coming to bed my honey might be made to fall — her neck breaks and —. Seriously now, shameful to knock its brains out beforehand. HONEY, CAREFUL! DON'T BY ANY SHAPE, FORM OR FASHION FALL HERE, DEAR!

(Don't suppose she heard me, do you?)

Anyway, I am wondering if this hall isn't too gusty for her? Seems to be a draught of a kind. Honey might catch cold. Catch cold *now* with the baby due?! Oh, I could not countenance it! HONEY, VERY DRAUGHTY. A DEATH OF COLD FOR YOU!

(Don't suppose she heard me, do you?)

I ought to shave oughtn't I? Lotion's gone, I believe. My, my! Poison per se in the bathroom cabinet. I am not to leave poison around am I? Not with the baby due? I can't conceive of anybody poisoning honey or the baby. Can I be sure? Someone just might undertake to do so. Heaven knows *who*? Who would poison a moronic wife about to have a baby? Be on the secure side, shall we? Pour it away. (). There, I've poured it away.

Honey and I drive to Wooldridge tomorrow. I sincerely hope I can keep on the road — for the baby's sake. Suppose I do not know that I have taken my hand from the steering wheel? do not know that I've stepped on the gas? The road turns abruptly. We are hurled hundreds of feet to death! HONEY! (I ought to persuade her not to go)HONEY, WE WILL NOT DRIVE TO WOOLDRIDGE TOMORROW. I'D JUST RUN OFF THE ROAD, I KNOW.

(Don't suppose she heard me, do you?)

When I go to kiss honey good night these days, I won't pull any cover up on her. So easy to smother an expectant mother.

Society has an almost pathological — I shouldn't say "society" has this — I should say that some individuals who help comprise that venerated phenomenon have an almost pathological desire to tear me piecemeal. Now why? Because — (I say this modestly) — because I'm big. They hate — it's entirely up to you whether you believe this — they hate that about me that won't adjust — that "big." Look, friend, I'm not trying, particularly, to account for why I am, "big," that is. Besides, I don't just, so to speak, not adjust for the hell of it. (I have the feeling that I am wasting my time revealing this to you? What's your business anyway?) I repeat: I should not have to account for not adjusting unless you mean for those who *do* adjust to account for that to the maladjusted. I can't quite picture you meaning that.

Good friends abhor my not having a job. No, no they don't know I know they do — it's hard to tell to you. They understand that I am to suffer because of no job. I am not suffering *now*. They are. They ask how can I sleep late. (My mornings begin about eleven o'clock.) In most cases, anybody who stays up late, sleeps late. At any rate, it's logical to suppose this — logical even for job boobs. And yet I'm told I ought to be in bed by nine. I could be up by seven o'clock. You tell me, will you, why? Because a lot of dupes get up at seven o'clock? Even if I retire at five o'clock a.m., be up by seven o'clock? What about rest? Do I need sleep? I have no job and the need for rest is directly proportional with not having or having a job? — any way, so says the boob.

Though I abhor the job boob, I admire his naivete. He has values, he feels. I suppose by the conformist's standards, he has. He hopes to be secure. He is even now: he's everywhere and that's "secure" in a suffusive way. He adds that he's of service to people. He understands and loves people.

"What is it that you do?" I asked, "— serviceably?"

He "contributes." He's dead serious. That's what he does. And then, contribution could be anything.

"Specifically," I asked, "how?"

But I suspected that he was afraid *not* to contribute. Maybe one ought to be afraid. My friends who resent me all feel that I don't contribute. They know I'm not afraid not to, though I *have* contributed. I've written verses; a few pieces of music; a few theoretical works. My friends don't think too much about them — or *of* them. These "contributions," however small they may be, are infinitely — I mean infinitely — *more* than society DESERVES. Especially do I have this deserving-of-nothing sense for society when I go into the horror of its streets. I have spoken of this before: driving impulses to be a suicide? Everybody's preoccupied with "survival." They have jobs and because they have, they have cars — they say so anyway — and having cars, jobs help keep cars up (cars, it seems, do not "survive.").

After a car is kept up for a job's sake and a job is kept for a car in some instances, there are families that have to be had for one reason or another: wives and unfortunate babies. What but that homes have to be bought to contain them while mortgages maintain homes while jobs manage mortgages. Even then, jobs not only have mortgages and wives and babies and cars to undertake, but taxes as well which maintain cities. State governments maintain the government — really the end — that maintains cities where homes are mortgaged. Now, I ask you — ?

I said to the job boob, “jobs are the lack of opportunity. Add that up.”

It was as if I’d sprayed him with D-Con.

“Social agencies” I continued, “try to make jobs of opportunity and opportunity out of jobs.”

“I’m one,” he said, “for facts.”

He was one, no denying it, for any outrage.

Of having wives, babies and what not, I count among “friends” those who, to be sure, have them. Mercy, yes, yes, yes, that’s all I hear: how husbands and wives love each other! Love undying and eternal. Anyway, “survival” is bound up with this, which, of course, the job boob explains: he believes he has one — an explanation that should satisfy. Consensus, seemingly, (he says) regards *not* being married — sorry, respectably married — as meaning *something*. I never seemed, he said, to talk of women. And he had something: I seldom do.

“Marriage there, boy!” he exclaimed, slapping my shoulder.

What was meant by that I don’t know nor do I too much dare to know, since I gathered that he alluded to some sort of — well, you can guess. If so, we seek highly disparate Elysiums. I don’t propose to have to pay for everything in life — least of all *that* and least of all with a job.

No kidding, the conformist tells how “you get out of life what you put into it.”

“Doesn’t it strike you,” I reply, “that good business is getting *more* out of it than you put into it?”

One ought not have to put anything into it sometimes.

“Besides, I *was* married,” I said.

“You were?” asks he. “Wouldn’t you know we fellows would fall into the trap. Even you?”

“I perceived no trap. My wife had the job.”

“No, I do not think you’re happy.”

I turned — ready. Somebody in a bar sitting around waiting to talk. I kind of indulged him a moment just to see if anybody could say anything of interest this day.

“What do you mean by “unhappy”?” I asked in a tone reserved specifically for the full of shit.

“Not committing yourself to life. Investing too little. Receiving commensurate returns.”

(I distrust anybody who presumes to show the nobility of humanity: who professes to be aware of a dignity inherent in human endurance. I can’t determine why it has to be “dignity.” Overt terror of the coffin and the No More.)

“I am happy because my interest in people goes deep,” the fool continued. (Needed at a time like this: a way to commit murder.)

“ — interest in their struggles, their problems, their — ,” he broke off with a laugh. “And you have many friends, do you?”

(I know nobodies like this've seen the buttocks of the preposterously mortal body; the inexplicable color of races; experienced the lizardly nausea of being in a crowd. What's to be said for looking in the "hearts of men"? A medical matter per se – atrocious goo.)

I said, "I don't know anybody "happy" — "happy" in some pervasive hypostasis of the meaning of the word — occasional moments of some neurological vibration, "happy." This is the trivia I should pursue? What's a minute of a kind of electrical thrill – your pissed "joy"? Don't imagine that I'm occupied with your crummy opinions about "happy." Be informed by the precursory divulgences here that I am moving adamantly toward annihilation. There is nowhere for turning. Consciousness, comprehension, value, etc., depend upon such shits as you."

"Friend, you err. I know a man — contentment is his. Infinitely so!"

"The dead are entirely another matter."

"I am happy." He smiled.

I took up a glass of water and poured water upon him, "Happy, eh?"

"Is this fair?" he said.

"Happy? If not now, *when?* Next moment? Next? Today (again, I felt myself losing something), tomorrow, eh? (I heard myself yell,

"I am Tetanus! I'm Tetanus!")

19

"Remember Millington Park yesterday?"

"Millington Park? Who's phoning might I ask?"

"Mr. Warner. You'd broken your handbag strap –"

"Oh — yes, well, *that.*"

"I thought to keep my promise of a call."

"Oh? Oh, of course. (YOU GUYS, QUIET BACK THERE!) Sorry, Mr. Warner, I've got crazy pals

"— yes — sounds like quite a few?"

"Yes, it's — (OH, SAY, LISTEN — I'M TRYING — SAY LISTEN! —) They're crazy, Mr. Warner. (NOT ON YOUR LIFE! — YOU GORILLA! JACK, SHUT HIM UP A MINUTE WILL YOU?) Sorry, Mr. Warner."

"I couldn't seem to cast off the pregnant implications of our conversation together —"

"(ANSWER THE DOOR SOMEBODY! THAT'S PROBABLY AL.) That's probably Al."

“Of course. As I was saying —”

“Pregnant?”

“Pregnant implications —”

“Oh, I get it. What’s it to do with me, Mr. Warner?”

“Well, this: there’s no point in beating about the bush. I am — well, I — frankly, I have taken a fancy to you.”

“Jesus!”

(SAY WARNER, YOU’RE TAKIN’ MY GIRL’S TIME)

“Get away from the phone, Jack. Sorry, Mr. Warner, that’s Jack.”

“Oh, sure —“

“Mr. Warner, I think — (AL, HONEY, YOU GOT HERE!) Hold the line, Mr. Warner —“

(OH AL YOU LOOK WONDERFUL)

(AL YOU LOOK WONDERFUL)

(DOESN’T AL LOOK WONDERFUL)

(WHO’S ON THE PHONE?)

(HEY, AL!)

“Mr. Warner — listen — I’m —”

“Lorraine, there are things to be shared. Seriously, the moment we met, seeing that indefinable quality, that element so precious these days, perfectly embodied, richly expressed in you, I could have no other ambition than that of seeking your devotion. There was made instantly the path of a pursuit so incalculable in its reward, that I have had little other concern in mind. Only —”

“Mr. Warner, you must have got me wrong. (DON’T TURN ONN THE MUSIC, AL.) Really!”

“Surely you meant something — your earnestness, your courtesy — your —”

(SAY, WARNER —!

(JACK, PLEASE!

(WHO’S THAT GUY?

(JACK. He's settled, so please!)

"Lorraine, how is this a question of us?"

"Mr. Warner, I'm natural with everybody. I try to be. Friendly, you know? I took you to be a business man just — well —. Really, Mr. Warner, I figured you as married and settled and merely passing the time of day."

"What does *that* signify?"

"Really, Mr. Warner, I'm myself with everybody. I never —"

"What does *that* signify?"

"It don't signify nothin' Mr. Warner. I thought you were — well — settled. Really."

"Do you mean old, Miss Heathers?"

"Look, Mr. Warner, forget it —!"

"Forget it? Forget it? Give me some explanation, then, of your — your manner yesterday —!"

(WARNER, ARE YOU CRAZY?

(WHO THE HELL IS IT, LORRAINE?

("Some guy a hundred years old trying to work me. You should see him!")

"Miss Heathers — Miss —"

Gnash your teeth, bastards. I'm about to be a middle-class, maybe even -- yeah -- wealthy suburbanite. Kick that around a little, dad. How's about that? Few legal details cleared up and zowie! Honest to goodness I laugh at slumdweller. I jist hafta laugh. I think of the split-level or ranch-style or whatever layout I'm headed for.

That a car stashed over there -- that junk heap? Does somebody actually drive that claptrap? How do you get that kind of low self-esteem? Wait to dig me in my brand new Fiat, or Capri, vinyl upholstered and with every gadget in the book. Think I'll have more than one car, of course -- possibly three.

How came I by all this affluence? By chance, baby. I stepped from behind a parked truck and WHAMMO! this wonderful motorist rammed my ass. I bounced, daddy. I lay, the object of a real attentive public shocked by my two dislocated legs. But dad, kick this around for luck: the driver of the Olds had whipped through a traffic signal. Real happy times! Witnesses saw it all and I picked up a bundle.

One day on my job -- I was a skilled worker in a factory -- I figured: several thousand more and another down payment was mine -- that split-level deal I spoke of. Hell, next year I had fifty thousand in loot. A defective parts-accelerator took off my arm. My lawyer took the Co. to the cleaners,

I had my Caddy-lackey -- latest thing -- up to the Realtor's. Legs in a brace, fake arm, so what? I had more blueprints than an architect. Cars, houses and a sizable amount of "cookies" in a District National Bank, my "cookie jar." Will you dig this in a million years? I've just deposited a hundred thousand smackers in my account. I slipped down an open shaft -- some unmarked construction site, ThockMortion Mfg. I broke up into little pieces inside. Medics patched me together. I'm on crutches now, but you wait, dad.

Got a big one: icy hotel steps first, maybe, then later, I've got the wildest maneuver of all on the map: skid on the deck of a luxury steamship, fall overboard and --

Never mind how I'll work it. So-long you money-grubbing bums out there in anonymous-ville. Read about me when my horse wins the Preakness.