

/ SAMPLE CHAPTERS FROM THE NOVEL  
KILLING BRYCE /

by

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### Critical Introduction

The object of this report is to examine several different applications of the third person restrictive mode of narration in fiction. The book from which the body of this report is excerpted is entitled KILLING BRYCE. This critical introduction will, a, briefly summarize the plot of KILLING BRYCE; b, acknowledge debts the author owes to the naturalist tradition, at the same time disclaiming any overindebtedness; c, outline any extra-literary influences which the author might have fallen under during the conception and composition of KILLING BRYCE; d, place this work within the tradition of the novel, citing many specific works and authors, with an emphasis on modern antecedents; e, discuss the notion of the third person restrictive and how this fictional resource is exploited in KILLING BRYCE, particularly in the sample chapters included herein, and, finally; f, briefly discuss the problem of establishing sympathy for fictional characters when operating under the third person restrictive mode.

It is Saint Patrick's Day, 1980. Sam has come all the way to the white semi-slums of Los Angeles from his underground hiding place in the "tube" of London. He has come with intentions of provoking his brother-in-law Bryce into a fist fight and killing him. Sam's motives are gradually revealed over the course of the book.

Simultaneously, Sam's mother Gwen is languishing in a Utah psychiatric ward, receiving vague presentiments that soon she and her son will be sharing a continent again. These presentiments have come directly from a postcard explicitly stating as much. She has forgotten that she has read the postcard. Such are the effects of thorazine.

Also concurrently the father, Professor Edwine, is playing poker in his BOQ room in Wiesbaden, Germany with a group of his students, all Air Force officers. The professor is trying to win back some of the money he has just sent to Sam to pay for his mysterious return to America. The professor is a most indulgent father, shelling out money at a moment's notice, because he correctly believes that his son is a genius. The professor is living in self-imposed exile across the seas because he cannot handle the recent developments in his family's life.

At this moment on Saint Patrick's Day Professor Edwine's daughter, Cassie, is in her upper-managerial office high atop the corporate headquarters of Zippy, Incorporated, a fast food conglomerate in Houston. She is pining away for her baby, whom she has left with her distant-cousin/husband back in Los Angeles. Her job calls her away from her baby three quarters of the time. She, too, is suffering discomfiting premonitions concerning Sammy. She has spoken on the phone a moment ago to her husband and has been informed that her weird brother has suddenly shown up, all sullen and uncommunicative and unannounced. She worries that the two young men might get into some kind of trouble.

Just at the moment when she is on the verge of correctly intuiting the nature of this trouble, her secretary steps in with some papers to be signed.

On this day, at this moment, McJunken, Bryce's amoral mentor, lies in a morphine ecstasy in the amputee ward directly downstairs from Gwen's place of incarceration. For mysterious reasons his leg is missing, and he is ruminating with glee upon the considerable damage he has wreaked upon the Edwine clan -- partly out of mishatched plots to seduce Gwen, and partly out of sheer perversity on his part. He holds total sway over Bryce and has used it with incredible destructive force, as is shown in the course of the novel.

So these, then, are the prime situations as they stand as of 11:20 to 11:45 AM, Saint Patrick's Day. They come in brief present-tense scenes, interspersed liberally with flashbacks. At first the flashbacks are episodic and apparently disconnected. But gradually the past tense takes over and the novel progresses in a straight chronological narrative, with the Saint Patrick's Day "nows" appearing only at climactic moments or at the ends or beginnings of books. (The novel is in four books.)

The main seminal development is the arrival of McJunken upon the scene. This wandering, Nabokov-reading former hitman sees Gwen and immediately becomes obsessed with having her. Gradually, he realizes that would be impossible, mainly because he himself is so preternaturally repulsive and Gwen is so fastidious. So he settles on trying to



make her notice him. He does this by effectively hypnotizing her stupid nephew Bryce and manipulating him into marrying Gwen's self-loathing, desperate, 350-pound daughter Cassie -- an action that McJunken is sure will mortify such a correct person as Gwen. But Gwen barely notices because she is involved with her own incipient madness and with worrying and cooing over Sammy, her "favorite genius ideal boy."

McJunken realizes eventually that Sam should be his target; and in an incredibly brutal, abortive mugging scene he manages to fall off a third-story fire escape and pulverize his leg, leaving his intended victim, Sammy, high and dry and undamaged and totally ignorant as to even the identity of that peculiar little Irishman writhing down there on the asphalt.

Sam, halfway out of his mind with amphetamines and the deprivations of the musician's life, is so exaggeratedly horrified by the marriage of his sister to his distant cousin that he recoils to England, to fester and brood and play banjo for ha'pennies in the yellow tile tunnels of London's underground. From there he realizes that it is time for killing Bryce, and the action is brought cleanly back to the present. The ending will not be revealed here, but it is highly affirmative.

The preceding comprises only about three-fourths of the plot of KILLING BRYCE; but the main points have been covered. The selections excerpted for this report come early on in the book and are essentially introductory scenes. Cassie is presented before her marriage and trans-

formation from shut-in hypochondriac to tough businesslady. Professor Edwine is presented before his disillusionment and loss of faith in Family as an agent of human redemption. Gwen is presented before her final lapse into insanity. These selections were made precisely because of their introductory nature -- to make as clear as possible the subtle stylistic distinctions between each point of view. Most of the rest of the novel is more dramatic in form, with the characterization being done more through the horses' mouths, so to speak, rather than through the eye of the "reverberator."

Operating from so many different points of view, and having such an enormous field to work and play in, this novel manages simultaneously to be naturalistic and a satire of naturalism. For example: Sam is obsessed with the notion that he is foredoomed to die unpublished and obscure because half of him is comprised of the genes that formed the "hideous walrus colony known as the Edwine clan" -- his father's Jack-Mormon relatives. But it is strongly hinted, in a secret family legend that Sam knows nothing about, that Professor Edwine was a foundling. This bestows upon Professor Edwine the benefit of the archetypal hero's ambiguous origins, and totally undercuts Sam's prime life-obsession.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that Sam's harelip is a mutation caused either by Eisenhower's nuclear weapons tests upwind in Nevada in the year of Sam's birth, or by the primitive 1950's chemical compounds that Gwen was obliged to take so that Sam's foetus would not spontaneously abort when it got wind of the incompatibility of the

professor's blood type with Gwen's.

In any case, Sam -- mutant or not, cursed naturalistic anti-hero or not -- happens to be the strongest, most courageous person in the whole teeming book, the deepest delver, who digs down and finds his own considerably strong Bloodthirsty Demon and goads it to the very point of fratricide -- and defeats it. He denies violence not because of any overriding gentleness on his part, but simply because he finally understands that violence is trivial. Sam is far too proud and too busy to engage in trivial activities. The strongest affirmation here is not one of predetermination, but of the soul-excavating individual.

That is Sam's section of the book. There are other parts of the book that run like naturalist tracts. There are subplots acted out by fully-developed "minor" characters -- my coinage is foil novels. For example: Bryce has another gentler mentor, a Mormon Melchizedek whose Mormonism is presented as a component of his genetic makeup, who deliberately puts himself through an apostasy and joins the Episcopalian church simply because he covets a job as Kapellmeister in the local Episcopalian parochial school. But he winds up being unable to overcome the Mormonness intertwined to basically into his body's cells. In a world where people still argue about whether Judaism is a race or a religion, this foil novel's treatment of something as superficial as Mormonism takes on a gleefully, deeply perverted light.

Similarly, the Weltyan "sense of place" is played upon and disposed of -- in one section of the book. The one person with the most intense

awareness of what it means to be Utahn is Sam, and he reviles, almost vomits on the entire notion of Utahness. He sneeringly dismisses the Great Salt Lake, the very symbol of his homeland, as "the world's largest wet-cell battery, bisected into halves of unequal salinity by a dilapidated railroad causeway leading out to buffalo-infested Antelope Island." He considers the Mormon nation to be the Whore of Babylon in Moral Majority clothing. The landscape is never described in Sam's sections as anything more than a salted, sapped wasteland. Welty, of course, speaks of "sense of place" as a source of strength and integrity for a writer. Well, the most powerful and honest sounds that come out of Sam are his shrieks of Utah-loathing.

Outside of novels, I have done systematic reading in nothing but art and music history and theory, pharmacology and sexology, and Carl Jung (useless except accidentally, so he won't enter into my discussion here). What sociology I have has been picked out of the sociology-rife air. I justify my generation of 336,000 words out of thin air by virtue of my musician's-ear awareness of everything that goes on in the audible culture around me, and by pointing out that I am trying primarily to get novels published, and it is only horse sense to derive the bulk of one's material from popular notions when the literary marketplace is so venal as it is now in America. So the topic of this report must be one of pure literary technique -- since that is the only pertinent area in which I've done systematic, even obsessive thinking.

This book is the next step in the novel, no rodomantade intended.

The step before was GRAVITY'S RAINBOW, which took the stylistic innovations of the two previous steps, REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST and ULYSSES, and liberated them in terms of time and place (in the first instance) and subject matter (in the second instance). The result, as everybody knows, was a boring, unreadable, sophomoric, but important tour de force. KILLING BRYCE displays a mastery of all the new Pynchonian techniques of self-centered "neo-stream of consciousness," but hearkens also back to the earlier novels of Tolstoy and Flaubert to provide the reasonably well-informed, attentive reader with something entertaining, edifying, and accessible. If one or two of the various individual styles have not been easily distinguishable to some of the lesser New York literary agents, and if they have been unable to uncover evidence of my "mastery of all the new Pynchonian techniques," it is simply because their ears have been jaded by over-exposure to the mere pyrotechniques of Vonnegut, Tom Robbins, Barth, the Barthelmes, and the other legion hybrid spawn of Proust/Joyce/Woolf. Laboring under a similar jadedness of the ears, some people still claim that Rimsky-Korsakov is a superior orchestrator to Brahms.

So, what KILLING BRYCE has to offer, then, are exercises in several different applications of the third person restrictive mode of narration. Sam's uses the intensely self-conscious, self-centered, highly informed Nabokovian mode, such as is applied in PNIN, where puns and private anagrams and literary allusions are of prime importance in the delineation of the main character. No excerpts from Sam are used in this report,

mainly because his sections do not stand well on their own: without a context to provide a reason for this strangeness of style, the Sam sections look merely like examples of callow obscurantism.

Gwen's style, in this excerpt at least, constitutes an almost clinical observation of a mind wandering, applying the scientifically precise methods of Joyce (in the earlier Stephen Dedalus sections of *ULYSSES*), and Woolf (all throughout her *MRS DALLOWAY*). Gwen, like Woolf, a proper lady, tends toward interior monologue rather than pure stream of consciousness. Interior monologue, as everybody knows, is Woolf's grammatically corrected version of the Joycean stream of consciousness; and it is entirely appropriate to proper ladies, who most certainly think grammatically, even at private moments. One will note that Gwen's style gets slightly subjectively outré only at moments of emotional stress. Later on when she goes completely insane, the reader is treated to a grand demolition spectacle of this great cathedral of grammar crumbling to monosyllabic pumice on the sidewalks of Salt Lake City.

Cass and Professor Edwine have languages that are similar. They love each other a great deal and think in similar ways. Each of their styles verges at times on the quasi-omniscient, using the intuitive insight possessed by the center of consciousness as an excuse to impinge upon other human consciousnesses to a controlled degree -- with the purely utilitarian intention in mind of moving the plot along. These sections subtly flirt with violation of point of view, using as their

precedent similar violations perpetrated by Henry James and Marcel Proust when they think we are not paying attention. These sections, Cassie's in particular, could be said to employ a Jamesian "reverberator," or a passive mediator between reader and action, as can be found in Proust's *CITIES OF THE PLAIN*. Cass and her father are the most unself-centered people in the book. Their comparative insight into others stems largely from their love of humanity. The selection of their two sections was made mostly as a means of displaying the subtlety of difference in their thought modulations -- the reader must look beyond the obvious colloquialisms they share as doting father and daughter.

McJunken's style penetrates the man's mind to such a shallow degree that his scenes appear to be written in the slick, shallow, "parviscient" mode used by Irwin Shaw and Mario Puzo and other writers of popular, cheap trash (H. E. Francis calls their method "sloppy omniscience"), where action is all and characterization is perfunctory, and the only reason one character can be called the main one is that his name is the object or subject of more verbs than any other. This approach is justified by the shallowness of McJunken himself, whose main function, in the first three-fifths of the book at least, is to generate mindless activity and to cause trouble for everybody else. For palpable reasons he has no excerpt in this Master's Report.

There are three different levels of informedness. Gwen and Sam are both highly educated and self-conscious, and their styles have literary

allusions sprinkled in liberally, along with metaphysical conceits and the like. Cass and Professor Edwine are middlebrows -- but each is possessed of more or less unconscious poetic gifts. Bryce and McJunken have low-average intelligence and next to no education. Generally speaking, the ratio of immediately available, gratifiable sympathy can be traced in a sort of bell-curve over these three levels of diction: the middlebrows are the most spontaneously lovable, with a marked drop in attractiveness as one proceeds to either end of the spectrum. That is not to say that the other four characters are not sympathetic; it just takes some extra effort and thought and compassion to get used to them. That, along with the unusual length, is what is keeping KILLING BRYCE unpublished and off the shelves of Mini Marts all across this country and Canada and Australia: in a commercial literary marketplace main characters have to be spontaneously digestible, pre-chewed, like Twinkies.



## Chapter Eleven

Cass wore a light blue cotton print, a mummy-type affair. It was more like a miniskirt on her because she was so tall. She'd bought it long ago when she was with her mother and brother in Sienna. She'd still been skinny back then, and she'd wanted something light and baggy so she could feel breezes and just wear panties underneath. Also it would've fit just right in case she ever got pregnant with a black baby -- Cass remembered thinking that. Now it was just a fairly tight, long blouse that she wore over pants whenever she had to go out of her parents' house, because it covered her bottom. Cass was not pregnant; she hadn't made love at all for the longest time. But she had really gained a lot of weight.

She didn't feel so unattractive when she wore her light blue Italian print. The material was very unusual -- sort of natural and coarse, and sometimes people stopped in their double-knits and acetates and asked her about her nice blouse.

But in public places such as doctors' offices where she had to sit waiting for a long time in a straight-backed chair among the dumb old

business magazines, her blouse sometimes began to feel tight and pinchy up underneath her breasts and made her uncomfortable. She didn't like the thought of the red marks that the material would dig around her ribs; she had enough red lines down in that area already. The doctor would see her soon.

It was odd, but Cass usually never got that certain urge when she was with physical body doctors. The kind of doctors you get naked for usually didn't turn Cass on at all, unless they were very young and very beautiful. (Her and her mom's old gynecologist had a colleague, a sort of young disciple, who fit that description: whenever the old man was ill or out of town and the young beautiful man was handling the appointments, Cass always embarrassed everybody by getting all lubricated there in the stirrups.)

But that was an unusual case. Usually Cassie just felt numb all over when naked in a doctor's office. She wanted not to think so, but she was sure that the reason for this numbness could be found in the mirrors in MDs' offices, in which she saw her own distressing nakedness under an unkind white light. She was young and she'd never nursed, but her breasts already were as low and deflated and liney as an old aborigine's, and it sometimes seemed as though her skeleton itself had bent under all that weight. It seemed she had no shoulders; and the long, curvy triangle of open space that she used to have rising between her closed knees and her crotch was gone. She was no fashion model, and being with body doctors reminded her of that.

It was the mind doctors that made Cassie want to leap out and grab their

penises -- (that is, assuming they weren't middle-aged and old-fashioned and sort of creepy, like Mo Katz, her mom's analyst). Cass supposed that when people got fat like her their sexiness got sort of squeezed up from their bodies to the region of the head, centralizing in either the brain or the tastebuds or both. In Cass it was both, but mostly brain. And these many, many various sorts of brain doctors made her feel sexier than she'd felt ever since she'd been town pump across the ocean so long ago. These doctors were men who paid attention to her brain, which was now as ticklish as genitals.

Cassie was seeing all these doctors because she had been feeling ill lately. For the past five years. The symptoms sometimes switched around or traded off one for another, but the one thing that had remained constant all throughout this half-decade was a muddy feeling, a feeling of muddiness in her brain. And a smart person can't help but develop a permanent, debilitating sort of anxiety when her brain is feeling muddy. Her brain's all a smart person's got, really.

As for other symptoms, well, sometimes Cassie felt that her pee was too strong: uncomfortable coming out and dark-looking, strong-smelling. When she was still in her body doctor phase she worried about sedimentation rate and about hypoglycemia and about various other physical disorders of a general life- and personality-altering sort. These diseases had been coming out in paperback form in the supermarkets lately.

She had her daddy bring her huge blocks of orange rubber cheese, which was supposed to have the same mollifying effect as the Aventyl that her mom

took. Dietary supplements and minerals she'd eaten by the cupfull, meal-sized dosages of pills.

But none of the plain old physical doctors could ever find anything wrong with her, yet. They told her she had better lose weight or else. Worse things would happen to her than even she, with her hypochondriacal, psychosomatic brain, could cook up. They ignored her complaints and suggested she was just fat and neurotic. So Cass had very calmly switched to the mind doctors.

She wasn't depressed or discouraged; she didn't care if it was all in her head or not; she just wanted the mud to go out of her brain and her pee.

Since Mo Katz was right in the middle of analysis with Gwen, he couldn't very well get too much involved with her daughter Cass. So he just had a few conversations with her to "steer her on the proper course." Cass sensed right off that Dr Katz, this creepy man to whom her mom was giving so much of herself (all of herself, really -- isn't that what psychoanalysis meant--?), this creepy, imperious doctor wasn't taking Cass's complaints too seriously either. Though he never once mentioned overworked imagination, he was still sort of flippant when he recommended that Cass go see some of the other sorts of psychologists. The glint behind his glasses told Cass, "Yes, since you are a basic, textbook hypochondriac of the mildest sort, I shall send you over to the tinkerers, the conjurors, the so-called brain physiologists among my colleagues. They'll entertain you with their gimmicks and take your parents' money until such time as you can find something else besides your fat body to worry about. Full-blown psychoanalysts such as myself are too important to

waste our time on the likes of you, young woman. So be off to the tinkers and let me get back to pondering your fascinating, complex, challenging, mad mother --(we're just getting to the good part, the crash of '29)--"

Cass received no broken heart from this rejection. Creepy old-fashioned psychiatrists and their creepy old-fashioned psychology were something she'd never been able to swallow anyway. They didn't seem to make her feel nearly as healthy and tingly as the newer, behaviorist kind of medicine did. Mostly, men like Katz seemed morbid and destructive. For instance, Cassie was sure that Freud (or at least the popular conception of him that the supposed experts like Mo Katz had allowed to take root) was partly the reason why her brother Sam was so snotty and secretly sad today.

When he was little, her brother was so full of unabashed, indiscriminate affection, and was so thrilled with words, that he always was making up nicknames, terms of endearment for everybody and everything around the house and yard. Cassie had lain by her bedroom window one series of midsummer afternoons and had counted over two dozen different pet-names that little Sammy had cooed to Zachariah their pet dog in the back yard. (This was before it got squished by a dumptruck.) "Honey-Bunny, Scummy-Bunny, Hummy-Drummy," etc.: they had just seemed to flow from his mouth like honey. And, even though Sam was only a couple of years younger than Cass, he had once tried to name her "my 'nother-Mother." And he was always wanting Cass to play the babyish bedroom and body games they'd played in the distant remembered days, the bathing-together days before they'd gotten so dangerously close to puberty. He was always being seductive and wanting to play "smooth backs"

and "bumpy bed" and "tickle under armpits" and "jawbone on the bod." But Cass was by that time sophisticated enough to respond only with silence or even stern looks, because this was the sixties and everybody, even children, had some small smattering of "Freud," the "Freud" that came across on the psychodramas on tv in those days. Just enough "Freud" to make "'nother-Mother" seem like a dirty word, and to make skin something not to be smoothed in brotherly, sisterly ways, but only to be fucked, and then only with all sorts of old-fashioned psychological significance and weight attached.

If Cassie had been less corrupt, had responded more naturally to her brother, it might've been easier for him. He obviously had been that sort of boy who still needs a lot of touching and reassuring well into what is supposed to be the "latency" period. If Cass and Mom had only been sweeter to him, he might have turned out less snotty. Cass blamed — but, in the very next moment she always realized that this sort of retrograde regretting and blaming was just the sort of thing that creeps like Katz would want her to do; and she let it alone.

Better to think of her family as she had done sometimes back in Germany: as if it were a typical Henrik-Ibsenian cursed brood, the result of a bad blood mix, with absolutely no chance of fulfillment, no matter its nurture. Therefore no regrets.

In any case, Cass was glad that Katz sent her to the "tinkering" sort of head doctor. They were younger, handsomer, they had fascinating machines, and they thought about things like tissues and electricity and brain cells

and plain old nervy skin more than they thought about heady abstract things that you couldn't feel or smell or taste. Cass didn't have to get naked for them, so she could feel free to squinch herself up inside and get as wet as her underpants could absorb.

Like the time she was hypnotized. She was just sitting there, knowing full well that she'd been hypnotized, remembering every word that had been spoken during her trance, and knowing exactly what was going to happen at the very moment that the hypnotist worked the signal word into their conversation. Nevertheless, when at the signal her arm raised up high above her head, all by itself, uncontrollably, Cassie had gasped "Damn!" making it two syllables just like her little southern airmen had done back in Wiesbaden. All her black lovers put together couldn't've made her do something that -- eerie. And, even though two whole months of hypnosis hadn't enabled her to auto-suggest the muddiness away, still it made her feel nice for a long time. Here was something not boring to think about. And the doctor was cute and nice to her; he said she was a perfect subject. And just talking in civil tones to a young man, all alone in a room with him, made Cassie feel like a woman again -- for a while.

Or else there was the time she cooled the biofeedback machine. It was the first time she'd ever set foot inside the place where her handsome cousin Bryce Barkdull worked, the tacky dayglo-orange building with its hippy receptionist and staff, all wearing the tranquil, vapid stare of the alpha-awareness initiate; it was the first time Cassie had ever laid eyes on this particular type of oscilloscope -- (when she was little, she and WN7-EAP,

the nice poetic Jewish boy, had built from scratch their own larger, more cumbersome oscilloscope that worked with an orange needle, but she'd never seen this fancy kind up close, with the pencilbeam of white light); and it was the first time she'd ever felt electrodes and slippery conducting jelly applied to shaved parts of her body. But, nevertheless, the therapist barely had time to explain the nature of the game before Cass offhandedly made the glowing line jump exactly as it was supposed to jump. Pure alpha waves on the very first try! Everybody from all the surrounding offices gathered around, including the dope counselors, her muscly brown cousin among them. At will Cassie entertained her audience by screwing the pattern up. She tried to make the sort of abstract waltzy designs that she'd seen in that enormous old Disney cartoon "Fantasia" when she was little -- disembodied violin bows sort of swinging through space. She could almost approximate the boom-chug-chug rhythm with the glowing white line in its little circle of black glass. It was as easy as belching at will, as easy as making herself have an orgasm with no hands -- as a matter of fact, the same muscles seemed to be engaged (or disengaged) in all three activities. This biofeedback machine was as easy to fool as those lie detector tests they'd routinely made her take on the secretary job she'd had at Wiesbaden. With the polygraphs she deliberately made herself get shrill inside, so that it looked like she was lying in her teeth, even when they asked her if she was a boy or a girl. With biofeedback it was just the opposite: she just loosened everything and swam.

This time it was the therapist who said, "Damn." Totally flabbergasted,



he looked at Cass almost with interest in his eyes (just for one second).

"You've had alphacontrol training before," he said in a sly, low, skeptical voice.

"Nope," said Cassie. To show she wasn't lying, she flooded the screen with what she knew were the purest alpha waves he'd ever seen. It was muddiness that was causing her grief; calmness and alertness were at her fingertips --

(Just play like it's afterglow with little Looie sleeping across your firm breasts in the BOQ, and there's plenty of white wine for now and later, and Mom and Sam are happy, off in Greece or somewhere, and Daddy still doesn't know you're town pump so he's in his room down the hall, gambling happily -- )

" -- Then you're some kind of free -- I mean phenomenon of nature, Miss Edwine," said the young therapist in bewilderment. He tapped forlornly on the window of his contraption and prodded a few of the electrodes on Cassie's upper arm.

The oscilloscope did a little thrill-dance when he touched her, but he didn't notice because he was too upset.

Cassie didn't want him to feel inadequate or anything. She'd seen how viciously men could react when made to feel inadequate in front of a woman. So she didn't mention that such an instrument as this oscilloscope had been a toy of her childhood and even now seemed ridiculously easy to master. Instead she just muttered something dismissive like, "Well, I've forced myself to do a lot of inner-self-discipline stuff. I taught myself

the Lamaze system a while ago and -- "

"Ah-hah," the therapist started to say. But then he looked puzzled, glanced at her data sheet, and said, "But you said you never had any --" The therapist's pretty eyes widened, and Cass could see the dumb nosy questions forming a riot somewhere behind his eyes: Abortion? Miscarriage? False pregnancy? (She might have gained all this fat so rapidly -- and maybe her mom neglected to tell her that her periods were supposed to stop -- ? this is Utah, after all); Maybe she delayed her period and inflated herself hysterically?--(that would be consistent with her history of psychosomatic disorder, and who knows what these alpha-prodigies are capable of? He'd only read about them, never actually met one --)

He eyed her so intently that Cassie felt a rush of heat -- anger or horniness? Probably not anger: she was too -- too liberated -- no, too elevated to let any mere man's nosiness bother her. And, if it made her sad that she hadn't had a penis in her since she was seventeen, it certainly didn't embarrass her or make her ashamed. So she just glanced appraisingly at the medium-sized lump in the front of his white denim pants and squinched herself inside a tiny bit and said, "I taught myself the Lamaze system just to pass the time."

That was essentially true. On that string of nights long ago when her mom lay on the couch, moaning soft bourbon- and barbiturate-secrets, and Cassie was supposed to be nearby listening, Cass sometimes got down on the living room rug, propped the paperback close by, and did the Lamaze exercises-- when she wasn't eating sandwiches and things. Her mom didn't seem to mind

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Cass's being on the floor, or else she was too zonked to notice.

As for motive, well, it was partly to pass the time, to amuse herself. But there also was another reason: With her mom laid out like that, steamrollered out flat on the couch, Cassie had suddenly been visited by an overwhelming desire to prepare herself. She had wanted to spend this time, in this situation, preparing herself for the one thing in the whole earth that she suddenly wanted most: a baby. Naturally delivered and ten pounds heavy and screaming and sopping wet with her own blood and tissue, a baby boy.

She remembered that her overdramatic teenaged mind had perceived, through the darkness of the living room on Dimple Dell Drive, the specter of Death hovering over her insane mother. And a corresponding urge for birth had risen inside Cass -- equal and opposite reaction. And she'd applied herself rigorously to the fine, exacting methods of muscular and respiratory and emotional control that Lamaze had to offer. And now she was just incidentally a biofeedback prodigy. That attested to her determination and to her sheer powers of retention, for she'd done the exercises ten long years ago, back when it had still seemed possible that she'd one day get to make love some more, in some future moment of heat and black dampness -- . She still hadn't given up hope at that time, though her body had been inflating bigger and fatter by the moment --

performance this evening?" asked Gwen.

"No. I suppose we could have a fall down this light well and fatally hurt ourselves."

"Why must private schools be run by mining magnates and bankers? It seems as though teachers might be a little better qualified to run schools."

"Oh, but my dear Gwen. The school board gives wealthy parents a chance to size each other up in their fine clothing. Furthermore, it gives them a chance to fete us poor faculty members, give us a taste of the good life. We should both be deeply grateful for the chance to see what the Alta Club looks like on the inside."

"I'll try not to let my mouth hang open — Martha, tonight you get to see my husband again."

"I can barely contain my enthusiasm. By the way, it's your turn to take the Bishop home, dear."

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Professor Edwine had to go outside on the Alta Club's balcony during supper and loosen his rented black bowtie. The rice fumes had nearly overcome him. Of course, almost everybody in the dining room appreciated his reasons for having to wait outside until the rice was consumed and the

plates cleared. They even gave him a moment of reverential silence as he walked out.

Gwen's husband and several other infantrymen had escaped from a Japanese prisoner of war camp, all of them suffering from intense rice diarrhoea. Professor Edwine had had the heroic presence of mind to remember from his Eagle Scout survival training that charcoal taken orally is an effective consolidator of the bowels, and he'd saved himself to fight more Japanese. What nobody here at the Alta Club knew (besides Gwen and her mildly amused confidant, Miss Esse) was that, after saving himself, Professor Edwine had gathered up all the charcoal from the abandoned campsites in the area and, in his long-suppressed rage over total dispossession, stashed it away for himself in the jungle. Somebody saw him wolfing it down and the secret of charcoal's inspissating qualities somehow leaked out. Since nobody dared to light a fire to produce a new charcoal supply, the other men, who by now were crawling on their bellies, were forced to grovel and beg for it. Once their bowels were sufficiently bound, the men severely beat Professor Edwine, causing the hero to have that battle scar on his jaw that sprouted double rows of hot purple knobs whenever he broke down in bed and whispered to Gwen the true story of his war exploits.

Those cicatrices on his jaw were the only things, in fact, that ever swelled or got purple or hot in bed; for the Edwines had actually made love together only about five or six times in their marriage. On the first night neither of them had liked it at all; neither had ever again

given it a second thought -- at least not in relation to pleasing themselves or each other; just enough to fill the post-war obligation to make two babies. The professor was the one who saw it as some sort of patriotic duty. Young Gwen figured this was just some trivial sort of sexual compensation for a man who'd spent the war hiding in the bushes. She didn't care about politics back then, just as long as she eventually got some tall, strong babies to cuddle.

The main reason she'd married the man was his body. Before she met his relatives, Gwen had approved of the gene pool that produced this huge body. Gleaming eyes, good large forehead, nose and chin, strong lips. Seven feet of pure, lean farmboy muscle. All this symbolized to Gwen the wideopen, spacious west that she'd heard so many lies about back east. The west turned out even pettier than the east; so Gwen had selected the most "western" man she could find, as compensation, to prove she hadn't been ill-advised to wander west.

Gwen would get her giant western man college-educated and firmly-established in some professional position or other and, with his assistance, Gwen would set up a new proud family, a dynasty. Her effete bloodlines would have a chance to start over again in this clean-seeming, uncivilized Utah place. What a blood mix it would be, full of unfathomable possibilities. From the bringing together of disparate strains come fine specimens with new and unexpected traits. Gwen would get a couple of fine, strong changeling-babies, with western bodies for her to cuddle, and eastern souls for her to guide in their refinement. It would be a mixture from her aristocratic

and admittedly effete blood line, which could claim Dr Johnson and John Hancock; which could claim passage over on the Mayflower; whose individuals had written and disputed and thought themselves anemic over the centuries, had stunted their bodies with the sooty air and choleric water of the capital cities for as far back as there'd been capital cities in the British Isles, but who, nevertheless, were full of slyness and brilliance and sarcastic wit -- qualities that had helped Gwen and her sisters survive their father's homicidal madness and their family's decimation by the effects of the Great Depression. Precisely what this lineage needed was contact with the enormous clan of Idaho dry farmers known as the Edwines: converted to Mormonism and brought over fresh from the peat bogs of Wales less than one hundred and thirty years ago, preposterously hardy and wholesomely dull between the ears -- the strong salt of the earth. Gwen's babies would have her mind, his body.

After a prudent pause for their financial situation to stabilize they made two babies. Fortunately, the Edwines were each abnormally fertile, as long as she kept taking certain primitive 1950s chemical compounds that counteracted the lethal incompatibility of their blood types and prevented her from miscarrying --; so physical contact was kept at a minimum. And they decided to stay together long enough to raise the babies well, because that's what civilization's function is. After the two babies grew up, she and the professor stayed together out of inertia. Also, by that time their bank accounts and tangible assets and their "liquidities" (as the professor put it) were inextricable by any polite means. Also, with each new



misadventure of Sammy's and each new neurosis of Cass's, there kept popping up the nagging question of whether the "babies" were indeed "raised" at all yet. (Poor Cassie had never even lived away from her parents.)

So, Gwen had been virtually untouched until she'd come to work at Tuttle Hall College Preparatory Institution for Young Women, and had gotten her entire personality revamped by Martha --

At the time when she'd first met Professor Edwine, Gwen had been a pale, terrified, shuddering thing, fresh from the convent school back home, back east. She'd wandered west in a daze, and had patriotically played piano in the Salt Lake USO center, watching the soldiers "put the make" on the other girls, while they only treated her in a protective, fatherly way --; so babyish was she that they ignored her considerable beauty. One night, the recently liberated Corporal Edwine sort of stumbled in, wearing in his eyes what Gwen mistook for a gleam of madness. And she, secretly hot underneath, all adolescent and gothic and completely unaware of her true leanings, went for this freakishly tall, muscular man. The "gleam" properly should have been attributed to the POW's malnourished state -- more of a glaze than a gleam; for, as soon as she'd married him and fed him for about a week, the last of the Jap rice and charcoal had gotten rinsed away and he'd become as dull-eyed as all other men. The madness had vanished, to be replaced by --

"It's always the big jovial saps who are so torn up inside that they must do things like leave in the middle of a dinner party," murmured Dr Mo Katz, the aggressive little psychiatrist, the stumpy freckled Jew, Gwen's

analyst -- (no! her ex-analyst! Gwen had to remember that!), who had taken the opportunity of Professor Edwine's absence to descend on Gwen here in the Alta Club. "Big jolly cowpokes make the worst lovers, I'm told. They repress their true feelings so completely that they're often impotent. Is this true, Gwennie?"

"Well, Dr Katz," said Gwen, narrowing her eyes, "things aren't so bad that I should feel the need to go searching for relief among smaller, more serious men."

This Alta Club was a brown mahogany, male-dennish sort of place, with a few thin gold stripes at strategic places, but mostly sculpted brown. A circle of fat industrial men with brown drinks and brown cigars, fathers of the bitchier girls, discussed the birds and bees people in reviling tones. Captain McJunken, the U.S. history teacher, fed them lines attentively, obligingly, and looked as though he hoped to be tossed tips about the stock market. Mrs Dora Lee Kimball, Gwen's Horse Lady, was blatantly on Captain McJunken's elbow, all huge horsey grin, while her blithely unsuspecting husband across the room tried to make the wrinkly wives stop their cackling long enough for him to thump out the Hollywood tunes they had insisted on. It was diverting to watch a naturally unassuming Utah peasant like Father Kimball try to make his eyes glower doughtily at these Salt Lake City society matrons, these prestigious patronesses of a parochial school, in their orange and turquoise rinses. The clankings of their silver and turquoise Navaho bracelets alone could drown out the tinklings of the brown spinet. Gwen wanted Martha Esse to see all this; but the headmistress was

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being dominated at the other end of the table by a tipsy and maudlin Bishop. So Gwen's signal was lost. But no to Dr Katz, who still leaned over Gwen with his glass of sherry and importuned.

"Someday, Gwennie, you will have to stop needing a mommy," he said.

"It's not mature. It's not fully individuated."

Gwen was about to ask the doctor why he wasn't at home tucking in his lovely little daughter Thalia, or watching television with his wife, when somebody finally decided to go out on the balcony and inform Audie Murphy out there that the rice was all gone.

"Welcome back, ol' Easy Edwine!" cried Dr Katz, making his face go like a cowpoke. "It's a heap more satisfyin' for big men to relieve theirselves under them western stars, aint it? Didja drown any buses, haw haw?"

"Up yours, Mo," said Professor Edwine cheerfully, approaching with his hand extended to be shaken.

At the last second Dr Katz turned his back and walked away.

"Bishop ready to hit the road?" asked Professor Edwine, smiling too much.

The Bishop was crying in Miss Esse's arms, definitely ready to hit the road. He sobbed, "Sometimes I feel as though my whole soul was coated with a vile black tar -- !"

Gwendolyn Edwine had whole years of this sort of thing to look forward to, with whole interminable weekends of speeding across the Salt Flats to Wendover, to visit the home of the professor's "Bro-in-law" Rusty Barkdull,

and his "sis" Rhubarb.

\* \* \* \*

The one thing "Bro-in-law" Rusty Barkdull had to recommend him was that in freezing weather he lassoed a flowing garden hose up into the top branches of the birch in his yard -- the only tree in Wendover -- and let the whole thing freeze so it was something striking and spontaneous. But Rhubarb cancelled that out by dabbing pink and turquoise food coloring on the branches she could reach. That Death Lady perverted everything westward towards Nevada with her garish touch.

Actually, Rhubarb was Professor Edwine's second cousin once removed (or something like that), but he called her "Sis" because they were brought up at close quarters, sharing space, air, food, and god knows what else, all together with a few dozen others in the same clapboard farmhouse in the deepest reaches of southern Idaho, during the deep Depression -- an inextricably inter-related brood of fifth-generation Mormons, directly descended from handcart pioneers and polygamists. In areas of Idaho that primitive and that remote, polygamy had thrived underground well into the twentieth century; and Gwen sometimes was tortured by the question of whether inbreeding, not Eisenhower's gamma rays, but bestial perverse inbreeding might be the cause of her boy Sammy's -- (no, don't think like that!) --.

Gwen secretly called Professor Edwine's big "sis" Death Lady because her head was like a peeled skull, dried to a piecrust flakiness by the salt desert.

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dominated by savagely chipped buck teeth and bug eyes: a death's head that recalled to mind the mobs of inbred dregs, the misshapen giant Edwines of this world, who had insinuated themselves and their handcarts across the mountains a hundred years ago, straggling and scavenging along behind the ratty seagulls that, in turn, picked through the leavings of the prairie schooners of the Mormons -- who had been dregs themselves, in fact: escaped convicts needing to relocate somewhere remote; perverts needing multiple wives to achieve erection; and the cows or Death Ladies who couldn't secure a man all to themselves.

Gwen knew this was a severe assessment of an entire religion. It would seem especially severe to feed a little son along with his baby food, as she'd done with Sammy. But she had always wanted to make sure that Sammy grew up without falling victim to that complacency that seems to come guaranteed with living in Utah. If she couldn't leave Utah and Martha and Martha's cabin, she wanted at least to make sure that her son would never develop any sense of community with these desert and mountain dwellers. Rather he would spend his youth alienated and solitary until such time as he'd developed his talents, until such time as his mind was presentable to the real America, the East: NYC, Washington D.C. -- through him, Gwen would return to the great stone mansion on Connecticut Avenue. She knew his brain was too good to waste in this salt desert of a state, among the likes of Rusty and Death Lady, on these salt flats where philistinism took a more virulent form than anyplace else on earth.

It seemed oddly appropriate to Gwen that Rusty and Death Lady should've

chosen such a place as Wendover to hide in: even after thirty long, long years in Utah, an easterner like Gwen still saw this salt desert as enormously empty and terrifying -- a perfect setting for her inlaws' vacuous personalities. In fact, the whole West looked to Gwen uncannily like a representation of her own soul at her very worst moments. Wherever the West wasn't all jagged, bald mountains making her feel bloated and dizzy, it was wasteland like this Wendover, baking under the sun and infinitely more terrifying than the deepest, darkest black ghetto in Washington D.C. At least back home there was some reassuring hint of -- of air and water.

Death Lady's husband was a beaten hound. Rusty operated "one o' yer bigger sorts o' backhoes --" with a western sluggish guttural hoe, apologetic in tone, that said, "Here, you first. Tread all over me. I am doormat stuff." Rusty was a depression packrat. He had a forty-five-year collection of bottlecaps displayed in heraldic rows on dozens of brown towels which Death Lady had cut and hemmed to resemble animal hides.

"Look, Gwen," said Rusty, "what I do is I dig the little disc of cork out and I wedge it back in with some towel between. That is howcome they stick like that."

Nephi Creme Soda. Nesbitt Strawberry. Rows and rows, some of them flecked with rust. Brown desert expanses of bottlecaps covering the particleboard walls of their mobile home --

And, of course, Professor Edwine, old gregarious jerkwater Edwine, yukked it up with the Bro-in-law: "Well, my hell Rust. Some of these

bottlecaps look almost as old as you! You old Rustacean!"

(He always started talking like a cowpoke when around his relatives. It made Gwen seethe.)

Some men came, three young burly men, to deliver a used frigidaire for Death Lady's wretched bottled vegetables.

"There, you three steady it down there. Rust'n me'll heft her up --" The giant professor huffed and puffed and almost popped his eyes out, so invigorating was this salt flat air. (Giants never possess particularly great strength, though they never believe it.) "Yeah, ah. We got 'er! Watch the damn doorknob, Rustacean." Professor Edwine gestured with a giant thumb displaying on either side gory imprints of the dolly and doorjamb. "Ah, these wide-open spaces put vigor in a old mountain dweller like me," grunted Professor Edwine, hobbling in pain now, entertaining further the three young men who left laughing up their sleeves.

Before the door could swing shut, the wind blew some salt and grit under the jamb and wedged it open. Gwen could see Rusty's two sons out in the salty yard -- the boys who had been from birth the objects of Rhubarb's hideous sexual gloating. They were two fine-looking specimens, neither snaggletoothed ~~nor~~ microcephalic (must've been adopted). There was Bryce, the younger of the two, sullen-faced, earnest, easily upset and clean-cut and muscular. And there was his poor, emotionally disturbed, quite golden and beautiful elder brother --. (Gwen couldn't remember this one's name at the moment; she recalled some tale or other -- probably exaggerated -- about some extravagant and hideous things happening to this

older boy on his Mormon mission back east, but just now she couldn't recall his name; nevertheless, all throughout his tormented, demoniacal life, when not blurbling incoherently in one back yard or another, this beautiful boy had always called her by her name — Auntie Gwennie, he'd always called her.) The brothers were tinkering with some sort of large electrical device in an old-fashioned plastic cabinet. The beautiful boy was wearing his usual weird costume of old glittery lame, and he seemed to be in the middle of a manic talking spree. Gwen could see his mouth bobbing but couldn't hear his words, because a Zorro rerun was blaring on the television here inside the trailer and everybody was shouting.

Rusty was asking the professor's advice on how to deal with some shady-sounding land speculation that Bryce was getting into "up to his damn jockey shorts," up in "Utah's Swiss Alps."

"Damn kid says it'll be a good business proposition, cause there's gonna be a interstate going through. Pymnie claims he's got ESP or some dang thing and knows exactly where the roads gonna go. Hell, I'll probably be the guy building the damn thing -- on my own kid's property! Aint that the damndest thing, Prof?"

But before Gwen's husband could reply, there came the sudden blast of a giant woman's voice from the back yard, so loud and ancient that it sounded as though Diana herself was out there, calling to her hounds. The voice roared and whined, all scratchy, "NOW I WANT YOU TWO HONYOCKS TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT WHAT THEY DONE TO YOUR GREAT GRAMPAW HYRUM --"

Outside, Bryce pushed his cackling brother away from the apparatus and



frantically twisted at some knobs, cutting the voice off. Every dog in the trailer court was howling.

When Gwen glanced over at her husband, he was sitting ramrod straight in his chair, looking around wide-eyed and amazed.

Rusty said, "Hell, that's just a old wire recording of Gramaw we made when the kids was babies. Didn't we ever tell you bout that, Prof?"

"No," whispered Professor Edwine. Gwen saw that he was on the verge of tears -- the way he got sometimes when remembering Japan.

She almost had a moment of sympathy for the man. And it was painful and confusing to her. She supposed that just being around him so long had made him a small part of her after all, like a tattoo of permanent black where you once jabbed a pencil into your lip as a child in grade school. Besides, what sort of stoney-hearted person wouldn't sympathize with a grown up man's yearning for his dead grandmother? -- even if your dead grandmothers were both roaring bitches, like Gwen's --

(Pynn -- "Crazy" Pynn. That was her handsome golden nephew's name. It just came back. Strange name, very forgettable.)

Rusty was saying, "Yeah, the boys's getting the old wire recorder working again so's we can bring it up and play old Gramaw's voice back for the whole family at Re-union. It's old Gramaw at Hyrum's funereal, and she talks up a shit storm!"

"It's foul blast-phemy, if you ask me," said Rhubarb, getting petulant and scowling terrifyingly for a second. Rhubarb could conjure up, for whole minutes at a time, amazing depths of religiosity, and sympathy for

the LDS faith, whose practitioners had run the early pioneer Edwines up into the hills and made them live like cavemen for a generation and a half. But her attention span had always been limited, and her ability to focus on unpleasant things totally undeveloped. She seemed to forget about the contents of the ungodly wire recording even as she scowled about it. Soon her face relaxed and her chipped teeth came poking out once more in her habitual death-grin.

" -- Yeah," said Rusty, acknowledging the change in his wife's face with a sigh of relief. "Yeah, we was thinking bout having Re-union in them 'Swiss Alps'-- you know, Prof, up where Gramaw's and Hyrum's roots and all was. We was thinking bout having it up on Bryce's land, but then we decided we needed ourself a swimming pool and snack bar and like that, so then we decided to have it up to the Lucerne Spa -- "

"Your school preacherman's place, Gwennie!" shouted Rhubarb. She took the opportunity to nudge Gwen in the ribs violently with her boney elbow -- she never had liked Gwen.

Professor Edwine was still in some kind of sentimental daze, apparently repining for his lost youth and "gramaw." He wasn't responding or taking part in the plans.

Rusty continued, "But then we got on the phone with all them poor relations of ours up in Idaho, and they all decided we better have it up to the Cowboyland Spaw instead. Cheaper."

Professor Edwine suddenly snapped out of it. "That's where my boy lives," he said. Evidently, the mere thought of his grown son, his genius musician

son, his personal guarantee of immortality sprung from his loins, etc., the thought of Sammy eased the sadness that Gwen's husband had been feeling for time's passing. "Yeah," he said, enthusiastically, "we'll surprise my boy with a reunion right in his nifty back yard!"

Professor Edwine pronounced the word reunion with slow, rolling joy; the word evidently sounded good to him. He loved seeing his relatives -- (none of whom had any sort of development at all, in Gwen's opinion).

"Maybe old Sambo can get us a super-cheapo discount," hissed Rhubarb through her skull's teeth, ravenously. "Maybe by now he's learnt some of that ol' Stevie Foster music I gave him!"

Gwen heard that last remark, thought of her son, foresaw a confrontation, and decided not to go --. (Not that she would've gone under different circumstances anyway.)

Rusty was visibly relieved that the "Prof" had emerged from his momentary daze. "Let's us four get on down to the Stateline Casino for some griddlecakes and syrup, what do you say!?" shouted Rusty. (Zorro was still blaring.) "Or would you rather Big Jim's?" he asked, accomodatingly.

"Well," said Professor Edwine, sobering and shuffling his feet a bit quailingly, "we don't much have a preference. Either place."

"You two decide," said Death Lady. "Me 'n Rusty like either place."

"Yeah, griddle cakes are just as good either place," said Rusty. "Besides, we'll be accepting your son's hospitality up to the Cowboyland soon, y'know?"

"Well, you two're the native Wendoverites," said Professor Edwine.

"You should know which place is best. Besides, Gwennie and I don't have much of a preference either damn place even if we'd got our druthers."

"Neither do we, really," said Death Lady.

"Big Jim's has got that Largest Stuffed Polar Bear in Northern Nevada we was telling you about," said Rusty, tentatively.

"Fine," said Professor Edwine in a suddenly malcontent tone of voice.

"Should we follow you in our car?"

"I guess we could all of us fit in your car. We'll buy you some gas," said Death Lady.

"No, no, no, no, no," demurred Professor Edwine, "that's not necessary, it's just down the road."

"No, Rust's got him a Husky card. Let us pay for some gas."

"My hell," said Professor Edwine, being cowpoke-trenchant, "it's only spittin' distance."

"No, no," said Death Lady. "We insist on it --"

\* \* \* \*

There seemed to be a rule that one had to make one's mouth look like pudenda when ordering "Griddle cakes, tall stack," at the Stateline Casino, Wendover. And one had to exchange badinage and be seductive with the bleached old waitress, whose face was powdered with all the arid lassitude of the

Bonneville Salt Flats. Right outside the cinderbrick casino walls were the old state prison grounds, referred to by Rusty as "Bendover" (with an apologetic simper in Gwen's direction), the green stucco motels-cum-lupanars, and the tumbleweeded airstrips where countless open-air atom bomb tests had originated. One of which had had her Sammy's name on it--

("God didn't make the mistake, Sammy -- President Eisen --, I mean, the governm --, I mean, the foul fiend Flibbertigi --, I mean Mother Nature made the mistake," she had sputtered at him one afternoon, trying to explain congenital defects and nuclear radiation to him, when he came home crying because his harelip had been made fun of at kindergarten.)

(The only reason she subjected herself to Wendover and Death Lady and all the rest was so that she could come out here and remember -- never forget. Never forget the first moment she'd laid eyes on him in the incubator, and his upper lip and lower nose were split, just flapping open, his whole face hanging open, his eyes pressed up from the gash below, his eyes pressed into two blind slits -- like a Japanese baby. Death is the word that had come to her mind. Death. And she'd felt like a murderer.)

Here inside the casino. Yes, here, now inside the casino -- there was a morning maid on a stepladder, vacuuming among the folds in the gold lame stage curtains above the bar. There was a pair of giant slot machines by the restrooms with brand new pink sports cars rolling from their maws. Nearby, the blackjack dealer stood looking like a corpse, so long-dead and skinny that his age must have matched his weight, bits of green baize fuzz adhering to his forearms like corpse-mold. The fat change girl, her

nickle-plated change maker wedged horizontally between rolls of sebaceous cellulite, was like a puckered corpse from a salt water drowning. The Keno balls rattled like bones in their cages. The showgirl behind the bar breathed hoarsely into her microphone, and in her unctuous lipstick voice announced a phone call:

"Mr Hyman Digger. Phone call. Hyman Digger."

A group of college boys, sleeping the pouting sleep of Nevada satiety, rose up on their elbows from their lounge chairs long enough to squeal and giggle about the name of Hyman Digger, then recollapsed.

"My hell, Rustacean," said Professor Edwine through a hearty mouthful of breakfast. "I don't know how you live out here without losing your paycheck every Friday to the damn slots."

"We imposed a ten dollar a week limit," said Death Lady. "Rusty can't spend more'n ten dollars a week, because that's the limit. We imposed it."

Professor Edwine suddenly stopped chomping his link sausages. He swallowed. His eyes narrowed. And he said, in a low voice, "Hon, fork me over one of those silver dollars."

Gwen obliged.

Professor Edwine stalked across the casino, still hobbling in pain from the frigidaire, and he approached the giant slot machines. He paused a moment, finally chose the one by the men's room. He deposited his dollar. The lever was as big as a normal-sized man, but Professor Edwine, PhD., wrestled it back and let it snap. He got a bell, a bar, and a watermelon. And you could hear Gwen's husbands "Aw heck!" clear across the casino --

(Dignity must be fought for in Wendover. No, the mere awareness of what dignity is must be fought for in Wendover. The dignity itself is unattainable unless you have already brought it in with you, as Miss Esse would have. Martha Esse would glance at Wendover -- these corpselike employees, the prematurely bulged bellies peeking out from under the upriden teeshirts of the torpid college boys, the nauseating buffoon named "Prof" -- and, at the very most, she'd allow a slight tilt of one eyebrow. But Gwen was visibly sullen and uncivil and sneering. She could tell her disgust was showing by the mauveness of her husband's battle scar and by the way he laughed too hard, too loud, as if decibels could blow away disagreeableness.)

"There's one damn dollar shot all to hell! Work damn hard for 'em too, don't we old gal? Gwennie is m'little Annie Bancroft, aint she?" Gwen's husband popped her on the shoulder so that she spilled burning hot coffee on her knees --

(Gwen had always fancied that she looked like Anne Bancroft, but had always kept this bit of vanity a secret between herself and Martha Esse, who agreed. But somehow the professor had divined it. It was irritating and embarrassing and vaguely terrifying. Terrifying from the sense that, in such a bourgeois, domesticated situation, the old cliché might have possibly come true: that husbands and wives, as they approach their silver anniversary together, wind up being able to read each other's minds. The phrase x-number of decades came into Gwen's mind. She shuddered, searched her face, as reflected in the puddle of Rusty's spilled milk on the table, searched her Anne Bancroft face for physical resemblance to her "hubby."

Doesn't the hormonal horror of physical resemblance come next? -- Then she realized, or her body realized, that hot coffee had just been poured on her lap --)

"Oh! You pathetic fool!" screamed Gwen with the first surge of pain. Professor Edwine came at her thighs with a scratchy paper napkin -- "Keep your hands off me!" she cried.

There was a pause. Even the ringing of the slots seemed to stop. And, in that frozen moment, Death Lady's and Rusty's hideous faces both petrified into two variants of a single expression, a vulgarization of the archaic smile, a knowing, slit-eyed sneer that said, "So that's her problem -- "

"We'll see you at Re-union, Gwennie?" asked Death Lady facetiously.

\* \* \* \*

As they drove back towards the Great Salt Lake, Professor Edwine whistled a little breathlessly and snorted back wads of phlegm, indicating that he was already ready to be ingratiating, wanted to make up. He fiddled with the car radio, dialed sputtery sounds up and down the AM band: Paul Harvey, UPI World Desk International, Ray Conniff Singers -- red roses for a blue, blue lady -- : parched horizontal static, busy snips of people chanting or mumbling into the bleak electronic desert that stretched across



the continent --

Gwen's scalded knees were turning ruddy, and she could feel it when the sun flashed hot on them between telephone poles. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir came on singing a hideous jingle.

## Chapter Thirteen

"Yoh, heave-ho! The vul-l-lgar boaaat man!" sang the assembled Edwine family, Idaho branch, as they loaded the cars and campers with lawn furniture, Shasta soda pop, and miscellaneous things like ukuleles, wallaby boards, and new baby Edwines.

Professor Edwine was among them, helping to lift heavy things with his strong back. Also he was organizing the distribution of bodies in the caravan so that each little cousin could have the maximum amount of fun on the trip down to Utah, with the minimum amount of nerve-wracking for the adults who had to drive each vehicle.

So he and Cassia could be up here today, Professor Edwine had gotten one of the decadent TAs from the econ department to take his Intro to Stat class. That particular TA was the only kid Professor Edwine had ever met, since the Depression ended, whose grooming was worse than Sammy's. This young marxist kid was the only TA in either the College of Business or the College of Economics who was in enough academic trouble so that he could be coerced into taking over the professor's big 400-student class in the roundhouse amphitheater. It almost required seven feet of height

and a huge voice to keep order among 400 freshmen in a required course, and Professor Edwine felt a little bit guilty about feeding that poor little scrawny-butt marxist kid to the lions like that.

But Bro-in-Law Rusty'd had to take off work too, and leave his backhoe to some crackerass hippy kid, and the other Utah Edwines had to send emissaries up here today, too; because the Idaho Edwines were poor and their vehicles were all too small and rickety to be able to make the trip out of the Tetons down to "Utah's Swiss Alps" for Reunion. Their vehicles might die and strand them in some dangerous curly canyon somewhere, especially packed with people and party stuff.

Reunion was only once every couple years, and everybody knew how important and fun it was to maintain family ties, so nobody begrudged anybody else the day's work, and the Utah Edwines chauffeured the Idaho Edwines, and everybody was joking and singing "Vulgar Boat Men" and hugging each other.

Matter of fact, it felt sort of good to Professor Edwine to be back up here in Freeley, in the sun, among the boxelders (what do you call a lady Mormon? Boxelder!) and the livestock and the shiny hay, here on a Friday morning in the spring, just footloose and fancy-free as they all used to be when they were just kids, charter members of the "Sewerside Alley Gang," doing classic standard kids' stuff like disassembling the Sunday school teacher's Model-A bit by bit and reassembling it up on top of the outhouse, etc.

All the ages of man were represented here today in this extra-twiggy and -branchy Mormon family tree. There were grandbabies-in-arms, and toddlers.

There were gabby little two-year-olds trying to help the grownups by packing their own armloads of toys. There were adolescent nephews and nieces who'd probably been coerced into coming but were obviously glad now that they had. And there were older pregnant sisters blushing and holding hands with tall strong sons-in-law.

There was Glenna, whose age was sort of right in between, who didn't fit exactly into any particular generation or category --: not young enough to have received the benefits of the modern orthodontia that had made the new Edwines so beautiful smiling, yet not old enough to be able to blame Eisenhower for her baby's problems. Glenna's baby had problems caused by things that, still, even in the eighties, you didn't talk about; and it wouldn't have been so hard on her, weirdly enough, if Glenna could've blamed that poor old stupid asshole Ike.

Representing the older generation in grand style was Cousin Lou, the family athlete, who had been right there in Chicago at the big moment in the forties, who'd been instrumental in making basketball a respectable professional sport like baseball. Lou was nearly as tall as Professor Edwine, and still his body was bronze-shiny and tight. Everybody took pleasure in pounding Lou's right shoulder and shaking his enormous, splayed-out fist. The women all got close and cuddled up at him. Cousin Lou, the Exemplary Edwine, all grins.

Lou was sort of the opposite of Cousin Ely, another member of the older generation, who was sort of pious and effeminate and slippery and universally disliked by Utah and Idaho Edwines alike.

Then there was the relic from almost-handcart pioneer days, Great Aunt Flo, or Gr'Auntie, as the children called her. She was the only person here older than Professor Edwine. Actually, she wasn't an Edwine by blood or even by law. One tradition suggested she might have been one of old Grampaw Hyrum's supernumerary wives. Another tradition said said she was just somebody's old maid neighbor who had latched on to such an august body of people because she was lonesome. Anyway, she was quiet and bothered nobody. For the past forty years or so she had mostly seemed sort of semi-comatose. Sometimes, though, she seemed intensely conscious, self-conscious, embarrassed by her age like so many old people in the America of Pepsi Generations and television, sort of apologetic about her wrinkles and her hunchback and her wheelchair, sheepish when new babies would scream and writhe to be taken away from her arms. But the Edwine babies who were old enough to talk a little and understand such things made up for their little brothers and sisters' rudeness by bringing Gr'Auntie Flo a cream soda and holding her hand and telling her calm stories.

Gr'Auntie was the Edwine with standards. People were careful not to say "Horseshit" or talk about "Personal things" around her, because she had standards that everybody tried their god damndest to respect. Even the two-year-olds told her only the nice parts of the stories, stopping just before the woodsman gashes open the wolf's guts and Gr'Auntie gushes out on the floor.

In this way the relatives ranged out, progressively larger and more

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important, clear on up to Professor Edwine who, at this moment, realized that he was the Patriarch. With Grampaw Hyrum dead these past twenty years, Professor Edwine had been the oldest male Edwine, the Patriarch — all this time, and he hadn't even noticed. He supposed he might deserve to lay back a bit and bask in his venerableness; he had helped to support a number of these Edwines during the late Depression, their Patriarch.

He stood still a moment, looked over the heads of his family and over the tops of the campers and out across his hometown of Freeley, Idaho. He could see the white clapboard ward house up on the knoll, where on countless Sunday prayer meetings he had sat in the very back with his brothers and sisters so they could have the crusty part of the sacramental bread all to themselves, the substantial fibrous crust that warded off a Depression kid's hunger pains so much more efficiently than the softer, whiter parts of the body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Today, all the young Freeley girls were strolling in the shade of the ward house steeple, on their way to Mutual, all gussied up in those old fashioned calico aprons and gingham gowns that reminded the old Patriarch of Gene Autry picture shows, the cool Bijou down in Ogden (the big City), three-D spectacles, Ju-jus for a nickel. This latest checkered cowboy gown fashion made Professor Edwine feel good, rejuvenated sort of.

He could smell the sweet white sweat of the horses that were clopping close by down mainstreet, carrying the latest generation of Freeley children three at a time to a spring picnic in the flowerfields of the Tetons. The Edwine children shouted, "Ho-oh," at them jovially, like the audience on

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Johnny Carson. (In the professor's day everybody was in bed by that hour -- the Patriarch is what he felt like!)

He looked straight up, arched his long back, and saw the three jagged peaks of the Tetons, big teats in a row, each one poking a bit higher into the upper atmosphere than the one before, as sharp and steel-grey as razor blades. The Tetons were like scratching kittens being delivered by some enormous mother cat underground; they were like cater-wauling infants, mere babies from the standpoint of geologic time. And Professor Edwine was the Patriarch, the Old Man of the Mountains, in human time --

"Don't get too moony over it, Prof. Mountain West's all just a damn colony. Personal property of ol' Uncle Sam, y'know."

Rusty was there, having snuck up beside him. Professor Edwine felt his Bro-in-law's hand on his shoulder. It was a hard and rough and twisted hand, because this man had been a laborer all his life. Professor Edwine could feel the years and years of picks, shovels, and yellow backhoe throttles digging into his Bro-in-law's palm, and the ridges of toughness, human gristle hard as a bull's horn, that had risen to meet the hardness.

The professor's hands might have wound up like this, too; he might even have remained an Idahoan, if not for just one chance occurrence in his life -- something that had involved this same Rusty guy as a matter of fact --

"Hey Rustacean. Remember our flip-the-cigarette trick?"

"Does a fat dog fart?"

It had been right after the Bad Thing in Japan. Corporal Edwine had

been liberated and fixed up, deprogrammed, debriefed, fed, and flown to Boise. He'd gone straight back to Freeley to see the family, and Rusty was right there, still just a kid hoping for the end of the war before his next birthday. Rusty was a bit of a chickenshit even then, praying never to become a soldier. But he'd somehow gotten his hands on a uniform, and he wanted to claim certain privileges of the soldier. He begged Corporal Edwine to drive down to Salt Lake with him, because he'd heard a few tales, read a few dime novels, and he believed in his heart that the USO center down there would be more of a whore house than it actually turned out to be. So they drove like mad dogs in full dress uniform, full of beer and nicotine, clear down to Salt Lake, and Corporal Edwine made eyes at all the girls and casually shuffled a poker deck (though he knew nobody was going to gamble at a USO), and he flashed his battle scar at everybody, and, since one little cigarette could make a Jack Mormon boy feel even tougher and more heroic than several dozen battle scars ever could, he called across at Rusty to lend him a cigarette. Rusty was tormenting the girl behind the record player (called herself Rosie the Riveter), and Rusty didn't want to leave her to the other horny guys, so he lit a Kool up and threw it across the room. It landed right between the fork in Corporal Edwine's giant banana fingers, just so; and each of them went about their business as if nothing unusual had happened, the Corporal smoking all squinty-eyed like Bogey and trying his damndest not to jump up and cheer, "God damn, fellas! Did you see that?"

He glanced casually over to his left, and there at the piano sat someone



he hadn't even noticed before, someone dark and not very noticeable, sort of underdeveloped; Corporal Edwine had seen scrawny little Japanese jungle urchins who had looked more significant, etc.

Sort of had nice eyes and smooth tits, though, and she seemed really excited by such finesse --

"Yeah, Prof, ol' Gwennie was real sweet and innocent-like back then," Rusty said, scanning the Freeley skyline. "Christ. What a change come over her, huh Prof? Being around all those god damn Jews and Pisserpalians is what changed her."

Rusty was obviously trying to make Professor Edwine feel better, probably figuring that the Prof was sort of unhappy about Gwennie's not coming to Reunion -- for the eighteenth year in a row.

" -- and that damn old school principal, old Peg Leg Esse," continued Rusty, "where's she get off at? What sorta palsy-walsy is that for a fella's wife to have? A old maid gimp that leaves Utah and gets herself educated over to Berkley and then comes back to live like a damn savage in a teepee with the redskins. Berkley, damn. It must of been weird and full of those what-you-may-call-its, Radicalistic Ideologies even 4000 years ago, B.C. -- Or however long ago it was when that old bitch mother went there. Hell, Prof, you oughta of pulled Gwennie's ass right out of that school long time ago. Now, with Gwennie taking off alla time, you know, it's all because of that Martha Esse's fault, Prof. And --"

Rusty was saying these things sort of mechanically, like he did every year, saying all the things that everybody knew Professor Edwine would like

to say himself. And Rusty must've known from long experience that Professor Edwine wouldn't tell him to back off. Hell, the only reason the Bro-in-law knew any of these few bad things about Gwennie and about Esse and Berklay and "radicalistic" stuff was because Professor Edwine had spilled his guts to everybody in the Utah branch of the clan a million times over Saturday night beers.

"Those Jews and Pisserpalians, they think they're so dang smart," said Rusty. "They don't know shit from Shinola, man."

Professor Edwine replied with something calm and neutral, letting Rusty know that he appreciated the traditional effort, but after so many years he was getting used to being the only Edwine at Reunion with only half his nuclear family present, and Rusty could relax, quit talking any time now, please.

"Yeah, sure, okay Rust," said Professor Edwine.

That really was partly the reason why the professor sort of wanted Rusty to shut up: because he was used to Gwennie's indifference by now and didn't really need anybody to commiserate with any more, and it embarrassed him to hear Rusty echo all those indiscretions. But there was another reason he wanted Rusty to be quiet -- and this was hard to admit even in secret to himself --:

A bit of Professor Edwine's simple pleasure in returning to Freeley and his roots was being destroyed each time Rusty opened his mouth and said Idahoish, ignorant things like shit from Shinola. Professor Edwine couldn't help it any more; he kept thinking of the faces Gwennie would pull

at phrases like that. Linguistic solecism is the phrase she'd use to summarily dismiss him and his whole blood line. And, instead of getting better after so many years, Professor Edwine's over-sensitivity to Gwen's fastidiousness seemed now to be getting worse. And as his only son grew, under Gwen's influence, into something strange and un-Edwine, Reunion began to lose some of its appeal for the professor. This was the first time he'd ever in his life come close to telling Rusty or any other Edwine to shut the hell up.

In spite of himself, Professor Edwine was now noting other unattractive things besides vulgarity in his Bro-in-law, the sorts of things Gwen would call his attention to with subtle elbows or kicks if she were here.

For instance, there was a certain simplistic smugness in Rusty's attitude as he stood there watching the Idaho Edwines preparing themselves to accept the free ride down to Reunion. Rusty was taking the wrong sort of pleasure, acting just plain superior, in helping his less fortunate relatives. Burgeois pride in an old Depression boy -- it was ugly.

Rusty snickered a little and said, "Shit O dear. Can't wait till these folks hear old Gramaw Grunt talk up a shit storm! Won't they be surprised? And old Cousin Ely, won't he shit a sharp brick when ever-body hears about what happened to his nuts!"

Professor Edwine wished the damn Jack Mormon Utah Edwines had had more -- refinement -- yes, more refinement than to bring that old wire recording along. With the more fundamentalist Idaho branch of the clan so strongly represented, it just might bring the whole fiesta to a grinding halt.

Gramaw Grunt's voice could bring death and skunion down on your ass even singing old Brahms's Lullaby; but when she got to talking about religion it sometimes used to make even an atheist like Professor Edwine sweat a little. She was really something, old Gramaw. He'd had a bad moment at Wendover when the boys'd suddenly played her voice back at him from the back yard; and he could just imagine what it'd do to the good Mormons within earshot. Hell, even the Utah Edwines weren't all Jack Mormons: there was Rhubarb with her god damn choir practice and her praying; and that musclebound Bryce kid, reborn recently, gabbing about going on a mission (Rusty had almost sobbed the news over the phone, "How'm I gonna live this down? How'm I gonna pay for it, for hell sake?"); and, of course, there was that awful shit that happened to "Crazy" Pynn on his mission -- Bryce was, literally, his brother's keeper. His brother needed a keeper after that mission to Salem, Mass.

And, of course, the Idaho Edwines were all almost exclusively good LDS. The only swear word these pious folks ever used was bastard, as in "S.O.B., that's what you are, Prof. A sweet old bastard!" Sometimes the nephews and uncles called the professor that, and they snickered. Professor Edwine just joshed along, assuming that it was all in fun -- like the way everybody always called him "Prof," constantly calling attention to the fact that he was the only one among them who had ever entered and finished college. Ever since Gwennie got him up off his butt and at the books, everybody named him "Prof." And they used their single naughty word on him, too: Bastard. Hell, bastard would sound like baby custard to them after this

god damn wire recording.

That Gramaw Grunt wire could do some real disrupting at Reunion today -- from beyond the grave. God damn technology, preserving people's worst moments for Time and All Eternity (as the LDS say).

To say nothing of what sort of awful childhood memories the wire might revive in Sammy's head, Sammy, the kid who was not exactly steady as the rock of Gibraltar these days anyway. Sort of closely resembled his mommy in that respect.

Matter of fact, the two of them had always seemed a bit too close. Like that one time when Sam said a certain thing to Gwennie that was a bit too familiar for Professor Edwine's tastes. Professor Edwine was right in the middle of trying to discipline the kid when suddenly Sam's eyes went dead. And then Sam started laughing. This slow, awful laugh -- and he sounded and looked so much like Gwennie at her bad times that it was almost scary --. That kid did not exactly need any childhood traumas revived today.

Professor Edwine had never made his son laugh before, not in their whole life. From the time Sammy was a baby, the professor had tried to talk to the kid, had tried at least three dozen different anecdotes on the kid. He wanted to instruct his son, transmit Edwine lore, and be wise and be close and chatty. But Sam hardly ever responded. Eventually Professor Edwine refined it down to two tales about the olden days that at least held Sam's attention and even got a slight smile out of him sometimes. There were two of them, two stories, and Professor Edwine had to

tell them in a certain precise way to even get Sam to sit down with him. He fairly had to start talking in tongues, and had to get all physical and gesture a lot. And he had to phrase things; he had to pay close attention to his phraseology, and make things sound sort of sissified or mock-highfaluting.

Like the story about the time when he was Sammy's age, and that old bloomer button Tyrone Powers came a-sashaying through Freeley on a hunting expedition. In the flesh, Tyrone Powers, that handsome heartthrob. He wanted to be like old E. Hemingway because he was researching a part in a lowbrow movie version of one of Papa's books. Except nobody had been kind enough to tell the silly old thespian that there were no longer grizzlies or even antelope down this low on the western slope of the Tetons. Tyrone had the cutest little leopardskin jodhpurs on, all billowy and crinkly around his thighs --

(Here the Prof would prance a bit, knock-kneed, and Sam would watch impassively -- )

"And, even though he was the rich bitch, everybody in the bar insisted on buying Ty-baby a drink. Banana Daquiri, if you puh-leeze? But Tyrone was unimpressed and sort of bored and bitchy-looking, like this --

(Here the Prof would pull the appropriate face -- )

"And nobody wanted a big star like Tyrone Powers to come away from Freeley with the impression that it was a boring town or anything like that. Oh, perish, Sammy! So they got me, old Easy Edwine, old string bean Edwine, all seven feet, 170 pounds of me, clomp-clomp, to do my famous trick, where

I opened a bottle of beer with my bare teeth, held the bottle straight up in the air with just my lips, no hands, Sammy, and let the whole twelve ounces pour straight down into my gut without swallowing --

(Here the Prof would aim his face up at the ceiling and make gurgling sounds, and Sammy might chuckle if it really was good gaggy sounding gurgles like Linda Lovelace -- )

"'Lookit, Tyrone!' my friends yelled, 'Old Easy Edwine, he's a atheist bastard, he don't care!' And Tyrone was so entertained that, as a climax, they had me break the bottle against my temple --

(Maybe cross-eyes and a Kookoo noise here -- )

"Then Tyrone sneaked out the back way with his body guard and we were all alone, and so there was the Nightly Fight to the Death, Sammy. And I woke up in the gutter three miles away next noontime as per usual, with a four-inch gash on the side of my head, and Tyrone Powers's autograph on my adam's apple! He had to stand on a chair to reach it!"

Or else there was the second tale about the time the carny came to Freeley. This was the same carny where the Prof out-boxed the black pro boxer, got the reach on him and won the prize money. But that part of the story Professor Edwine had to save for Cass, because Sammy wouldn't respond to heroic stories like that. Also Sammy wouldn't respond to the funny part about when Grampaw Hyrum saw the hippo sweating blood in the tub and almost dropped his dentures, but Easy Edwine made the old man even more astonished by telling him, "Hell Grampaw! Anybody who knows anything about science knows that all hippos sweat blood!" That part also only worked on Cassie,

along with other sorts of self-complimentary heroic carny tales -- like the time he was watering the elephants to earn his admission and there was this city woman in the midway, just standing there outside the elephant tent, real obviously staring at him with his shirt off, and she stood there a full twenty minutes, just staring at him and he knew he could've had her. Right on the spot. That was a Cassie tale, not a Sammy tale.

Professor Edwine had to tell Sammy only the weird part of the carny tales, the part about the Pituitary Kid, the ten-foot-tall freako with a fifty dollar bill on top of his head for anybody to keep if they could reach it, and Easy Edwine knelt down in the crowd while the barker made the offer, then stood up and got the bill simple as pie, and he had to get up close to the Pituitary Kid's face, saw his dead eyes, smelled his sweet breath, felt the iron braces all up and down his huge rickety legs, and the Pituitary Kid started crying softly and whispered, "Please don't, I'll lose my job, please don't!" Then they asked Easy Edwine to be in the freak show, too!

That's where he'd sometimes get a response from his son. Never any words, but just this slow, low laughter. It was communication, at least, low level, but communication. Sam would laugh until he was tired, then just sort of wander away into another room, and the Prof would end feeling sort of weird. But you had to talk to your boy once in a while no matter what. That was the rules. The only thing the Prof still accepted about the Latter Day Saints was their emphasis on the close-knit, communicative Family.



The only other time Sammy would act interested in the lore of the olden days and in things pertaining to his father, was when somebody brought out a copy of the October 6, 1939 Freeley "Beacon" and showed Sammy the photo in the sports section of Freeley High's first string center, "Easy" Edwine. "Easy" Edwine with his face sort of blank and full of questions like it always was back in those days, in his too-small basketball jersey, looking like a bean pole, palming a basketball in each hand, holding them out in the crucified position, while the two little forwards stood on tip-toe underneath, one joker scowling upward into "Easy's" thin armpit and holding his nose. Sam liked that photo. Professor Edwine knew it was not for the right reasons that Sam liked it; but at least it got laughter out of the usually morose kid, a response.

So, the time that Sammy said to Gwennie that certain too familiar thing, the time Sammy called Gwennie a fucking cunt and the Prof disciplined him, smashed him up against the wall and choked him earnestly (the last time that the Prof, or anybody else probably, ever laid a hand on Sam in anger or affection or anything), and Sammy's eyes went dead and he started that awful slow laugh of his, and Gwennie's fingernails were excavating the meat of the Prof's big shoulder -- ; that time, with Sammy laughing, it must have been almost by conditioned reflex, but the Prof came up with another true story from the olden days that he thought Sammy might like. He told it in highfaluting style. It was the story of the Bad Thing that happened in Japan that he'd never told anybody before. And he told it , yes, in real highfaluting style now, as he choked the life out of his only son's eyes.

"The short little nips, Sammy, the way they run their POW camps makes the Baton March look like a maypole dance -- they get them a big nip, descended from Samurai, who in peacetime is a sort of nip carny attraction, an exhibition swordsman (this guy really is in freak shows, Sammy); and they starve your old dad's ass for months, keep your old dad's ass in solitary, and they tie your old dad's ass down to bamboo stakes, and they stomp your old dad's ass, and the Samurai meditates, the Samurai rises up, the Samurai screams his god damn Samurai/kamikazi/banzai scream and swings that sword down with all his fucking might, and "chop-choppee da big Amellican down to size," except that there's a secret oriental slanteye discipline the Samurai have, Sammy, and the Samurai can stop the blade short at just the split-assed second that it slices into the skin and muscle over your old dad's shin bones, and they do it night after night, laughing and screaming and kicking, until they got old Easy Edwine, your old dad laughing and screaming all the time, even when he's asleep, even when he's eating his rice --"

The Prof made a long, horrible wail right into his son's face, and Sam and the Prof both started laughing. And the Prof let go of his son's throat so he could hold his sides, laughing; Sam sank to the floor, gagging and coughing, and the Prof hiked up his pants cuffs, "See the scars, Sammy?" And Prof was almost to the point of finishing the story: escaping, shitting blood and rice and mucous nonstop in the jungle; and the other part that he'd never told a single soul before except Gwennie (only when he was half asleep, cold-sweating, up to his shins in a nightmare), the last part that

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showed what that kind of treatment can do to a guy's manhood, not to mention a guy's face --. But then Sam suddenly rolled over on his pudgy back and gasped, "Stop!"

There was a pause.

Sammy glanced over to Gwennie, the "fucking cunt," who had meanwhile sunk to the floor also, flat on her butt, dead-eyed, bloody-fingernailed, making this certain hup-hup-hup noise that meant it would soon be time to go to the credit union once more for psych ward money.

Sammy looked at his mom. He used the knuckles of both fists to knead his windpipe more or less back open. He sighed. And, eyeing Gwen as if for approval, Sammy explained in a choked whisper why Professor Edwine should stop:

"Quit while you got your audience rolling in the aisles, old Easy Edwine."

Sam laughed, coughed. Sam coughed up lungers of mucus with red threads and laughed at it. And he continued to explain himself in literary, intellectual, Gwennie-type terminology, condescending to Professor Edwine from heights of refined intelligence, as he'd learned to do from the fucking cunt. He whispered something about the shape of Easy's little tale being spoiled by tacking on a pat moralizing ending. Something about making it sound like the little LDS Boys' Golden Storybook.

Trying to get a rise out of Gwen. Failing.

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After pondering that unpleasant moment over the years, Professor Edwine had almost convinced himself that Sam had really yelled stop and had said all that because he'd had a presentiment of the nature of what was about to come from the mouth of the old man and, since he loved his old man in spite of all the problems, since Sammy was a natural son, he'd wanted to spare the old man a moment of total, permanent humiliation. Sam didn't want his dad to castrate himself before the eyes of his wife and son.

This may have been something starry-eyed to believe. But, back when Professor Edwine was coming up in Freeley, the force of optimism necessarily endured no restraints — "Of course God won't let us starve."

See, Sam wasn't such a bad kid. He just seemed to have been born with a sort of weird attitude towards the Patriarch. But he wasn't really a bad kid. He was self-indulgent, sure, extremely so; and his personal hygiene and grooming might be better; but he wasn't nearly as artsy-fartsy-ivory-tower-sociopathic-mindlessly-innovative-etc. as he pretended to be. He didn't really conduct his life like one of those short novels that the old hippies and the political refugees from behind the iron curtain were "penning" these days, where everybody's deformed or dope-mad or else represents some twisted aspect of old hippy or commie decadent life and human beings aren't important enough to carry their own names so they just are called by the name of whatever vice they represent, like in Gramaw's copy of that crappy old Pilgrim's Progress. No, Sam was okay, deep down -- had material deep down inside him that promised one day to yield up a good, solid citizen. Professor Edwine had seen Sammy in certain moods when he'd forget about his decadent pose, and

he'd be just full of this floating, generalized affection for anybody and everybody and nobody at all. And Sammy wasn't mean. Professor Edwine had seen him act really tender around his little cousins.

Matter of fact, he did pretty damn good for a kid whose mom kept going nuts and vanishing all the time.

Professor Edwine now remembered a thing that he'd once overheard Sammy telling Gwen one afternoon on Dimple Dell Drive when the two of them were being sensitive and metaphysical and full of pathos together in the living room. Sammy said something about his feeling this "great deep rush of sadness" whenever he saw a baby holding an armload of its favorite toys. It had something to do with the transitory nature of all matter. And Professor Edwine, standing alone with his cup of coffee in the kitchen, heard this and almost understood his boy for a moment.

And yes, Professor Edwine was proud of his son. Though some pretty awful shit did tend to take place whenever the little prick came around.

Strangely enough, it seemed that the Prof was never half as sad or worried about Sam as he was about his daughter, Cassie. In his off moments -- the moments that had been coming with greater frequency lately, the moments when he began to think somewhat like Gwennie -- Professor Edwine sometimes thought that his parental concern might be so lop-sidedly distributed between his two kids simply because Sam was the kind of person who wouldn't let you worry about him, while Cassie was the kind who would let you: a matter not of straightforward parental concern, but of some kind of awful hierarchy of domination and submission --.

Here was Cassie now, in Freeley, taking care of all the Idaho Edwine babies as their parents packed the campers and cars, Cassie all wrapped up in babies and happy as a pig in shit. Gwennie called her "sullied" because of something that was supposed to have happened with the black men back in Germany. But, sullied or not, Cass's virtue was almost beside the point -- because, just look at her now:

Unemployed, past twenty-five and still unmarried, hypochondriac as hell with all her vague complaints of "muddiness" and hypoglycemia and microwave poisoning, etc., jumping from one sci-fi hoodoo quack to another and draining the Prof's pockets dry.

What would become of her? Seemed like she'd just been going downhill ever since they went to Germany. Maybe she got lonely, or maybe she was deprived of some essential stage of development in Germany. Maybe it had been a bad move on Professor Edwine's part to uproot a teenaged girl for a whole year like that -- ?

She used to be so god damn gifted. She used to come barging into your room like a slender little gunslinger, ready for anything and full of rough-and-tumble jokes that she'd make up on the spot. Now, God only knows how close she'd come to 350 pounds -- her old Daddy's prime source of sadness.

But, at least Cass was close at hand now, today. Close at hand where, if they couldn't save her from doom and disintegration, at least the Edwines could grab her up and hug her tight once in a while. At least she was here, to be touched, close by the Family.

Family. Arguments fly about eternal, nameless things beyond Man's ken

and all those other sorts of bullshit. But Professor Edwine knew at least this much: If God is anything, God is Family. Immortality is Blood Mix. Perdition is no Family. Rituals in His honor are merely excuses for small or large Reunion. And, no matter what Reunion this year would turn out to be like -- no matter what the immediate effect of Rusty's decision to bring beer, or of Sammy's new dooper's beard, or of Gramaw's blasphemous return from the grave by way of that damn wire recording -- no matter what effect these things would have on relations between the various ideological camps among the Edwines, still, Reunion must by definition be something ultimately good. Something good was coming down to that weird old Cowboyland Spaw this morning.

Renewal, praise, sacrament, ritual, for God, for consecrated Family --

"Shit O dear fellas!" yelled Professor Edwine. "Let's hit that damn road!"

SAMPLE CHAPTERS FROM THE NOVEL KILLING BRYCE

by

THOMAS IVER BRADLEY

B. A., University of Utah, 1976

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CHAPTERS EXCERPTED FROM THE NOVEL KILLING BRYCE

This report offers exercises in several different applications of the third-person-restrictive mode of narration.

The first excerpt's mode verges at times on the quasi-omniscient, using the intuitive insight possessed by the center of consciousness as an excuse to impinge upon other human consciousnesses to a controlled degree, with the purely utilitarian intention in mind of moving the plot along. This excerpt subtly flirts with violation of point of view, taking as its precedent similar violations perpetrated by Henry James and Marcel Proust when they think we are not paying attention. This excerpt could be said to employ a Jamesian "reverberator," or a passive mediator between reader and action, as can be found in Proust's Cities of the Plain.

The second excerpt constitutes an almost clinical observation of a mind wandering, applying the scientifically precise methods of Joyce ( in the earlier Stephen Dedalus sections of Ulysses), and Woolf (all throughout her Mrs. Dalloway).

The third excerpt uses the intensely self-conscious, self-centered, highly informed Nabokovian mode, such as is applied in Invitation of a Beheading, where puns and private anagrams and literary allusions are of prime importance in the delineation of the main character.

Each section presented here is introductory in nature, so there is no "plot" to be abstracted.