

# Manhattan Morning



A Story  
by Fowler W Martin

# **Manhattan Morning**

A Novella

By Fowler W. Martin

Copyright © 2015 by Fowler W Martin

All rights reserved including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in  
any form whatsoever.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictionally. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The illustrated edition of a book published by print-on-demand through

The Book Patch

([www.thebookpatch.com](http://www.thebookpatch.com))

ISBN 978-1-6827-3100-0

Originally published as an e-book through Smashwords

([www.smashwords.com](http://www.smashwords.com))

ISBN 978-1-3109-1724-0

All photos, including the cover photo, were taken by the author.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction, p 5

The Cast of Characters, p 8

A Particular Girl in the Frieze of Life, p 11

In a Certain Light, p 33

The Significance of the Day, p 52



## Introduction

“Manhattan Morning” is fundamentally a novella of associative thinking – in essence, the commonly experienced phenomenon that one thought often leads to another, and then to another and perhaps even further. The initial thought is often the result of external stimuli of one sort or another, principally sights and sounds and smells.

As such, this story falls generally into the camp of Modernist fiction. While the story is in part narrated, the role of the narrator minimal. Much takes place within the mind of the protagonist, Dan Morrison, as he walks through part of mid-town Manhattan on an unnecessary errand.

I am indebted to John Dos Passos and his 1925 novel “Manhattan Transfer” for the framework of this piece. I read the book many decades ago and was captivated by the way Dos Passos used the sights and sounds of the city to help tell his story. Long interested in doing something similar, I never re-read the book for I had no interest in being overly influenced by the specifics of the work. It was simply the idea that mattered.

Thus in “Manhattan Morning,” external stimuli, for the most part, lead Dan to think about certain things – food, architecture, historic preservation, sports teams and Japan, for example. A particular type of shoe prompts him to wonder how well he knew his mother. The destination of certain buses gets him thinking about neighborhoods and who lives in them. But most importantly, he thinks about art and fashion, and connections between the two, and those topics, in turn, get him thinking about his former wife, Helen.

At one point, overwhelmed by the bustle and noise of the city, Dan ducks into St. Patrick’s Cathedral for a few moments of temporary relief, forgetting that the interior of a church is likely to bring to mind a particularly difficult topic involving his current wife, Marcy, and his mother-in-law, Gloria. The heart of the story is there.

A big reason Dan’s thoughts are driven by his surroundings is that he is “off duty.” Normally a busy account manager for a Philadelphia-based advertising and marketing firm, his thoughts would typically be directed toward problem solving and he would in all likelihood be largely oblivious to what was happening around him as he walked a city street. This might be called practical thinking as opposed to associative thinking.

But as this story takes place, Dan is headed to California to visit a relative and he has for the moment wrapped things up at the office and put his work aside. Back in Manhattan, where he once lived, and with nothing to do for a day, he experiences a sense of freedom that facilitates a free-wheeling thought process.

At the end of the story, Dan is brought back to the present, and problem solving, by an unexpected encounter with a woman at an eatery in Grand Central Terminal. In some respects, this dose of reality calls into question, at least in part, all that has transpired before. Dan is prompted to think about what may lie ahead and wonder about his values.

After I finished “Manhattan Morning,” I came across an essay by Virginia Woolf called “Street Haunting” that runs on what I would call a parallel track.

Just as is the case with my protagonist, Woolf used an unnecessary errand as the impetus, or justification, for her walk:

*... so when the desire comes upon us to go street rambling a pencil does for a pretext, and getting up we say: “Really I must buy a pencil.”*

Assuming she started from 52 Tavistock Square where she was living at the time the essay was published, her round trip was probably a little over two miles. Outbound, she ambled through crowded streets – it was the time of day we would call rush hour – and overshot her putative destination, walking all the way to the river Thames. Inbound, she hurried home, probably as fast as her legs could carry her, the streets now largely deserted, and we learn of nothing she might have glanced at while on her way home.

And then much later in the essay, explaining why she needed a pretext, she said:

*One must, one always must, do something or the other; it is not allowed one simply to enjoy oneself. Was it not for this reason that some time ago, we fabricated the excuse, and invented the necessity of buying something. But what was it? Ah, we remember it was a pencil.”*

[An interesting aside: this is clearly a woman speaking. Men rarely wonder or ask if they are “allowed” to do something. Women often do even in the wake of repeated feminist instruction to the contrary and Woolf is often hailed as a feminist icon.]

Dan, too, needed a pretext for his walk and decided he wanted to make sure the location for catching a bus to JFK airport the next morning was where he remembered it to be (the hotel concierge could have confirmed that). In addition, there was no need to purchase such a bus ticket a day ahead of time.

Woolf, as always it seems, considers the nature of beauty – in this case what it conceals as well as its appeal. Encountering a dwarf and two blind men gets her thinking about the complexities of society and its odd juxtapositions. Window shopping leads to thoughts about possible different lifestyles.

Dan most notably thinks episodically about art and its interrelationships with other aspects of society. He sees the Museum of Modern Art and thinks of the utopian aspirations of the De Stijl movement; is then reminded of a particular credo of his deceased architect father-in-law and wonders about its societal implications; sees flags flying on buildings and thinks of art as decoration; contemplates the Fendi dress in a window display and finds it leads to thoughts about the expressionism

of Munch; notices the ceiling of Grand Central Terminal and is reminded of its indirect connection with Proust and with Paul César Helleu's beautiful wife, Alice, and the French artist's love of family, and, finally, of his former wife Hellen to whom he gave a Helleu etching.

Both Virginia and Dan notice and think about women's shoes and in Virginia's case, how much pleasure an otherwise peevish dwarf gets from a new pair selected only after considering many.

Virginia thinks in some detail about how the plethora of second-hand books she sees can result in one experiencing the world in a random fashion – akin to the experience of street haunting.

Dan's unsettling thoughts prompted by sitting in St. Patrick's Cathedral combined with what a woman tells him during an unexpected encounter at lunch gets him thinking about relative values.

All of this happens in both cases simply as a result of talking a walk in a complex urban environment.

Lastly, as her essay ends, Virginia realizes that getting out of her house has served to heighten her appreciation of the pleasures of home. In Dan's case, his walk leaves him contemplating what a future home life with children might look like.

More significantly than the need of a pretext, both Woolf's essay and "Manhattan Morning" center on associative thinking. Virginia and Dan both observe urban phenomena as they walk and it gets them thinking about things they associate directly or indirectly with what they see. Sometimes the thoughts are fleeting. In other cases they are lengthy – Virginia in several instances, and Dan first looking at a Fendi dress; later while mulling an incident in Marcy's premarital life.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Dan Morrison**, born and raised in a middle-class household in South Bend, Indiana, is in his early 30s when the story takes place. An only child, his mother died of breast cancer while he was in college. Thanks to a scholarship, he was able to attend Northwestern University where he majored in international relations with a focus on the Far East. Shortly after his mother died, his father met a wealthier woman from Texas, moved in with her and they soon married. Unable to get along with his step-mother and distressed by the loss of his home, Dan became estranged from his father.

Uncertain what to do next and loath to ask his father to help pay for more education, Dan fled to Japan after graduation with the intent of polishing up his Japanese while thinking things over. He supported himself by teaching English to Japanese students. While in Tokyo, Dan met a foreign journalist who taught him how to properly write a news story, gave him free-lance work and eventually helped him get a job with Hearst in Washington, D.C. There he met a summer intern named Helen, fell in love and followed her back to New York City where she worked in the fashion industry. Unable to find his feet in NY journalism, Dan switched to advertising and marketing, working his way up from an entry-level job editing ad copy.

His marriage, devoid of children, ended after about five years when Helen suddenly asked for a divorce. Shaken and perplexed, Dan, now quite good at his new occupation, followed one of his bosses to an emerging firm in Philadelphia. While there, he met his current wife, Marcy, through an Internet dating service.

When “Manhattan Morning” takes place, Dan is briefly back in New York with his wife and mother-in-law. He is scheduled to leave for California the next day at the request of his mother’s older brother, who lives in Santa Barbara and, with nothing better to do, decides to walk to Grand Central Terminal to buy a ticket for the bus to Kennedy Airport.

**Marcy**, Dan’s wife, is about six years younger than her husband. Also an only child, she grew up in Ohio and followed her mother to Barnard College in Manhattan where she majored in French Literature. Uncertain what to do with the degree, or her life in general for that matter, Marcy returned home to live with her mother. Her father, an architect, had died in the interim.

When Marcy appeared unlikely to soon marry, her mother encouraged her to take courses that would enable her to get a teaching job. Frustrated with her social life, Marcy eventually turned to the Internet and came across Dan. That led to marriage and a move to Philadelphia where she got a job she likes teaching very young children at a private school.



Dan and Marcy both want to have a family and the time to start could be drawing near.

At the time the story takes place, Marcy is in New York with her mother to attend an alumni event at Barnard.

**Reginald Saddleford**, an Episcopalian minister, is an important character who doesn't appear in person. Born in South Africa to an Indian father and a mixed-race mother and thus a "colored," his last name was changed at some point.

Saddleford got a scholarship to study in England where he had a religious experience, switched to theology and was ordained in the Anglican Church. His marriage to Lydia, an English girl, was facilitated by the tragedy of Partition. Unable to overcome racial prejudice in Britain, the Saddlefords relocated to America where the minister was accepted into the Episcopalian church and posted to Marcy's home town -- in fact, to the church built by her father.

Saddleford's importance in preserving Marcy's father's church and in helping to stabilize the community around it, and beyond, are important counterpoints to certain personal shortcomings.

**Gloria**, Marcy's mother, is a formidable woman. A free spirit with an artistic temperament, Gloria is bent on enjoying life after bringing up her child, supporting the priorities of her architect husband -- "he so detested the perfectly straight line" -- and devotedly caring for him as his health slipped away.

Now flamboyant in her choice of attire, in her unapologetic devotion to an active love life, and in the manner in which she expresses herself, Gloria comes across as a liberated bohemian, albeit of a certain age. But when problems arise, she knows what to do and how to make sure everyone else follows her lead -- and when her late husband's legacy is at stake, her attitude is take no prisoners.

Marcy loves her mother because despite their obvious differences, the two of them have always had a warm and understanding relationship, in contrast to the complaints many of her college classmates expressed about their mothers. Grateful to her mother for taking good care of her father, Marcy believes Gloria now richly deserves a life of her own while she is still able to enjoy one.

Dan admires his mother-in-law even while finding her somewhat challenging.

**Helen**, Dan's former wife, doesn't appear in person in "Manhattan Morning," but Dan can't help thinking about her during his walk along 5th Avenue, past any number of high-end purveyors of the latest fashions. Although he has successfully put her behind him in all practical respects, she remains an important influence in terms of how he thinks about certain things.

Marcy doesn't feel threatened by Helen or by the impact that she had on Dan. She believes the past is the past and life moves on.

**Sheryl**, a woman with whom Dan has an unexpected encounter while eating lunch at New York's Grand Central Terminal, lives a hectic life as a working mother of three very young children. But her classy appearance makes an impression on Dan as does the story she tells him and the values she expresses.

**Hartley**, a person mentioned in the story, was Dan's best friend when they were both fledgling journalists in Washington, D.C. and he was the best man at Dan's first marriage. Although Hartley identifies himself as a writer, he lives off editing other people's work. He resides on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

## A Particular Girl In The Frieze of Life

The door opened and Daniel Pettigrew Morrison, lone occupant of the descending car, stepped out into the babble of a bustling hotel lobby – bustling not because the number of people milling about was particularly large, but rather because the lobby was remarkably small.

As Dan knew from his mother-in-law's impassioned commentary over a somewhat disappointing dinner at "Murals on 54" the previous evening, that aspect of the hotel was unlikely to change. The Warwick, embraced by The National Trust, was one of Manhattan's treasures, she explained. Such buildings are to be preserved for the edification of future generations, not altered to accommodate the quotidian requirements of contemporary users. That was her view, firmly stated, not to be contested.

Thinking about that as he gazed out into the lobby, Dan wondered if the hotel restaurant's food was constrained by similar considerations.

Gloria bedded down with The National Trust for Historic Preservation whenever possible, Dan's wife, Marcy, had explained later that evening over drinks in "Randolph's." Her mother did so as a tribute to her deceased husband, Alfred, an Ohio architect who had refused to have anything to do with buildings devoid of ornamentation.

"He so detested the perfectly straight line," Gloria was fond of stating.



Although this wasn't Dan's trip -- it was Gloria's -- and Marcy had said her mother wouldn't mind if they plundered the over-priced mini-bar, Dan had insisted on going back downstairs for nightcaps in the hotel bar and paying for them himself. It wasn't because he was worried about incurring his mother-in-law's displeasure. Gloria had reached the stage in life where she was more concerned that she might not spend enough money than that she would spend too much. It was a matter of principle. Dan had lived in New York during a previous marriage and couldn't abide the thought of having drinks in a hotel room. He had wanted a sense of place, a sense of belonging; to pay by leaving a few bills on the bar and walking away – just the way he had always done.

That was one thing Helen had admired about him, even at the end. Style mattered to Helen. Rather too much for Dan? He didn't think so. That hadn't been the problem.

"Randolph's," as in William Randolph's, was less than ideal for Dan's purpose, but he sensed Marcy was indulging him and he didn't want to drag her around a part of town with which he had little familiarity in the hope of finding someplace better. The room was nearly deserted – Dan liked his bars busy – and the fact that it was named for Hearst was unfortunate. Dan had worked for a Hearst paper briefly, left by what was termed mutual agreement and wasn't sure he had ever managed to collect all he had been owed.

But there was no getting away from it. The whole hotel was Hearst's, or had been. That's what Gloria had said. Built for some mistress in the theatrical world – her name vaguely familiar when Gloria mentioned it, but Dan couldn't recall it now.

Gloria, seated between Dan and Marcy at dinner, had turned, looked him straight in the eyes and identified the woman in question as a *paramour*, dragging that word slowly off her tongue in an effect apparently calculated to suggest delicious, sophisticated scandal.

As Marcy had rolled her eyes and exclaimed something along the lines of "oh, mother, no one uses *that* word anymore," Dan had stifled a guffaw. It was one of those moments that help cement a marriage, he thought.

"Excuse me, sir. Cart on your left."

Dan realized he had paused, in a moment of indecision, just outside of the elevator, impeding a bellhop who was attempting to maneuver a large load of luggage. He tried to move to his right, only to block the path of a couple entering the hotel from



6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. To accommodate them, Dan, now slightly flummoxed, stepped quickly forward onto an oriental rug that served to demarcate a seating area, strode across it, and found a place on a small couch under a gloomy cityscape in a palate of browns. He felt a need to collect himself.



Next to him, a man sat reading a newspaper, aided by the light of a table lamp. In a chair positioned at a right angle to the couch, a woman studied a map. About mid-morning. Tourists, surely.

What was he, Dan wondered? Not here on business, he had arrived from Philadelphia the previous day and was departing for California on the next. Perhaps that made him a traveler. What about a visitor? Surely not a transient with all the baggage that term carried. Mulling the words over, he decided traveler best described his status and, for that matter, his mood. In contrast, Gloria and Marcy were visitors: they were here for a reason. He was with them in a sense, but not in another. Fundamentally, he was just passing through.

Well, what did it matter? Dan attempted to dismiss the topic as he gazed toward the front desk where five or six people were seeking attention. Yet it did make a difference: Dan realized he couldn't abide the thought of being mistaken for a tourist in Manhattan. It diminished him, rubbed in a sense of failure. New York, the center of advertising and marketing. He had worked there. No more.

Why did he think such thoughts when he was happy with his life? Dan felt there were times when he had little control over his mind – it went wherever it wanted, taking him places that were often interesting, but sometimes distressing in a needless way. This was one of those times. Why should the sight of a woman reading a map lead to self-doubt? Dan suspected that sort of thing didn't happen to other people. Well, not the sort of people he admired. That said, the sort of people he admired wouldn't be immobilized on a hotel couch: they would be getting on with their days and so should he.

Still not quite ready to move, Dan leaned forward and eyed the scene at the front desk. The farthest person back from reception was standing under an imposing chandelier of the candelabra variety. From the middle of it, a large glass orb descended alarmingly close to head-top height. Not an ideal hotel for visiting basketball teams, he mused.

The hotel was across the street from the Museum of Modern Art, spitting distance from Carnegie Hall, and a block from the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue shopping corridor. It wasn't convenient to any sports arena Dan could recall and given the somewhat precious nature of the place, he couldn't imagine a team manager booking it for a bunch of athletes.

Well-positioned in many respects, The Warwick wasn't all that convenient for getting to Barnard College. But Gloria and Marcy would take a taxi. Decent weather; should be no problem. What about getting back? Not as many cabs that far up. Marcy would be comfortable on the subway, but surely not Gloria. When one looked at Gloria, one saw a woman being helped out of the back seat of a comfortable car, not a woman laboring up the steep, gritty steps of a New York subway exit.

Surveying the entirety of the Warwick's cream-colored lobby, Dan admired the wainscoting and elaborate crown molding. Some square metal vents in the ceiling seemed out of place, but probably didn't attract much attention. He turned to the floor -- highly polished, slightly flecked marble, also cream -- and his eyes encountered a pair of satin-black shoes, medium heels, somewhere between sensible and stylish. Dan's gaze followed a pair of subtly patterned black tights upward until they disappeared into one of those short, straight skirts women wear with suits. Sure enough, she had one on: navy blue, tailored, but not in a particularly feminine manner. Too boxy. The woman, well into middle age, was no beauty, but she looked competently put together in a professional way. Here on business, Dan surmised, wondering what her occupation might be.

Something about the manner in which she carried herself -- confident, but reserved -- reminded him of his mother. So different from Gloria. Would they have gotten along? And what about Marcy?

This wasn't the first time Dan had wondered whether his rather strait-laced mother would have approved of his new wife. Actually, he thought, the question was a little more subtle. Even if she had disapproved of Marcy, would she have approved of Dan's decision to marry her? It was possible, he thought.

Still considering the lobby, Dan realized the room had probably been painted to match the color of the marble floor. Interesting: the tiles were laid at a diagonal to the main walls, making the room look somewhat larger than it actually was and perhaps less like a public edifice. Alfred would surely have approved.

Small black squares -- aligned with the walls as opposed to with the diagonals -- adorned the interstices of the main tiles, providing visual relief and enhancing a sense of formality. It was a nice effect, Dan thought, pleased he had taken the time to appreciate it. There was something to be said for not getting on with one's day.

While the Warwick's marble was far more elegant than the nondescript, industrial-strength carpeting favored by most hotels, it was noisy -- very noisy, he realized.

Dan looked to his left. A couple of large, green marble pillars were built into the wall, framing a tall bookcase, full of books. While the pillars seemed out of scale -- Dan would have thinned them down somewhat -- the effect was comforting. A homey counterpoint to the formality of the lobby.

Looking back over the Oriental rug, in the direction from which he had come, Dan noticed the cream-colored floor tiles gave way to a strip of dark green marble in front of the brass-fronted doors of the hotel's three elevators. A heavy brass letterbox -- U.S. Mail -- was embedded in the wall between two of them. One elevator door was open; above it large letters, incongruously made of plastic, were illuminated: "This Car UP." Where were the preservationists when those were installed? What exactly must be preserved and what could be changed?

How often did the elevators ascend each day? And how much of one's hotel bill went for that?

Dan's thoughts were sliding around.

"I think you're wrong. I think we can take the 'F' train." The woman with the map addressed the man reading the newspaper, seemingly oblivious of Dan's presence.

"Um-hm," the only response.

As the woman continued to study the map, Dan decided he was finally ready to go. He arose, walked around the woman's chair, and headed toward the main exit, leading out to 54<sup>th</sup> Street.

"This one yours, too?"

On the verge of uttering a response, Dan realized the question wasn't for him.

Mounting three stairs, crossing another strip of green marble and pushing through a small revolving door, Dan emerged onto the sidewalk. A large black sedan, its hind-quarters still out in traffic, was trying to nose into a space in front of the hotel entrance that was mostly occupied by a yellow cab. Horns were sounding and a bellman was doing his best to get the taxi emptied expeditiously.

"City scenes," Dan murmured to himself, skirting several bags and a couple of people about to enter The Warwick. He was enjoying the spectacle. On the loose in the Big Apple on a day when he would normally be sitting in his unremarkable Philadelphia office, contemplating various requirements of "the client." Not that he was upset about that. On the contrary, Dan was proud that after an unsuccessful attempt at journalism, he had entered the world of advertising and marketing on the ground floor and risen rapidly entirely as a result of his own initiative. He had known no one, was no one's protégé, and hadn't had much in the way of mentoring. He had kept his eyes and ears open and had been quick to seize the initiative, accept responsibility, get in early and leave late – often the person still around to handle something that came up at the last minute, even if it was outside his job description.

That was how he'd landed an account manager job in Philly, following someone from his New York firm who had decided Dan could be the guy he most needed.

Dan loved his job, in large part because he was good at it, but at the same time, the work was frequently exhausting. So he had welcomed the opportunity to take some time off and standing outside the Warwick in the heady New York midtown milieu, Dan experienced an almost giddy sense of freedom. For the first time in months, he didn't have to think about solving problems.

Glancing upward -- it was hard to get a sense of exactly what the weather was doing from the patch of sky visible between the buildings -- he headed east on 54<sup>th</sup> Street.



As he passed under an elaborate wrought iron lantern, Dan observed a vertical cloth banner hanging from the exterior of the hotel: “Murals on 54,” in restrained Art Deco lettering. The restaurant was on this side of the main entrance. “Randolph’s” was on the other side, wrapping around to front on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Avenue of the Americas was not a term Dan used -- because a pretentious outfit that once employed Helen had insisted on it? How he’d hated those office parties. Standing around in Helen’s shadow. Not that she’d wanted it that way. He had to give her credit for that. What was she doing today?

Anxious to get thoughts of Helen out of his mind, Dan paused to look at a menu in the hotel restaurant’s window, wondering if he had erred in ordering the previous evening. No way to reassess: the menu was for Thanksgiving, even though this was only mid-October.

*Grilled stuffed lobster ... Russian pumpkin salad ... what was that? ... ingredients in writing too small to be deciphered ... Dan didn’t really care ... something finished with papaya seed vinaigrette ... seemed to be popular these days ... wild forest mushroom terrine ... were there tame forests? ... garnished with toasted pinole cream ... did he read that right? ... micro greens ... duck consume floated with truffles and shredded duck, topped with a pastry dome ... that one sounded good if, well, too rich... choice of roasted free-range turkey or grilled Wisconsin rack of veal, glazed with bourbon honey mustard ... cranberry beans ... beans? ... baked halibut with zucchini and tomato on steamed spaghetti squash and English beet puree – colorful, but would that combination really work?*

Dan lost interest before he reached the desserts, or the price. Hard to cook Thanksgiving dinner in a NY apartment. Helen had had friends upstate. Their job had been to bring a treat from the city. A whole side of smoked salmon one year – that had been a hit. What a feast! What would he and Marcy do this year? No invitation from Gloria – yet anyway. Perhaps that was for the best. Dan, who rarely drove (he was still a New Yorker in that respect), didn’t relish the idea of navigating the Pennsylvania Turnpike in late November.



Straightening up, Dan turned away from the menu and glanced across the street. His eyes swept past a sign advertising “Icon 24-Hour Parking” to an empty lot. Like a missing tooth he thought, looking through the gap at a gray building beyond. His glance then traveled upward to where part of Rockefeller Center – “GE” emblazoned near the top of one building -- was visible through a crack in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Street fortress. Beyond that, a gray sky. Unseasonably warm, though.



Lowering his gaze and resuming his walk, Dan first saw *Manhattan is Modern Again*. Then a building on the other side of the street came into focus. Medium height, mostly windowless, dark gray, but sufficiently polished to reflect the images of a couple of apartment buildings on his side of the street. The backside of the new Museum of Modern Art, he realized. Completed during his absence – some controversy there, but when isn't that the case? *Manhattan is Modern Again*. Dan admired the slogan and wondered who had thought it up – and how much the campaign had cost the museum.

Dan had gone to the old MOMA many times – he'd enjoyed it when he was pursuing Helen, less so after they were married – and had no interest in exploring the new building now. Too many paintings. Impossible to absorb. All a blur not long thereafter. But he had always liked seeing the Mondrians, lingering there as Helen, who had little interest in them, went on ahead. Dan had taken a couple of art



appreciation courses in college and, fascinated by the idea of art as an avenue to utopia, had written a paper on the De Stijl School. Who could take such notions seriously now? The diagonal was forbidden – a concept so weird he could never get it entirely out of his mind. He thought of Alfred and the straight line. Suggestive of cold, unbending authority? Totalitarianism? Maybe Marcy's father had been onto something. Too bad he had never met the man. But would Marcy have been searching the Internet for a partner if he had?

Dan walked toward a dark awning – Connolly's Restaurant Pub, a Stella Artois blackboard on the pavement in front of the establishment advertising lunch specials -- and drifted to his right to avoid a woman who was walking toward him, but looking elsewhere.

Suddenly she stopped, peering intently toward the building on her right. Something about the woman intrigued Dan and he stopped, too.

The woman was wearing a dark blue suit jacket, but unlike the somewhat stolid cut of the one worn by the woman in the hotel lobby, this jacket was tailored to flatter her waist – perfectly, he noted. Under the coat, she appeared to be wearing a crisp, white cotton top. Her straight skirt ended just above her knee, revealing a set of dark blue tights, precisely matching the color of the suit, and dark blue shoes, unadorned and flat for walking. Her almost shoulder-length white hair, definitely that of an older woman, but refreshingly natural, was surmounted by a little blue hat, worn at a jaunty angle. Her face – she had a soft, natural complexion with only a hint of makeup -- put her in her late 60s, perhaps beyond. Only in Manhattan, Dan thought, admiring the outfit – exquisitely put together, all of a piece.

The only thing he would have changed was a purse, hanging from a shoulder strap, that seemed far too large. But that was the fashion. On the other hand, the classy gray shopping bag she was carrying by its thick, white rope handle was just right. Living with Helen had left its mark, he realized.

As they both resumed walking and passed each other, the woman's chin tilted slightly upward, Dan noticed a playful smile on her lips and a little sparkle in her eyes. She was happy. Done a bit of shopping – pleased with her purchase -- and meeting someone for an early lunch? Maybe the rendezvous was at MOMA's new restaurant – was it named "The Modern?" – and perhaps she was anticipating the pleasure of a good meal with a special friend. They hadn't seen each other for ages and would have a glass of wine – white of course – to mark the occasion. The woman in blue would talk excitedly about what she had just bought; her companion would relate the details of a recent trip. They would gossip about mutual friends. Promise to meet more often.

A civilized pleasure, Dan thought, wondering about the luncheon Gloria and Marcy were about to attend. They, too, would be seeing old friends and they were probably already giggling to each other about the well-known foibles of their prospective companions. Dan envied Marcy's relationship with her mother. They were very different, but clearly enjoyed each other's company. What about his own mother? Had she had a happy life—before the illness, of course? Dan wasn't sure.

As he continued to walk, Dan's view of the new MOMA building was blocked first by a glossy brown UPS delivery van and then by a truck that said "Party Rentals Ltd." – out of Peterborough, New Jersey, he noted. Big event? Something connected with "The Modern?" Probably a fundraiser. Museums were voracious.



The Thai Grill and Sushi Bar was now on Dan's left, its narrow yellow awning running above the establishment's door and windows. Then came another restaurant – Il Gato Pardo – something about a cat? – with not much frontage on the street. No awning, but a couple tables outside, one or two steps down from the sidewalk. A waiter was sweeping up around them.

Dan could now again see across the street where a white, eighteen-wheeler – devoid of any markings -- stood alongside MOMA. An exhibition was coming or going. Best to transport valuable art as anonymously as possible. Just beyond the rig stood a hot dog cart, tended by a man in a warm-up jacket and a ball cap.

Looking to his left, Dan saw a window displaying a few pair of women's shoes. No signage apparent. A store with no name? He slowed his steps and looked around more carefully. Embedded in the brick wall, a very small brass plaque said simply "Manolo Blahnik." Repeating the name aloud, he realized it sounded familiar and he looked into the shop where a well-dressed black man, a bit too generous around the middle, but otherwise sufficiently intimidating, stood just inside the door. Otherwise, the store seemed empty.



The front window displayed a pair of black heels with glittering rhinestone bows. Beside them, similar shoes offered a safer option -- rhinestone circles. Shoes of a few other colors were visible on low shelves within the store.

Dan rolled the old-sounding "Blahnik" over in his mind as he stared at the footwear, no indications of price evident. It seemed likely he had heard that name from Helen, a notion that put him on the wrong track. Finally it came to him – Marcy – some episode from "Sex and the City" – that woman with the frizzy hair liked those shoes. She was obsessed with them, actually.

Dan peered at the shoes more intently. They didn't look particularly remarkable and his thoughts went back to the footwear he had seen in the hotel lobby – the low heels that reminded him of those his mother used to wear. He doubted she had been obsessed with shoes, but how could he know? Silly, ridiculous women talked openly of such things; sensible women like his mother kept their mouths shut. But had his mother, alone in her bedroom, cradled one of her shoes, stroked the leather, admired the curves and the lines and the craftsmanship before slipping it on? Did she experience a sensual feeling if it fit perfectly? Had she smiled to herself as she stood up, smoothed her outfit and turned sideways to check the state of her profile in a full-length mirror? Dan had to admit such images didn't square with what he remembered of his mother. But it wasn't impossible she had enjoyed certain indulgences. Dan hoped she had – before the breast cancer recurred and she seemed to lose all interest in life – and in him?

Then more about Blahnik came back to Dan. Blahnik's shoes were sexy because the man himself was celibate. That's what Marcy had said. How could she know? She must have read it on the Internet. Just the sort of rubbish one found online.

While the notion was clearly ridiculous, Dan realized it was sufficiently provocative to have lodged in his brain. Just like the de Stijl School's forbidden diagonal and Alfred's abhorrence of the straight line. Just because something was absurd didn't mean it could be dismissed. Dan's thoughts were bouncing between Blahnik, art and marketing.

For instance, what about the absurd explanations one heard from apologists for contemporary art? One prominent artist had apparently said something along the lines of: "It doesn't matter what art looks like." That was another useless notion that had stuck with Dan even though he couldn't remember who said it. But maybe it wasn't totally useless. Perhaps it made sense if one accepted the idea that a work of art is in essence the realization of intent. An artist starts with an objective and a work is finished when the intention is realized, not when the piece looks like anything in particular. The realization finds an appreciative public or it doesn't. Even if it doesn't, it's still art.

Life is similar, Dan thought. People start with intentions and to the extent they are realized, some, perhaps the fortunate ones, can find fulfillment even if others don't appreciate their accomplishments.

What other explanations for contemporary art were there? Dan reconsidered MOMA and couldn't recall if the museum displayed current work. "Modern," he knew, didn't have anything to do with what was happening today. It was a certain period of history, now past. Even post-modern was finished. Was everything thereafter doomed to be contemporary, even when it no longer was, or would there be a post-contemporary period?



*Manhattan is Modern Again.* Dan thought back to the slogan advertising the museum in its new quarters. Curiously contradictory. In fact, virtually Dadaesque. But powerful: the compelling power of nonsense. *Post-Contemporary.* How about that? Could it be used to, say, sell condos? Dan's mind flicked back to his job in Philly, then to his time in Japan.

*We Want New!* He remembered the department store that had flooded Tokyo with that disconcerting slogan. Disconcerting if you were a native English speaker, at any rate. Unfettered by grammatical strictures, the Japanese deployed English words so as to conjure up a certain mood or feeling – for effect. In music, that was Handel's particular genius, or so said Mozart. Would they do something special for Christmas this year? "The Messiah" again? Hopefully not "The Nutcracker." Dan's mind had slipped out of gear. He was free-associating.

Resuming his progress, Dan passed under scaffolding, its thick, lower legs freshly painted dark blue. The Rockefeller Apartments, favored by people in the arts and entertainment. That's what Gloria had said last night. Apparently getting a facelift.

Gloria and Alfred had once taken a sublet there when Alfred had worked on a project with a New York firm – before Marcy had arrived. It wouldn't have suited them afterward: the apartments were tiny, Gloria had explained. Dan looked to his left and up, but it was hard to get a sense of the building when it was enveloped in metal pipes and wooden walkways.

John D. Rockefeller had supposedly lived in a house on this block. Had it been located right here, where the apartment building that bore his name now stood? Dan decided to ask Gloria that evening, knowing she would appreciate the question. It was something in which a son-in-law of Alfred should be interested.

Parked along the curb was a white van with blue livery: Disalvo Contracting Co.; Restorations and Renovations of Fine Luxury Residences Since 1977. On the apartment steps a young woman wearing a sweatshirt sat smoking. As she scowled at Dan, he looked away and unconsciously quickened his step. "Reality intrudes," he murmured.

Where the scaffolding ended, the architecture was older, more interesting. It was also quieter near the middle of the block and Dan experienced a sense of serenity. He'd forgotten how the racket of the city took its toll, even when one wasn't annoyed by it.





noticed he could see into MOMA's courtyard through something akin to large Venetian blinds. Gray day. No one sitting there. Had the courtyard been part of the controversy?

East of the gap that revealed the courtyard, a door led into another part of the building – the entrance to the museum's education and research center. Was it a staff entrance, or could anyone enter there? Dan thought of his art appreciation courses. How did one *appreciate* contemporary art when most of it neither provided much in the way of aesthetic pleasure nor had discernible meaning to anyone other than the artist? Could answers be found through that door? The question intrigued him. Then again, how much appreciation for art stemmed simply from its perceived potential for appreciation?

Would some collectors guess wrong and discover today's treasures were nothing but tomorrow's junk? Surely so. But what about today's junk? It was treasure! Dan was thinking of an "installation" he had recently seen in Philadelphia. Artists had become alchemists, far more successful than the ancients in turning lead into gold. What had Duchamp wrought?

Back on his side of 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Dan passed a door to something identified only as The Research Board and the mysteries of what constituted art vanished from his thoughts. With a name that vague, it had to be a CIA front, didn't it? Hartley might know the answer, Dan thought, wondering why he hadn't called his friend to tell him he would be in New York. Not here long enough was the easy answer.

Next came a pair of town houses – built, a plaque explained, in the late 1800s for someone identified as New York businessman William Murray. An ornate stairway – about half a flight – connected the main entrance with the sidewalk. It was flanked by bow windows, gargoyles underneath, holding the window bays above a small courtyard outside the building's half basement. Alfred's sort of thing? Dan's gaze traveled upward to twin balconies above the windows, each with a flagpole flying the American flag. Flags everywhere around here, he realized. Nothing new. Childe Hassam.

Garden Homes Development. Occupying the building or managing it? He couldn't be sure.

Dan turned to look across the street and

Dan thought about tonight's dinner at Café des Artistes. Alfred had always eaten there, Marcy had explained.

But there was another reason he hadn't called Hartley. After all, they could have met for lunch today – no conflict with Gloria there. Marcy had even suggested it. But Hartley was probably working on that profile of Helen – maybe he'd even finished it – and Dan didn't want to hear about it. Hartley might ask him to corroborate this or that. Uncomfortable.

There had been that moment in North Carolina when Hartley had caught him staring out to sea and asked Dan what he was thinking about. The war, Dan had replied, setting Hartley off on an annoyingly glib treatise of how it had come about. It was a lie, of course. Not Hartley's facile little history lesson, but what he had been pondering. It hadn't been the war at all. Dan had actually been wondering what Hartley thought about his marriage to Marcy. Wasn't that the main reason he had asked his friend to come to the beach? But he couldn't start the conversation just then. Not enough time. Marcy was waiting for them. Moreover, Hartley hadn't had enough time to get to know her.

The blast of a truck horn, unexpectedly close, cleared Dan's thoughts and he strode more purposely toward the end of the block, soon passing a side entrance to the University Club – "members and guests only, appropriate attire required." Wonderful word: "appropriate." So prescriptive yet so flexible – intimidating and accom-

modating at the same time. Dress code enforced by a certain look and a catch of the throat; waived by a wink and a nod? Dan wasn't sure. He didn't belong to such clubs.

Standing on the corner of 54<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Dan felt oppressed by a resurgence in the level of street noise. A man wearing a tweed jacket and smoking a pipe, the bowl of which was an elaborately carved head, brushed past him with long strides. Going into the club? Apparently not: he walked on past.

"Completed in 1899 and inspired by palace architecture of the Italian Renaissance." So a small plaque announced. Plenty of places for Manhattan's grit to lodge in the fussy, decorative touches, Dan thought. Maybe there was some benefit to the straight line. What was it like inside?





Gerritsen Beach: No Sunday Service. Starrett City: No Sunday Service. Kings Bay: No Sunday Service. BM3, BM4, BQM1. No such buses in evidence. Infrequent except for rush hour?

Gerritsen Beach didn't ring any bells, but Starrett City was one of those massive housing complexes, built where the land had been unattractive and thus cheap. It started out white – for workers in the wake of World War II – but had then adopted a plan to foster measured integration. That failed – a story of America – and now it was mostly black. What would it be like to live there, Dan wondered?

The destination of the buses seemed much at odds with both the University Club and the stores on that section of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. There was Takashimaya, the fancy Japanese department store, little rounded red awnings pushing out over the sidewalk at the store's two entrances. When Dan was in Japan, Takashimaya had always been the safest place to purchase a present for one's host – the wrapping on the gift more important than the contents of the package. Takashimaya wasn't the department store that had plastered Tokyo with *We Want New*. That was a brash upstart in comparison.



Actually, the Manhattan branch of Takashimaya was a disappointment. Dan had been in there and the wrap jobs – like the merchandise – weren't up to Tokyo standards.

Elizabeth Arden sat next to the Japanese emporium. Would women heading home to Gerritsen Beach or Starrett City stop in there? Maybe. It was sufficiently familiar to be unintimidating, but what about Kenzara Clothing? Corner location, expensive rent. Unfamiliar brand, surely a non-starter for Gerritsen Beach, Dan surmised.

King's Bay? He didn't have a clue.

Things got worse south of 54<sup>th</sup>, Dan realized as he crossed 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, looking downtown. There was Gucci, Fortunoff, Fendi.

Now on the northeast corner of the intersection, Dan gazed at Gucci's silver logo as he prepared to cross 54<sup>th</sup> and head south. But before he could put a foot forward, he was brought up short by the warning bleep-bleep, bleep-bleep of a pickup truck reversing into the crosswalk. A bunch of tree branches, mostly stripped of their leaves, were in the back. Suitably, an emblem of a leaf was on the tailgate, above a government license plate. New York Parks Department. Why here? Did they do street trees? Dan looked at the branches again: they didn't look freshly cut.

A man pushing a cart of sandwiches slid confidently around the back of the still-moving vehicle.

Dan was eventually able to cross 54<sup>th</sup> before the light changed, reaching the other side just as a slim woman with short orange hair, glasses so dark as to appear black, wearing a severely rectangular, chalk-stripped, gray flannel suit entered Gucci. He supposed she looked the type. What color hair were “they” showing these days? What would “they” do next? Of Dan’s friends, only Philip purported to know.



That was an interesting thing about Helen, Dan realized. For someone deeply involved with fashion, she was surprisingly focused on the present. Her critiques of what was right, what was wrong, what was in, what was out were unerring, but she never made pronouncements on what would, or should, come next.

Dan paused to look at one of Gucci’s window displays: black dresses over purple tights, all with slit necklines, one down to the waist, but fastened at the neck with a silver clasp. Ideal for a woman with a modest bust who thought she needed a way to compensate while holding a cocktail, he thought.

Dan couldn’t remember the last time he had been to a cocktail party, or heard of anyone else attending one, but such clothes suggested they must still exist somewhere. Or maybe there were nothing to attend but “benefits” now and cocktail dress was just a name.

Continuing on, Dan noticed that a black woman wearing a beret was staring intently at something in Fortunoff’s window. He didn’t follow her gaze. Whereas Helen had repeatedly schooled him on clothes as they walked around Manhattan or looked at magazines, he knew nothing about jewelry.

What was trendy and why. What was boring. What was avant-garde, what was just plain horrid. Helen had thoroughly enjoyed such talk and Dan had been a good listener. Too good, he thought. Now, he sometimes caught himself paying more attention to what a woman was wearing than to what she was saying or doing.

He wasn't as bad as Philip, but that was Philip's job. Or at least it had been. There was a lot of ugly turnover in that field, Dan thought, wondering what Philip was up to now. He wasn't going to try to find out on this trip. Then Dan suddenly had a thought. Philip and Gloria! Philip loved older women with class, but would Gloria be flattered or appalled? Dan burst out laughing. No way to find out. He'd left it too late.

Reverting to thoughts of female attire, Dan considered Marcy. She was young and tall and didn't think much about what she wore. Why should she when she looked fine in just about anything, especially in Philadelphia? Well, perhaps Marcy did care at times, such as when her mother was around. She hadn't yet decided upon what to wear for lunch when Dan left the hotel – not that she had a lot of choice given what they had packed.

Dan could have accompanied them to the lunch – Gloria had taken pains to make that clear – but she had also noted that he would be the only male. Dan got the message, but it hadn't been necessary. Had the invitation been genuine, he would have begged off.

So instead, here he was, just outside of Fendi where white dresses appeared to be in. The one featured most prominently in the display window looked rather retro in a country-outing sort of way and Dan stopped to consider it. An unusual shawl collar, tied in the front, both imparted a period-piece look and gave the dress an air of youthful innocence. "Just a frock I bought somewhere." Dan mimicked in his mind the voice of a girl who might wear it. Then he noticed the shoes on the feet of the headless manikin. They were jet black, had very tall, spiky heels and large, stiff black bows on the toes. "I'm sophisticated, sexy and filthy rich," they screamed.



Dan walked closer to the window. The manikin was seated leaning backward, one leg crossed over the other, knee up high. The pose was evidently designed to display the drape and the texture of the dress, which seemed to be made of a couple of layers of some sort of soft, silky fabric, edged with a narrow scalloped border. Dan looked closer and noticed the fabric wasn't all white, but was printed with tiny gray dots. Sophisticated. Going some way to justify those shoes? As he continued to contemplate the outfit, Dan remembered a phrase he had read in a newspaper article on fashion some time ago: "He designs clothes as though he has a particular girl in mind." Now he understood what that line meant.

Dan turned, watched pedestrians go by and thought about the women he had seen during the course of the day. None of them could wear that dress except, maybe, Marcy – if she were in the mood. He thought about other women he knew or remembered having seen. Not likely. What was she like – "the particular girl?"

Dan tried to imagine a woman, probably a natural blond with hair that would catch the light, in her late 20s or early 30s, standing on the patio of an expensive house in late spring. He wanted to put her out on the lawn, near a flower bed, but not with those shoes. Well, maybe there was a paved path through the garden. Her hair curved gently in a careless sort of way and she brushed it away from her face from time to time as she talked and laughed with a companion. No, not a single companion. With two men, both very attentive.

None of the curves of her body impeded the easy drape of the dress, much to the delight of the designer who was watching from a distance, surrounded by admirers totally unsuited to his line of clothing.

Helen would have loved that story, taking it up as Dan's imagination began to falter. Soon they would know everything about that girl – Helen wouldn't be able to resist revealing a few catty secrets – and for some time, the girl would be part of their life. No wonder the designer couldn't get her out of his mind – if she could carry off an outfit like that, the dress demure and innocent, but clearly as expensive as all get-out, and as for those shoes – move over Blahnik!

Could he handle a woman like that? Even if he had sufficient income, Dan doubted it. After all, what would she see in him? What doors would he be able to open?

What about the designer? Maybe he was only able to make the perfect dress for "a particular girl" because he was celibate! Dan laughed out loud, attracting wary looks from a middle-aged couple passing by.

Stifling an urge to continue chuckling, Dan reconsidered the window display. Positioned on a pedestal next to the manikin wearing the white dress was a gigantic black handbag. Clearly the bag carried by that woman in the blue suit wasn't out of scale by today's standards, Dan thought. He realized that without Helen's guidance, he had no way of knowing.



No way of knowing. His mind reverted to the scene on the imaginary lawn, the figures frozen where he had left them. What about those two men talking to the girl in the white dress? Was this just a casual encounter or were they rivals? And what about those people on the other side of the frame? Dan imagined an older woman in red, talking to the designer as the designer contemplated his muse. Who was she? A collaborator, a sycophant, or perhaps the girl's mother? The designer seemed to be ignoring her.

Two men, attentive to a young woman in white. A lush, green lawn with maybe some trees and a body of water – Long Island Sound – in the background. On the other side of the tableaux, a man regarding the three. The figures around him indistinct except for the woman in red. It was Edvard Munch, Dan thought as the initial, photo-realistic rendering of his conception resolved into pigment. Each of the five main figures symbolic of a human emotion. "The Frieze of Life." Dan's art appreciation course had come back to him again. He had liked Munch.

And what about that time back on Carolina Beach? That was Munch, too, wasn't it? Remember how Hartley had told him that Marcy, back down the beach where they had left her, had been staring out to sea just when Dan had been doing the same thing? Two men on one side of the frame, one gazing out toward the horizon while the other appeared to talk to him. On the other side, a lone woman gazing outward, just like the man. In between, a bleak, gray seascape, perhaps with a lone bird, symbolic of something. Puzzling over the meaning of the scene, Dan resumed walking.

"That's a gorgeous dress," one woman said to another. His concentration broken, Dan looked to see what had attracted their attention and discovered a black evening gown in another Fendi display. Boringly predictable, it was the sort of thing many women could wear – if they could afford to buy it. Aside from whispered confidences, only the label would reveal its provenance.

Dan meandered on, passing several windows featuring animal-look handbags displayed against black and gold backgrounds, patterned to resemble gated oriental doorways. Black boots were everywhere. Mostly standard designs, unimaginative and safe. But women always looked good in them and they undoubtedly sold well. Dan had to admit he liked women in black boots and he hoped Marcy would get some nice ones. He could always buy boots for her, but when would she wear them? She was a teacher at a small private school. Philadelphia.

Across the street, Dan noticed what appeared to be two homeless men lounging on the steps of St. Thomas' church. Next to the church, a building was cloaked in black, courtesy of Highrise Hoisting and Scaffolding Inc. Continuous reincarnation. That was the story of Manhattan.

Arriving at 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, the light was green and Dan didn't need to break his stride. Still gazing across to the other side of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, he noticed Brooks Brothers and

Hickey Freeman. Birds of a feather do flock together, male as well as female, he thought.

"It just felt like we were never going to get out of there." A couple of women overtook Dan and passed him by.



The NBA store! Here on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.? Well, maybe it made sense next to those stores selling men's clothing. The thought of basketball brought that low chandelier in the Warwick's lobby into Dan's mind again. Unconsciously, he shook his head to clear it.

"How's My Driving?" A dirty-looking maroon van sailed by.

On his side of the street, Dan had reached St. Johns, suits made of the usual nubby material in the window. Lots of women liked them, but Dan found them stuffy. He supposed his mother might have worn one – if no one had told her what it cost – and looked good in it. What about Gloria? Well, who knew what might be in her closet, but she certainly didn't do the St John's look just now. Gloria was into drapey and dramatic. "*Paramour*, indeed," Dan thought.

Two girls in chino pants, light cotton tops and open jackets walked past Ferragamo, deep in conversation, oblivious to a sumptuous, deep blue, pleated silk dress in the window. It was worn by another seated manikin, also headless and also holding a very large purse, this one blood-red and made of something that looked like alligator.

"Look at me!" the brash color combination seemed to shout.

"Not loud enough," Dan thought, reflecting on the indifference – no, it really was obliviousness – of the girls. But then again, they clearly weren't suited for an outfit like that. Again designed for "a particular girl?" Not this time, Dan thought, considering the dress – pleated from the neckline, but belted at the waist. More like "for a particular type."

Why were so many of the manikins headless, Dan wondered? Were women supposed to see themselves in the dresses by imagining their own heads on the manikins' necks? Sort of like those carnival attractions where people get their photos taken as clowns by sticking their heads through holes in a painted board? He tried to imagine one of the manikins with his own head on it -- without success.



A little further along, Ferragamo's idea of a man seemed to be an aviator wannabe this season. Thick, khaki, zipper-fronted sweaters ending just at the waist were displayed over dress shirts and ties, one manikin wearing jeans, another wool trousers and high brown leather boots. No sign of any flight helmets or long, white scarves, however, thereby avoiding the Snoopy look.

"Chink-chink; chink-chink; chink-chink" – the sound of feet passing registered in Dan's ear as he surveyed the window display.

Diesel engines idling at the corner of 52<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> ratcheted up the already oppressive din of the avenue. Place de Cartier. How did they score that coup? The jeweler's store, festooned with maroon "Love" flags hanging down in front, was across the street.

Dan's progress was slowed by a crowd of Asians in front of the store – Japanese by the sound of it. As he gently pushed his way through, he noticed both a private security guard – "5<sup>th</sup> Ave. Safety District" -- beside the entrance to Cartier and just a bit further along, a New York cop, two-way radio squawking on his belt.



Across the street a store called Mexx and then H&M, manikins populating three floors of windows. Still a hot ticket? Dan wasn't sure.



Versace followed on his side of the street – a cluttered display of bronzy gold merchandise.

"Where did he go?" A well-dressed, but rather burly man speaking into some sort of hand-held device burst out of Versace and looked up 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Dan's direction.

Almost as quickly – apparently seeing nothing – he ducked back inside. What was that about? There was no obvious commotion within the store as Dan passed the entrance.

Double-breasted coats for men, one in corduroy. Gant.

Ahead, at the intersection – **Don't Block The Box – Fine Plus Two Points** – a Kingfreeze HVAC Service van was making a turn. As Dan approached the corner he passed Armani Exchange. A neon sign on an inside wall proclaimed “Girls Live Live Live” and a young man in a black velour suit, white shirt, no tie and white leather shoes emerged empty handed. Hadn't found what he needed? Or just looking?

Pausing to survey the thickening crowd, Dan watched a woman in a gray dress made of semi-transparent material approach on very high heels, red purse in hand. In the corner of his eye, a kid wearing shoe skates skidded across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

On the far side of 51<sup>st</sup> Street, one of many street vendors selling silk pashmina scarves for five dollars each watched as two police officers spread a scarf open between them and fingered the material, relaxed, chatting. Dan crossed the street behind two women, one wearing a baloony sheath dress. Ahead, a large traffic sign identified 50<sup>th</sup> Street as “Best Thru Route To 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave., 10AM to 6PM M-F.”

St. Patrick's Cathedral. A middle-age woman was sitting on the steps of the church's front plaza, map and pencil in hand, talking on a cell phone. Three men in near-identical gray suits and white shirts – only their ties were different -- mounted the steps from the sidewalk as a “Clean Air Hybrid Electric Bus” bound for South Ferry glided by. They looked happy, Dan thought. Delighted to be out of the office for lunch? He followed them up the stairs and through the door – Jesus towering over his disciples, bronze on black just above -- into the imposing sanctuary, leaving the din of the thoroughfare behind.

Slipping around to one side so as to avoid the center aisle (people were pausing there to make the sign of the cross before venturing further inward), Dan found a largely empty section of pews about a half way to the main altar and sat down. It felt good – calming. So much of the racket out there seemed to get trapped within his body. Now, as he sat in the vast, cool sanctuary, it seemed to be seeping out. Glancing cautiously about, he noticed a couple of other people, also just sitting. Thinking? About what?

Dan's own mind drifted back to the hotel where he had been embarrassed to be wearing no pajamas, even though he was still in bed, when a knock on the door announced the arrival of breakfast. A friendly tussle with Marcy ensued over who would get up, open the door and pick up the tray. She did. She gave him the front section of *The Times* to read first and he took Gloria's call when Marcy was in the shower. “No, they hadn't stayed out late. Anything she needed? Marcy would get back to her shortly about the day's outing. He would amuse himself – oh, and thanks again so very much for dinner.”

In fact, Dan was amusing himself, he thought. Today's walk was a totally unnecessary expedition. The concierge at the Warwick could have told him what he needed to know. Going out instead was simply an excuse to walk a few of Manhattan's

streets, to be by oneself in the middle of a crowd, to again feel the heartbeat of a real city. Energizing but exhausting. Or should that be energizing and exhausting, both at the same time?

Dan pushed his rear end forward to get a little more comfortable in the straight-backed pew. Without warning, his mind engaged. Gloria. Marcy. Marcy. Gloria. ... Gloria, Alfred. He'd forgotten about the risk of coming into a church. Now there was no avoiding it. He'd have to think it through one more time. Maybe St. Patrick's would bring a new perspective. Dan took a breath, then another.



## In A Certain Light



There was only one place to start -- that Internet dating site. It was her picture, of course, that drew him into the posting: a relaxed smile, cute nose and blue eyes, looking with trust straight at the camera, head tilted ever so slightly. Her hair had been cut short and seemed to be just off blond, clearly natural. In fact, everything about her seemed natural. She was 26 at the time, about 8 years younger than Dan and seemingly out of reach. Why would she be interested in a divorced man, nearly a decade older, even if he wasn't encumbered, so to speak, with children?

As he read her posting, the usual interests listed, one line jumped out. "I'm looking for someone forgiving of past mistakes who can help me move forward."

Dan had only recently registered with the service – it had been given good marks in a newspaper article – and at first, he kept on looking. But he found he couldn't get Marcy out of his mind. Finally, he drafted a response, letting it sit for a few days until he felt comfortable with it. He'd sent her a photo – reasonably recent – and told her about his situation, his disappointment with the divorce and his move from Manhattan to Philadelphia to re-start his life. He said he knew he was probably too old for her, but that he wanted a secure, long-term relationship and that he sensed she did, too.

Nothing came back. Not until several months later when he received an email that said, simply: “If you’re free – I mean not involved with someone – and you’re still interested, let’s talk.” Not exactly love at first sight, Dan realized, but, in his excitement, that thought hadn’t initially occurred to him.

A couple of email exchanges and some phone calls followed, awkward at first – then more comfortable – until it was Marcy who said they should meet. She would come to Philly, she said. It would be easier that way. Dan had wondered if he would like her voice as much in person as over the phone.

She hadn’t stayed with him on her first visit. In fact, he’d been rather surprised when she’d booked a room in a rather fancy, downtown hotel and asked Dan to meet her there, not at the airport. They’d gone to the art museum, walked along the river, thought about the zoo, but decided against it, and had dinner at one of those trendy restaurants that had started to appear one after another now that the downtown was no longer a war zone. Dan had originally made a reservation elsewhere – a place that was nice, but traditional in a way someone from the Midwest would find comfortable, he thought. But when he learned where Marcy planned to stay, Dan switched the reservation to a spot considerably more contemporary.

The first day had gone well and following that, on Sunday, she had come over to his place and they had had “the talk.”

It was then that she had told him about her affair with the minister – to get it out of the way, Dan presumed. The therapist had linked it to the death of her father from Lou Gehrig’s disease when she was in her low teens, but she had never felt entirely comfortable with that explanation. And she had told him about how her mother had managed to put a lid on the situation when it was about to come to light.

That had required a lot of explanation.

The church back in Ohio, designed by her father, was his best work, he had believed. But what might be considered an unfortunate choice had been made. To be able to afford the design and the materials that Alfred had insisted upon, the church had been located not within their upscale community that housed most of the congregation, but on a less expensive plot just outside of it.

At the time of construction, the neighborhood adjacent to the church had been white and working-class – Ohio was full of successful factories then – and the location hadn’t seemed to be a problem. But over the years, the factories had closed and as the blue-collar workers with union wages had been laid off, many had been forced to move. When that happened, other white families left, too, and prices fell further. Now the area was populated almost entirely by minorities -- blacks on one end, various immigrant groups on the other and a lot of tension in the middle.



The church was on the edge of all this, in a state of grace. At least that's the way it appeared to most observers since the janitor was quick to remove from the shrubs each morning used condoms, paper bags containing empty bottles and other nocturnal debris. Then there was the mattress, badly burned, and a dead pickup truck, license plates removed, in the parking lot one morning. Those did attract notice.

Attendance had been falling away and not because of the decimation of the factory community. Only a few of the workers had been Episcopalians – mostly people who for one reason or another, couldn't stand the Catholic Church, located on the other side of the blue-collar community. No, it was the families of the bankers, lawyers, doctors, executives, accountants, merchants and the like who lived in Marcy's community of custom-built houses under a graceful canopy of trees – until Dutch Elm Disease hit – that had started to fade away. Deaths and old age, some said. Times are changing and church-going isn't as popular anymore, others maintained. Everyone knew those weren't the real reasons.

Salvation had arrived unexpectedly in the form of a new minister, a man educated and originally ordained in Britain, who demonstrated that he could move easily in both communities. Because he clearly wasn't of one or the other, both sides of the divide trusted him once they got to know him.

The minister's sermons – clear in diction, imaginative in imagery and delivered in an English accent – appealed to Marcy's community. They also enjoyed him as a dinner guest because he was sophisticated, urbane, funny and – when the situation demanded -- liberal-minded. He seemed interested in everything and people felt comfortable in his company although some found his shy, quiet wife hard to read. They returned to the church and contributions increased considerably.

But there was more. The man had quickly reached out into the immigrant community that lived in the old blue-collar neighborhood near the church and developed a successful ministry there. But his efforts in the adjacent black community were less fruitful.

Some of the new members actually attended services; others simply took advantage of what the church had to offer. The day-care center – the minister's first big initiative -- was especially popular. He won funding for it by arguing that it would allow mothers to work, increasing family income, stabilizing the community around the church. In addition, the minister said, the program would get disadvantaged children ready for the school system, improving the educational environment for everyone and cutting the drop-out rate.

It wasn't long before families in Marcy's community discovered that the day care center had another, unexpected benefit. It soon acted as an unofficial clearing house for finding trustworthy domestic help, in effect vetted by the church since the minister visited the homes of all those who used the church's services and facilities.

The minister was soon appointed to an urban-issues task force at the request of the mayor and had served with distinction. In addition, he had acted as a go-between in certain racially charged situations. All this had rebounded very favorably on the church. Instead of representing a last bastion of the privileged, the church – and its members – came to be seen as a force of progressive adjustment and renewed stability in a city searching for a multi-cultural future in the new economy. All of this, but especially, in Gloria's view, the Church building itself, was threatened by "Marcy's dalliance," as her mother had quaintly put it.

It had all started after Marcy, just out of graduate school with a master's degree in French literature and no idea how to make use of it, had taken a part-time job at the church while she attempted to determine what to do next. Gloria, who had apparently assumed she planned to soon get married, was supportive and even happy to have some company in the big house. And she liked the idea of a family member "on watch," as it were, inside Alfred's temple.

Eventually, Marcy also started taking education courses at a local college. Gloria, gradually realizing a marriage probably wasn't in the offing any time soon, had suggested she get a teaching certificate.

Ironically, it was Marcy's dead father who had facilitated her affair with the minister. A friend of the church's first rector, Alfred had built for him a private office, separate from his official one. It wasn't exactly secret – no revolving bookcases -- but it was far from obvious. The door, a utilitarian affair that looked like it probably led to some sort of maintenance space, was off a short hallway that served a room under the choir loft where extra chairs, tables, books and whatnot were stored. They were only needed occasionally and as a result, the hallway experienced no regular traffic.

The private office was small, but lovely with dark wood paneling. Natural illumination came from a kind of slanted skylight, invisible from the ground outside the church because it was hidden amid the elaborate architectural features with which Alfred had so loved to adorn his buildings. Inside the room, sconces built into the walls gave the space a feeling that was both monastic and romantic. Within the sconces were candle-shaped light bulbs controlled by a dimmer so that the natural and artificial light could be properly balanced.

The room had been intended as a personal sanctuary – where a minister could retreat, meditate and compose his sermons, undisturbed by either the demands of running a church or the inevitable interruptions of domestic life. When Marcy first saw it, the room was furnished with a small desk (probably original), a straight-backed chair and, most significantly, a narrow cot with a reading lamp over one end of it. There was also a bookcase, built into one of the walls, that was about half full of books. Folders full of papers of one sort or another occupied the remainder of the space on the shelves.

Marcy's workspace had been located in the church's administrative quarters, next door to the minister's rather large official office. A door linked the two rooms and unless he was having a private meeting, the minister left it open. The minister insisted upon it, arguing that an open door signaled his accessibility. But in truth, he also liked to be able to keep an ear on what was going on in the outer office.

The church had once employed staff on a full-time basis, but during the years when membership and contributions fell away, they had been replaced by part-timers. Although contributions were now arguably back to the point where one or more full-timers could be hired – even with benefits -- the minister liked it the way it was – and so did the current employees, all of whom had taken the jobs because the hours were exactly what they were looking for. The jobs paid well for part-time employment, the work wasn't terribly demanding and the environment was pleasant. As those who got the positions didn't tend to leave, things ran smoothly.

There was a different, newer staff that took care of the day-care center and the various other community services. Their space was located in an addition to the church – built just after Alfred had died, but before things started to go downhill – and they rarely had occasion to come into the church itself since the minister spent part of each day in the community services office.

Marcy's job – a "girl Friday" position – overlapped in part with the others on most days, but on a couple of afternoons, she was the only person in the office. Late in the day, as things were winding down, the minister would often talk to her, sometimes over a cup of tea. He took his with milk; she preferred lemon. Often he'd produce a couple of very small shortbread cookies – with an apologetic smile. They discussed her work – what she was doing and what she should do next – and they discussed her dad, first tentatively and then more easily.

When Gloria had talked to the minister about her dead husband, Alfred had seemed to be more of a concept than a person. Thus, the minister was curious about what Marcy remembered. Her father had been "nice," had smelled of pipe tobacco, had sometimes given her special things – she still had some and particularly liked one German doll -- but she couldn't really say much about what sort of a person he had been, in the adult sense. Her mother and her father had seemed to get on well. They had never fought, or even had many disagreements that Marcy had overheard, but at the same time, they hadn't seemed terribly close emotionally. Marcy couldn't recall ever having seen them hug or kiss with any great warmth or passion – affectionate pecks upon arrivals or departures were the common currency.

At dinner, her father tended to talk about his work – problems with clients, contractors, suppliers – or about the work of other architects: what he liked and what he didn't. Increasingly, it was the latter Marcy thought. She had told Dan about the curse of the straight line even before he had heard it for the first of many times from Gloria.

Straight lines. Diagonals.

Dan's mind, almost as though it needed a rest from thinking about Marcy, wandered to Mondrian, Van Duesenberg, Richter and the others. He wondered if any of Richter's rather severe furniture was more comfortable than the pew in which he was sitting. What if one owned "a piece?" Surely one couldn't sit in it. Did Richter ever make furniture for actual use, or did he just make ideas? And how about the De Stijl utopia? Had it been just a concept? Not like those early American communities – Brook Farm, Amana – where people really tried various idealistic life styles out.

Yet, look at elementary schools – the De Stijl influence so powerful, particularly in the early grades with the prevalence of primary colors, light wood furniture and strict geometry. There must be something to it, even though no one seemed to think about it in those terms – at least Dan didn't think they did. At this point, much of the de Stijl aesthetic seemed to have been absorbed into the culture – an integral part of Western civilization.

Outside of St. Patrick's, Broadway Boogie Woogie was in full swing, just as Mondrian had depicted it. Well, ok, around here it was Fifth Avenue Boogie Woogie. Different, but the same – Warhol inverted.

Holland. Such a small country, but so influential in ways few people knew. The bond market growing out of annuities. A seafaring nation's need for capital matched by a desire for secure incomes. A deep sense of trust required. Only possible in homogenous communities? *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Another college course half remembered.

Dan stopped there. He looked up, surveyed a scene that appeared little changed, and refocused on his wife.

One day, after Marcy had been working at the church for several months, the minister told her about the private office, about how it spoke of her father's aesthetic. Of course she had wanted to see it. They had gone that very day – it was late afternoon and the light was fading -- and once inside the room, the minister had closed the door behind them.

"I need to keep this private," he had explained – and turned on the sconce lights, but not fully, Marcy realized later. Slightly orange light came through the skylight in a soft glow, diffused by the thick glass. The entire room seemed to be in soft focus as the dark paneling absorbed more light than it reflected.

"It's beautiful, isn't it? An oasis of solitude!" The minister's voice came from behind her.

Standing close together in the small space, Marcy hadn't moved when she felt the minister's body brush slightly up against her from behind. That was all the encouragement the man needed. He leaned forward and kissed her hair. When she still

didn't move, he turned her around, bent down and kissed her mouth. Her response was tentative, but positive. So he had continued, slowly undressing her – and then, after further dimming the lights, himself, too.

At this point in her story, Dan had told Marcy that she didn't need to go into any more detail. But she had insisted. She wanted him to know everything, she said, because she didn't think they could go forward if he didn't. Moreover, she wanted him to know that she hadn't been harmed by the minister, either that first time or during the remainder of their affair. She was speaking not about physical abuse, she explained, but about sexual and emotional distress.

Although Dan had felt profoundly uncomfortable, he had allowed her to continue. Part of his discomfort was voyeuristic, but in addition, Dan was worried about whether he would be required to reciprocate. He hadn't felt like talking about his sexual relationship with Helen, or anyone who had come before.

They'd lain together on the cot and it had felt right, Marcy had told Dan. Of course it wasn't the first time for her. She'd had a number of boyfriends and had had sex with several of them, starting in college. But she hadn't had a boyfriend just then, when the minister had seduced her, and perhaps that was part of it. Her last male companion had left town for a better job elsewhere a few months earlier and Marcy was finding it harder and harder to meet new men.

Dan found he was starting to perspire, sitting almost totally still in St. Patrick's. Just like the first time he heard the tale. In fact, on that occasion he had broken out in a full sweat. It had been a very awkward moment, but they'd overcome it.

"I'm sorry," Marcy had said. Sorry about what, he had wondered, without asking.

There had been no discussion between the minister and herself that afternoon, Marcy had told Dan. When they had finished, she and the minister had simply gone their separate ways. It was the end of the workday.

Of course she had agonized over what she'd permitted, for a while at least. But not, she explained, because she had felt that either she or the minister had done anything actually wrong. That came much later. At the time, it seemed to be just something that had occurred in the natural course of things. But he was her employer. It was awkward, for a little while.

First and foremost, one should live one's life in tune with nature. All else was artifice. That's what she had believed at the time, Marcy explained to Dan.

As she and the minister had quietly lain close together on the cot, she had felt an internal glow that had seemed to be an extension of the soft lighting of the room. She had felt herself a part of the space, not an occupant of it. The minister? Not really another person at that moment, she had explained. Just a source of warmth.

The affair had gone on for just under a year – at irregular intervals since the minister had a lot of commitments -- and of course they had talked about things.

There was the minister's relationship with his wife. He loved her and admired her. She was his rock and he could never live without her, he had said. But sex had become a problem. At first he had blamed himself, but then one day, he had found his wife with a woman when he had returned home unexpectedly in the middle of the day. They'd had a frank discussion and he'd told his wife about Marcy.

Marcy -- horrified -- said she couldn't believe he had done that.

It was really for the best, the minister had said. He and his wife had arrived at a good, mutual understanding. There was no reason for Marcy to be concerned, he had maintained.

Did God or religion ever come into these discussions? Dan had asked.

These were Episcopalians, Marcy had reminded him. And the minister was even more broad-minded than most.

Marcy went on to say that she hadn't brought up the topic of religion. She didn't believe in God and had taken the job simply because it was convenient and because it was her father's church. It was just a job, like any other, and she dealt with practical things, not religious issues, when she was in the church office. In her view, religious beliefs were personal matters, she explained.

What about hypocrisy -- the Ten Commandments and adultery? Surely the Episcopalians hadn't tossed those rather basic tenets of the Christian religion overboard, had they?

Marcy had said she wasn't stupid -- she knew the preacher was being hypocritical, but who wasn't? It's the human condition, isn't it? If one starts criticizing others for saying one thing and doing something else, where will it end? That's what she had argued the first time she and Dan had discussed it. On later occasions, her attitude had been somewhat different. It was one part of the story that kept changing in subtle ways.

She wasn't perfect and never would be, Marcy had said. And she tried not to pass judgment on other people. But in the end, there was no denying her affair had been wrong, or at least a serious mistake. Even if the minister's wife didn't care -- and in case Dan was wondering, yes, the minister and his wife continued to have sex from time to time -- the affair posed a threat to the social fabric of the community. Marcy had come to see that.

"What about you?" Dan had asked. "Did you have ... did you have other boy-friends while this was going on?"



Actually, Marcy had told him, her social life had gotten easier. It took sex out of the dating dance. If someone she met was too pushy too fast, she simply dropped him. She wasn't concerned she might not meet someone else. In time, she had met a couple of men she quite liked, and had slept with one of them several times, but it had been clear early on that neither man was going to be a long-term companion, so the sex really didn't matter.

"Is that the natural course of things?" Dan had asked.

"Yes, I think you could say so," Marcy had responded – after pausing for a moment.

What else would occur in the natural course of things, Dan had wondered, but he hadn't given voice to the thought.

But what about the risk? Clearly, it was enormous for the minister. Affairs have a way of coming to light, especially when people of prominence are involved, and the minister surely would have had to resign – and perhaps been unable to get another church -- if it had come out. Dan wanted to know if Marcy had thought of that and had she discussed it with the man.

"It was his problem, not mine. At least that's what I thought at the time," she had responded. "He liked me. And he was willing to risk everything. I was flattered – what girl wouldn't be? And of course I would never have told anyone. I wasn't naive: I understood the situation. We weren't going to get married or run off together. It was just something for the moment, however long the moment lasted. Something nice for both of us. I wasn't in love with him – not in the sense that I had to be with him – and I would have ended it if I had found someone else – for real, I mean. He told me he understood and that he expected that to happen at some point. I was an attractive woman and they get taken, he told me."

But that wasn't the way it had ended.

One day the door to the little room had been left slightly ajar. The hallway had been dark and even though the door had been open only a crack, a small shaft of light had evidently been noticeable. The church's maintenance man – he was relatively new and hadn't known about the private office (a small sign on the door read "Document Storage") – had seen the light, thought it odd and decided to investigate. He had found them in there, fortunately not in too compromising a position.

That was what had saved the situation for Gloria: there was plausible deniability. But word would inevitably get around, confirming what a couple of the others who worked in the office had come to wonder about.

Marcy had told her mother everything as soon as she had returned home that day – she hadn't wanted Gloria to hear it any other way. As it turned out, that was a wise decision: her mother had instantly launched a whirlwind damage control effort.

Where and how had Gloria acquired such skills, Marcy had wondered?

Her mother had first grilled Marcy about what the room looked like – how it was furnished – and then about what the maintenance man had actually seen. Not much Marcy had told her, because he had never actually entered the room. She had been sitting on the cot and the minister in the desk chair when the man pushed open the door, looked in and immediately retreated. They were both fully clothed except that neither one had shoes on. And Marcy thought her hair had probably been messed up. She had just finished dressing and hadn't attended to that.

With that, Gloria had swung into action. She had called the minister and told him to get the cot out of the room that very night. No one other than his wife was to help him if he needed assistance. Get it out of the church entirely if possible; if not put the frame somewhere out of the way – such as in the basement. But the mattress had to go. That was not to be found anywhere in the church under any circumstances. Then he was to drive his minivan over to her house and pick up an old leather armchair of Alfred's – it would look perfect in the private office – and an old smoking table. When the minister had arrived, Gloria had also given him a small oriental carpet – taken from an upstairs hall in the house – to put down in case the floor was marked or discolored from the cot.

On the very next day, Gloria had a talk with the minister. Did he want to retain his post? He did. He was contrite. He understood his relationship with Marcy was over. He would cooperate. Do whatever was necessary.

Gloria instructed the minister to call in the staff and apologize to them. He was to tell them that he had done something inappropriate: that he had taken Marcy alone after work the previous day to see the private office her father had built for the first minister of the church. He should have taken someone else along, too. He realized that. He now wanted to show everyone the office – yes he used it from time to time to write sermons, to think, to pray, he was to tell them. Be sure to include “to pray,” Gloria declared, reminding him that he was to do *exactly* as he was told. From the look on her face, the man realized he had no alternative.

Gloria had told him he was to lead everyone present – yes, that would include Marcy -- back into the hallway, open the door and usher them into the room. There was to be no delay: this was to be done as soon as possible. They would see the room as it was now furnished, without the cot.

Of course Marcy was to quit her job – not immediately, but soon. A higher paying one would be found downtown – never mind where -- and she was not to visit the church again during what Gloria termed “the hours of opportunity.” She was, however, to stop by every so often when the others were there, “just to say hello.”

The maintenance man was given a certain sum to cover “moving expenses” and a

similar, but better paying job had been found for him in another town. The new job, he was reminded, was a “plum” at that particular pay level and there would surely be no shortage of takers “if things didn’t work out.”

The man was more than grateful, assuring them that what other people did was their own business as far as he was concerned. Later, it emerged (at the day care center, in fact) that the maintenance man had had his own reasons for welcoming a move. He wasn’t going to be a problem.

Gloria’s main ally, and the only other person who was told the full story, was the long-serving volunteer treasurer, an accountant who lived in their neighborhood and whose firm just happened to have a job opening for Marcy. The church had borrowed heavily against pledges – there were several bankers in the congregation – to fit out the day care center and for various repairs and improvements. Therefore, a decline in giving was out of the question. The treasurer would simply do what was necessary: a fiduciary responsibility he had told himself. And he was devoted to Gloria. Yes, there was that, too.

Certainly a whiff of scandal had been in the air – these things can rarely be completely snuffed out – but as it turned out, no one in a position to probe had wanted the status quo disrupted. Of that, Gloria was well aware. She had known what she was doing. She might have a flair for the dramatic in her clothing and certain other aspects of her life, but at her core, she was coldly rational and highly disciplined when she needed to be.

In what Marcy had termed “an amusing sidelight,” she had not long after overheard some of Gloria’s friends complaining one Sunday about the morning sermon. It had, one woman said with clear disapproval, been entirely focused on the topic of the importance of forgiveness for those who transgress – the minister had avoided the word “sin.”

“So out of character and rather unnecessary. Where had that come from?” the woman had wondered.

“More tea, or should we switch to sherry?” her mother had responded.

They had both laughed when Marcy told that story and Dan had to admit he felt a certain admiration for his mother-in-law. There were times, however, when he didn’t know what to think about his wife. But she was different now. That’s what she said and he accepted it. He felt fortunate to have her and had no interest in trying to find anyone else.

Through it all, the minister had remained well-liked, trusted and, indeed, needed by the community. In fact, he was still there – and still married.

“Life goes on,” Marcy had said with a shrug and, Dan thought, a rather sly smile.

How many times had Dan turned that story over in his brain? He certainly hadn't needed to do it again today. Why had he stopped in St. Patrick's? Of course it would happen. Self-flagellation. In a church. How appropriate!

It seemed crazy, but Marcy appeared to have been better able to move on than had Dan. It was as though, through a process of catharsis, she had somehow transferred her burden over to him – not deliberately of course -- by means of telling him the story.

Except for the sweating episode, Marcy's account hadn't initially bothered Dan. He had wanted her too much, wanted all obstacles out of the way. He had decided to accept her view that telling him everything right up front was for the best. She'd encouraged him to do the same and he had, to an extent that was reasonably credible.

His account had certainly been credible with respect to Helen and the reasons – as best he understood them – for their divorce. Marcy had listened with no discernable discomfort and, to be truthful, with not as much interest as Dan thought his story deserved. People had prior relationships – some were marriages, some weren't – and sometimes they didn't work out. That's what Marcy had said when he had finished his account.

"Let's leave it all behind -- together," Marcy had told him eagerly.

It sounded wonderful and Dan had agreed with enthusiasm.

They'd have children – at least one – when she was ready, Marcy had said when Dan had brought that subject up. Everything in its time. That was the way she had put it when they were married, and lately, it had seemed the time could be drawing near. As a teacher, Marcy often spoke of her very young students, but in the recent past, Dan had sensed a shift in the tenor of her comments. Whereas earlier she had talked about her charges in a sympathetic, but dispassionate manner – professional discourse -- she had more recently mentioned not infrequently how much she loved them. That had got Dan thinking. In principle, he definitely wanted a family. In practice ... well, how would it fit in with his job, and would his relationship with Marcy change?

No point in going there. Unproductive. Instead, Dan picked up his earlier train of thought.

There was no question he had positively gulped down Marcy's let's-leave-it-all-behind notion at the time. What a delightful idea, what a wonderful feeling! Later – even though he was happy and didn't think he had made a mistake – Dan worried about his motives.

*“I’m looking for someone who can help me move forward.”* A damsel in distress, needing a man to rescue her. The classic White Knight, a strong man on a big horse. Which knight would she choose?

It had been a huge boost to Dan’s ego when she had chosen him over younger men, especially after his failure with Helen. It was an affirmation. He was a good person and evidently attractive. And lucky, too. He’d gotten a young wife, far more attractive than he had any right to expect. Virtue rewarded, or was it? Maybe that was why Dan couldn’t shake Marcy’s story. Had he paid for his prize in an unexpected way?

The marriage itself had been a little tricky to arrange. Nothing big or in any way public, Gloria had stated. Marcy was not to become a topic of conversation in the community. Alfred’s church had survived for the time being, but the Church’s debts were still high and there was talk of expanding the day care operation, maybe starting a pre-school. Alfred’s legacy. Gloria’s purpose in life.

Dan hadn’t known much of anyone in Philadelphia except for the people at his office. All of his close friends were in New York and they all knew Helen. As a result, neither of those locations seemed right. His mother was dead and his dad had remarried. He didn’t like his stepmother and it would be no problem – in fact a blessing – if they didn’t come. There were an uncle and aunt in California, but he hadn’t seen them since he was a child.

Finally, it was Gloria (of course) who had told them what they were going to do. It was going to be a civil wedding, officiated by a close friend of hers who was a judge. They would stay at an inn on a lake in another part of the state. The wedding party would comprise the four of them plus the church treasurer and his wife, who would serve as witnesses.

Marcy had no idea how much the treasurer’s wife knew, but she was a college classmate of Gloria’s, so perhaps she knew something. (Dan suddenly wondered if the treasurer’s wife was in New York for the Barnard lunch.)

They would all have a very nice dinner at the inn on a Friday night and the marriage ceremony would take place by the shore of the lake at sunrise, the break of dawn symbolizing a new beginning, a new life. Marcy would look stunning in a Vera Wang dress – the accountant was an excellent photographer – and while discreet, the wedding would be very romantic, Gloria had argued. As usual, she had been right.

On the day, Gloria had surprised them. When they all walked down to the inn’s dock on a late September morning with mist rising off the lake, a string quartet was playing music by Corelli. After a brief ceremony as the sun rose over the water (the inn was on the western shore of the lake), the wedding party and the quartet adjourned to a small gazebo a ways up the lawn from the water’s edge where a caterer had laid out the wedding breakfast – smoked salmon, caviar, chopped hardboiled

eggs, toast, orange juice and, of course, Champagne -- of a vintage year. That was one nice thing about a small wedding, Gloria had said – they could have the very best of everything.

After breakfast, the quartet played Strauss waltzes and the three couples danced on a small concrete patio outside the gazebo. During the high season, the inn set up a barbeque and a few tables up there, but nothing occupied it then.

Dan wasn't much of a dancer, but he had learned how to waltz at one point in his life. That had come out in a conversation over dinner at Marcy's house during one of Dan's visits to Ohio and he realized Gloria must have made a mental note of it. She was exceptionally sensitive to the considerations of others, he thought, gaining an insight into her ability to control events.

The surface of the patio was fortunately very smooth – like a shuffleboard court – and Dan found the steps came back to him easily. Gliding around with Marcy – after the judge, standing in for her father in this instance, had had the first dance – Dan wasn't surprised to see Gloria sweeping about with a far-away look on her face, as though imagining herself the center of attention in the grandest of ballrooms. It was all the judge could do to keep up with her, Dan noted with amusement. When he pointed that out to Marcy in a whisper, she giggled.

What did surprise Dan were the accountant and his wife. A bit on the stolid side, their demeanor changed when they began to dance. Pounds seemed to fall away from both of them as they floated over the patio surface.

When Dan's turn came to dance with the accountant's wife, he sensed she was, perhaps with the aid of the champagne, totally caught up in the romance of the moment. Reliving some special occasion of her own, he wondered?

Dancing with Gloria, on the other hand, was a trip. There wasn't any other word for it, Dan thought, telling Marcy later how he had felt a bit like a leaf in a storm.

"Mother does know how to take charge," Marcy had said, sitting in a chair in their room, still in her wedding dress well after the dancing was over. "But you stayed with her, didn't you? Just like she knew you could."

"I suppose you could say so – after a fashion," Dan had said.

They had both laughed, a laugh imbued with the effervescence of the champagne. But later, thinking over what had transpired, Dan wondered whether he – and even Marcy – had just been along for the ride – Gloria's ride. No matter, it had been a good one with a good ending. He felt a sense of satisfaction and a sense of well-being.

After Dan and Marcy had given their thanks and said their farewells to the judge, the accountant and his wife, Gloria had driven them directly to the airport where



they left for a few days in Puerto Vallarta. Hurricane season is the wrong time to go to the Caribbean or the east coast of Mexico, Gloria had stated. She apparently was unaware that hurricanes hit the west coast of Mexico as well, but no matter. The weather was fine for their honeymoon.

Sometime later, Dan had learned that Gloria and the judge had most likely slept together the night before the wedding. They had adjoining rooms at the inn and the door between them was open, Marcy had told him. She had discovered that when she had gone up before bed to thank her mother for the dress, for dinner – for everything – and to double check at what time they were to be up and dressed the next morning.

“Had Gloria been embarrassed?” Dan had enquired.

“Oh, heavens no,” Marcy had said. “The judge is divorced.”

But hadn’t Gloria been in a relationship with another man at the time? Dan had asked.

“Oh, yes. A widower who wants to marry her, but she doesn’t want to marry him.”

The man was nice enough, Marcy had said, telling Dan she wouldn’t object if her mother accepted his proposal. But Gloria evidently enjoyed playing the field.

“It was fun to discover that mom sleeps around a bit,” she had told Dan. “Good for her, at her age! Dad’s been gone a long time, you know.”

That was another episode Dan had found difficult to get out of his mind, even after Marcy had told him more about her family history, including the rather grim period during which her mother attended Alfred with devotion as ALS destroyed him.

Moreover, Marcy had told Dan, Gloria had always been a wonderful mother – understanding and supportive, even in the most difficult of times. So different, she had said, from the apparently stormy relationships many of her friends and classmates had had with their mothers. Gloria had cheerfully sacrificed a lot of her life for the needs of her husband and her daughter – always putting their priorities ahead of hers – and finally it was her turn to have a life of her own.

“Thank goodness she’s still an attractive woman,” Marcy had concluded.

That was fair enough, Dan agreed. What disturbed him, he decided, was not Gloria’s promiscuity, assuming matters rose to that level -- or should one say “fell?” Rather, he realized, his discomfort arose from Marcy’s choice of words to depict Gloria’s one-night-stand, fling, relationship, or whatever it was, with the judge. What did it say about Marcy? What had she really meant when she had said she needed help going forward with her life?

Rehashing this episode as he shifted position in the pew, Dan contemplated their age difference. Had he bit off more than he was going to be able to chew?

Having arrived at a dead end – a very familiar dead end -- Dan's thoughts turned to his own mother. "Plain" would probably have been a compliment, he realized. But growing up, he'd never thought of her that way. What had she wanted? What had given her the most pleasure? He had no idea. What if he had learned that late in life (she'd never had a "late in life") she was "sleeping around?" Would he, like Marcy, have found that "fun?"

"Sleeping around." Dan turned the phrase over in his mind. Was that, too, in the natural course of things? Nature's Way versus The Social Fabric: the great dialectic?

Dan's formal education hadn't prepared him for this. He couldn't help feeling lost. No wonder people seek refuge in religion, he thought, again surveying the interior of St. Patrick's.

Dan rested his head in his hands, breathing in and out. Anyone who happened to notice him would probably think he was praying. He was tempted to try it, but what should he pray for?

Dan finally decided that instead of looking for a way out, he needed to finish re-thinking the story about Marcy. It wouldn't be fun, but perhaps going through it one more time, here in St. Patrick's, would result in closure. He couldn't just stop at this point and walk out into that din again.

Curiosity about the minister had gotten to Dan eventually. Sometime after their marriage, he'd finally taken the trouble to learn the man's name. It hadn't been difficult. Reginald Saddleford. Then he'd done an Internet search, just to see if anything came up.

Several things did, but Dan only read one of them in its entirety. It was the transcript of a talk the minister had given at a conference the town's mayor had organized on the topic of immigration, dislocation and the creation of new communities. A photo of Saddleford and his wife, Lydia, accompanied the piece.

Saddleford had been born in South Africa and had been considered, as he explained, a "colored." Those were mixed-raced people – not the black population. His father had been Indian – a doctor – and his mother part Afrikaner and part black. As he scrolled down, Dan found their pictures, too. The minister's father appeared tall, thin and light skinned. Rather distinguished. His mother had obviously been very attractive, perhaps beautiful, helping to explain a decision that must have greatly upset Saddleford's family. Had he changed his name as a result? Saddleford certainly didn't sound Indian.

The minister, too, appeared to be tall with a tan complexion and fine features. Like his father, he looked distinguished, in a slightly exotic way. Dan could see why people were taken with him. Lydia, in contrast, was short and very white – not unattractive, but somehow not what one might have expected.

The transcript of the talk explained it. In South Africa, Saddleford had been a good student – probably exceptional, Dan surmised – and had won a scholarship to a university in England. He had taken to Britain and while there, had had what he described as a religious experience and decided to study theology. That had gone well – he graduated near the top of his class -- but he was still an outsider, not really wanted or accepted by the English, he felt.

He had almost decided to go back to South Africa when he had met Lydia and fallen in love. She came from three generations of civil servants in India, her parents having left in 1948 with Independence. Times had changed in England and they, like so many overseas English, had been left behind. They had experienced trouble fitting in and Lydia, an only child, close to her parents, steeped in their values, had trouble, too. She and Saddleford had both been fish out of water, but in his eagerness to find a path to belonging in the community, he had overlooked the full implications of that.

“How often we don’t see what we don’t want to see!” That line from the minister’s talk caught Dan’s attention and set him wondering about his own life.

At first Lydia’s parents had been horrified by the idea of her marrying Saddleford. Wasn’t something like this one of the main reasons they decided against staying on? What future would Lydia, then just a young child, have had in India with all the English gone? Well, not all. Those who elected to stay did seem like a pack of strays. An Anglo-Indian – probably quite handsome, but they were an unfortunate lot, her parents had thought – might have presented himself as her best prospect. They hadn’t wanted that and now ...

But the minister had been charming, very attentive and persistent – well, the transcript of the speech didn’t say that, but Dan could easily imagine – and eventually Lydia’s parents had realized they liked him better than they liked most of “their own people” – leaving aside a few old Colonial Office types they occasionally saw.

As they talked with Saddleford about such things as the horror of Partition, they discovered they had much in common. Lydia’s mother had been broken hearted; her father, a district administrator, had taken it as a personal failing. Saddleford’s father had been forced to flee his devastated region for South Africa. Lucky to get away, he had said.

In due course, Reginald and Lydia had married and for some time, matters appeared to be going well. Saddleford was ordained in the Anglican Church and a

ordained in the Anglican Church and a position was found for him in community outreach. The church was worried about rising social tensions as immigration, much of it from East Asia, surged. But then they'd had their first child and as the girl approached school age, Lydia realized trouble loomed ahead. Mixed race. No getting around it.

It had been very difficult for Lydia to leave her parents behind, but like so many people from so many countries, they had realized there was only one solution: America. A thousand, a hundred thousand, a million, many million stories: different beginnings, but the same ending. "America! America!"

Quite a speech, Dan had thought.

But the ending wasn't really the end, Saddleford had continued. The common ending became a common beginning and a million new stories were spawned as the immigrants tried to fit into American society. In many cases, it hadn't been easy – especially for the new waves -- "people of color." That led to the meat of the speech – comments on prevailing attitudes toward immigration, prejudice and racial intolerance.

As he read, Dan found himself admiring the man. Saddleford's rhetoric was beautiful – the sort of sentences you want to say out loud as you read them. The cadence of the language suggested the speech was written to a time signature, like a piece of music. The man understood how to use the tone and sonority of words and phrases, but never at the expense of clarity. The minister could make English sing and was probably enthralling in the pulpit, Dan thought. He had been tempted to find out.

The content of the talk was extraordinary as well, Dan realized. While Saddleford didn't pull punches, didn't gloss over problems, he wasn't preachy. He didn't pretend there were solutions: he talked about approaches and initiatives. While he laid blame on no one, and didn't talk in terms of one group owing anything to another, "fairness" figured prominently. But it was important to start in small ways – "on a human scale" -- and build gradually toward a better community, he maintained. There were many avenues for participation for those who wanted to join in the effort, he said, going on to talk briefly about some of them.

It was, Dan thought, a tour de force: there was something there for almost everyone. The optimism Americans crave, but expressed in terms that seemed practical and realistic. Dan was very impressed. He had long felt strongly about racial justice, had gone into journalism because of that. How had it gone wrong? His mind went back to Hearst, to the Warwick. What time was it? Had they left for the lunch?

Dan took a deep breath, collected himself and looked around again. A few people were quietly coming and going. That was about it. His mind reengaged.

Of course Marcy couldn't help but fall for Saddleford, Dan thought. How many other women had too – before, and perhaps even after? If afterwards, the minister had better not let Gloria get wind of it. Maybe in other towns. Saddleford was apparently traveling more now – his reputation spreading. King had availed himself of those opportunities. Tillich far more brazen. Why shouldn't Saddleford? The natural course of things?

As Dan continued to sit in St. Patrick's his mind flitted back and forth over elements of Marcy's story and of what he had found out about the minister. He wondered how the minister would account for the affair, how his story would differ from Marcy's version. Would his account suggest that it was Marcy who had taken the first step toward intimacy, perhaps subtly through a look, a gesture, a change in complexion, some breaths taken quickly? Dan wondered where reality lay.

Finally, as always happened, Dan returned to the starting point. In the church, in Alfred's church. In her father's church. In God's church. Father. God. God the Father. Creator. Architect. Minister. Passion. Concepts as sexual as they were religious. Dan's brain swirled. That room. A certain light. Gloria hadn't been surprised. Hadn't been upset – not with Marcy. Had she experienced it, too? Not with Saddleford, but earlier? There were certain things Marcy had said. Gloria suffering Alfred's decline as his illness advanced.

What was real and what imaginary? There was no way of knowing. Certain things were true: things one knew for a fact from one's own experience. Then there were things that one couldn't personally verify, but which seemed surely, well almost surely, to be true. Then there were things that were possibly true. And things that probably weren't true, but could be true. And on and on in various permutations until eventually one arrived at False. But Dan never seemed to get there, not with respect to the things he wanted to be false. Why did he care? He couldn't explain it.

Confusion mounting, Dan realized he had to get away -- away from St. Patrick's. Sliding out of the pew, he retraced his steps, then crossed the back of the church on the inside, heading toward the exit nearest 50<sup>th</sup> St. Just before the door, Dan noticed a tiny collection box on the wall of the cathedral – no bigger than one of his mother's modest purses. "For the Poor of the World." That says it all about the Catholic Church, Dan thought, relieved by the distraction.

Outside on the cathedral's plaza, Dan gazed about, attempting to adjust to the light and the cacophony of the intersection. Across the way was Rockefeller Center: Banana Republic and Cole Haan at street level.

## The Significance of the Day

Dan eyed the traffic, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue now moving, 50<sup>th</sup> Street at a halt. A yellow cab displayed a sign advertising Nugatocity. Looked like a candy bar. Was it? Trucks. Abco Refrigeration Supply. Sixteen convenient branches. How many inconvenient ones? (Dan was coming back to the present.) Cadogan Tate Fine Art Logistics. Now that was a name that smacked of exclusivity. Art theft a considerable problem in the city, Dan had heard. His mind went back to the anonymous white truck outside the Modern.

The light changed and traffic on the avenue came to a ragged stop. The usual face-off developed between a vehicle trying to turn and a mob of pedestrians crossing the street. The truck, which persisted in inching forward, was owned by Cheese-works Ltd., importers of specialty foods. Behind it a Volvic water truck: “Treasure of the Volcano.” Doing business right here in Manhattan where the tap water was a recurrent winner in taste tests. Dan resented bottled water even while sometimes drinking it.

Just then, he noticed a man, almost across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, walking with a Springer spaniel in tow, the dog seemingly unperturbed by the traffic and the crowds. As Dan continued to watch, the man and the dog approached, mounting the church plaza steps from sidewalk level. The man was wearing khaki trousers and a slate gray windbreaker over a dark blue shirt and even darker blue tie. He had a moustache and was chewing gum and as he passed Dan, heading toward the door of the cathedral, Dan noticed a large, two-way radio strapped to his belt. The dog looked out of place. It wasn't a New York dog. It was the sort of dog one would expect to find lounging on the front portico of a tree-shaded house in a small town, eager to welcome a visitor, or maybe bark at the postman.

As Dan turned to watch the man and dog enter the church, a black man with a solemn look on his face exited. Catching Dan's gaze, he glanced back at the dog, and then broke into a lopsided grin, shaking his head. A couple of his teeth were missing.

“This is New York,” Dan murmured, sharing the moment with the stranger by means of a grin of his own. Who could really know the city? He headed down the steps to the intersection, Saks and Co. – better known as Saks Fifth Avenue -- across the way.





As Dan waited for the light, a gray-haired man with a backpack, carrying a large single-lens reflex camera, and a young woman with a long ponytail, dark glasses pushed up on her head, joined him. When they stepped off the curb before he did, Dan's eyes followed the woman's hair down over a tank top. Below that were jeans and gray suede boots with tall pointy heels. The man and the woman seemed to be together, but their relationship was by no means obvious.

Safely across and staring blankly at a display window featuring the Marlboro Man look, Dan's thoughts were again caught up in the turmoil Marcy's story always produced. Incest – not in the literal sense -- he didn't think that – was the worst interpretation, the one he felt he needed to wash out of his brain.

Dan had tried to gently bring it up with Marcy – she had, after all, emphasized the importance of openness – but hadn't gotten anywhere. For instance, hadn't she felt discomfort or unease having sex in the church?

"It's just another building. No one but mother thinks it's very special," she had responded. That had left Dan totally flummoxed.

On other occasions, he had sought to explore Marcy's ideas about religion. She considered herself very spiritual, she had told him, but organized religion had nothing to do with that. She didn't object to it for others, but it wasn't for her – too much about control. The things that happened in the world were far too complex to be fully understood rationally or scientifically and certainly couldn't be corralled into order by religious dogma, she maintained. She was, she thought, perhaps inclined toward mysticism, but not by way of outward practice. Humans were not all that special, except they could obviously do far more harm than any other species. That accounted in part for all these ridiculous laws, rules, strictures. Man was really just another animal and animals didn't need such things. Life could – and should – be so much more basic, so much more fundamental, she argued.

On one level, far too much was made of right and wrong, Marcy said. But at the same time, one couldn't simply wish away the manner in which humans and their societies had developed. Once the social fabric had been woven, it couldn't be ripped willy nilly without inviting chaos. She had torn it, she was sorry. That was the way she felt about things. Yes she wanted to be her own person, but she didn't want to be a problem for others. She was very conventional in most respects, she thought.

"The social fabric." Dan realized his wife loved that phrase. Helen, he thought, had never used it and never would. Fabric loomed large in her life, but in a professional rather than in a metaphysical sense. How could he have been attracted to two such different women?

There were times when Dan found Marcy's explanation comforting. Then there were other times when he wondered if they inhabited the same planet.

But he loved her just the same. He knew that because he missed her intensely when they were apart.

While thinking those thoughts, Dan had been gazing at the Saks' Marlboro Man display without seeing it. Now he focused on what the window contained. Manikins wearing jeans, light blue work shirts and cowboy hats; slouching, hands in pockets. "Timeless," or just a cliché that's easy to sell? He examined the boots the manikins were wearing. That's probably where most of the money was made.

Dan sensed someone too close and turned to look while moving slightly away. A man wearing a "Ted Baker" tee shirt, "Ted" in one color and "Baker" in another, brushed past – anxious to make the light?

Dan eased around the corner of the building, to another part of the same display.

*everyone is talking about fashion blogs at the moment, even if most of them read like stream of consciousness fashion warbles from the seventh row.*

The words were printed on the window in type so small that Dan had to concentrate to read them. "Seventh row?" The moral equivalent of bleacher seats at the average runway show, he surmised.

Dan skimmed the rest ... *one site with a difference* ... some run-on name of about three words ending in "blogspot.com." *A novel, bite-size approach to fashion ... essentially a menswear visual blog.* Was Helen, or more likely Philip, up on this? *Interprets fashion by concentrating on how editors, critics, buyers and models dress rather than by taking its lead from the catwalks.* The only time menswear looked interesting to Dan was when it was adapted for women – another vestige of his life with Helen. *Started because all the "real" industry guys were so much better dressed and inspirational than anything I would see in magazines* ... menswear shown in magazines did tend to look pretty much the same all the time. Only the prices changed.

What exactly did these "inspirational industry guys" wear? Dan wondered.

He continued along the row of windows, reaching one featuring a Nepalese Sherpa look. That was followed by a display centered on a manikin looking remarkably like ... Dan paused. Remarkably like whom? Older man, horned-rim glasses, bow tie on a striped shirt under a wool vest, mustard yellow with a Scottish Tattersall pattern. Black corduroy trousers. Camel coat with a corduroy collar. The manikin shown holding a black cane with a gold handle. Bennett Cerf? Must be. Should be, even if it wasn't. Or else Mr. Magoo. No point in wearing an outfit like that if you don't belong to a club with large, well-worn leather chairs, Dan thought. His mind went back to the University Club. Was someone wearing an outfit along those lines tucked away in the library somewhere, snoozing under a newspaper?

“I’m your boss whether you like me or not. My word is shit? I’m the one who hired you.”

Dan turned to see a woman with short blond hair, talking on a cell phone, stride past. She had on another one of those nubby looking suits and seemed very comfortable in her high heels. But the voice had been that of a man. He must have been walking in the other direction.

Deciding he’d had enough of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Dan retraced his steps along Saks’ window displays and headed east on 50<sup>th</sup> Street. Across the way, a big-ticket BMW convertible, top up, was parked alongside St. Patrick’s, in front of a fire hydrant. A black female with large gold earrings and dark glasses lounged in the passenger seat. No sign of the driver.

Just before reaching the New York Health and Racquet Club, a dark blue awning extending out over the sidewalk, Dan had to alter course to clear a man – Middle Eastern by the look of him – earnestly shinning a large brass stand-pipe extending out from the department store building.

“Work any better when it’s polished?”

The man glanced up at Dan with a puzzled look on his face.

Geller Paper. Large white truck. “A complete line of paper, plastic and janitorial supplies for the restaurant and food service industry.”

At the corner, Dan turned right on Madison, almost walking past a man in a wheelchair, holding out a blue ball cap and shaking it. Uncharacteristically, Dan stopped, fumbled in a pocket and deposited his change in the cap. The man rewarded him with a bemused smile.

“There, but for the grace of ...,” Dan murmured as he walked on.

“Ever use Fresh Direct?”

“Nah.”



The sidewalk was narrower on Madison, the pace faster, and snatches of conversations were audible –

“...it’s part sales, but it’s also part sales less expenses ...”

“... put together the best version of it ...”

“...like, are you kidding? It’s very hard to come up with down to the letter.”

Dan soaked it in. Real Manhattan living. Away from the tourists. Walking, talking, doing business.

“... what about that 16 million? Cash that would otherwise be ...”

A black guy carrying a bag decorated with a smiley face dug around in a trashcan, found nothing of interest and quickly moved on.

Dan arrived at the next corner just in time to see a young man with a large black camera kneel down and attempt to take a picture of someone sitting on the sidewalk, back against a building, paper Starbucks cup extended. But the beggar was too fast for him. He sprang up, uttered an oath and kicked at the photographer, forcing him to back away, camera held at arm’s length from his body.

Dan wondered what would happen next, but nothing did. The photographer simply smiled and turned away as the beggar resumed his spot.

“... but on the outgo side, it’s amazing ...”

Dan was forced to pass right between two men talking to each other as he crossed 49<sup>th</sup> Street.



A block later, he passed over to the east side of Madison and walked under a couple of yellow Pax banners hanging from the front of a building. “Wholesome Foods” was printed in small letters along the bottom of the signage, identifying the nature of the establishment. Dan thought Pax was an odd name for a food store and wondered if it had been in business when he lived in New York. He couldn’t recall having seen it. A door into the store, standing open and partially blocking the sidewalk, advertised acceptance of the usual credit cards. Dan felt for his wallet. Still there.



On the other side of the street, Bank of China occupied an older brick building adorned with marble. Two flagpoles rose above the main entrance, but no flags were flying. Could one find an ATM machine in there? Not likely.

A sidewalk vendor selling fruit and nuts reminded Dan that noon was approaching.

“Dutch Herring Alert!” Or was it “Hering?” Sign on a kiosk. Dan didn’t read the fine print.



He reached 47<sup>th</sup> Street and there it was, more or less where he remembered it. Located it by dead reckoning, the way Dan found his way to most places in Manhattan. So different in Philly – well, so far anyway. But one didn’t walk the streets there, did one? Not like New York.

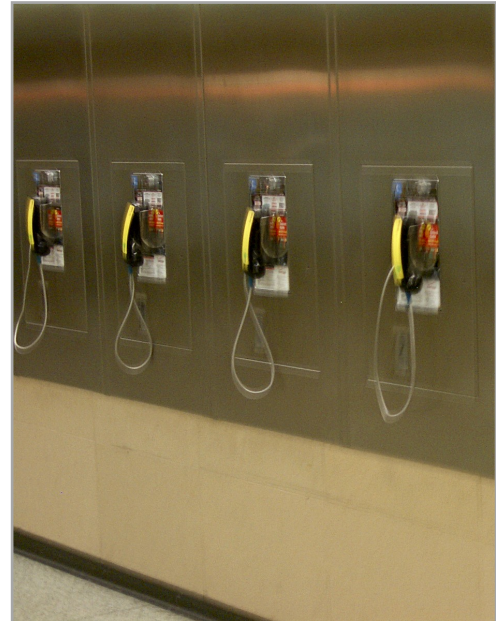
A plate glass entry, triple doors framed in heavy chrome, reflected snatches of street life. Above the door, in gold letters on a large glass panel, was written: “Grand Central Terminal.”



Not at all obvious to the uninitiated, Dan thought, recalling how he had been fortunate to stumble across the entrance in a heavy rainstorm, many years ago. Looks nicer now, he thought.

Dan headed in, following a man wearing a blue and white checked dress shirt over blue trousers, carrying a bulging, satchel-type brief case, and rode down the immaculate escalator. Alongside the moving stairway, glossy cream walls gleamed in the fluorescent lighting. Not a speck of graffiti and no lights were out of order, Dan noticed with approval.

Turning right at the bottom of the staircase, he passed a bank of impeccably maintained pay phones – once a common sight in New York buildings, but now unusual enough to be of note. None were in use.



A wide passage, reasonably well trafficked for the time of day, crossed under a row of train tracks eventually terminating at Grand Central’s main building. “Tracks 11-42 & 101-117 – Grand Central Terminal – Elevators.” Once there had been an elevator directly from the tracks to the Waldorf Astoria, Dan had heard. He wondered where it was.

Steps led from the side of the main passage up to the various tracks, boards displaying the destinations of departing trains. “Harlem, 125<sup>th</sup> St., Morris Heights, University Heights ... Riverdale ... Yonkers ... Glenwood, Greystone, Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley, Irvington ...” Sounded like a local. Not many express trains in the middle of the day, Dan thought.

“Dop, clop. Dop, clop. Dop, clop.” Someone hurrying to catch a train?



“Clink, shs. Clink, shs. Clink, shs. Thock, thock. Thock, thock.” Different shoes, different strides on the hard marble floor.

Dan turned right out of the passage, into a corridor leading to the terminal’s main waiting room, still a considerable distance away. Every billboard space along both walls was taken by H. Stern, the jeweler. “essentially you” “revealingly you” “designingly you” “entirely you” It was a clever campaign because one tended to keep looking at the ads just to see what phrase would come next. But the sequence



started to repeat itself too soon. “recklessly you?” “exasperatingly you?” “flauntingly you?” “shamelessly you?” “irresponsibly you?” Dan could imagine the agency guys getting slaphappy in the process of dreaming things up. He’d been there and would surely be there again.

The Stern account must have given a few of the creative types plenty of laughs over martinis after work, Dan thought, wondering where the best watering holes were these days. The ad business had a reputation for creating drunks and no wonder.

Somewhere along the corridor, he passed a door to an elevator serving something identified as the 45<sup>th</sup> St. Cross-Passage and tracks 101-117.

Emerging into a vestibule adjoining the main waiting room, Dan passed a somewhat jarring object: a Metro-North touch-screen ticket machine, looking like a cross between a safe and a vending machine. “Buy tickets!” scrolling red letters exhorted. “Touch to Start.” No one using it at this hour. What about “Please Buy Tickets!”

He strode past the machine into the main concourse with its soaring celestial ceiling and crossed toward the other side, passing close to the central information booth, surmounted by a four-faced clock, designed like a globe with flattened sides.



“... so the next one that stops in Westport is the 1:10?”

Across the way, rows of ticket windows. Harlem Line Departures. Hudson Line Departures. New Haven Line Departures. Just where, in years past, had one bought tickets for *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited*? Dan wondered.

The station wasn’t particularly busy at that hour – not by rush hour standards – and Dan easily found space to stop and gaze upward without impeding anyone’s progress across the cavernous expanse. Dan knew the constellations were depicted backwards. But was it deliberate or a mistake? There didn’t seem to be a definitive answer. There was disagreement, too, over whether the mural had much in the way of artistic value. Doesn’t really matter. Surely no one was going to replace it with anything else. The ceiling, like the Oyster Bar, was Grand Central. There would be no repeat here of the Penn Station atrocity. Not in his lifetime. Dan thought he could say that with certainty.

But ... what about terrorism? A tempting target, for sure. Dan briefly conjured up scenes of chaos, carnage and collapse. Then he decided this wasn't a day for traveling that road and turned his attention back to the ceiling, trying to find the dark spot that had been left as it was when the mural had been cleaned and restored – so



the public could see the ravages of cigarette smoke. Like a dark spot on the lung. Was that what it was supposed to represent?

As his eyes traversed the upper expanse, pausing at some of the stars, Dan thought of Helleu. Paul Cesar Helleu, a painter of society women in France, the man summoned by Proust, his friend, for a death-bed portrait. How many people who pass through here now know the name of the man who designed the ceiling, know anything about him? A curious choice in the first place. But perhaps Helleu had painted one of the Vanderbilt women. Was that how he got the commission? Dan's curiosity was aroused, then extinguished as his mind clicked over to Alice and, of course,

to Helen. Did she still have it, he wondered? She'd loved it when he had given it to her: she'd probably kept it, but did she still hang it in the bedroom? He wondered about that.

They'd been in London on their honeymoon, had gazed at the exterior of Handel's house, and were walking through the gallery district when Dan had seen it in a window. An etching of a woman – elegantly dressed in the style of the Belle Epoch, her long hair swept up, revealing beautiful, refined features. She appeared to be reading her mail.

"It's you! That's the way I see you!" he had told Helen.

She had laughed, but was touched. They had both stared at the etching without talking until Helen suddenly surprised him.

"I'd love to look like that," she had told him. And so he had bought it.



The print, Dan later learned, was one of many Helleu had made of his wife, Alice. Possibly – perhaps probably -- it was etched with the diamond Tissot had given the younger artist. Helleu had fallen in love with Alice when she was only 14 years old, when he'd been commissioned by her family to paint her portrait. The painter was 25 at the time and according to the accounts Dan had read, Helleu had courted her for the next two years, at which point her family had agreed to a marriage. How, Dan wondered, does one “court” a 14-year-old? Their first child was born when Alice was only 17, but the marriage had turned out to be a tremendous success. Helleu was said to have adored her his entire life. That seemed evident in the prints. No woman could possibly ask that she, and her children, be depicted any more gorgeously and sympathetically than Helleu depicted his family.

Dan had been much taken with the artist's story. Back in New York, after the print had been framed and hung in their bedroom, he had told Helen he was sure their life would turn out that way, too. But it hadn't happened and Dan felt his chest tighten – with disappointment, even remorse. But over what exactly? What upset him the most: the failure of his marriage, or the collapse of his self-image? It was an uncomfortable question – one he didn't want to try to answer.

Shifting his gaze downward, Dan took a breath and regrouped. Time to get moving. Exit off to the right, up a ramp and out onto 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, he thought – and started walking.

Heading up a hallway out of the main concourse, Dan noticed something identifying itself as a Directory on the wall, beside an elevator. Framed in brass, it appeared to be one of those glass-fronted, black felt boards into which white plastic letters could be inserted. “The Campbell Apartment” on a floor labeled “E.” Dan had heard there was a stylish, quiet bar somewhere in Grand Central. Could that be it, he wondered, his eyes traveling rapidly down the listing. Offices were on most of



the floors, but there on “3”, along with “Falt Watch Service” – was that spelled correctly? – was an entry that said “Tennis Club.” Could there really be a place to play tennis in Grand Central? It seemed unlikely, but then again, Manhattan was full of astonishing things. Dan tried to imagine a few old-school bond brokers stopping after work for a regular game of doubles before catching their trains home.

Yes! It was a bar! Just beyond, a discreet brass and black sign lay almost flush on the marble wall. “The Campbell Apartment. *Cocktails from another era.*” Dan was sure he knew the era in question. His mind floated back to *The*



*20th Century Limited.* Cocktails in the observation car, now swaying noticeably as the train tried to make time lost to track work on its overnight run to Chicago. Porter making up one's berth a few cars forward. Probably finished by now, but no need to rush back. Comfortable chair. Time to unwind.



Could the Campbell Apartment be just the right place to take Gloria? The thought intrigued him. Well, not this time. Dan reminded himself of their forthcoming dinner at Café des Artistes – Gloria's treat, Gloria's choice (Alfred had liked it) -- and he was leaving for California the next morning. Would they ever be with Gloria in Manhattan again? Dan wondered as he resumed his progress, under a gently curving marble arch.

“SUBWAY 4·5·6·7·S SHUTTLE PASSAGE MAIN CONCOURSE ”



None of those for him. Facing a row of shops across the corridor just beyond the arch, Dan angled left, toward a ramp leading up a level to the exit on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. He glanced toward the window of a bookstore, filled mostly with greeting cards it seemed. The name of the store, **posmanbooks**, was printed as one word in a modern, unadorned, lower-case font – something akin to Tahoma Bold, Dan thought -- but “posman” was black and “books” a greenish bronze color.

Both a name and a logo: the sort of modern marketing gambit with which he was all too familiar. Dan thought briefly again about his office in Philadelphia. No fires

burning there, he was sure. The trip to New York with Marcy and Gloria followed by his own visit to a relative in California had fallen conveniently during a lull at work.

“He’s retired now. Field and Stream, I think. The guy is a maniacal fisherman.”

A couple of men, walking purposefully, brushed past Dan as he headed up the ramp.

“No, I was there and I heard him tell Dotti ...”

Dan glanced down to his left, where part of the corridor continued level toward an entrance to the subway. A man was buying something at a small shop that sold what looked like very nice bread and pastries. Dan imagined himself stopping there many mornings to pick up the forbidden fruit – a Danish or a croissant to have with coffee at the office he imagined he might have on Madison Avenue. And he would probably stop again in the evening to buy a fresh loaf of bread for dinner at home. At home? What was he imagining – that they wouldn’t live in the city? Maybe kids were in the picture and they would live where? In one of those towns in Connecticut? He could easily picture Marcy there, but would he be happy?

“ ... because I had too much trouble in the first place, Joe. I paid off a hundred dollars ...”

Dan, dodging a woman pulling a roller bag with one hand while carrying some sort of beverage in the other, reached the top of the ramp and a rounded vestibule where several sets of doors led out to the street. He pushed through one of them and found himself on the corner of East 42<sup>nd</sup> and Vanderbilt Ave., staring across 42<sup>nd</sup> Street at the Lincoln Building.



Although Grand Central could hardly be described as quiet, the noise level jumped markedly on the street. A couple of sirens were blaring a few blocks off, competing with the insistent staccato of a jackhammer somewhere closer by. Trucks, hitting a steel plate in the street, added to the din. People standing near Dan as he waited to cross 42<sup>nd</sup> were talking, but he could scarcely hear a word.





“Hugs, Not Drugs” proclaimed the sweatshirt of a young woman. Eyeing her, Dan was just as happy she wasn’t actually offering them.

As the noise level dropped with the changing of the light, Dan heard the musical lilt of an Indian accent just behind him.

“You are planning to go where? To 57<sup>th</sup>? Heading the wrong direction. Definitely wrong, veddy wrong.”

He chuckled to himself as he crossed the street. Always very definite, the Indians.

Safely on the other side, Dan headed east, toward the light green, iron overpass that takes Park Avenue across 42<sup>nd</sup>, on its way around Grand Central. “Pershing Square,” said a green and gold plaque in the middle of the arch. Not a square at all and as such, not much of a memorial to the hero of World War One – not that anyone thought about that particular conflict anymore. Nonetheless, it seemed a bit slapdash, Dan thought.



Under the arch sat the Central Café, its façade designed to resemble a French bistro. “Now the busiest and best breakfast in New York,” a sign on one of the café’s windows proclaimed. Assuming it was true, which establishment previously held the title for “busiest and best”? Dan wondered, pondering the relative attractiveness of a place that identifies itself as “busiest.”

“So busy no one goes there anymore?” That was something Berra said, wasn’t it?





Emerging from beneath the underpass, Dan glanced at the glass-covered exterior of the Hyatt Hotel, which had displaced the old Commodore – a jumping off point for a trip on the *The Limited*. Gone now, just like the train. But the Chrysler Building was still there, a bit further east, its sunburst-terraced Art Deco crown clearly visible even on a somewhat gloomy day. Still the most graceful building in Manhattan, Dan thought. But as memorable as the Flatiron? He wasn't sure.



Dan didn't much care for the Empire State Building and he didn't want to ponder the merits of the missing twin towers. Was that the real reason he had abandoned New York for Philadelphia? Philly probably isn't too high on the hit list of terrorists – unless you count the Washington Redskins. Dan was relieved to have come up with something amusing to deflect that line of thought. He made a mental note to find a way to work that into a conversation the next time he saw Hartley.



There, on the other side of Park, was Dan's destination, just where he had expected to find it: the busses to LaGuardia and Kennedy. A few people, accompanied by a motley collection of luggage, straggled along the sidewalk behind a sign that said: "Line Forms Here." No bus loading for LaGuardia at the moment, but just beyond, a slightly decrepit blue and gray "NY Airport Service" bus – surely fully depreciated, Dan thought – appeared to be taking on passengers for JFK. Tomorrow morning, that was where he would be.

Did one buy tickets on the bus? Dan couldn't remember. Glancing about, he noticed a singularly grungy ticket office, occupying what used to be a rather grand entrance to the office building in which it was located. Anything but "purpose built," Dan thought.

"So what are you up to, honey?" a woman said to a cellphone.

Dan walked in, passing on his left a couple of ancient ticket machines adorned with



the warning “cash only.” This operation hasn’t even caught up with parking meters, he thought.

Above the ticket window, all was explained: LaGuardia \$12; JFK \$15: physically disabled seniors, \$5.50 and \$6.50, respectively; students \$8.50 to either airport, IDs required. Why the destination differential for full-fare passengers and the disabled elderly, but not for students? One of life’s many mysteries.

He purchased a ticket for \$15, put it in his wallet and walked out.

Turning back toward Grand Central, Dan noticed the MetLife building beyond. Pan Am didn’t survive all that long beyond *The 20th Century Limited* and the Commodore, he thought. The heroic days of air travel were long over. “This is the final boarding announcement for Pan American World Airways Flight One, AROUND THE WORLD.” It had a certain ring to it. Some people took the flight just to say they had done it.

As Dan stood contemplating the past, a bus for LaGuardia arrived, just as the bus for JFK decided it was time to depart. As the two behemoths snorted, hissed and jockeyed for position, a woman with a small child rushed up and pounded on the side of the JFK coach. Obliging, the driver stopped, and opened the door to let them on. But instead of walking up into the coach, the woman stood in the doorway, gesticulating excitedly. Wondering what the fuss was all about, Dan soon realized her luggage was still on the curb. Although the bus was now angled into the narrow street, blocking traffic, the driver, with little sense of urgency, got out and stowed her bags. Then the bus listing slightly and belching smoke, pulled away.



“Ah, the glamour of air travel,” Dan said to himself as, mission accomplished, he pondered what to do next. The answer came from his stomach: he was hungry, but for what?

Before he could answer that question, he had to field another.

“Do you know where Penn Station’s at?” a man asked.

“In a landfill someplace,” Dan was tempted to respond. But he didn’t.

“About eight blocks that way and about five rather long blocks that way,” Dan said, pointing in the appropriate directions. “Or you can go down that stairway there,” he said, gesturing toward a door labeled “Subway” adjoining the ticket office, “take the Shuttle – it’s the “S” train – across town to 42<sup>nd</sup> and take the IRT -- either the express or the local -- one stop downtown. The 1, 2 or 3 train.”

The man looked mystified.

“Or you can take a cab – it’s not far – and there are plenty of them.”

Dan decided against warning the man about the adverse impact of cross-town traffic on cab fares. He clearly had too much to digest already.

“Thanks,” the man said and turned away. Dan decided against watching to see what choice he would make. Instead, he started walking, retracing his path to Grand Central, mentally vetoing the “Central Café” for lunch as he again strode past it.

Back in the main concourse again, Dan felt undecided. The station was full of places to eat, some up here, overlooking the main floor, others in the food hall down below. He didn’t feel like sitting at a table by himself, but he didn’t feel like the usual grab and gulp lunch fare either. There was the “Oyster Bar” – “the only seafood restaurant with a train station” – a line Dan enjoyed now that he was, occasionally to his distress, in marketing. He could sit at the raw bar, or at one of those low stools at the serpentine counter. No problem for one, even at this hour, he thought. But last night’s dinner had been a little too rich: what he really felt like was just a salad. Dan headed toward one of the stairways leading down – the one with the big brass fork over the landing at the west end of the main hall.

Emerging into the space below, Dan found himself staring at a cheerful orange and white striped sign that said “Junior’s” – a take out. Pre-made salads and sandwiches by the look of it – a couple of women staring at a glass-fronted display – with a seating area off to the side. It didn’t appeal, and he walked on.



Out in the middle of the hall was a food island, surrounded by rather peculiar, outward-facing, hard-leather easy chairs – mostly occupied. There were also some wooden benches of the sort one identifies with railway stations. Dan walked through a gap in the chairs and looked at the small establishment. A round signboard, looking a bit like an upside down lampshade, rose from the middle. Caffe Pepe Rosso, it said in large,



illuminated blue letters. Under that, in black script “tavola calda.”

On the lower part of the lampshade, sloping inward, colored panels listed the bill of fare: “Pasta” against a green background, “Panini” and “Insalata” against orange, drinks and whatever else the establishment offered on panels of other colors, marching around in a circle. Dan peered at what was available, his stomach warning him against anything with much in the way of fat in it.

One stretch of the perimeter of the little café was left open for take-out orders, but Dan noticed a counter with high, curved-back wooden chairs bending around the remainder of the oval. It looked full – not surprising at this hour – but he circled it anyway since more food vendors lay beyond. As he reached the far end, Dan saw to his surprise that one chair was unoccupied – the last one in the line, just before what appeared to be a large espresso machine. He stepped forward quickly, pulled the chair back a bit and, since it was at the end of the row, slipped in without disturbing any neighbors.

Glancing about, he noticed her for the first time, sitting next to him, leafing through a pouch-type briefcase stuffed full of papers, presumably awaiting her food. She was slim and simply but professionally dressed – a black skirt with a matching jacket, open at the front, over a medium green, round-neck cotton top. Her hair, dark, thick and apparently naturally curly, was pinned back behind her ears. If she were wearing any jewelry, Dan didn’t notice it.

In profile, her fair complexion and gracefully delineated features captured Dan’s attention for longer than the situation permitted. If she were aware of his gaze – and she probably was – the woman ignored him in the manner one ignores something that actually isn’t there at all.

“She’s got class,” Dan thought, gazing around the gentle arch of the counter. Most of the other customers were, to his eyes, nondescript. Little more than lumps on their chairs.

“Need a menu, or know what you want?”

Dan realized he was being addressed and glanced upward at the panel listing Panini sandwiches and salads.

“I’ll have the orange and goat cheese salad,” he said. It sounded the lightest of the three choices. Spinach with bacon and eggs was clearly out of the question, his stomach told him.

“Anything to drink?”

“Just water, thanks.”

Dan stole another glance at the woman. She had pulled a white legal tablet out of

her briefcase, leafed about half way through it and was staring at almost a page of rather large scrawl. Indecipherable from his vantage point. He looked away, wondering who she was and what she was doing there. Long, somewhat delicate arms; nice hands; dark eyes. Dan felt fortunate to have her in his company – even if he wasn't in hers.

The counter was a thick slab of what looked like white marble even though it surely wasn't. In between each couple of places was a chrome-plated caddy, holding sugar on one side of the handle, salt and pepper on the other. The menus were thin, narrow strips of paper. Dan studied one, determined for the moment to resist the urge to steal another look at the woman beside him.

Someone wearing white, chef-like attire arrived with a salad and placed it in front of the woman. Not the one Dan had ordered and clearly not spinach with eggs and bacon. He glanced up. Must be the apple, arugula and Gorgonzola option.

The woman, apparently in no rush, ignored it, continuing to leaf through her tablet. Out of the corner of his eye, Dan could see that many pages had been used although some seemed to have little more than a couple of words on them. This was a person who took notes, sometimes needlessly, he thought. Force of habit? He could envisage her writing furiously in a college lecture. Too much nervous energy? Even seated, she projected a certain air, that of a temperamental thoroughbred? Or maybe she was insecure. Or detail oriented. Or couldn't sit back and take in a big picture. Those were some of the thoughts that coursed through Dan's mind.

Stuffing her tablet back into the briefcase, which rested in her lap, the woman glanced ever so slightly in Dan's direction – but not actually at him, he noticed – as she turned to her salad. He quickly looked straight ahead, then off to the left at nothing in particular, embarrassed to have been caught invading her privacy. Starting a conversation was out of the question, he thought, feeling somewhat dejected.

Dan's salad arrived and he surveyed it. Mostly mixed greens, a few slices of those little orange sections that come in cans and some small white lumps of generic goat cheese – the variety packaged in little round logs. A light dressing was already on the greens.

Just about right, Dan thought, sipping his water and contemplating the simple concoction. As he picked up his fork, he noticed the woman had just about finished hers – not much there, easy to eat. She'd soon be gone, he thought.

Shortly thereafter, the woman signaled for attention, but instead of asking for her bill, she ordered a cup of tea. It arrived almost immediately – a cup of hot water with a tea bag on the saucer, leaning against the cup – and her plate was removed. Nothing special in the way of tea, Dan noticed, as the woman ripped open the little packet and dumped the bag into the cup. Taking his time about it, Dan nibbled his salad.

The woman took a sip of the tea, put it down and pushed it slightly away. Pretty dreadful, Dan thought. Probably the water in the cup wasn't piping hot and in any event, she clearly hadn't let it steep long enough.

The woman pulled her briefcase up and began prowling around in it. Dan tried hard not to look.

"Shit!"

Dan couldn't believe his ears.

"Oh, shit!"

Fork in midair, he looked at her, hesitated slightly, and then asked what was wrong.

"I can't pay for my lunch. I don't have enough cash and I don't have my credit card with me. I must have left it at home this morning. What a nightmare!" She was staring at the briefcase with a distraught look on her face.

"Don't worry about it. I'll pay for it. It looks like ... what, about ten bucks? Including the tip? I mean it's nothing. I'd be happy to."

"No, no, I can't let you do that."

They looked at each other and Dan smiled.

"Come on, what's ten dollars? I mean it's just nothing. And what's the alternative? My guess is this place doesn't run tabs and I can't exactly see you washing dishes here."

She laughed.

"I guess not. Well ... I feel totally ridiculous ... how could this happen? ... How can I let a complete stranger buy my lunch? ... Only if I can pay you back. You have to promise."

"Sure, but I don't care if you forget. Really, it's a ridiculously small amount."

"It's the principle."

Dan knew what she meant from his days in Japan. If she didn't pay him back, it would hang over her. The Japanese often refused help from strangers, even in rather dire circumstances, and by the same token, people sometimes walked past a person in need, unwilling to help. As soon as one did something for someone, a debt was incurred. The problem was, there was never any way to pay it off exactly, to square the account. So one tended to overpay so as not to have double the burden through what might be perceived as ingratitude. But overpayment simply shifted the obligation to the other side, presenting the same dilemma there. The two parties were now linked like two small children on a seesaw that refused to balance



in the middle.

Americans were better able to shrug it off and move on, but in a way, once a person enters your life in this fashion, they never really leave. Just a ghost in most cases, but people did make friends – even enemies – through such circumstances. Dan suddenly felt sorry for his companion. She seemed busy. She didn't need complications in her life.

"Here, write your name and address on this piece of paper," the woman said, handing Dan one of the white tablets and a ballpoint pen. She had turned over many pages before finding one that was blank.

As Dan took the materials, the woman looked at him rather intently, afraid he might refuse?

"Sure," Dan said, and wrote it out.

"You're from Philly," she said, looking at what he had written. "What are you doing here?"

The tone of her voice was suddenly very friendly – "you wanted to talk to me: ok, I'm willing," it said.

"Actually, I'm in Manhattan with my wife and my mother-in-law," Dan explained. "They had a ladies' lunch – probably one of those chicken-salad affairs – with some friends and I was excused, but ..." Dan glanced down at his plate "... here I am eating the same sort of thing."

The woman laughed.

"By the way, I'm Sheryl," she said.

"Dan."

"I know, I saw your name when you gave me your address."

"What in the world have you written in those tablets?" Dan asked. "I mean, page after page."

"Only my life. I write everything down. Can't help it."

"What do you do?"

"I work for a drug company."

"A drug company? How can you? The paper's full of drug company scandals. Seems like one every day. Have you read the business section of today's Times? What about that one?"

"I know, I saw it. But I don't work for one of those companies. My company is

small and specialized.” She gave him the name – one of those made-up sounding words like Pharmochem – and he shrugged.

“Not one I know, or recall having read anything bad about.”

Dan listened as Sheryl talked a bit about her occupation. She was involved in the public affairs side of the company. More outreach and education than marketing since the company’s main product was the only one of its type. It addressed certain symptoms of an affliction more common in women than men, an affliction for which there was no cure. When Sheryl told him what it was, Dan realized he’d heard of it, but that was about as far as his knowledge went.

“So, your office is around here somewhere?”

“A few blocks away, but I don’t really work there. I’m on contract and I come into Manhattan two or three times a week. Other times I work at home.”

Dan and Sheryl had both turned in their chairs and were facing one another now. Her face was broader than Dan had expected – less refined than her profile had suggested. But she was still a very attractive woman in a confident, professional sort of way.

“Where do you live?” Dan asked.

“Fairfield, Connecticut. It’s not too bad a commute, which reminds me I have a train to catch before long.” Sheryl looked at her watch, but didn’t move.

Dan finished his salad and Sheryl, somewhat tentatively, tried another sip of tea.

“Are you from Connecticut originally? Go to school there?” Dan inquired.

She was and she had. Sheryl named a university that sounded like it was part of the state system and Dan nodded as though he had heard of it. She had studied something akin to medical sociology, not a subject Dan knew anything about.

“Did you ever want to be a doctor or a nurse? I had a good friend who went to Columbia Nursing School. Very tough, I think.”

“Not when I went to college, but now, I wish I had a gotten a degree in something in the clinical area. How about you?”

“Poly Sci major. Useless, of course. But I got into journalism – DC, initially, then here in New York. But it didn’t work out so I’m in marketing now. The money’s good. Speaking of which, how’d you happen to end up with no money today? I thought drug companies were loaded.”

Sheryl laughed, glanced at her watch again and said, “well, you asked.”

“I’ve got three-year-old twins and a baby – actually, she’s nine months now – and

things can get a little chaotic. I came home yesterday and I couldn't believe it. When the babysitter wasn't looking – I think she was putting in a wash – she's good that way – the twins had somehow got hold of all my little bottles of perfume and that kind of stuff and tossed them into the crib with the baby. The bottles were in the back of a drawer so how the twins found them, I don't know. I haven't used any perfume for years so the bottles were closed tight, not that the baby can open anything, but ... well, you can imagine, I panicked. I just dropped everything who knows where and flew into action."

Dan, now curious about life with children, tried to visualize the situation, but what stuck in his mind was the comment that she no longer used any of her perfume. Different life. Did she miss the old one, he wondered?

"It didn't get any better this morning. My husband forgot to make lunches for the twins and took them off to pre-school with nothing to eat. Fortunately, he remembered when he got there and called me, but then I had to make the lunches myself and deliver them, which is not on the way to the railroad station, so I just grabbed my stuff when I dashed out of the house without really looking to see that I had everything. Of course it was after rush hour – that's an advantage of my job – but it meant I had to park at the far end of the station parking lot and then I heard the train coming so I had to run all the way to the platform. Fortunately I have a rail pass and didn't need to buy a ticket because I had a meeting today, you see."

"I guess you made that, Ok – right?"

"Yes, but the stuff I grabbed to take with me didn't have my credit card in it. At least I can't find it anywhere. And I'd forgotten how little cash I had and without the card, I can't get any more."

Dan shook his head in sympathy and smiled at her. She smiled back and he wondered what she was like in a meeting.

"Look," she said. "I've really got to go very soon. I do have a few dollars. I want you to take them. I want to pay for at least part of it." Sheryl reached into her briefcase, fumbled around a little and extracted four dollar bills.

"Really, don't bother. I mean, you don't even have to repay me. This has been fun. I'm delighted to buy you lunch."

"No, no, no. Please take them."

"Ok, I'll take two, but you keep two. You can't have no money at all."

That seemed to satisfy her and she pushed the bulging briefcase more or less closed and rose to go.

As she did, Marcy's recent comments that seemed to suggest she was warming to the idea of having children again returned to Dan's mind. He wondered if he had

just seen a preview of the sort of life he might soon be living.

“One last thing,” he said.

Sheryl paused and looked at him.

“When you were in college, or before you were married, did you ever think that this is what your life would turn out to be? I mean the chaos of kids; charging across train station parking lots; trying to make meetings in Manhattan, and then rushing to get back before the babysitter has to go, only to have it all start over again?” (He wanted to add “and never wear perfume” but he didn’t.)

Sheryl gazed down at him and hesitated, but only briefly.

“I think I’m very fortunate,” she said.

That wasn’t the response Dan had expected and he was taken aback.

“Really?”

“Yes. I always wanted to have children and my husband is a nice guy.”

A smile of contentment on her face, Sheryl said good-bye and disappeared into the flow, leaving Dan pondering the significance of his day.

# # # #