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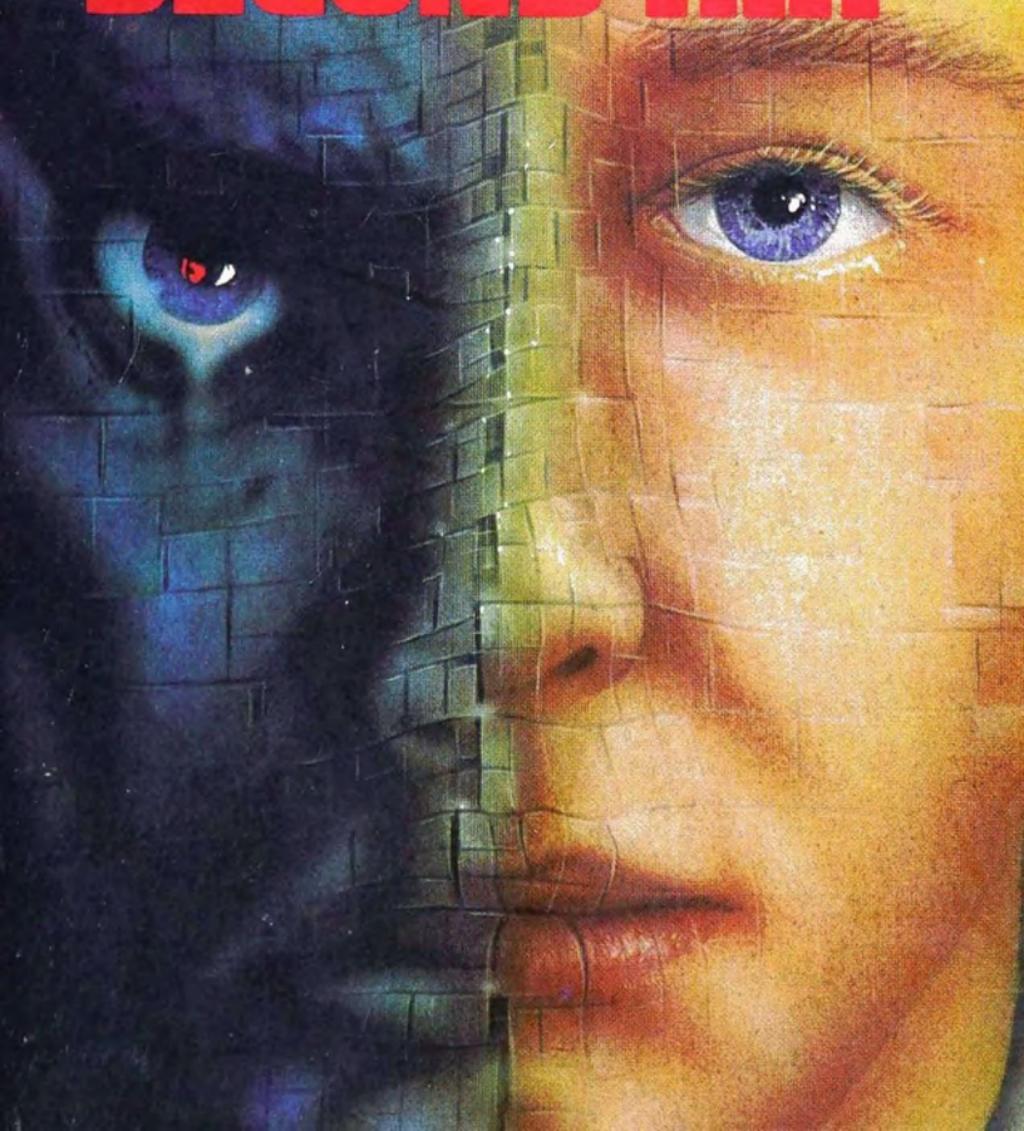
# ROBERT SILVERBERG

Author of LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE

TWO MINDS  
IN ONE BODY...

ONE OF THEM  
MUST DIE.

## THE SECOND TRIP





## **MANHATTAN 2012 A.D.**

Lissa loved Nat Hamlin because he was  
passionate and brilliant. She loved  
Paul Macy for his warmth and kindness.  
Now each man wants her help in battling  
the other, for with her Power, the  
man she chooses can kill.

Lissa is terrified. She has to send one  
of her loves to his destruction. If  
she chooses the wrong man, the  
horror will never end.

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**THE MAN IN THE MAZE**  
**NIGHTWINGS**

# **ROBERT SILVERBERG**

## **THE SECOND TRIP**



**AVON**

PUBLISHERS OF BARD, CAMELOT AND DISCUS BOOKS

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# **THE SECOND TRIP**



# ONE

EVEN the street felt wrong beneath his feet. Something oddly rubbery about the pavement, too much give in it. As though they had changed the mix of the concrete during the four years of his troubles. A new futuristic stuff, the 2011-model sidewalk, bouncy and weird. But no. The sidewalk looked the same. *He* was the new stuff. As though, when they had altered him, they had altered his stride too, changing the swing of his knees, changing the pivot of his hips. Now he wasn't sure of his movements. He didn't know whether he was supposed to hit the pavement with his heel or his toe. Every step was an adventure in discovery. He felt clumsy and uncertain within his own body.

Or was it his own? How far did the Rehab people go, anyway, in reconstructing your existence? Maybe a total brain transplant. Scoop out the old gray mass, run a jolt of juice through it, stick it into a waiting new body. And put somebody else's rehabilitated brain in your vacated skull? The old wine in a new decanter. No. No. That isn't how they work at all. This is the body I was born with. I'm having a little difficulty in coordination, true, but that's only to be expected. The first day out on the street again. Tuesday the something of May, 2011. Clear blue sky over the towers of Manhattan North. So I'm a little clumsy at first. So? So? Didn't they say something like this would happen?

Easy, now. Get a grip. Can't you remember how you used to walk? Just be natural.

Step. Step. Step. Into the rhythm of it. Heel and toe, heel and toe. Step. Step. That's the way! One-and-two-and-one-and-two-and-one-and-two. This is how Paul Macy walks. Proudly down the goddam street. Shoulders square. Belly sucked in. Thirty-nine years old. Prime of life. Strong

as an—what did they say, strong as an ox? Yes. Ox. Ox. Opportunity beckons you. A second trip, a second start. The bad dream is over; now you're awake. Step. Step. What about your arms? Let them swing? Hands in pockets? Don't worry about that, just go on walking. Let the arms look after themselves. You'll get the hang of it. You're out on the street, you're free, you've been rehabilitated. On your way to pick up your job assignment. Your new career. Your new life. Step. Step.

One-and-two-and-one-and-two.

He couldn't avoid the feeling that everybody was looking at him. That was probably normal too, the little touch of paranoia. After all, he had the Rehab badge in his lapel, the glittering bit of yellow metal advertising his status as a reconstruct job. The image of the new shoots rising from the old stump, warning everybody who had known him in the old days to be tactful. No one was supposed to greet him by his former name. No one was supposed to acknowledge the existence of his past. The Rehab badge was intended as a mercy, as a protection against the prodding of absent memories. But of course it attracted attention too. People looked at him—absolute strangers, so far as he knew, though he couldn't be sure—people looked and wondered, Who is this guy, what did he do that got him sentenced to Rehab? The triple ax murderer. Raped a nine-year-old with pinking shears. Embezzled ten million. Poisoned six old ladies for their heirlooms. Dynamited the Chartres Cathedral. All those eyes on him, speculating. Imagining his sins. The badge warned them he was something special.

There was no place to hide from those eyes. Macy moved all the way over to the curb and walked just along the edge. Right inside the strip of gleaming red metal ribbon that was embedded in the pavement, the stuff that flashed the magnetic pulses that kept autos from going out of control and jumping up on the sidewalk. It was no good here either. He imagined that the drivers zipping by were leaning out to stare at him. Crossing the pavement on an inward diagonal, he found another route for himself, hugging the sides of buildings. That's right, Macy, skulk along. Keep one shoulder higher than the other and try to fool yourself into thinking that it shields your face. Hunch your head. Jack the Ripper out for a stroll. Nobody's looking at

you. This is New York, remember? You could walk down the street with your dung out of your pants and who'd notice? Not here. This city is full of Rehabs. Why should anybody care about you and your sordid eradicated past? Cut the paranoia, Paul.

*Paul.*

That was a hard part too. The new name. *I am Paul Macy.* A sweet compact name. Who dreamed that one up? Is there a computer down in the guts of the earth that fits syllables together and makes up new names for the Rehab boys? *Paul Macy.* Not bad. They could have told me I was Dragomir Slivovitz. Izzy Levine. Leroy Rastus Williams. But instead they came up with Paul Macy. I suppose for the holovision job. You need a name like that for the networks. "*Good evening, this is Dragomir Slivovitz, bringing you the eleven-o'clock news. Speaking from his weekend retreat at the Lunar White House, the President declared—*" No. They had coined the right kind of name for his new career. Very fucking Anglo-Saxon.

Suddenly he felt a great need to see the face he was wearing. He couldn't remember what he looked like. Coming to an abrupt stop, he turned to his left and picked his reflection off the mirror-bright pilaster beside an office building's entrance. He caught the image of a wide-cheeked, thin-lipped, standard sort of Anglo-Saxon face, with a big chin and a lot of soft windblown yellow-brown hair and deep-set pale blue eyes. No beard, no mustache. The face seemed strong, a little bland, decently proportioned, and wholly unfamiliar. He was surprised to see how relaxed he looked: no tensionlines in the forehead, no scowl, no harshness of the eyes. Macy absorbed all this in a fraction of a second; then whoever had been walking behind him, caught short by his sudden halt, crashed into his side and shoulder. He whirled. A girl. His hand went quickly to her elbow, steadying her. More her fault than his: she ought to look where she's going. Yet he felt guilty. "I'm terribly sor—"

"Nat," she said. "Nat Hamlin, for God's sake!"

Someone was slipping a long cold needle into his eye. Under the lid, very very delicately done, up and up and around the top of the eyeball, past the tangled ropes of the nerves, and on into his brain. The needle had some sort of

extension; it seemed to expand telescopically, sliding through the wrinkled furrowed folded mass of soft tissue, skewering him from forehead to skullcap. A tiny blaze of sparkling light wherever the tip of the needle touched. Ah, so, ve cut out dis, und den ve isolate dis, and ve chop here a little, ja, ja, ist gut! And the pain. Oh, Christ, the pain, the pain, the pain, the fire running down every neuron and jumping every synapse, the pain! Like having a thousand teeth pulled all at once. They said it absolutely wouldn't hurt at all. Those lying fuckers.

They had taught him how to handle a situation like this. He had to be polite but firm. Politely but firmly he said, "I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. My name's Paul Macy."

The girl had recovered from the shock of their collision. She took a couple of steps back and studied him carefully. He and she now constituted an encapsulated pocket of stasis on the busy sidewalk; people were flowing smoothly around them. She was tall and slender, with long straight red hair, troubled green eyes, fine features. A light dusting of freckles on the bridge of her nose. Full lips. No makeup. She wore a scruffy blue-checked spring coat. She looked as if she hadn't been sleeping well lately. He guessed she was in her late twenties. Very pale. Attractive in a tired, frayed way. She said, "Don't play around with me. I know you're Nat Hamlin. You're looking good, Nat."

Each time she said the name he felt the needles wiggle behind his eyeballs.

"Macy. Paul Macy."

"I don't like this game. It's a cruel one, Nat. Where have you been? What is it, five years?"

"Won't you please try to understand?" he asked. He glanced meaningfully at his Rehab badge. Her eyes didn't follow his.

"I understand that you're trying to hurt me, Nat. It wouldn't be the first time."

"I don't know you at all, miss."

"You don't know me at all. You don't know me at all."

"I don't know you at all. Right."

"Lissa Moore."

"I'm sorry."

"What kind of trip are you on, Nat?"

"My second one," Macy said.

"Your—second—one?"

He touched the badge. This time she saw it.

"Rehab?" she said. Blinking a couple of times: obviously adjusting her frame of reference. Color in her cheeks now. Biting her lip, abashed.

He nodded. "I've just come out. Now do you understand? I don't know you. I never did."

"Christ," she said. "We had such good times, Nat."

"Paul."

"How can I call you that?"

"It's my name now."

"We had such good times," she said. "Before you went away. Before I came apart. I'm not working much now, you know. It's been pretty bad."

"I'm sorry," he told her, shifting his weight uneasily. "It really isn't good for me to spend much time with people from my first trip. Or any time at all with them, actually."

"You don't want to go somewhere and talk?"

"I can't. I mustn't."

"Maybe some other time?" she asked. "When you're a little more accustomed to things?"

"I'm afraid not," he said. Firmly but politely. "The whole point is that I've made a total break with the past, and I mustn't try to repair that break, or let anyone repair it for me. I'm on an entirely new trip now, can you see that?"

"I can see it," she murmured, "but I don't want it. I'm having a lot of trouble these days, and you can help me, Nat. If only—"

"*Paul.* And I'm not in any shape for helping anybody. I can barely help myself. Look at how my hand is shaking."

"And you've started to sweat. Your forehead's all wet."

"There's a tremendous strain. I'm conditioned to keep away from people out of the past."

"It kills me when you say that. *People out of the past.* Like a guillotine coming down. You loved me. And I loved you. Love. Still. Love. So when you say—"

"Please."

"You, please." She was trembling, hanging onto his sleeve. Her eyes, going glassy, flitted and flickered a thousand times a second. "Let's go somewhere for a drink, for a smoke, for a talk. I realize about the Rehab thing, but I need you too much. Please. Please."

"I can't."

"Please." And she leaned toward him, her fingertips clutching hard into the bones of his right wrist, and he felt a baffling sensation in the top of his skull. A sort of intrusion. A tickling. A mild glow of heat. Along with it came a disturbing blurring of identity, a doubling of self, so that for a moment he was knocked free of his moorings. Paul Hamlin. Nat Macy. In the core of his mind erupted a vivid scene in garish colors: himself crouched over some sort of keyboard, and this girl standing naked on the far side of a cluttered room with her hands pressed to her cheeks. *Scream*, he was saying. *Go on, Lissa, scream. Give us a good one.* The image faded. He was back on a street in Manhattan North, but he was having trouble seeing, everything out of focus and getting more bleary each second. His legs were wobbly. A spike of pain under his breastbone. Maybe a heart attack, even. "Please," the girl was saying. "Don't turn me away, Nat. Nat, what's happening? Your face is so red!"

"The conditioning—" he said, gasping.

The pressure eased. The girl backed away from him, touching the tips of her knuckles to her lips. As the distance between them increased he felt better. He clung to the side of the building with one hand and made a little shooing gesture at her with the other. Go on. Away. Out of my life. Whoever you were, there's no room now. She nodded. She continued to back away. He had a last brief glimpse of her tense, puffy-eyed face, and then she was cut off from him by a stream of people. Is this what it's going to be like every time I meet somebody from the old days? But maybe the others won't be like that. They'll respect my badge and pass silently on. Give me a chance to rebuild. It's only fair. She wasn't being fair. Neurotic bitch, putting her troubles above mine. Help me, she kept saying. Please. Please, Nat. As if I could help anybody.

Twenty minutes later he arrived at the network office. Ten minutes overdue, but that was unavoidable. He had needed some time to recover after the encounter with the girl on the street. Let the adrenalin drain out of the system, let the sweat dry. It was important for him to present an unruffled exterior; more important, in fact, than showing up on time the first day. The network people were probably

prepared to be tolerant of a little unpunctuality at first, considering all that he had been through. But he had to demonstrate that he had the professional qualities the job demanded. They were hiring him as an act of grace, yes, but it wasn't pure charity: he wouldn't have been accepted if he hadn't been suitable for the job. So he needed to show that he had the surface slickness, the smoothness, that a holovision commentator had to have. Pause to catch the breath. Get the hair tidy. Adjust the collar. Give yourself that seamless, sprayed-on look. You had a nasty shock or two in the street, but now you're feeling much better. All right. Now go in. A confident stride. One-and-two-and-one-and-two.

The lobby was dark and cavernous. Screens everywhere, a hundred sensors mounted in the onyx walls, anti-vandal robots poised with bland impersonality to come rolling forth if anybody tried anything troublesome. Standing beneath the security panel, Macy activated one of the screens and a cheery female face appeared. Just a hint of plump bare breasts at the bottom of the screen, cut off by the prudish camera angle. "I have an appointment," he said. "Paul Macy. To see Mr. Bercovici."

"Certainly, Mr. Macy. The liftshaft to your right. Thirty-eighth floor."

He stepped into the shaft. It was already programmed; serenely he floated skyward. At the top, another screen. Face of an elegant haggard black girl, shaven eyebrows, gleaming cheekbones, no flesh to spare. The expectable gorgeous halo of shimmering hair. "Please step through Access Green," she said. A throaty, throbbing contralto. "Mr. Fredericks is expecting you in Gallery Nine of the Rotunda."

"My appointment is with Mr. Bercovici—"

Too late. Screen dead. Access Green, an immense oval doorway the color of a rhododendron leaf, was opening from a central sphincter, like the rising shutter of an antique camera. Abandon all hope, ye who enter here. Macy stepped hastily through, worrying about having the sphincter reverse itself when he had one leg on each side. Beyond the doorway the air was soft and clammy, heavy with a rain-forest warmth and humidity, and mysterious fragrances were adrift. He saw low, dim passages radiating in a dozen directions. The walls were pink and rounded, no

corners anywhere, and seemed to be made of some spongy resilient substance. The whole place was like one vast womb. Trapped in the fallopian tubes. Macy tried to persuade himself not to start sweating again. There was a popping sound, of the sort one could make by pushing a fingertip against the inside of one's cheek and sliding it swiftly out of one's mouth, and the black girl emerged from a gash in the wall that promptly resealed itself. She was sealed too, encased in purple plastic from throat to toes, like a chrysalis, everything covered but nothing concealed: her tight wrap startlingly displayed the outlines of her bony body. Superb skeletal structure. She said, "I'm Loftus. I'll show you to Mr. Fredericks' office."

"Mr. Bercovici—"

She didn't wait. Hurrying down the hall, legs going like pistons, bare feet hitting the spongy floor, thwunk thwunk thwunk. Trim flat rump: no buttocks at all, so far as he could tell, merely a termination, like a cat's hindquarters. He was upset. Bercovici was the one who had interviewed him at the Rehab Center, all smiles and sincerity, thinning blond hair, pudgy cheeks. Don't worry, Mr. Macy, I'll be looking after you personally during your difficult transition back to daily life. Bercovici was his lifeline. Without looking back, the black girl called out, "Mr. Bercovici's been transferred to the Addis Ababa office."

"But I spoke to him only ten days ago, Miss Loftus!"

She halted. Momentary blaze of the eyes. "*Loftus* is quite sufficient," she said. Then the expression softened. Perhaps remembering she was dealing with a convalescent. "Sometimes transfers happen rapidly here. But Mr. Fredericks has your full dossier. He's aware of the problems."

Mr. Fredericks had a long cavernous office, rounded and womby, from the sloping ceiling of which dangled hundreds of soft pink globes, breast-shaped; a tiny light was mounted in each nipple. He was a small dapper man with a moist handshake. Macy received from him a sweet sad embarrassed smile, the kind one gives a man who has had a couple of limbs or perhaps his genitals amputated to check the metastasis of some new lightning cancer. "So glad you've come, Mr. Macy. Paul, may I make it? And call me Stilton. We're all informal here. A wonderful opportunity for you in this organization." Eyes going to Macy's

Rehab badge, then away, then back, as though he couldn't refrain from staring at it. The stigmata of healing.

"Show you around," Fredericks was saying. "Get to know everybody. The options here are tremendous: the whole world of modern data-intake at your service. We'll start you slowly, feed you into the news in ninety-second slices, first, then, as you pick up real ease at it, we'll nudge you into the front line."

*Good evening, ladies and chentlemen, this is Pavel Nathanielovitch Macy coming to you from the Kremlin on the eve of the long-awaited summit.*

The rear wall of Fredericks' office vanished as though it had been annihilated by some wandering mass of anti-matter, and Macy found himself staring into an immense stupefying abyss, a dark well hundreds of feet across and perhaps infinitely deep. A great many golden specks floated freely in that bowl of nothingness. He was so awestruck by the unexpected sight that he lost a chunk of Fredericks' commentary, but picked up on it in time to hear, "You see, we have thousands, literally thousands of free-ranging hovereye cameras posted in every spot throughout the world where news is likely to break. Their normal altitude is eighty to a hundred feet, but of course we can raise or lower them on command. You can think of them simply as passive observers hanging everywhere overhead, little self-contained self-propelled passive observers, sitting up there soaking in a full range of audio and visual information and holding it all on twenty-four-hour tap-scanning drums. Those of us here at Manhattan North Headquarters can tap in on any of these inputs as needed. For instance, if I want to get some idea of what's doing at the Sterility Day parade in Trafalgar Square—" he touched a small blue button in a broad console on his desk, and up out of the darkness one of the golden specks came zooming, halting in midair just beyond the place where the wall of Fredericks' office had been. "What we have here," Fredericks explained, "is the slave-servo counterpart of the hovereye camera that's hanging above that parade right now. I simply induce an output—here, we get a visual"—Macy saw gesticulating women waving banners and setting off flares—"and here we get the audio." Raucous screams, the chanting of slogans.

Macy hadn't heard of Sterility Day before. The world

becomes terribly strange when you spend four years out of circulation.

"If we want any of this for the next newscast, you see, we just pump the signal into a recorder and set it up for editing—and meanwhile the hovereye is still up there, soaking it all in, relaying on demand. Gathering the news is no frigging chore at all when you have ten thousand of these lovely little motherfuckers working for you all over the place." A nervous giggle. "Sometimes our language gets a little rough around here. You stop noticing it after a while." One doesn't speak crude Anglo-Saxon to a man who wears the badge of his trauma on his lapel, is that it?

Fredericks had him by the arm. "Time to meet your new colleagues," he was saying. "I want to fill you in completely. You're going to love it working here."

Out of the office. The rear wall mysteriously restoring itself as they leave, the dark well of the hovereyes vanishing once more. Down the humid fallopian passageways. Doors opening. Neat, well-groomed executives everywhere, all of them getting up to greet him. Some of them speaking exceptionally loudly and clearly, as if they thought a man who had had his troubles might find it difficult to understand what they said. Long-legged girls flashing the promise of ecstasy. Some of them looking a trifle scared; maybe they were hip to the evil deeds of his former self. Macy was aware of what crimes the previous user of his body had committed, and sometimes they scared him a little, too.

"In here," Fredericks said. Into a bright, gaudy room, twice the size of Fredericks' office. "I'd like you to meet the chief of daytime news, Paul. One hell of a guy. Harold Griswold, and he's some beautiful son of a bitch. Harold, here's our new man, Paul Macy. Number six on the late news. Bercovici told you the story, right? Right. He's going to fit in here perfectly."

Griswold stood up, a slow and complex process, and smiled. Macy smiled. His facial muscles were beginning to ache from all the smiling he had done in the last hour and a half. One doesn't smile much at a Rehab Center. He shook the hand of the chief of daytime news. Griswold was implausibly tall, slabjawed, perhaps fifty years old, obviously a man of great prestige; he reminded Macy somehow of George Washington. He wore a bright-blue tank suit, an earwatch, and an elaborate breastplate of several

kinds of exotic polished woods. His office was like a museum annex, with works of art everywhere: shaped paintings, crystallines, talk-spikes, programmed resonances. A million-dollar collection. In the corner, to the right of Griswold's kidney-shaped desk, stood a striking psychosculpture, a figure of an old woman. Macy, who had been glancing from piece to piece by way of an implied compliment to Griswold, lurched forward at the sight of the last work, coughed, grabbed the edge of the desk to steady himself. He felt as though he had been clubbed at the back of the neck. Instantly friendly hands clutched at him. "Are you all right? What's the trouble, fella?" Macy fought off dizziness. He straightened and shook himself free of the propping hands.

"I don't know what hit me," he muttered. "Just as I looked at that sculpture in the corner—"

"The Hamlin over there?" Griswold asked. "One of my favorites. A gift from my first wife, ten years back, when Hamlin was still an unknown—"

"If you don't mind—some cold water—"

Two gulps. Another cup. Three gulps. Carefully averting his eyes from the figure of the old woman. The Hamlin over there. The sleek smooth networkmen frowning at him, then erasing the frowns the instant he noticed. Everyone so solicitous. "Forgive me," he said. "You know, it's only my first day on the outside. The strain, the tension."

"Of course. The tension." Griswold.

"The strain. We understand." Fredericks.

He forced himself to look at the psychosculpture. The Hamlin over there. An excellent piece of work. Poignance; pathos; a sense of the tragedy of aging, a sense of the heroism of defying time. A soft hum coming from its resonators, subtly coloring the mood it was designed to stimulate. The Hamlin over there. Macy said, "That's *Nathaniel Hamlin* who did it?"

"Right," Griswold said. "God only knows what it's worth now. On account of Hamlin's tragic fate. Not that I have the slightest interest in selling, but of course when an artist dies young his work skyrockets amazingly in value."

He didn't know, then. He couldn't just be pretending. And he couldn't be that dumb. Either Bercovici hadn't told him, or he'd been told and hadn't cared enough to remem-

ber. That was interesting. Macy was shaken, though, by the intensity of his reaction to the unexpected sight of the sculpture. They hadn't warned him at the Rehab Center that such things might happen. He made a mental note to ask about it when he went back next week for his first session of outpatient post-therapy therapy. And a mental note, also, to stay out of Griswold's office as much as possible.

The sculpture was still exerting an effect on him. He felt an undertow, the sucking of a subcerebral ocean in his mind. Hollow echoing sounds of surf from far below. A hammering against the threshold of consciousness. The Hamlin over there. That's *Nathaniel Hamlin* who did it? On account of his tragic fate. Jesus. Jesus. A bad attack of wobbly knees. Sweaty forehead. Paroxysms of confusion. Going to collapse, going to fall down in a screaming fit, going to vomit all over Harold Griswold's nappy green electronic carpet. Unless you regain control fast. He turned apologetically to Stilton Fredericks and said in a thick furry voice, "It's more upsetting than I thought. You'd better get me out of here fast."

Fredericks took his arm. A firm grasp. To Griswold: "I'll explain afterward." Propelling Macy urgently toward the door. Stumbling feet. Head swaying on neck. Jesus. Outside the office, finally.

The moment of intolerable *angst* ebbing.

"I feel much better now," Macy murmured.

"Can I get you a pill?"

"No. No. Nothing."

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"Sure."

"You don't look all right."

"It'll pass. It shook me up more than I expected. Listen, Fredericks—Stilton—I don't want you to think that I'm fragile, or anything, but you know I've just been released from the Rehab Center, and for the first few days—"

"It's perfectly natural," said Fredericks. A comradely pat on the shoulder. "We understand the problem. We can make allowances. This was my fault, anyway. I should have checked things out before I brought you in there. He's got so many works of art in his office, though—"

"Sure. How could you have known?"

"I should have checked anyway. Now that I see the diffi-

culty, I'll check the whole building. I simply didn't realize that it would upset you so much to come face to face with one of your own sculptures."

"Not mine," Macy said, shaking his head emphatically.  
"Not mine."

## TWO

DAYTIME it wasn't so bad. He built a cozy routine for himself and lived within it, just as they had advised him at the Center to do. The Rehab people had found him a little apartment near the upper tip of Old Manhattan, five minutes from the network office by short-hop tube, forty minutes if he walked; he hadn't wanted to risk exposing himself to the chaotic rush-hour environment of the tubes too soon, and so at first he went to work on foot. The exercise was good for him, and he had nothing better to do with his time anyway. But from the fourth day on he took the tube. The jostling and the screeching of wheels turned out not to bother him as much as he feared it might, and, packed belly to rump in the cars, he didn't have to worry about people staring at him or his Rehab badge.

At work he slipped easily and comfortably into the network's news-broadcast operation. He had had six months of vocational training at the Center, and so he came to his new career already skilled in voice projection, sincerity dynamics, makeup technique, and other such things; he needed only to learn the details of the network's daily practice, the authority levels and flow patterns and such. Everybody was kind to him, although after the first few days most of them dropped the maddening exaggerated courtesy that made him feel like such a cripple. They showed him what to do, they covered his blunders, they responded patiently and good-humoredly to his questions.

In the beginning Fredericks didn't let him do any actual broadcasting, just dummy off-the-air runs under simulated studio circumstances. Instead he was put to work reading scripts aloud for the timing, and monitoring air checks of the other broadcasters. But he did so well at the dummy

runs that by the fifth day they were putting him on the late news to do ninety-second capsule reports in what they called the mosaic-texture section, in which a bunch of broadcasters offered quick bouncy segments of the news in swift succession. Fredericks told him that in another few weeks he'd be allowed to handle full-scale stories, even to select his own accompanying hovereye coverage. So all went well professionally.

The nights were something else.

*Lonely, for one thing. You'd be wisest to avoid sexual liaisons, at least at the outset, the Center therapists had suggested. They could be disturbing during the initial two or three weeks of adjustment.* He paid heed. He refrained from bringing any of the network girls home with him, though plenty of them made it clear that they were available. Just ask, honey. At night he sat alone in the modest apartment. Watching a lot of holovision. Pretending that it was important to his career to study how the various networks handled the news. In truth he simply wanted the companionship of the bright screen and the loud audio; he left it on even when he wasn't watching anything.

He didn't go out in the evenings. A matter of economy, he told himself. Supposedly he had been a wealthy man in his former life, or at least pretty damned prosperous. A successful artist, work in constant demand, prices going up at the gallery every year, that kind of thing. But his assets had been forfeit to the state. Most of his money had been used up by the costs of his therapy and the termination settlement awarded his wife. What little was left had gone into renting and furnishing his apartment. He was essentially a pauper until the network salary checks began coming in. But he knew that the real reason for staying home was fear. He wasn't ready yet to explore the night world of this formidable city. He couldn't go out there while his new self was still moist and malleable around the edges.

Then there were the dreams.

He hadn't had nightmares at the Rehab Center. He had them now. Traumatic identity crises punctuated his sleep. He ran breathlessly down long gleaming ropy corridors, pursued by a man who wore his face. He stood by the shore of a viscous gray-green pool that bubbled and steamed and heaved, and a gnarled hairy claw reached up from its depths and groped for him. He tiptoed across a

sea of quicksand, sinking deeper and deeper, and something underneath plucked at his toes. Pulling him under with a loud plop. A coven of monsters waiting down below. Teeth and green horns and yellow eyes. Often he woke up shrieking. And then lay awake, listening to something knocking on the inside of his skull. Let me out, let me out, let me out! Great gusts of wind blew through his brain. Vast snorting snores setting the medulla atremble. A slumbering giant, restless, cranky, trapped behind his forehead. Belching and farting within his head. Knock. Knock. Knock.

Also the peculiar doubleness of self assailed him, the sensation of being enshrouded and entangled in the scraps and threads of his old identity, so that he momentarily was sucked back into it. I am Nat Hamlin. Married, successful. Psychosculptor. This is my face. These are my hands. Why am I in this unfamiliar little apartment? No. No. I am Paul Macy. I used to be. Formerly was. In another country, so to speak. And besides the stench is dead. Why does he haunt me? I am not Nat Hamlin.

Sometimes at night it was hard to be sure of that, though. By the third night Macy dreaded going to bed. There was that man with his face, always haunting him when he crossed into dreamland. Waking in distress, he wanted to call a friend and ask for reassurance. But he had no friends. The old ones had been washed away by the therapy, and he hadn't made any new ones yet, except a few people he had come to know at the Rehab Center, fellow reconstructs, and he didn't want to bother them in the middle of the night. Maybe they had demons of their own to wrestle with. And the people from the network. Mustn't call them. You'd blow the whole pretense of your stability in one gush of panicky talk. Nor could he call any of his therapists. Dr. Brewster, Dr. Ianuzzi, Dr. Gomez. You're on your own, they said. We're cutting the umbilicus. So. So. All alone. Sweat it out. Eventually, no matter how bad a night it was, he would sleep. Eventually.

"Is there any chance," Macy asked, "that the Rehab job didn't completely take? I mean, sometimes I think I can feel Hamlin trying to break through."

A Tuesday late in May, 2011. One week after his discharge from the Rehab Center. His first session of post-

therapy therapy. Dr. Gomez, round-faced, swarthy, drooping black mustache, not much chin, scowling and chewing on a computer stylus. Soft buzzing voice. "No chance of that at all, Macy."

"But these dreams—"

"A little psychic static, is all. What gives you the idea Hamlin still exists?"

"During these nightmares I feel him pushing inside my head. Like somebody trying to get out."

"Don't mess things up with your pretty imagery, Macy. You've been having some bad dreams. Everybody has bad dreams. You think I'm immune? I've got my share of lousy karma. Without any fancy hypotheses, tell me why you think it's Hamlin."

"The man with my face chasing me."

"A metaphor for your own unfocused past, maybe."

"A sense of confusion. Not knowing who I really am."

"Who are you, really?"

"Paul Macy. But—"

"That's who you really are. Nat Hamlin doesn't exist any more. He's been stripped out of your body, cell by cell, and extinguished. You really surprise me, Macy. I thought you were going to make one of the best adjustments I ever saw."

"I felt that way too," Macy said. "But since I've been outside there have been these—these bursts of psychic static. I'm scared. What if Hamlin's still there?"

"Hamlin exists only as an abstract concept. He's a famous psychosculptor who ran into trouble with the law and was eradicated. Now he exists only through his works. Like Mozart. Like Michelangelo. He isn't in your head."

Macy said, "My first day at the network, I walked into the office of one of the high executives and there was a big Hamlin sculpture in the corner. I looked at it and I recognized it for what it was and I just took it in, you know, the way I'd take in a Michelangelo, and after a fraction of a second I had this sensation like somebody had banged me on the head with a mallet. I almost fell over. The impact was tremendous. How do you account for that, Dr. Gomez?"

"How do you account for it?"

"Like it was Hamlin still inside me, standing up and yelling, 'That's mine, I made that!' Such a surge of pride

and identity that I felt it on the conscious level as physical pain."

"Balls," the doctor said. "Hamlin's gone."

"How can you be sure of that?"

Gomez sighed. "Look," he said, and jabbed an output node. On the walls of his office blossomed screened images of Macy's psychological profiles. Gomez pointed. "Over on the left, that's the EEG of Nat Hamlin. You see those greasy waves of psychopathic tendency, those ugly nasty jiggles? You see those electrical storms going on in that man's head? That's a sick EEG. That's sick as hell. Right?

"Now look over here. We've begun the mindpick operation. We're wiping out Nat Hamlin. The waves get smoother. Sweet as a baby. Chart after chart. Look. Look. Look. As Hamlin goes, we bring in Macy. You can see the overlay here. *This* is what a double mind looks like. Vestigial Hamlin, incipient Macy. Yes? Two distinct electrical patterns, no problems at all distinguishing one from the other. And now, this side of the room, you can see Hamlin wiped out entirely. Can you find any of the typical Hamlin waveforms? By shit, can you?"

"You aren't saying anything, Macy. There's your brain on the wall. Alpha, beta, the whole mess. Compare your waves and Hamlin's. Altogether different. Two separate patterns. He's him, you're you. The machine says so. It isn't a matter of opinion, it's a matter of voltage thresholds. A voltage doesn't lie. Amperes don't have opinions. Resistances don't fuck around with you for sly tactical reasons. We're dealing in objective facts, and the objective facts tell me that Nat Hamlin has been wiped out. They ought to tell you that too."

"The dreams—the sight of that psychosculpture—"

"So you're a little unstable. A couple of surprise adjustment traumas. But Hamlin? No."

"Another thing. My first day out, that same day, I met a girl in the street, somebody from Hamlin's life. She kept calling me Nat. Telling me she loved me."

"Weren't you wearing your Rehab badge?"

"Of course I was."

"And the dumb bitch still dumped all that garbage on you?"

"I suppose she's disturbed mentally herself. I don't know. Anyway," Macy said, "she was doing all this to me, Nat

this and Nat that, paying not attention when I told her I was Paul Macy, and out of nowhere I felt, well, like hot on top of my head, and for half a second I didn't know who I was. Which one of me I was. It was like something had reached into my head and mixed everything up. I could even remember myself making a psychosculpture of the girl. You see, she was one of Hamlin's models, apparently, and I had this flickering memory of her posing, me at a sculptor's keyboard—"

"Crap," Gomez said.

"What?"

"Crap. It wasn't a memory. You couldn't possibly remember anything out of Nat Hamlin's life."

"What was it, then?"

"It was an episode of free-floating masochism, Macy. A normal self-injury wish. You invented this phantom image of yourself sculpting the girl because you wanted to fool yourself into thinking that Hamlin was breaking through."

"But I don't see why—"

"Shut up and I'll explain the mechanism. You lived at this Center for four years, right, and you got constant attention. It was like being in the womb. Every need instantly attended to. Okay, it's time for Paul Macy to be born, and we toss you out into the world on your ass. Not exactly as rough as that, we find you a job first, we find you a place to live, but it's still a ballbreaker to get evicted. Out you go. Suddenly no umbilicus to feed you. Suddenly no placenta to cuddle in.

"Well, you want attention, and one way to get it is to come here yelling that your personality reconstruct didn't really take, that Hamlin is knocking around inside your head. I don't mean that this is a conscious thing. It's a mechanism. Your rational self just wants to make a decent adjustment to outside life and live happily ever after as Paul Macy, but there's this irrational side of us too. Which often operates directly counter to the needs and desires of the rational side.

"Suppose I tell somebody that his sanity depends on never calling his mother-in-law by her first name, okay? And he nods, he says, 'Yes, I understand, if I do that it'll really wreck me.' So of course every time he sees the old witch he finds that her first name is on the tip of his tongue. He'll have dreams in which he calls her by her

first name. He'll fantasy it while he's sitting at his desk. Because it's the most destructive fucking thing he could possibly do, so of course the temptation to do it keeps rising out of his head, and he's constantly imagining he *has* done it.

"Now back to you. The last thing you want to have happen is for Hamlin to come back to life, so naturally you fantasy yourself making a sculpture of this girl. Which upsets you and sends you in a sweat back to me, screaming for help. The immediate result of this mechanism is to give you bad dreams and general trauma, and an incidental side-effect is to supply you with that claim on my attention that you unconsciously crave. You see how the dark side of our mind always craps us up? But don't worry about it, Macy. None of this is real, in the sense that Hamlin *is* there. Oh, sure, it's real in a psychological sense, but so what?" Gomez grinned triumphantly. "You're a smart boy. You've been following all this, right?"

Macy said, "Isn't it possible to run some new EEGs all the same? What if I did come up with a double wave pattern?"

"You really want me to coddle you, don't you?"

"Would it be so hard to make an empirical test?"

"I could do it in five minutes."

"Why not, then?"

"Because I don't believe in giving in to an outpatient's weepy fantasies. You think you're my first reconstruct job? I've had a hundred of you. I know what's possible and what isn't. If I tell you Hamlin is eradicated, it's because I *know* Hamlin is eradicated. I'm not just being a bull-headed bastard."

"All right, so I'm irrational," Macy said. "But if I had the evidence of the EEG in front of me—"

"I won't play that game with you. The fantasy came from inside you; let the cure for it come from in there too. Sweat it out. Convince yourself that your belief in Hamlin's continued existence is nothing but a move to get sympathy from us."

"And if the hallucinations don't go away?"

"They have to."

"If they don't, though?"

"You'll be here again next Tuesday," Gomez said. "I won't be seeing you then. Dr. Ianuzzi will, and as you know

she's an entirely different kind of doctor. Sweet and refined and sympathetic, whereas I'm a vulgar and hostile son of a bitch. If this stuff is still bothering you then, maybe she'll run an EEG for you, though I hope she doesn't. I won't, Macy. I can't. The top sergeant never kisses you and tucks you in, no matter how piteously you ask him, and I'm top sergeant on this team. So come back next week."

Gomez stood up. "I saw you on the late news last night. You weren't bad at all."

The next morning he found a message cube addressed to him in his box at the office. Puzzled, he plugged the glossy little cassette into his desk's output slot. The face of the girl who had talked to him on the street the week before appeared on the screen. Red-rimmed eyes, hollow cheeks. Her hair straggly, unkempt. She offered the camera an uncertain lopsided grin and said, "I saw you on holovision and so I knew where to send this. Please, Nat, don't just ignore me. I can't tell you—"

His hand shot out and killed the playback. *Please, Nat.* He couldn't take that. The use of his old name: it was like slivers of wood under his fingernails, needles probing behind his eyes. Last night the dreams had been worse than ever. Seeing himself as Siamese twins, one body ripping and clawing at its identical brother. And then the trapdoor opening in the attic floor and the shambling disemboweled thing lurching up out of it. The girl had initiated all his traumas; there hadn't been bad dreams before that miserable accidental meeting. He wasn't going to give her a second chance to screw him up. If that bastard Gomez wouldn't offer supportive therapy, he was simply going to have to defend himself against potential inner turmoil. And therefore it was necessary to avoid new sources of anguish.

Macy switched the output control to *Erase* and reached for the button. Then he saw the girl's sad, eroded face in his mind. A fellow human being. She also suffers. I could at least listen once.

He turned to *Playback* again and she reappeared, saying, "I saw you on holovision and so I knew where to send this. Please, Nat, don't just ignore me. I can't tell you how much you still mean to me, even after everything. I know you've been through Rehab and things must be very strange to you, and you don't want to hear from people out of

your old life. But finding you like that was such a miracle that I can't simply pretend you don't exist. Because I can't keep going like this much longer, Nat. I'm in bad shape. I need help. I'm sinking and somebody's got to throw me a rope."

There was more in that vein. She said she'd wait for him Wednesday night at six o'clock on the northeast corner of 227th and Broadway, opposite the network building, and that she'd be waiting for him the same time the next two nights also, in case he wasn't free Wednesday. Or if he wanted to make other arrangements he could call her at her home, any day after eleven in the morning, such-and-such a number. With all my love. Yours truly, Lissa Moore.

I can't, he thought. I don't dare. He erased the cube. That night he left ten minutes early, going out the building's east entrance to avoid her. He did the same on Thursday and Friday.

On Monday there was a new cube from her. He carried it around for three hours, unwilling to erase it, afraid to play it, and finally slipped it into the slot. On the screen, her pale face against a black velvet backdrop. The mouth drawn into a quirky grimace. A hyperthyroid bulge to the eyes that he hadn't noticed before. The lighting in the booth where she'd recorded the message was too bright, and it struck her cheeks so fiercely that it seemed to strip them to the bone. Her voice, blurting, unmodulated: "You didn't come. I waited, but you didn't come. All right, Nat. Paul. Maybe you don't give a damn about me. Maybe you've got your own neck to look out for and can't fool around with me. I won't bother you after today. I'll wait tonight, six o'clock, same corner, Broadway and 227th, northeast side. You aren't there by half past eight, I'll be dead by nine. I mean it. Now it's up to you."

## THREE

A FEW minutes past six, he was still in the central newsroom, finishing his last piece of the day. A cold sullen anger still gripped him. Let the bitch kill herself. I won't be blackmailed like that. She doesn't mean anything to me except trouble.

With a sharp stabbing gesture he summoned control of the hovereye that patrolled the street outside the network office building, forever keeping watch for demonstrators, bombers, self-immolators. With newly skillful motions Macy brought the airborne camera down the block until it was scanning the streetcorner where Lissa had said she'd wait. Now the fine control, the vernier.

Yes, there she is. Pacing in a taut little circle. A self-contained zone of tension on the busy street. Damn her. She can do whatever she likes to herself. Whatever she likes. Macy signed himself out of the newsroom and, gliding on the glacial flow of his rage, drifted toward the liftshaft. Down forty stories. Sweeping quickly through the lobby. Outside. A soft spring evening. Long lines of patient homegoers wearily filing into the tubemouth. So easy to avoid her, in this crowd. Just slide on past.

He found himself walking toward her, though. One-and-two-and-one-and-two; he couldn't stop. She seemed to be talking to herself; eyes turned inward, she didn't notice him approaching. From twenty yards away he glowered at her. Who the hell does she think she is, trying to use me this way? Playing on my sympathies. Oh, I need you, I need you so much! With throbbing violins. And working on my sense of guilt. Meet me on the corner or I'll jump off the Palisades Bridge! Sure. What business is it of mine if you want to jump off a bridge, baby? I've got nothing to feel

guilty about. Guilt? I haven't done a thing. I'm brand new in the world. Christ, I'm even a virgin. That's right: Paul Macy is a virgin. A goddamn virgin.

He was only a few feet from her, now, but she hadn't seen him yet. He started to touch her arm, but halted as a curious discomfort flitted across his skull. That sense of doubleness, again, that scrambling of identities. Disorientation. A bonging sensation like the muffled tolling of a distant bell. With it came a fast spasm of nausea, a light tightening around his adams' apple.

Then all the disturbing symptoms vanished. He nudged her elbow. "All right," he said gruffly. "Wake up! Here I am. You're pulling a lousy stinking trick, but I fell for it. And here I am."

"Nat!" Looking at him in mingled amazement and delight. Color stippling her cheeks. Eyes fluttering: she's scared of me, he realized suddenly. He experienced a second spasm of strange uneasiness, here and gone before it had any real effect. "Oh, Nat, thank God you came!"

"No," he said. "Let's get this established once and for all. My name's Paul Macy. You want to have anything to do with me, you call me by that name, and no options about it. Paul Macy. Say it now."

"P-Paul."

"Say it all."

"Paul Macy. Paul Macy."

"Good." He was starting to get a headache: two spikes of pain converging on the center of his head. This girl was no good for him. "Nat Hamlin doesn't exist any more, and don't you forget it," he said. "Now: you wanted me to meet you, and I met you. What's on your mind?"

"You sound so cruel, Paul." She stumbled on the *Paul*.

"Just annoyed. Your suicide threat—what a miserable tactic that is. I goddam well should have called your bluff."

"I wasn't bluffing."

"Whatever you say. I fell for it. I'm here. What do you want?"

"We can't talk here," she said. "Not in the middle of a crowd. Not out on the street."

"Where, then?"

"Your place?"

He shook his head. "Absolutely not."

"Mine, then. We can be there in fifteen minutes. Everything's filthy, but—"

"What about a restaurant?" he suggested.

She brightened. "That would be okay. Any place you like. One of your favorites, where you'd feel comfortable."

He tried to think of one of his favorite restaurants.

"I don't know any restaurants," he said. "You pick one."

"You don't know any? But you always ate out, practically every night. It was like a compulsion with you. You—"

"That was Nat Hamlin," he said. "Hamlin might have been the one who ate out a lot. If you say so. But not me. Not yet."

He reached into his stock of memories, looking for the names of some Manhattan restaurants. Zero. They really should have given him some restaurant memories when they were constructing the Paul Macy persona at the Rehab Center. It wouldn't have been any big effort for them. They had given him all kinds of other things. Star of the high school lacrosse team. Chicken pox. A mother and a father. Breaking his leg on the slopes at Gstaad. Reading Proust and Hemingway. Putting his hand under Jeanie Grossman's polo shirt. Thirty-five years of ersatz memories. But no information about restaurants. Maybe Gomez, Ianuzzi, and Brewster didn't eat out much. Or perhaps the restaurant stuff was hidden in some cranny of his mind that he hadn't found yet. He said, "I mean it. I've got no suggestions. You pick."

"There's a people's restaurant two blocks from here. I've been having lunch at it a lot. You know it?"

"No."

"We could go there," she said.

It was a deep, narrow room with tarnishing brass walls and a bunch of sputtering defective light-loops threaded through the thatchwork ceiling. Service was cafeteria-style; you took what you wanted from servo-actuated cubbyholes along the power-counter. Then you found seats at dreary long community tables. Macy, following Lissa to the counter, whispered, "How do you know how much anything costs?"

"It's a people's restaurant."

"So?"

"You don't know what that is?"

"I'm new to a lot of this."

"You pay whatever you can afford," she said. "If you don't have any money, you just eat, and make it up next time. Or you go around back and help wash dishes."

"Does the system work?" he asked.

"Not very well." She smiled bleakly and began piling food on her tray. In a few moments she had it completely crammed with dishes. Five different kinds of synthetic meats, a mound of salads and vegetables, three rolls, and other things. He was more sparing: vegetable juice, proteoid steak, fried kelp, a cup of no-caffy. At the end of the counter stood a central-credit console. Lissa walked by it without giving it a glance. Macy hesitated a moment, confused, peering into the glossy dark-green screen. In a flustered way he authorized the console to charge his credit account ten dollars. A fat flat-faced girl waiting behind him in line snorted contemptuously. He wondered if he had paid too much or too little. Lissa was already far down the aisle, heading for an empty table at the back of the restaurant. He seized his tray and hurried after her.

They sat facing each other over the bare grim plank of the tabletop. "I've got some golds," she said. "Want one?"  
"I'm not sure."

"Try." She pulled out a pack. Its brim snapped up and a cigarette popped out. He took it. She took one also, and he carefully watched her nip the ignition pod with her nail. He did the same. A deep pull. Almost at once he felt the dizziness and the acceleration of his heartbeat. She winked at him and blew smoke in his face.

Then she started to eat, stuffing the food down as if she hadn't had anything in weeks. The way she wolfed it, so unselfconscious in her gluttony, fascinated him: it was like watching a fire sweep through a dry meadow. Head forward, jaws working frantically. Sounds of chewing. White teeth flashing. He sat still, dragging on the cigarette, ineffectually trying to spear a strand of kelp with his fork. She looked up. "Aren't you hungry?" she asked, mouth full.

"Not as hungry as you are, I guess."

"Don't mind me."

Her wrists were dirty and there was a film of grime visible on her neck. She was wearing the same blue coat as the other day. Again, no makeup. Her fingernails were

ragged. But she wasn't merely outwardly unkempt; she conveyed a sense of inner disintegration that terrified him. Obviously she had once been a beautiful girl, perhaps extraordinarily beautiful. Traces of that beauty remained. She had a parched, ravaged look, though, as if fevers of the soul had been consuming her substance. Her eyes, large and bloodshot, never were still. Always a birdlike flickering from place to place. Cheeks hollower than they ought to be. She could use about ten pounds more, he figured. And a bath. He stubbed out his roach and cut himself a slice of steak. Filet of papier-mâché. He gagged.

Lissa said, "God, that's better! Some food in the gut again."

"Why were you so hungry?"

"I always am. I'm burning up."

"Are you sick?"

She shrugged. "Who knows?" Her eyes momentarily rested on his. "I'm trying to think of you as Paul Macy. It isn't easy, sitting here with Nat Hamlin opposite me."

"Nat Hamlin doesn't exist."

"You really don't remember me?"

"Zero," he said.

"Shit almighty! What did they *do* to you at the Rehab Center?"

He said, "They pumped Nat Hamlin full of memory-dissolving drugs until every bit of him was flushed away. Which left a kind of zombie, you see? A healthy empty body. Society doesn't like to waste a good healthy body. So then they built me inside the zombie's head."

"Built you? What do you mean, built?"

"Created an identity for me." He shut his eyes a moment. There was a tightness at his collar. Choking sensation. He wasn't supposed to have to explain any of this. The world was supposed to take it all for granted. "They built up a past, a cluster of events that I could move around in as if it had really happened. Like I grew up in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and moved to Seattle when I was twelve. My father was a propulsion engineer and my mother taught school. They're both dead now. No brothers. No sisters. I collected African stamps and I did a lot of hunting and fishing. I went to college, UCLA, class of '93, got a degree in philosophy of communication. Two years of national service, stationed in Bolivia and Ecuador, doing voice-overs

for the People's Democratic Channel. Then various TV and HV jobs in Europe and the States, and now here in New York. Et cetera, et cetera."

"God," she said. "And it's all phony?"

"Pretty near. It follows Nat Hamlin's biography only as closely as it has to. Like in age. Or Hamlin broke a leg when he was twenty-six and you can see that in the bone, so they've given me a skiing accident for that year."

"What would happen if I checked the UCLA alumni records, looking for Paul Macy in the class of '93?"

"You'd find him. With a Rehab asterisk saying that this is a pro forma entry covering a retroactively established identity. Same thing if you looked up the Idaho Falls birth register. They do a very thorough job."

"Christ," Lissa said. And shivered. "How creepy this is! You actually are a whole new person."

"I don't know how whole I am. But I'm new, all right."

"You don't have any idea who I am, then."

"You used to pose for Nat Hamlin, didn't you?"

She looked startled. "How come you know that? I haven't said anything about—"

"The day you stopped me in the street," he said, "while we were talking, I got a flash picture of you naked in a kind of studio, and I was leaning over a complicated keyboard thing and telling you to scream. Like a psychosculptor trying to get an emotional effect. I saw it maybe half a second, then it was gone." He moistened his lips. "It was like a piece of Nat Hamlin's blotted-out mind surfacing into mine."

"Or a piece of my mind reaching into yours," she said.

"Eh?"

"It happens. I can't keep it under control." A shrill giggle. "Wherever you got it from, it was right. I was one of Nat Hamlin's models. From January to August, '06, when he was working on his *Antigone 21*. The one the Metropolitan bought. His last big work, before his breakdown. You know about his breakdown?"

"Some. Don't talk about it." He felt a band of fire across his forehead. Simply being close to someone out of the old existence this long was painful. "Can I have another gold?"

She offered the cigarette and said, "I was also his mistress, all through '05 and most of '06. He said he'd get a

divorce and marry me. Like Rembrandt. Like Renoir. Falling in love with the model. Only he went out of his head instead. Doing all those crazy things."

Macy, suddenly vulnerable, tried to stop her with an up-raised hand, but there was no halting the flow of her words. "The last time I saw him was Thanksgiving Day, 2006. At his studio. We had a fight and he threw me down the stairs." She winced. Into his mind a searing image: an endless flight, the girl falling, falling, skirt up around her thighs, legs kicking, arms clutching, the dwindling scream, the sudden twist and impact. A sound of something cracking. "In the hospital six weeks with a broken pelvis. When I got out they were hunting him from Connecticut to Kansas. And then—"

"*No more!*" he yelled. People turned to look.

She shrank away from him. "I'm sorry," she said, folding into herself, huddling, shaking. His cheeks were hot with shame and turmoil. After a moment she said softly, "Does it hurt a lot when I talk about him?"

A nod. Silence.

"You asked me to see you because you were in trouble," he said at length.

"Yes."

"Would you honestly have killed yourself if I hadn't shown up?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I'm all alone. I have nobody at all. And I'm going out of my mind."

"How do you know?"

"I hear voices. Other people's minds come into mine. And mine goes into theirs. Extrasensory. Perception."

"ESP?" he said. "Like—what is it, mental telepathy?"

"Telepathy. That's what it is. ESP. Telepathy."

"I didn't think that that really existed."

A bitter laugh. "You bet your ass. Sitting right here in front of you. The genuine article."

"You can read minds?" he said, feeling dreamfogged and unreal.

"Not exactly read. Just touch, mind to mind. It isn't under my conscious control. Things drift in, drift out. Voices humming in my brain, a word, a phrase, an image.

It's been happening since I was ten, twelve years old. Only much worse now. Much, much worse." Trembling. "The past two years. Hell. Absolute hell."

"How so?"

"I don't know who I am any more a lot of the time," she said. "I get to be five, six people at once. This mushy noise in my head. The buzzing. The voices. Like static, only sometimes words drift in on the static. I pick up all these weird emotions, and they scare me. Not knowing if I'm imagining or not. There's somebody two tables away who wants to rape me. Wishes he dared. In his head I'm naked and bloody, spreadeagled, arms and legs tied to the furniture. And over to my left, someone else, a woman, she's transmitting the odor of shit. She sees me like some kind of giant turd sitting here. I don't know why. And then you—"

"No," he said. "Don't tell me."

"It isn't really ugly. You think I'm dirty and you want to take me home and give me a bath. And fuck me afterward. That's okay. I know I'm dirty. And I'd like to go to bed with you, too. But I can't stand all this crosstalk in my head. I'm wide open, Nat, wide open to every stray thought, and—"

"Paul."

"What?"

"I said, call me Paul. It's important to me."

"But you're—"

"Paul Macy."

"Just now, though, you were coming through as Nat Hamlin to me. From deep underneath."

"No. Hamlin's gone," he said. "I'm Paul Macy." A feeling of seasickness. The light-loops swaying and hissing overhead. He found himself covering her hand with his. Ragged cuticles against his fingertips. He said, "If you're suffering so much, why don't you get some help? Maybe there's a cure for ESP. Is that what you want, a cure? I could take you to see Dr. Ianuzzi, she's a very sensitive woman, she could get you into the right kind of psychiatric hospital and—"

"And they'd give me shock treatment," Lissa said. "Memory dislocation with drugs, like I was a criminal. They'd wash half my brain out trying to heal me. There

wouldn't be anything of *me* left. I'm afraid of therapy. I haven't ever gone. I don't want to go."

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know."

"Then what am I supposed to do for you?" he asked.

"I don't know that either, Paul. I'm absolutely fucked up in the head, so there's no use asking me rational questions." Her eyes glittering eerily. Sick, sick, sick. "What you really ought to do," she said, "is get the hell away from me, right now, like you've wanted to do since the first minute you saw me. Only don't. God, please, don't. Help me. Help me."

"How?"

"Just be with me a little. I'm all alone. I've cut myself off from the whole world. Look, you know how it is with me? I don't have a job. I don't have friends any more. I look in the mirror and I see my own skeleton. I sit home and wait for the voices to go away, and they scream and scream at me until my head is coming off. I live off the welfare checks. Then I go out for a walk one day, on and on and on, way the hell uptown, and I crash into some guy on the street and he turns around and he's Nat Hamlin, he's the only man I ever really loved, only he isn't Hamlin any more, he's Paul Macy, that's what he says, and—" She caught her breath. "All right. You don't know me at all and I guess I can't say I know you. But I know your body. Every inch. That's a familiar thing to me, a landmark, something I can anchor myself to. Let me anchor. Let me hold on. I'm going under, Paul. I'm drowning, and maybe you can hold me up, for the sake of what I used to mean to the person you used to be. Maybe. Maybe for a little while. You don't owe it to me, you don't owe me anything, you could get right up and walk out of here and you'd have every right. But don't. Because I need you."

Sweat-soaked, numb, fists pressed together under the table, he felt a wild surge of pity for her. He felt like saying, Yes, of course, whatever I can do to help you. Come home with me, take a bath, let's blow a few golds and talk about things, this telepathy of yours, this delusion. Not because I ever knew you. Not because the things that happened between you and Nat Hamlin give you any claim

on me. But only because you're a suffering human being and you've turned to me for help, and how can I refuse? An act of grace. Yes, yes, I will be your anchor.

Instead he said, "You're asking a hell of a lot from me. I'm not the most stable individual in the world either. And I'm under doctor's orders to keep away from people out of Nat Hamlin's life. You could be big trouble for me. And me for you. I think the risks for both of us are bigger than the rewards."

"Does that mean you don't want to get involved?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Sorry I wasted so much of your time," she said. In a dead voice. No change of expression. Not really believing he means it, maybe.

"It wasn't wasted. I only wish I was in shape to do you any good. But a Rehab lives right on the edge of collapse himself, in the beginning. He's got to build a whole new life. So when you ask somebody like that to take on the additional burden—" All right, Macy. Stop explaining things, get up, walk out of here, before she starts crying and you start listening to her again. Up. You don't owe her a thing. You have your own troubles and they aren't small ones. Getting to his feet, now. The girl watching him, stricken, incredulous. Giving her a sickly smile, knowing that a smile of any kind is out of context when you're condemning somebody to death. Turning. Walking away from her, up the aisle of the people's restaurant, past the counter, the sauerkraut and the algaecakes. Another ten strides and you're out the door.

A scream from the back of the room.

"No! Come back! Paul! Paul! *Nat!*"

Her words leaped across the gulf between them like a flight of arrows. Six direct hits. Thwack thwack thwack thwack thwack *thwack!* The last one a killer, straight through from back to chest. He staggered. St. Sebastian stumbling in the restaurant aisle. His brain on fire, something very strange happening in there, like the two hemispheres splitting apart and taking up independent existence. And then a voice, speaking quite distinctly from a point just above his left ear, saying:

—How could you walk out on her like that, you snotty creep?

He hit the floor hard, landing elbow-first. A stunning

burst of pain. Within that cone of red agony a curious clarity of perception.

*Who said that?* he asked, losing consciousness. And, going under, he heard:

—I did. Nat Hamlin. Your twin brother Nat.

## FOUR

HE was at work in his studio again, after too long a layoff. All the sculpting equipment covered with a fine coating of dust. Maybe the delicate inner mechanisms are ruined, or at least imprecise. Try to build an armature for a man, end up with a chimp, something like that. He checked all the calibration carefully: everything in order, surprisingly. Just dusty. Ought to be, after all these years. A wonder it wasn't busted up by vandals. Fucking vandals all over the place. Goths, too. He touched the main keyboard lightly. This was going to be his chef d'oeuvre, a group composition, a contemporary equivalent of *The Burghers of Calais*. But fragmented, intense, multivalued. Call it something unpretentious, like *The Human Condition*.

A fucking headache getting all the models together at the same time. But the group interactions are important: shit, they're the whole point of the thing! There they all stand, now. The fat lady from the circus, eight hundred pounds of quivering suet. Half a ton of laughs. The kid from the student co-op, the one with the shaven head. Gomez, the skull doctor, for that little touch of hostility. The pregnant chick from the supersupermarket. Get the clothes off, baby, show that bulge. Bellybutton sticking way out like a handle. And the vice-president from the bank, very very proper, turn him on a little when we're ready to start. Also the old plaster model from art school days, Apollo Belvedere, missing his prick. A real technical stunt, trying to make psychosculpture out of a hunk of plaster. Faking in the appropriate responses: the test of a master. A cat, too, the one-eyed one from downstairs, gray and white with maybe a dozen claws on each paw, the way it looks.

Lastly, Lissa. My beloved. Stand next to the banker, honey. Turn a little to the left. The banker lifts his hand.

He wants to grab your tit, but he doesn't dare, and he hangs there caught in the tension between wanting and holding back. Your nipples ought to be erect for this: you ought to be in heat, some. Wait, I'll do it. A tickle or two down here, yes, look at them standing up.

Okay! Okay! Places, everybody! Group interaction, take one! I want each of you to project the emotion we talked about before, project just that emotion, as purely as you can. And really *live* it. Don't say to yourself, I'm posing for an artist, but say, I'm so-and-so and this is my life, this is my soul, and I'm radiating it in big chunks so he can grab it with his machine and turn it into a masterpiece. Ready? Ready? Hey, you sucks, why aren't you holding the pose? Who gave you permission to dissolve? Let's have some fucking *stability* in here! Hold it! Hold it! Hold it!

He was running as fast as he could, and the effort was killing him. A band of hot metal around his chest. His eyes ready to pop out of his head. He had turned left outside the restaurant, onto Broadway, down the dark street in long loping strides, thinking at first that he was going to get away, but then he heard the footsteps precisely matching his, a clop for his clop, on and on, and knew he wouldn't escape. Don't look back. Something may be gaining on you.

Nat Hamlin running smoothly behind him, wearing the same body as his only four years younger. Shouting obscenities as he ran. What a foul mouth he has! You'd think artists were aesthetic types, more refined, and yet here comes this anthology of smut running after me. Shouting, Hey, you, Macy, you dumb cocksucker, slow down! We got a lot to talk about, you asshole!

Sure we do. The first thing we talk about is which of us dies and which of us lives, and I know right away what your position is on *that*, Nat. So I'm just going to keep on running until I drop. Maybe you'll drop first, even though you're younger. With your acid and your golds and your broads tearing you down, and I've lived a clean life in the Center all these years.

On. On. Almost at the bridge, now. The shining towers of Old Manhattan ahead of me. Hamlin still screaming garbage. Isn't that one of the network hovereyes up there? Sure it is! Following right along, taping the whole thing,

just in case a nice sweet murder happens. Call the police, you dumb machine! Look, there's a lunatic on my ass, a convicted criminal making an illegal breakthrough to life after having been eradicated! See, see, he's got my face! Why don't you do something? I'm a network man, can't you tell? Paul Macy. Number six on the late news. I know, you're just a machine, an objective reporter, a self-contained self-propelled passive observer, but screw all that now. My life's at stake. If he catches up with me. And I can't hold out much longer. Fire in my guts. All that spaghetti in there going up and down with every stride. Liver and lights ajiggle. Oh, Christ, a hand on my shoulder. Tag, I'm it!

Down on the ground. His knees on the crooks of my arms. Pinned. His lips drooling. A lunatic with my face. Get off! Get off! Get off! And he laughs. And over his right shoulder I see the hovereye recording everything. Wonderful. *Now we bring you the final moments of Paul Macy, thirty-nine, tragically slain by his berserk alter ego. After this brief message from the makers of Acapulco Golds. Going. Going. Go—*

He was moving warily through a sleepy suburb, Queens or Staten Island, he wasn't sure which. They all looked the same. A biting January day. High-pressure system sitting on the city: not even a cloud in the sky, just a bright blank blue shield pressing down, no hint of oncoming snow, though some blackened heaps of the Christmas snowfall still lined the curb. In this sort of dryness it was difficult to believe it would ever snow again. The leafless trees like gaunt bundles of sticks, silently shouting, I am an oak, I am a maple, I am a tulip tree, and nobody listening because they all look the same. Squat two-story brick houses, reasonably far apart, on both sides of the street. The kiddies at school. The hubbies at work. A hot little wifey behind each picture window.

He wasn't sure how he had found his way here. Starting out from Connecticut about half past nine in the morning, the work going all wrong, a fucking nightmare in the studio finishing in a horrid botch of a week's good labors, and then driving into the city, crossing two or maybe three bridges, ending up here. And the familiar yellow haze now swathing the temples and forehead, the steamy mist of

madness. He welcomed it. There comes a time when you have to surrender to the dark forces. Yes, yes, go on, take possession of me. Nat Hamlin at your service. Call me Raskolnikov Junior. Ha, that crazy Rooshian understood something about intensity! How we boil inside. And sometimes boil over.

Look at this house, now. A completely stereotyped suburban villa, maybe fifty years old, product of the buggy seventies, the creepy sixties. I shall bring some illumination into its dreary existence. By an act of will I shall intensify the life-experience of its inhabitant. See how easy it is to force the side door? Just this flimsy little latch: you insert the slicer, you waggle it, you push . . . yes.

Now we go inside. Good morning, ma'am, this is the mad rapist, the Darien cocksmit, I'm peddling ecstatic terror this happy day. No, don't scream, I'm friendly. I never do unnecessary injury. I assure you that I wouldn't be here at all except for this irresistible compulsion I have. Is it my fault I'm off my hinges? A man is entitled to have a breakdown. Especially if he's a serious important artist. You ought to be thrilled to know who's going to fuck you. You're part of one of the most significant personal disintegrations in the history of western art. Like, suppose I was Van Gogh and I cut off my fucking ear right here on your kitchen linoleum? Wouldn't that give you at least a peripheral place in his biography? Well, all right, then. He had his collapse, I'm having mine. Come here, now. Let's get this tunic off you. See what kind of merchandise you're offering. Sorry, I wouldn't have ripped it if you had been cooperating. Why fight it? This can be much more meaningful for you if you just spread and give in. There. There. See, you're creaming for me! How can you deny the activity of your own Bartholin glands? This lubrication brands you whore, milady! Ah. In. In. In. That's the ticket. In and out, in and out. *Con amore. Allegro, allegrissimo!* Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am. Zip it up. Out the door. Mad rapist strikes again. Thus we enact the latest fascinating episode in our case of personality disruption. I look so cleancut for being a psychopath. Oops! Hey, no, officer! Put that stunner down! Don't—hey, watch it—I surrender, damn you, I surrender! I'll go peacefully! I'll—go—peacefully—

Blinking furiously, soggy-headed, disoriented, he woke

up. He found himself in bed, his own bed, the covers up around his chin, the lights on in the bedroom. Darkness beyond the window. The sheets cool against his skin: somebody has undressed him. From his elbow there flowed rivulets of agony. For a moment he was totally unable to recollect his last previous period of consciousness; then the incident in the people's restaurant came back to him. Walking out on Lissa. The girl calling after him. Nat Hamlin's voice whispering snakelike in his ear. Calamity. Collapse. Chaos. "Hello?" he said, voice breaking, ragged. "Is anybody here? Hello? Hello? Hello?"

Out of the other room came the girl. Framed in the doorway, naked. Even more slender than he had imagined, ribcage visible, the double ridge of muscle on the flat belly, thighs lean with a gap of an inch or two between them all the way up. The breasts still full, though. Not big boobs but nicely shaped. Triangular red bush. Her skin pink, scrubbed-looking, still moist. She's had a bath. Looks about five years younger now.

"How long have you been up?" she asked him.

"Maybe half a minute. What day is this?"

"It's still the same Monday night. No, it's Tuesday morning by now. Half past one in the morning."

"You brought me home?"

"With some help. There was this cabdriver in the people's restaurant. He carried you out. Christ, I was scared, Paul. I thought you were dead!"

"Did you try to get a doctor?"

She laughed. "At this time of night? I just sat here and watched you and hoped you'd snap out of it. You seemed to be having nightmares. Your eyeballs rolling around under the lids. I touched your mind just once, more or less an accident, and it was pretty scary, something about being chased through a dark alley." Coming over to the bed, she said, "Do you feel all right? Headache?"

"Headache, yes. Jesus."

"After a while it looked like you were just sleeping. So I took a bath, like you said I needed. You should have seen the mud come off me. But you get to feeling so shitty sometimes that you don't even bother to wash yourself, and that's where I was at. Well, that's over, now. I couldn't figure out how to work your cassette player, so I've been inside reading a book, and—"

"What happened to me in the restaurant?" he asked.

She sat on the edge of the bed. He looked at her thighs and wanted to let his hand rest on them, but it took two tries before the quivering arm would lift itself and make the ten-inch journey. Her skin was cool and smooth. He stroked her thigh, up and down, midway between knee and crotch.

She said, "You got up to leave, remember? I didn't think you were going to do it, but you did, and there you were, walking away from me. The one hope I had, walking away from me. And I knew I had hit bottom right there."

"So you called out to me."

"No," she said. "I *reached* out. With my mind."

"You didn't shout my name? Yell at me to come back?"

"I didn't open my mouth. I reached. And I made contact. With both of you."

"Both?"

"I went right into your head, and there was someone called Paul Macy there, yes, but I hit you on another level, too, and I found Nat Hamlin. Coiled up like a spring. Hiding in the dark. I'll never forget it in a million years. My mind arcing across the gap from me to you, and finding two of you. The hidden one. Or the sleeping one, I guess."

—Sleeping is more accurate.

Hamlin's voice. Macy jumped, yanking his hand back from Lissa as though she were a stove.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"I didn't hear anything. But I felt a kind of twinge. A little jolt of ESP action."

"It was Hamlin, talking inside me. He said, 'Sleeping is more accurate.' What the hell's going on, Lissa?"

"He's still inside you," she said.

"No. No. That's impossible. They all said he was gone forever."

"I guess he wasn't," Lissa said. "A little bit of him left, down in the bottom of your head. Maybe you can't ever fully wipe out a personality. Like you can breed a whole new frog if you've got a single cell of the old one's body, and the new one will be identical to the old. Is that right? And so you had a couple of cells of Nat Hamlin still in your head, and I brought them back to life by touching them. I'm sorry, Paul. It's all my fault."

"It isn't possible," he said. "It's just some hallucination I'm having."

—You wish, brother.

"He's really there," Lissa said. "I *felt* him. A presence inside you. The two of you in one head."

"No."

—No?

"I didn't mean to bring him back, Paul. I mean, I loved him, yes, but he was no good, he hurt people, he was a criminal. When they sentenced him to be wiped out, they did the right thing. I don't want him back. How can we get rid of him?"

"Don't worry about that," said Macy. "He was got rid of before. He can be got rid of again."

—Up yours, friend.

Lissa managed a brave smile. She took his hand between hers and clamped it. She looked transformed by soap and hot water, no longer the moody, embittered, disturbed waif of the restaurant. He realized that his collapse now tied her to him. She had brought him home. She had cared for him. He couldn't throw her out. She said, "Can I get you anything? A drink? A gold?"

"Not right now. I'd like to see—if I can stand up—"

"You ought to rest. A nasty shock you had."

"Nevertheless." He swung his legs over the side of the bed and tested his feet a couple of times before putting his weight on them. Precariously rising. Wobbly. Standing there showing his nakedness to her. Then a gesture that astounded him: modestly moving his hand to cover his crotch. Immediately pulling it back; he could think of six different reasons why it was crazy to want to hide himself from her, starting with the fact that she had been this body's other owner's mistress for all those months years ago.

He took a step and another, and found himself in the middle of the room, lurching a little. His left elbow was stiff and sore, which was expectable enough, considering that all his weight had landed on it. Lucky thing it wasn't broken. But there was also a curious numbness around the right side of his face. No sensation in the cheek, and his lips felt funny in the corner of his mouth. As though he'd had an anesthetic shot at the dentist. As though he'd had a stroke, maybe.

He looked at his face in the bedroom mirror. Yes, a little lopsided, the way his father had looked after *his* stroke. The mouth pulled back, the lower eyelid drooping. Macy prodded the numb part of his cheek and tried to push the lips into their proper configuration. Everything hard, like plastic flesh.

—Hi ho.

“Are you doing that?”

“What’s the matter, Paul?”

“My face. He’s holding the muscles. I can’t get him to ease off.”

“Oh, Christ, Paul!” Terrified.

A battle of wills. Her terror infected him. This was grisly, having the side of your face held captive by something in your brain. Like going swimming and coming up with a lobster pinching your cock. He fought back. Tugging at the muscles, trying to soften the flesh. Re-lax—re-lax—re-lax. Yes. Getting the upper hand, or whatever. Some sensation returning, now. The mouth no longer distorted. Hamlin scuttling lobsterlike into deeper recesses of his brain, letting go. Tomorrow I scoot over to the Rehab Center and have this taken care of. A complete and exhaustive burnout of whatever vestiges of the previous self still remain. Macy glanced at the mirror again. Opening and closing his mouth, practicing big grins. The first round goes to me. He stumbled back to the bed and toppled onto it, quivering.

“You’re soaked with sweat!” Lissa cried.

“It was a real struggle. The muscles.”

“I watched it. Your face was writhing and grimacing. It looked like you were going crazy. Here, get back under the covers. You ought to rest. Would you like to smoke?”

“Maybe that’s not such a bad idea.”

She brought two golds over. Solemnly they lit up and went through the ritual of puffing, the deep drag, suck in lots of air. As the hallucinogenic smoke wandered through his lungs he imagined it traveling swiftly to his brain and befuddling the demon that Lissa’s ESP had conjured into life there. Lull him back to sleep. And then, when Hamlin’s groggy, drive a silver spike through his heart. Macy couldn’t feel any trace of the other’s presence now. For all he knew, the pot really knocked him out.

"Turn out the light," Macy said. "Get into bed with me. We'll lie here and smoke."

Her thighs cool against his. He felt feverish. The strain of the last few hours, no doubt. The tips of the golds glowing in the dark. They don't burn as fast now as they did when you had to roll your own. Time to meditate, time to contemplate. But eventually they were gone. Stabbing out the roaches. He was still unable to detect the presence of the passionate, warped soul of Nat Hamlin within him. Pot the panacea, maybe.

He reached toward Lissa.

Moving about in the bed was difficult, because of his sore elbow. Yet he managed. His right arm curling around her back and the hand coming out front on the far side to cup her distant breast. Soft firm bouncy globe, overflowing his clutching fingers. Trapping the nipple gently between index and middle, twitching his digits tenderly to excite her. Then, not easily, he pivoted upward, wriggled, touched his bad arm briefly and dismally against the headboard, and succeeded in wedging his right knee between her thighs without losing his grip on her breast. Her legs parted and he got the top of his knee up against the warmth of her. She made little purring sounds. The trouble was that he couldn't kiss her in this position, his neck simply wouldn't reach, but okay, this would do for now. Tentatively he flexed the stiff arm, planning to slide it across to her groin if it wasn't too painful for him.

This was the first time since he had become Paul Macy that he'd been in bed with a woman.

Oh, they'd given him a set of memories. Probably Gomez had taken care of the programming job, the little horny bastard. Dreaming up phantom lays for him. A proper heterosexual background, not even neglecting a spot of innocent pubescent homophily. Here he was with Jeanie Grossman in the cabin at Mount Rainier. Sweet sixteen, both of them, tiny boobies cold and hard in his hands, Jeanie's long black hair all disheveled, her thighs clamped tight on his probing hand. Oh, no, no, Paul, don't, please don't, she was saying, and then she was breathing hoarsely and murmuring, Be gentle, darling, just the way they said it in the dumb romantic novels Gomez most likely had stolen all this from, Oh, be gentle with me, Paul, it's my first time. On her and in her, wham and bam.

Frantic hasty poking. My first time too, but he doesn't tell her that. Jeanie Grossman gasping out her inaugural orgasm with the white bulk of Mount Ranier peering over her shoulder. But of course it hadn't happened. Not to him. To Gomez, maybe, long ago; maybe Gomez programmed his own sex life into all his reconstructs, for lack of imagination. Poor Jeanie, whoever you are, a hundred different men think they've had your cherry.

And there was much more to Macy's curriculum vita. The married woman, really old, easily past thirty, who had fallen upon him with sudden ferocity when he was seventeen years old and selling encyclopedias in the summer. Sitting next to her on the couch with all his charts outspread, saying, This is an outstanding feature, our three-dimensional visual aids presentation, and we have a choice of six bindings in beautiful decorator colors, and would you like to hear about our brand-new home videotape supplement, and while he prattles she pushes the brochures off his lap and dives for his zipper and then the amazing shattering sensation of her lips engulfing his cock.

Good old Gomez. And the nurse at Gstaad, seducing him in his huge plaster cast. And the plump German girl who liked him to use the butler's entrance. And the one with the rubber underwear and the whips. The endurance contest in Kyoto, too. The orgy on the beach at Herzlia. The dear doctor had stocked him amply with vivid and varied erotica. But what was the use? None of it was real, at least not so far as Paul Macy was concerned, and so he could no more claim it as earned experience than if he had got it all from Henry Miller and the divine marquis. He was minus any authentic lovemaking memories. So in effect he was about to lose his innocence at the age of thirty-nine. But as he fondled Lissa's slim sleek body he realized the value of having had all those imaginary episodes of the flesh implanted in him. A real virgin would be up against anatomical confusions, the mechanics of the thing, the correct angle of entry, all those problems. He at least knew where the way in was to be found. Secondhand knowledge, maybe, but useful. The Rehab Center hadn't turned him loose unable to cope.

One small problem, though. He didn't seem to be able to get it up.

Lissa was primed and ready, nicely lubricated, and his

item still hung slack. Through slitwide eyes she watched him and frowned. The juices souring and curdling in her as she waited to have her vacancy filled. At last understanding the reason for the delay. Cuddling against him; her hand to the scrotum, a light tickling, very skillful. Ah. Yes. Some wind in the sails, finally. The old familiar rigidifying that he had never before experienced. Up. Up. Up. At full mast, now. Swing smoothly around, slide yourself into her. They made adjustments of their positions. She prepared herself to receive him. He was athrob, inflamed, aloft.

Then came a laugh from within and a cold devilish voice:

—Take a look at this, pal.

Blossoming on the screen of his mind the image of Lissa spread wide on another bed in another room, and himself—no, not himself but Nat Hamlin—poised above her, seizing the calves of her legs, draping them over his shoulders, now lowering himself to her with ithyphallic vitality. Nailing her. And as that inward consummation took place Macy felt his own rod lose its vehemence. Limp again; shriveled, infantile, a wee-wee instead of a cock. Wearily he sagged against the girl. Doing it was impossible for him now. Not with *him* watching. I carry my own audience in my head. Hamlin, still roaring with turbulent inner laughter, was sending up scene after scene out of his no doubt actual experience, coupling with Lissa in this position, in that one, Lissa on top, Lissa down on her knees being had dogwise, the whole copulatory biography of their long-ago liaison, and Macy, helpless, his phantom images of Jeanie Grossman and the encyclopedia woman swept away by this gushing incursion of reality, lay stunned and sobbing and impotent waiting for Hamlin to stop tormenting him.

Lissa didn't seem to understand what was happening, only that Macy had lost his hard at a critical moment and was plainly upset about it. Her long thin arms cradled him affectionately. "It's all right," she whispered. "You've been under a terrible strain, and anyway that kind of thing can happen to anybody. It'll be better later. Just lie here and rest. It doesn't matter. It's all right. It's all right." Pressing his cheek against her breast. "Try to get some sleep," she said. He nodded. Closing his eyes, trying to relax. Out of the darkness Hamlin's voice:

—That was just to let you know I'm still here.

## FIVE

SOMETIMES during the night there must have been a flow of strength from her to him, for he had fallen asleep being comforted by her, and he was awakened by the sounds of her sobs. The room very dark: morning some hours away, yet he felt as though he'd had enough sleep. Lissa had her back to him, her bony spine pressing into his chest; she was curled up knees to breasts, making snuffling sounds, and every thirty seconds or so a great racking open-mouthed bed-shaking sob came out of her. Before he could tend to her he had to survey the condition of his own head. All seemed well. He was rested and loose. There was a delicious sense of aloneness between his ears. When he was in contact with Hamlin he felt inwardly cluttered, as though bales of barbed wire were coming unraveled in his skull. None of that now. The alter ego was sleeping, maybe, or at any rate busy in some other realm. Macy put his hand lightly on Lissa's bare shoulder and called her name. She went on sobbing. He shook her gently.

"What?" she said, sounding foggy and far away.

"Tell me what the trouble is."

A long silence. No reply. Had she gone back to sleep? Had she ever been awake?

"Lissa? Lissa, what's the trouble?"

"Trouble?"

"You've been crying."

"It's all a bad dream," she said, and he realized that she was still asleep. She pulled away from him, getting even more tightly into the fetal position. Heaving a terrible sigh. Sounds of weeping. He wrapped himself around her, thighs to her buttocks, his lips just above her ear. Her skin

was cold. She was shivering. "Chasing me," she murmured. "Ten arms, like some kind of octopus."

"Wake up," he said. "It'll all go away if you wake up."

"Why are you so sure?"

And she sent him her dream, nicely wrapped. Popping from her mind to his, clicking smartly into place like a cassette. Jesus. A lunar landscape of crumbling concrete, thousands of miles wide, a million cracks and furrows and fissures. Not a building, not a tree, not a shrub in sight, only this gray-white plateau of flat ruinous stony pavement covering the universe. From above a fierce white light plays on the concrete, so that the upthrust rims of the fissure-lines cast long harsh shadows. A frosty wind blowing. Footsteps. Lissa appears from the right, naked, breathless, running hard, her hair streaming behind her, streaming *into* the wind. Her pale white skin is marked by dozens of circular red cicatrices, suction-marks. And now her pursuer thunders after her. Nat Hamlin, yes, wearing his bland even-featured Anglo-Saxon face, but he has eight, ten, a dozen curling tentacles coming out of his shoulders, tentacles equipped with big ridged sucker-cups. Not hard to tell where Lissa got the red marks on her body. And a dick a yard long sticking out in front of him, like a club. His feet are frog-flippers the size of snowshoes. Thromp! Thromp! Thromp! He comes flapping toward her at an incredible speed. And then there are the voices. People are saying things about her in Sanskrit, in Hungarian, in Basque, in Hopi, in Turkish. Unfavorable comments about her breasts. Snide remarks about her unshaven armpits. A cutting reference to a mole on her left hind cheek. They are laughing at her in Bengali. They are offering her perversions in Polish. She hears everything. She understands everything. Hamlin now has split in two, a double pursuer, one of him somehow coming from the other side of her, and she is trapped between them. Closer . . . closer . . . impaling her fore and aft . . . she screams . . .

I reject this dream, Macy thought. It isn't a necessary nightmare. To hell with it.

"Wake up," he said again, loudly.

Waking her wasn't so easy. She was hovering in a peculiar borderline state, almost a hypnotic trance, in which she was able to hear him and even give him rational answers, without, however, being plugged into the waking

world in any meaningful way. Lost in her hallucinatory horrors. He switched on the light. Half past four in the morning. He'd been sleeping only about two hours, then. Seemed like a full night. Pulling her to a sitting position, he opened her eyes with his thumbs.

She stared blearily at him. Eyes like mirrors, seeing nothing. "Lissa? Jesus, Lissa, *snap out of it!*" Waves of terror rippling across her face. Her sharp little elbows digging hard into her sides, fists balled and held tight to her clavicles. Still sobbing, a quick panicky inhaling and exhaling. Macy hauled her from the bed and frogmarched her into the bathroom. His palm touching the shower control. A computerized cascade of chilly water. Get under, girl. A shriek. As though he were flaying her. But she was awake now.

"My God," she said. "I was on some other planet."

"I know. I know."

"My head's all full of it. A million square miles of cracked pavement. I still see it. And that light shining overhead, such a fucking bright light. And those tentacles."

"They're gone now," he said.

"No. They came out of my head, didn't they? They're still in there, the way Nat Hamlin's in you. I'm going crazy, Paul, isn't that obvious? Christ, hold tight to me. Maybe the octopus is real and this is the dream."

Her teeth were chattering. He wrapped a towel around her and guided her back to the bedroom. Her cheeks felt hot. A high fever raging in her. "I just want to hide somewhere," she said. "To disappear into my own brain, you understand what I mean? To get away into some inner world where nobody can find me. Where I can't hear the voices."

She slithered under the covers, pulling the blankets over her head. A thick mound in the bed, a lump, like a rabbit in a snake's belly. From underneath came muffled words. "What's going to happen to us, Paul? We're both crazy."

Macy got in beside her, and abruptly she turned to him with such fantastic ferocious passion that the breath was knocked from him. Grappling with him, knotting her arms and legs about his. Her belly pushing at his. Her pubic bone jabbing him painfully. Lissa clutching him as if she wanted to devour him. As a boy living in Seattle in the life he hadn't lived, he had watched a starfish in a tide-

pool going to work on a clam, pulling its shell open with its suction cups, then turning itself inside out so that its stomach might go forth and ingest. He thought of that now as Lissa writhed against him. Waiting for something long and slimy to extrude from her slit and begin digesting him. Thank you, Dr. Gomez, for that lovely image. Do you hate women too, you mindfucking bastard?

"Paul," she murmured. "Paul. Paul. Paul." Rhythmic exclamations. To his surprise he found his member stiffening despite everything, and in a single swift gesture he slipped it into her. She was hot and wet. As he speared her he expected Hamlin to surface and interfere with things again, but this time he was allowed the privacy of his genitals. Lissa cried out and came almost immediately. Her spasms were still going on when his began, a million and a quarter years later.

At half past seven he woke again. Lissa seemed to be sleeping soundly. Hamlin quiescent. He showered and went into the little kitchen-cum-dinette. Picked up the phone, tapped out the delayed-message code, and instructed it to call the network at nine to say that he was sick and wouldn't be coming in. Then he called the Rehab Center and arranged for today's post-therapy session to be moved up from four in the afternoon to nine in the morning. He didn't want to lose any time getting the Hamlin problem dealt with. "Will you hold?" the Center's computer asked him, and he held, and two or three minutes later the machine came back to him and said, "I've checked Dr. Ianuzzi's schedule, Mr. Macy, and it will be possible for her to see you at nine today." The computer's face, on telephone screen, was that of an efficient, good-looking brunette. "Fine," Macy said, winking at her.

He peered into the bedroom. Lissa lay face down, one arm dangling to the floor. Snoring faintly. Well, she'd had a hard night. He programmed breakfast for himself.

Macy wondered if Dr. Gomez would be at the Center today. He wanted to see the look on the little Mex's face when he showed up with a supposedly obliterated identity surfacing in his brain. Macy could still hear the doctor's cocky spiel. "If I tell you Hamlin is eradicated, it's because I know Hamlin is eradicated." Sure. "I'm not just being a bullheaded bastard." No, of course not. "Nat Hamlin

doesn't exist any more." You tell it, baby. "Hamlin exists only as an abstract concept." Right on, sweetheart. How was Gomez going to explain any of last night's events? I hope Hamlin spits right in his goddam face. With my mouth.

He thought he had a good idea what had brought Hamlin back to life. Who. Lissa was who. This telepathy business of hers had somehow managed to nudge the expelled ego out of limbo and give him at least a partial grip on his former body. Looking back over his relationship with Lissa, Macy saw the pattern clearly. That first day, two weeks ago exactly, when she'd collided with him on the street, that first moment of recognition, Lissa refusing to honor his Rehab badge and calling him by Nat Hamlin's name: right then, at the beginning, he'd felt a stabbing pain, as if he were Hamlin and back at the Center having his past uprooted. And then, a few minutes later, same incident, when Lissa had leaned close and grabbed his wrist: that feeling of heat in his brain, that sense of an intrusion. Clearly it was her ESP stirring things up in him. Producing an instant of confusion, of double identity, when he wasn't sure whether he was Hamlin or Macy. Probably that was the moment at which Hamlin's return to conscious existence was stimulated. When I got that vision of myself in Hamlin's studio, Lissa posing for me. And thought I was having a heart attack on the street.

And then? Later the same day, when he almost passed out in front of Harold Griswold's Hamlin sculpture, that must have been Hamlin giving a wild whoop and a leap inside him at the sight of something familiar. That night he had the first of his pursuit dreams. Hamlin loose in his head, and chasing him. Next? When Lissa sent the letter threatening suicide, and he met her on the street. Good Christ, was that only last night? And he walked up to her and there was that doubleness again, the nausea, the confusion. No doubt she had given Hamlin another little nudge. Lastly, when he tried to leave her in the restaurant, and she cried out for him to come back. The sheer mental voltage of that must have been the clincher, awakening Hamlin fully, giving him a chance to jump to the conscious level. He was so stunned by Lissa's telepathic scream that Hamlin was able to grab some of the cerebral centers and start talking to him. Even to seize the facial muscles on the

right side, for a little while. He doesn't have solid control of anything, not for long, he holds on a while and slips away, but he's there. Lissa's fault. Of course she didn't intend to. A weird telepathic accident, is all. Or maybe not so accidental. It was Hamlin she loved, he thought; I'm just a stranger in his body. Suppose this is her way of getting rid of me and helping him come back.

No.

He didn't want to believe that. She hadn't meant to yank Hamlin into consciousness. All the same, she was responsible. Now he had to get Hamlin removed again. Anguish and turmoil, most likely. After which he'd better not fool around with Lissa. Self-preservation has to come before concern for others, right? Out she goes.

The Rehab Center was just across the Connecticut line in Greenwich. Ten minutes by long-hop gravity tube from Manhattan North. Macy took the uptown shuttle to the nearest loading point for the tube. A gray, misty morning, more like late autumn than like late spring. Taut-faced commuters running this way and that. Most of them going the other way, thank God. They kept bumping into him. Giving him funny stares and going on. For over a week now he had been free of his obsession that people were staring at him, but this morning it returned. The Rehab badge seemed like a beacon drawing all eyes. Announcing: Here walks a former sinner. Doer of dreadful deeds! Behind this bland mask lurks the purified brain of a famous criminal. Do you recognize him? Do you remember the news stories? Go up close, take a good look, enlarge your life-experience through a moment of proximity with somebody who has been a household word. Guaranteed not to harm you. Guaranteed to be regenerated and redeemed from sin. He walks, he talks, he suffers like an ordinary human being! See the former monster! See! See! See!

"Greenwich," Macy said huskily to the ticket-scanner, and tapped out his account number. From the slot came a plastic ticket with thin golden filaments embedded in it. Clutching it tightly, Macy made his way to the loading gate. The doors of the train were open. Plenty of seats inside. He found one next to the wall. No windows in here. People drifting aboard. He sat passively, thinking as little as possible. Floating in here. Just as the train itself,

within its tube, floated in a larger tube on a two-foot-deep cushion of water.

"All aboard," the computer voice calls. The pressure-tight door sliding shut. We are sealed within. Gliding forward, through the airlock. The valve swinging open. Near-vacuum in front of the train, full pressure behind: the train goes squirting into the tube. Very clever. Little sensation of motion, because of the dynamic flotation system and the sleek roller-bearing wheels. Onward, zooming silently eastward, driven by cunning pneumatic forces, the air to the train's rear gradually becoming more tenuous, the air in front undergoing steady compression. Ultimately the air in front will be our cushion for deceleration. Meanwhile gravity also drives us as we swoop through a gently sloping tunnel. To the midpoint, where we will begin to rise and slow. How shrew these engineers are. If I could only ride the tube all day, coasting from here to there and back again at a lovely 300 mph. The ecstasies of free fall. Or almost free.

Macy sat with eyes closed. Not a twitch out of Hamlin. Stay hidden, you murderous bastard. Stay hidden.

He didn't understand how it was possible for Hamlin to have come back. At the Center he had picked up a good working knowledge of the Rehab process, and from what he knew of it he couldn't see any chance for the spontaneous or evoked resurrection of an obliterated identity. What's identity, after all, if not just the sum of all the programming we've received since the initial obstetrical slap on the rear? They pump into us a name, a set of kinship relations, a structural outlook toward society, and a succession of life experiences. And after a while feedback mechanisms come into play, so that what we've already become directs our choice of further shaping experiences, thereby reinforcing the contours of the existing self, creating the attitudes and responses that we and others consider "typical" of that self. Fine. And this accumulation of events and attitudes is engraved on the brain, first in the form of electrical impulses and patterns, then, as short-term memories are accepted for long-term storage, in the form of chains of complex molecules, registering in the chemical structure of the brain's cells.

And so, to undo the identity-creating process, one merely undoes the electrochemical patterns by which the identity

is recorded. A little electronic scrambling, first, to inhibit synapse transmission and rearrange the way the electrons jump in the brain. Then, when defenses are down, start the chemical attack. A shot of acetylcholine terminase to interfere with short-term memory fixation. One of the puromycin derivatives to wash out the involuted chains of ribonucleic acid, brain-RNA, that keep memories permanently inscribed in the brain. Flush the system with amnesic-facient drugs, and presto! The web of experiences and attitudes is wiped away, leaving the body a tabula rasa, a blank sheet, without identity, without soul, without memory. So, then: feed in a new identity, any identity you like. Building takes longer than destroying, naturally. You start with a vacant hulk that has certain basic motor reactions left and nothing else: it knows how to tie its shoelaces, how to blow its nose, how to make articulate sounds. Unless the wipeout job has been done with excessive zeal, it can even speak, read, and write, though probably on a six-year-old level. Now give it a name. Using nifty hypnagogic techniques, feed it its new biography: here is where you went to school, this is your mother, this is your father, these were your childhood friends, these were your hobbies. It doesn't have to be crystalline in its consistency; most of our memories are mush anyway, out of which a bright strand projects here and there. Stuff the reconstruct with enough of a past so he won't feel disembodied. Then train him for adult life: give him some job skills, social graces, remind him what sex is all about, et cetera, et cetera. The peripheral stuff, reading and writing and language, comes back faster than you'd imagine. But the old identity *never* comes back, because it's been hit by fifty megatons of fragmentation bombs, it's been totally smashed. Right down on the cellular level, everything making up that identity has been sluiced away by the clever drugs. It's gone.

Unless. Somehow. Skulking in the cellular recesses, traces of the old self manage to remain, like scum on a pond, a mere film of demolished identity, and from this film, given the right circumstances, the old self can rebuild itself and take command of its body. What are the right circumstances? None, if you listen to Gomez & Co. No recorded case of an identity reestablishing itself after a court-ordered eradication has been carried out. But how

many reconstructs have ever been exposed to ESP? The full blast of a telepath reaching out toward old and new identities simultaneously? It's a statistical problem. There are  $x$  number of reconstructs walking around today. And  $y$  number of telepaths.  $X$  is a very small number and  $y$  is even smaller than that. So what are the odds against an  $x$  meeting a  $y$ ? So big, apparently, that this is the first time it's ever happened. And now look. That psychopathic fucker Hamlin crawling around loose in my brain. Why mine?

"Greenwich," said the voice of the computer, and the train slid placidly to a halt on its cushion of compressed air.

The Rehab Center was north of the city, in the old estate district, which through inspired and desperate zoning arrangements had managed to resist the grinding glacier of population pressures which had devastated most of suburbia. Several acts of reconstruction and rehabilitation had been performed on the Center itself. The main building, a gray pseudo-Tudor stone pile three stories high, with groined stockbroker-Gothic ceilings and leaded-glass windows, had been a private residence in the middle twentieth century, the mansion of some old robber baron, a speculator in energy options. In the end the speculator had outsmarted himself and gone into bankruptcy; the big house then had been transformed into the headquarters of a therapy cult that relied a good deal on year-round nudity, and it was in this era that the five plastic geodesic domes had been erected, forming a giant pentagram around the main building, to serve as wintertime solaria. Recriminations and lawsuits did the cult in within five years, and the place became an avant-garde secondary school, where the scions of the Connecticut gentry took courses in copulatory gymnastics, polarity traumas, and social relativity. The various minor outbuildings, with many ingenious electronic facilities, were added at this time. The school collapsed before it had produced its first graduating class, and the county, taking possession of the premises for nonpayment of realty taxes, speedily turned it into the first Rehab Center in the western half of the state in order to qualify for the federal matching-funds grant then being offered; the na-

tional government, eager to get the Rehab program off to a fast start, was throwing its meager resources around quite grandly then.

As one rode up the thousand-yard-long driveway leading to the main building, one could behold all the discrete strata of construction marking the epochs of the Center's past, and, if one were imaginatively inclined, one might envision the old speculator placing phone calls from pool-side, the health fanatics toasting in the solaria, the youthful scholars elaborately fornicating on the lawn, all at once, while through the leafy glades wandered today's candidates for personality rehabilitation, smiling blankly as voices out of earphones purred their pasts to them.

Macy saw none of these things today, not even the driveway. For, as he emerged from the tube station in downtown Greenwich and looked about for an autotaxi to take him up to the Center, he felt a sensation much like that of a hatchet landing between his shoulder blades, and toppled forward, dazed and retching, sprawling to the pavement. For some moments he lay half-conscious on the elegant blue and white terrazzo tiling of the station entrance. Then, recovering somewhat, he managed to scramble up until he crouched on hands and knees, like a tipsy sprinter awaiting the starter's gun. More than that he could not do. Rising to a standing position was beyond him now.Flushed, sweating, stricken, he waited for his strength to return and hoped someone would help him up.

No one did. The commuters obligingly parted their ranks and flowed by him to either side. A boulder in a stream. No one offers to assist a boulder. Perhaps they have a lot of epileptics in Greenwich. Can't let yourself get worked up over one of *those*. Damned troublemakers always flopping on their faces, chewing on their tongues: how's a man going to get to work on time if he stops for them every morning?

Macy listened to time tolling in his head. One minute, two, three. What had happened? This was the second time in the last eighteen hours that he'd been clubbed down from within. *Hamlin*?

—You bet your ass.

*What did you do to me?*

—Gave you a leetle twitch in the autonomic nervous system. I'm sitting right here looking at it. A bunch of ropes

and cords, the most complicated frigging mess you could imagine. I just reached out and went *plink*.

Another shaft of pain between the shoulder blades.

*Stop it, Macy said. Jesus, why are you doing that?*

—Self preservation. Like you said a little while ago, self-preservation has to come before concern for others, right?

*Can you hear all my thoughts?*

—Enough of them. Enough to know when I'm being threatened.

*Threatened?*

—Sure. Where were you heading when I knocked you off your feet?

*The Rehab Center, Macy admitted.*

—That's right. And what were you going to do there?

*I was going for my weekly post-therapy therapy session.*

—Like shit you were. You were going to tell the doctors that I had come back to life.

*And if I was?*

—Don't try to play innocent. You were going to have them blot me out again, right? Right, Macy?

*Well—*

*—Admit it!*

Macy, crouching on the shining tiles, attempted to call for help. A soft mewing sound came from him. The commuters continued to stream past. A flotilla of attaché cases and portable terminals. Please. Please. Help me.

From Hamlin, a second time:

*—Admit it!*

*Let me alone.*

Macy felt a sudden explosion of agony behind his breastbone. As if a hand had clasped itself about his heart for a quick powerful squeeze. Setting the valves aflat, emptying the ventricles, pinching the aorta.

—I'm learning my way around in here, pal. I can do all kinds of things today that I couldn't swing yesterday. Like tickling your heart. Isn't that a lovely sensation? Now, suppose you tell me why you were in such a hurry to get to the Rehab Center, and it better be the right answer.

*To have you obliterated again, Macy confessed miserably.*

—Yes. Yes. The dirty truth will out! You were conspiring in my murder, weren't you? I never murdered anybody in my life, you understand, I merely took a few

liberties with my prick, and nevertheless the state was pleased to order my death—

*Your rehabilitation*, said Macy.

—My death, Hamlin shot back at him, giving him a tug on the right tricep by way of emphasis. They killed me and put somebody else in my body, only I came back to life, and you were going to have them kill me again. We don't need to debate the semantics of the point. Stand up, Macy.

Macy cautiously tested his strength and found that his legs now would support him. He rose, very slowly, feeling immensely fragile. A few tottering steps. Knees shaking. Skin clammy. Dryness in the throat.

—Now, friend, we have to get something understood. You aren't going to go to the Rehab Center today. You aren't going to go there at all, ever again, because the Center is a dangerous place for me, and so in order to keep you away I'll have to make it a dangerous place for you too. Let me give you just a taste of what will happen to you if you come within five miles of a Rehab Center. Just a taste.

Again, the hand tightening around his heart. But no mere squeeze this time. A fierce gripping full-strength clench. It knocked Macy down once more. Gradually the inner grasp was relaxed, but it left him nauseated and feeble, and a terrible thunder reverberated in his chest. Cheek to the tile, he kicked his legs in a frenzy of pain. This time his anguish was too visible to be ignored, and he was seized by passersby and hoisted to his feet.

“You okay? Some kind of fit?”

“Please—if I could just sit down somewhere—”

“You need a doctor?”

“It's only a little chest spasm—I've had them before—”

They took him inside. A bench in the waiting room. Advert globes floating in the air. Blinking their messages into his face. He was numb. Impossible even to think. A constant stream of people flowing by. Trains arriving, departing. Voices. Colors. After a while, his strength returned.

—If you try to go back for reconditioning, Macy, that's what I'll do to you, and not just a little squeeze. If necessary I'll shut off your heart altogether. I can do it. I see where the nerve connections are now.

*But then you'll die too*, Macy said.

—That's true. If it's necessary for me to interrupt the

life-processes of this body that we're sharing, we'll both die. So what? I don't expect you to commit suicide for the sake of getting rid of me. But I'm perfectly prepared to commit suicide for the sake of *keeping* you from getting rid of me, because I've got no choice. I'm a dead man anyway if you get inside a Rehab Center. So I offer you the ultimate threat. Keep away, or else. It wouldn't be smart of you to call my bluff. For both our sakes, don't.

*I'm supposed to show up for weekly post-therapy therapy sessions, though.*

—Skip them.

*It's part of the court decree. If I don't show up, they're likely to issue a warrant for me.*

—We'll worry about that when the time comes. Meanwhile forget about therapy sessions.

*But we can't share a body, Macy protested. It's insanity. There's no room for two of us.*

—Don't worry about that now, either. We'll work something out. For the time being we're sharing, and you fucking well better accept the idea. Now get yourself aboard a city-bound train. Put some distance between me and that Center.

# SIX

HOME again, midmorning. His head throbbing. Not a peep out of Hamlin all the way back. The apartment seemed to have undergone a strange transformation in the two hours of his absence: previously a neutral place, wholly lacking emotional connotations, and now an alien and sinister cell, cramped and repellent.

The flat's dark new tone astonished him. Its mysterious autumnal resonances. Its shadows where no shadows had been. Nothing had changed in it, really. Lissa hadn't moved any furniture around or sprayed the walls a different color. And yet. And yet, how frightening it all looked now. How out of place he felt in it. That L-shaped bedroom, low ceiling, narrow bed jammed up against flimsy wall, old-fashioned light fixture dangling, bilious green paint, cheap smeary Picasso prints, slit of a window revealing splotchy May sunshine and two scraggly trees across the street—how ugly it looked, how coarse, how constricted, how squashed! Did people really live in places like this? Tiny bathroom, slick pink tiles. Not even an ultrasonic cleanser, just archaic sink and tub and crapper. A microscopic kitchen-dinette affair, everything jammed together, table, freezer, telephone screen, disposal unit, stove. At least a tiny buzz-cleanser for the dirty dishes. A sitting-room, cheap red plastic couch, some books, cassettes, a video unit.

A prison for the soul. Our impoverished century: this is the best we can afford for human beings, after our long orgies of waste and destruction. For the last couple of weeks, this apartment had been his refuge, his harbor, his hermitage; if he thought about it at all, which he doubted, it had been in a friendly way. Why did it turn him off now? After a moment, he believed he knew. Hamlin's sensibility

now underlay his own. The sculptor's sophisticated perceptions bleeding through to the Macy levels of their shared mind. Hamlin's loathing for the apartment tinged Macy's view of it. To Hamlin the proportions were wrong, the ambiance vile, the psychological texture of the place slimy and grimy, the inner environmental color a nasty one. Macy shivered. He visualized Hamlin as a kind of abscess in his brain, a pocket of pus, inaccessible, destructive.

Lissa was still in bed. That bothered him. The Protestant ethic: sleeping late equals rejection of life.

But she wasn't asleep. Stirring lazily, sitting up, knuckles to eyes. A purring yawn. "Everything taken care of?" she asked.

"No."

"What happened?"

He told her about the episode at the Greenwich terminal. Wriggling on the blue and white terrazzo with fire in his chest. Hamlin playfully strumming the harp of his autonomic nervous system. Lissa listened, big-eyed, somber-faced, and said finally, "What are you going to do?"

"I haven't any idea."

"But that's hideous. Having him inside you like a parasite. A crab hiding in your head. Like a case of brain cancer. Look, maybe if I call the Rehab Center—"

A warning twinge from Hamlin, deep down.

"No," Macy said.

"I could tell them what's happened. Maybe this has happened before. Maybe they know some way to deal with him."

"The moment they tried anything," he said, "Hamlin would stop my heartbeat. I know that."

"But if there's some drug that might knock him out—I could slip it to you somehow—"

"He's listening right now, Lissa. Don't you think he'll be on guard constantly? He may not even need to sleep. We can't take chances."

"But how can you go on with somebody else inside your head, trying to take you over?"

Macy pondered that one. "What makes you think he's trying to take me over?"

"Isn't it obvious? He wants his body back. He'll try to cut you down, one block of nerves at a time, until there's

nothing left of you at all. He'll push you out. And then he'll be Nat Hamlin again."

"He just said he wanted to share the body with me," Macy muttered.

"Will he stop there? Why should he?"

"But Nat Hamlin's a proscribed criminal. Legally he doesn't even exist any more. If he tried to return to life—"

"Oh, he'd go on using the Macy identity," Lissa said. "Only he'd take up sculpting again, in another country, maybe. He'd look up his old friends. He'd be the old Hamlin, except his passport would say Macy, and—" She halted. "He'd look up his old friends," she repeated. She seemed to be examining the idea from various angles. "Old friends such as me."

"Yes. You." In a tone that he recognized as unpleasant, but which he found impossible to alter, Macy said, "He could even marry you. As he was originally planning to do."

"His wife is still alive, I'm sure."

"That marriage was legally dissolved at the time he was sentenced," Macy said. "It's automatic. They cut all ties. Officially, he wouldn't be Hamlin even if he took over. He'd be Macy, and Macy is single. There you are, Lissa." The edge of cruelty coming into his voice again. "You'd finally get to be his wife. What you've always wanted."

She shook her head. "I don't want it any more."

"You said you loved him."

"I once did love him. But I told you, that's all dead now. The things he did. The crimes. The rapes."

"The first time we met," said Macy heavily, "when you were still insisting on calling me Nat, you made a point of saying you were still in love with me. The old me. *Him*. You said it two or three times. Talking about how much you missed him. Refusing to believe that there was somebody new living behind his face."

"You misunderstand," she said. "I felt so lonely. So fucking *lost*. And all of a sudden I was standing next to somebody I knew, somebody out of the past—I just wanted help, I had to talk to him—I mean, I crashed right into you in the street, was I supposed to walk away and not even say hello?"

"You saw my Rehab badge and you ignored it."

"I didn't see it at all."

"You must have blanked it out deliberately. You knew Nat Hamlin had been put away for Rehab."

"You're shouting at me."

"I'm sorry. I can't help it. I'm tense as hell, Lissa. Look, so you saw somebody in the street and you thought he was Nat Hamlin, so you said hello, but did you have to tell him you were still in love with him, too?"

"I didn't mean it."

"You said it."

"What else could I do?" she asked. Her voice was shrill now. "Stand there and say, Hello, you look like Nat Hamlin who I used to love, and of course I don't love him any more and in any case he's been wiped out but since you look just like him I'll fall in love with you instead, so let's go home and ball a little? How could I say that? But I couldn't let you just vanish without saying something to you. I was making a stab at the past, trying to catch it, trying to bring it back. The beautiful past, before the hellish part started. And you were my only link to that, Paul, and I was excited, and I said Nat, Nat, I talked about being in love—"

"Exactly. You called me Nat, and said you were still in love with—"

"Why are you doing this to me, Paul?"

"Doing what?"

"Chewing on me. Shouting. All these questions."

"I'm trying to find out which one of us you're really loyal to. Hamlin or me. Which side you're going to take when the struggle for this body gets rough."

"You aren't trying to find out any such thing. You just want to hurt me."

"Why should I want to—"

"How would I know? Because you blame me for bringing him back to life, maybe. Because you hate me for having loved him once. Because he's sitting inside you right now forcing you to hurt me. I don't know. Christ, I don't know at all. Only why do you need to find out where my loyalty is? Didn't I tell you last night that I didn't want him coming back? Didn't I offer to call the Rehab Center just now?"

"Yes. Yes."

"So how could I possibly be on his side? I want him to

be wiped out. I want him gone forever. I want—oh, Christ—”

She halted suddenly. Leaping from the bed as though stung, arms and legs flying stiffly out from her torso. Turning toward him. Her face contorted, the eyes bulging, the mouth a rigid hole, the muscles of her throat bunched and jutting. From her lips a bizarre clotted baritone, hoarse and unfocused, like the blunt blurtings of a deaf-mute, no words intelligible: “*Mfss. Shrrm. Skk-kk. Vshh. Vshh. Vshh.*” A terrible gargling cry, all the more horrible because of the deep masculine tone in which it was delivered.

She lurched around the room, stumbling into things, clawing at the air. A plain case of demonic possession. What rides her?

“*Grkk. Lll. Llll. Pkd-dd.*” Eyes wild, pleading. Bare breasts heaving wildly. A sheen of sweat on her skin.

Macy rushed toward her, trying to embrace her, calm her, ease her back to the bed. She pivoted like a robot and her arm crashed across his chest, doubling him up in gasps. When he looked at her again her face was scarlet with strain and her mouth was open to the full reach of her jaws, beyond it, perhaps. The wild gargling sounds still erupted from her, and her eyes registered total horror and despair.

Once again Macy tried to seize her. This time successfully. Muscles leaping and churning and twitching all over her spare naked form. He forced her down on the bed and covered her with his body, hands gripping her wrists, knees imprisoning her thighs. A sour smell of sweat rising from her, bad sweat, fear-sweat.

Some kind of epileptic fit? Epilepsy was much on his mind this morning. In a low urgent voice he talked to her, tried to soothe her, to reach her somehow. More baritone drivel coming out of her in halting husky bleeps of thick noise. The static of the soul.

“Lissa?” he said. “Lissa, can you hear me? Try to go limp. Let all your muscles hang loose.”

Easier said than done. She still twitched. While in the midst of this he felt a hot sensation at the base of his skull, as of an auger drilling into him. Or drilling toward the outside from the soft center of his brain. Something jumped frantically within his mouth, and it was a moment before

he realized that it was his tongue, jerking itself crazily backward toward his gullet. "Vshh. Vshh. Pkd-dd. Slrr. Msss." The sounds not from Lissa this time. From him.

Lying there congealed and coagulated on top of Lissa, he understood perfectly what was happening. Nat Hamlin, having conserved his strength for a couple of hours, was trying to achieve a takeover of a new level of their shared brain. Specifically, Hamlin was attempting to grab Macy's speech centers.

Macy knew that that would mark the start of his own obliteration; once Hamlin had control of the voice, it would be *his* thoughts, not Macy's, that their body would express. Hamlin would have access to the external world and Macy would be shut inside. But at the moment Hamlin wasn't doing too well. He had grabbed the neural sectors governing speech, only his grasp was incomplete, and the best he could manage were these bursts of nonsense. Somehow, Macy realized, Lissa had become entangled in the battle before he himself had known it was going on. Her brain hooked into his; Hamlin speaking, or trying to, through her mouth. A microphoning effect of some kind. Now they were both doing it, the two of them bellowing like demented seals. Feeding hour at the zoo. Is this where it ends? Does Hamlin take over from me now? No. No. Fight back. Stop him here and drive him into a corner.

How, though?

The way you did last night, when he had hold of the side of your mouth. Pry him loose. Through sheer strength of concentration, break his grip.

Macy tried to visualize the interior of his brain. Telling himself, This is where Hamlin lives, this pocket of gunk, and these are the pathways he's been building to other parts of my brain, and this is the place he's attacking now. It was a purely imaginary construct, but it would serve for the moment. Try to visualize the speech centers themselves. Say, row upon row of tight-strung pink cords, a kind of piano deal, with a switchboard attached. Hamlin at the switchboard, plugging things in, looking for the right connection; and the pink cords, all ajangle, giving off weird groaning noises. Come up behind him. Grab his arms. He isn't any stronger than you are. Pull him away, knock him on his ass. Jump on him. Careful, don't smash any of the machinery. You'll need it when this is over. Just hang on

to him. Stay on top. Pin him, pin him, pin him! Good! Smash his head against the floor a couple of times! Okay, the floor's spongy, it gives a little, smash him anyway. Stun him. Right. Now start hauling him the hell out of there. Heavy fucker, isn't he? One hundred ninety pounds, same as you. Heave. Heave. Heave. Into this musty corridor. A hot humid smell coming out of it. Things must be rotting in there. In with him! Down the chute! Slam the door. There. Easier than you expected, eh? All it takes is some mental energy. Perseverance. You can relax now. Catch your breath.

Hey, Jesus, what's this? He must have come to, in there. Hammering on the other side of the door. Starting to push it open. Wow, you can't let him do that. Hold it closed! Push . . . push . . . push . . . a stalemate. He can't get it open any farther, you can't close it that last crack. *Push*. He's pushing back. *Push*. *Push*. Bear down. Oh, Jesus. There! It's closed again. All right, keep your shoulder to the door, hold it tight. The bear's locked in his cave; you don't want him coming out again.

Now fasten the door. With what? Slip a bolt in place, dodo. But there isn't a bolt. Sure there is. This is your mind, your own fucking mind, can't you use a little imagination? Invent a bolt! Like that. Fine. Now ram it home. In the slot. In. In. There. Okay, step back. See if he can break out. Be ready to clobber him if he does. He's banging on the door. Throwing himself against it. But the bolt holds. It holds. Good deal. Let's check out the machinery now. Make sure he didn't screw it up. Loud and clear, let's hear it:

"My name is Paul Macy."

Good. Nice to hear some sense out of your mouth again. Keep going.

"I was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho, on the twelfth of March, 1972. My father was a propulsion engineer and my mother was a schoolteacher."

Voice production generally okay. A little rusty around the edges, a little froggy in the lower frequencies, but that's only to be expected, the way he was abusing your pipes. It'll clear up fast, most likely.

You win this round, Macy.

Slowly, shakily, he rose from the bed. Lissa still lay there, looking crumpled and flattened. She didn't move.

Her face had resumed its normal appearance. Her eyes were open. No glow in them. A sullen, absent expression.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

No response. Off in another galaxy somewhere.

"Lissa? Are you okay?"

Staring blankly at him, she said, "Do you give a shit if I am?" Her voice was as hoarse as his.

"What kind of question is that?"

"You were really letting me have it before all the fireworks started," she said. "Telling me you suspected I was on his side, and a lot of other crap. If I had any sense I'd get the hell away from you, fast. I don't need to be pushed around like that." She stood up, huddling her arms against her sides, looking more vulnerable than ever. The blue streaks of veins visible in her breasts. Stretch marks in the skin of her hips, showing where she had lost weight lately. Quick angry motions. Snatching at her clothes, throwing things on. A blouse, a tunic. She said, "That was him, wasn't it? Hamlin? Trying to talk through my voice?"

"And then through mine, yes."

"Where did he go?"

"I beat him down. I made him let go."

"Hurray for you." Tonelessly. "My hero. You see my sandals anywhere?"

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"This is a crazyhouse. I'm worse off here than I was alone. I'm going home."

"No," he said. He remembered that he had decided, only this dawn, to sever her from his life once the Rehab Center had plucked the resurgent Nat Hamlin from his brain. Telling himself then that it was too dangerous to have her around him, because of her gift, her curse, whatever it was that had awakened Hamlin. Out she goes, he had decided. Self-preservation first and always. Out she goes. How hollow that sounded to him now. He still had Hamlin inside him, and he was frightened by the thought of having to grapple with him in solitude. Lissa wasn't as dispensable now as she had seemed earlier. "Don't go," he said. "Please."

"I'll get nothing but trouble here."

"I didn't mean to yell at you. My nerves were raw, is all. You can understand that. I didn't intend to accuse you of anything, Lissa."

"Even so. You got me all stirred up. And then *him*,

jumping into my head. The sounds I was making. I never did that before. Like I was some kind of ventriloquist's dummy, and I could feel Nat trying to move my lips, trying to push my vocal cords, trying to get his words out through me—" She seemed to gag on something. "It was coming out of you, Paul. I thought my head would blow. I don't want to go through that again."

"I beat him back," Macy said. "I shut him off."

"And if he gets out again? Or if you start suspecting me again? Asking me if I'm really on his side? Maybe next time you'll bang me around some. You could break my arms. You could knock all my teeth out. And then you'd apologize later."

"There's no possibility of that."

"But you've got reason to be hostile. I'm responsible for waking him up inside you, right? Even if I wanted to stay here, you know, it wouldn't be smart for you if I did. Maybe he'll use me now to finish the takeover of your body. Play his mental energy through my ESP output, or something. He almost did that just now, didn't he? Do you want to chance it?"

"Who knows?" Macy said. He caught her by the arm as she moved slowly toward the door. "Do I have to beg you, Lissa? Don't leave me now."

"First you didn't want anything to do with me. Then you screamed at me that you didn't trust me. Now you don't want me to go. I can't figure you, Paul. When somebody comes out of a Rehab Center, he's supposed to be sane, isn't he? You scare me too much. I want to get out of here."

"Please. Stay."

"What for?"

"To help me fight against him. I need you. And you need me. We can support each other. Separately we're both going to go under. Together—"

"Together we'll both go under too," she said. Moving no closer to the door, though. "Look, I thought you could help me, Paul. That's why I wrote you at the network, that's why I begged you to see me. But now I realize that your troubles are as bad as mine. Worse, maybe. I just hear voices from outside. You've got somebody else in your head. On account of me. We can only harm each other."

"No."

"You ought to believe it. Look what I've already done to you, bringing *him* back. And then you, bouncing him into my head for a couple of minutes. And on and on and on like that, things getting worse and worse and worse for both of us."

He shook his head. "I'm going to fight. I've beaten him twice in two days. Next time I'll finish him altogether. But I don't want to be alone while I'm doing it."

Shrugging, she said, "Don't blame me if—"

"I won't." He looked at the time. A sudden bold idea hooking him. By their works ye shall know them. Yes. Go to the museum, see his version of Lissa. Look at her through his eyes.

An unexpectedly powerful hunger rose in him to know the real past, to find out what manner of man he had been, what he had been capable of creating. In a sense what *I* was capable of, in my other self. And the sculpture of Lissa a bridge to that hidden past. Leading him out of this shadowy unlife into the realm of authentic experience. *He* did this, *he* made it, *his* unique and irreplaceable vision was at work. And I must understand him in order to defeat him.

Macy said, "Listen, there's no sense in my going to the office this late in the day. But we've still got the whole afternoon. You know where I want to go? The Metropolitan Museum. To see the sculpture he did of you, the *Antigone* 21."

"Why?"

"Old maxim: Know your enemy. I want to see his interpretation of you. Find out what his mind is like. Size him up, look for the places where I can attack."

"I don't think we should go. It could trigger anything, Paul. You said yourself, how at your office you saw one of his pieces and it almost knocked you out. Suppose at the museum—"

"I was caught by surprise that first time. This is different. I've got to take the offensive, Lissa. Carry the battle to him, do you see? And the museum's as good a place to start as any. Showing him that I can hold my own under any conditions. All right? Let's go, shall we? The museum."

"All right," she said distantly. "The museum."

## SEVEN

ENTERING the huge building, he felt apprehensive and ill at ease. An overwhelming sense of not belonging in this vast and labyrinthine palace of culture oppressed him.

Searching his stock of synthetic memories, he couldn't find any recollection of having been here before. Or any other art museum. The Rehab people hadn't built a strong interest in the visual arts into him, it seemed. Music, yes. The theater. Even ballet. But not sculpture, not painting, not anything that was likely to impinge on the world Nat Hamlin had inhabited. A deliberate divergence from the abolished past.

Still, why was he so edgy about going in? Afraid of being recognized, maybe? People turning, whispering, pointing? Look, that's Nathaniel Hamlin, the famous psychosculptor. He did that naked woman we saw before. Hamlin. Hamlin. That man looks just like Hamlin. Requiring you to say something by way of correction. Pardon me, ma'am, you are in error. My name is Paul Macy. Never done a sculpture in my life. Ostentatiously rubbing your Rehab badge. Thrusting it in her eyes. I must tell you, ma'am, that Nathaniel Hamlin has become an unperson. And the woman fading away in embarrassment, heels clicking on the stone floor, looking back at him over her shoulder, sniffing a little in disdain. Maybe even reporting him to a guard for molesting her.

Macy smiled sourly and swept the whole scenario away. Not much chance of any of that happening. Rembrandt could walk through this place and nobody'd recognize him. Michelangelo. Picasso. Mommy, who's that funny little bald-headed man? Shh, dear, I think that's some senator. Yes. Macy shook off his apprehensions. They went inside.

Just within the main entrance they were held for a moment in a cone of tingling blue light, some kind of scanning device ascertaining that they carried no explosives, knives, cans of paint, or other instruments of vandalism. Evidently there was a lot of free-floating masterpiece-directed hostility in this city. They passed the test and advanced into the colossal central hall. Pink granite pharaohs to the left; bleached marble Apollos to the right. Straight ahead, an immense dizzying vista of receding hallway. The dry smell of the past in here: the nineteenth century, the fourteenth, the third.

"Where is it?" he asked. "Your statue."

"Second floor, all the way in the back, the modern art wing," Lissa said. Once again she seemed remote and abstracted. She slipped easily into that kind of withdrawal, that closed-and-sealed surliness. "You go, Paul. I'll wait here and do the Egyptian stuff or something. I don't want to see it."

"I'd like you to come with me."

"No."

"Jesus, why not?"

"Because it shows how beautiful I was. I don't want to be in the room with you when you see it. And when you turn and look at me afterward and see what I've become. Go on, Paul. You won't have any trouble finding it."

He was stubborn. Refusing to leave her. Unwilling to face the Hamlin piece without her. Suppose the sight of it struck him down again; who would help him up? But she was equally firm. Not going with him, simply not going. The museum expedition was his crazy idea, not hers. She couldn't bear to see that piece. Won't you? I won't. I won't. A tense little scene in the grand hallway. Their harsh whispers echoing from alabaster arcades. People staring at them as they bickered. He half expected someone to say, any minute, Say, isn't that the sculptor Nathaniel Hamlin? Over there, the big one arguing with the redhead. Terrified by that irrational prospect. His discomfort grew so strong that he was on the verge of letting her have her way when suddenly she nipped her upper lip with her lower teeth, pressed her knuckles to her jawbone, hunched her shoulders as if trying to touch her earlobes with them, sucked in her cheeks. Began quirking her mouth from side to side. Possibly she was being skewered by invisible

darts. Eyes wild. Glossy with panic. Saying to him, after some moments, in a veiled, barely audible voice: "Okay, come on, then. I'll go with you. But hurry!"

"What's happening to you, Lissa?"

"I'm picking up voices again." A fusillade of twitches distorting her face. "They're bouncing off the walls, a dozen different strands of thought. Getting louder and louder. All garbled up. Christ, get me out of this room. *Get me out of this room.*"

Everybody in the museum must have heard that. She seemed about to come apart.

He took her elbow and steered her hastily into the long hallway facing them. Hardly anyone here. Without any real idea of where he was going, he hustled her along, infected by the urgency of her distress; she slipped and slid on the smooth polished floor, but he kept her upright. Mounted figures in chain mail streaming toward them and vanishing to the rear. Shimmering tapestries looming in the dusk. Swords. Lances. Engraved silver bowls. All the loot of the past, and no one around, just a couple of blank-faced robot guards.

When they had gone about a hundred yards he halted, aware that Lissa had grown more calm, and they stood for a moment in front of a case of small iridescent Roman glass flasks and vases with elaborate spiral handles. She turned to him, haggard, sweat-streaked, and clung to him, cheek to his chest. Her anxiety definitely subsiding, but she was still upset.

Finally she said, "How awful that was. One of the worst ones yet. A dozen of them all talking at once, each one with a pipeline right into my skull. A torrent of nonsense. Swelling and swelling and swelling my head till it wants to explode."

"Is it better now?"

"I don't hear them, anyway. But the echoes inside me . . . the noise bouncing around upstairs. . . . You know, I wish I could go far away from the whole human race. To some icy planet. To one of the moons of Jupiter. And just live there in a plastic dome, all by myself. Although even there I'd probably pick up the static. Minds radiating at me right across space. Can you imagine what it's like, Paul, never to have real privacy? Never to know when your head is going to turn into a goddam two-way radio?" Then

a chilly laugh from her. "Hey, that's funny. Me asking you about privacy. And you with your own ghost sitting in your head. Worse off than I am. Paul and Lissa, Lissa and Paul. What a pair of fucking cripples we are, you and me!"

"Somehow we'll manage."

"I bet."

"We can get help, Lissa."

"Sure we can. He'll kill you as soon as you go within a mile of your doctors. And nobody can fix me without chopping my brain into hamburger. But we can get help, yeah. I like your optimism, kid." She pointed. "We can take that staircase. Nightmare Number Sixteen is waiting for us."

Up the stairs, through another hall full of Chinese porcelains and Assyrian palace reliefs, past a room of Persian miniatures, one of Iranian pottery, gallery after gallery of archaic treasures, and emerging ultimately in an opulent cube of clear plastic cantilevered out of the rear of the building to overhang the wilted greenery of Central Park. The modern-art wing.

Crowded, too; Macy looked nervously at Lissa, fearing she would tumble into another telepathic abyss, but she appeared to be in control of herself. Guiding him coolly down yards of gaudy paintings and sculpture and tick-tock artifacts and dancing posters and metabolic mirrors and liqueospheres and all the rest.

Left turn. Deep breath. A small room, no door, just a circular entrance. Over the entrance, in raised gilded letters: ANTIGONE 21 BY NATHANIEL HAMLIN. Jesus. A private exhibition hall for it. What he had taken to be the absence of a door was in fact the presence of an invisible airseal, providing secret shelter for the masterwork within, ensuring it its own environment and psychological habitat. They stepped through. No sensation while breaching the seal: cooler on the other side, the air tingling, full of wandering ions. A faint chemical odor. A low hum.

"That's it," Lissa said.

Ten, twelve people clustered in front of it; he couldn't see. She hung tensely against him, arm jammed through his, ribs raking his side. Her tautness leaked through to him, a mental emanation of something just short of fear. He felt the same way. The knot of onlookers parted and as

though through a rift in the clouds he beheld Nathaniel Hamlin's *Antigone* 21.

Nude female figure, larger than life. Unmistakably Lissa, yet no danger that anyone in the room would turn from that radiant statue to the drab drained girl and connect the two of them. Firm, full body. The breasts higher and heavier: had the sculptor idealized them or had Lissa lost weight there too? The pose an aggressive, dynamic one, head flung back, one arm outstretched, legs apart. O Pioneers, that sort of thing. Emphasizing the strength of the woman, the resilience of her. Eyes bright and fierce. Mouth not quite smiling but almost. The entire solid figure crying out, I can take it, I can handle anything, stress and turmoil and flood and famine and revolution and assassination, I have endured, I will endure, I am the essence of endurance. The eternal feminine. And so forth.

But of course the sculpture was not merely just a sexy academic nude in a high-powered nineteenth-century mode, nor was it only a sentimentally-conceived monument to stereotyped concepts of womanhood. It was those things, yes, but it was also a psychosculpture, meaning that it approached the condition of being alive, it was a whole cosmos in itself. It did tricks. The room was rigged to heighten the effects. Imperceptible changes of lighting. That odd humming sound, coming from a battery of hidden sonic generators, controlled the mood through its pattern of modulations, hitting the onlookers at some subterranean level of their psyches.

The degree of ionization in the room was constantly changing, too. And the statue itself. Going through a cycle of transformations. Look, the nipples are erect now, the breasts are heaving (but are they, or does it just seem that they move?), the eyes are those of a woman in heat. What has become of the defiant, all-enduring woman of three minutes ago? Now we behold the essence of cuntliness. One could rush forward glady and prong her.

And yet she changes again. Her juices going sour, her nipples softening: a woman thwarted, a woman denied. How bitter that fractional smile. She holds grudges. In the darkness of the night she would gladly castrate the unsuspecting male. But the strength of hatred ebbs from her. She is afraid; she knows that there are questions for which she has no answers; she feels the phantoms of the night

fluttering against the windows, wings beating harder and harder. Terror closes its hand on her. She is alone, naked and vulnerable, not half so strong as she would have the world believe.

If they came to attack her now—but what comes is dawn. A brightening. Finding her place in the universe under a friendly sky. She seems taller. Older, though no less beautiful; voluptuous, though cooler than before; in command of herself, beyond doubt. Venus ascendant. A totally different self each few minutes.

What machinery is at work beneath that figure's supple skin? How is this cycle of transformations propelled? Watching it, the constantly shifting play of emotions and impressions, the subtle mutations of posture and attitude, Macy feels awed and overpowered but also vaguely cheated. He had not known what to expect of the art of his former self, other than that it would be dramatic and impressive. But is this really art, this clever robot? Will all this mechanical trickery be able to stand alongside the true artistic achievements of the ages? He is no critic, in truth he knows nothing at all, yet the intense realism of the sculpture that is its outstanding characteristic makes it seem aesthetically primitive to him, a toy, a stunt, a triumph of craft, not art.

But even so. But even so. Impossible not to respond to the power of the thing. How thoroughly Lissa has been captured in those gears and cogs; not his Lissa, not the broken dazed girl he knows, but Nat Hamlin's glorious Lissa, whose caved-in shell has fallen to Hamlin's successor. What Hamlin has created here may be simpleminded next to Leonardo and Cellini and Henry Moore, but behind the superficial superficiality may lie a carefully masked profundity, Macy suspects. He could stand here studying the figure for hours. Days. As others seem to be doing. Those students muttering notes into handrecorders, and that one, holographing the work from every conceivable angle—they are trapped by it too, plainly. A masterpiece. Undoubtedly a masterpiece.

With an effort he turned away from it, feeling an almost audible snap as the sightlines of his contact with the sculpture broke, and glanced at Lissa. She was drawn back, hunched against the wall, lips parted, eyes fixed and glassy, caught by the mesmerism of her overpowering simulacrum

up there. A gasp frozen on her face. What currents of identity, he wondered, were flowing from her to the sculpture, from the sculpture to her? What draining of self was going on, and what recharging? What must it be like to behold yourself made into such a work of art?

And where was Hamlin? Why wasn't he jumping and cavorting in pride before his wondrous achievement, as he had that first day in Harold Griswold's office? Hamlin was quiescent. Not absent, though. Macy became gradually aware of him glowing far below the surface, embedded deep in his brain. A thorn in his paw. A pebble in his hoof. Macy hadn't expected Hamlin to remain bolted inside his dungeon for long.

Nor did he. Rising slowly now, bubbling toward the top. Evoked into consciousness by the *Antigone* 21. That's all right, Macy thought. Let him come up. I can handle him. Bracing himself, battening down, Macy waited for his other self to finish drifting toward the surface. Not hostile, this time. Not even aggressive. A prevailing air of calmness about him. No resentment apparent over his defeat in their last battle. Perhaps a strategy of deception, though. Get me off guard, then make another quick leap for the speech centers. I'm ready, whatever he tries. But when Hamlin opened their inner conversation, his tone was easy, civil:

—What do you think of it?

*Impressive. I didn't know you had it in you.*

—Why? Do I seem second-rate to you, Macy?

*The only aspect of you that I know is the violence, the criminality. It turns me off. I don't associate great art with that kind of personality.*

—What a load of bourgeois crap that is, friend.

*Is it?*

—Item one, a man can be a thief, a killer, a babybuggerer, anything, and still be a great artist. The quality of his morals has nothing to do with the quality of his perceptions, hip? You'd be surprised how much of the stuff in this museum was produced by absolute bastards. Item two, I happened to have been a pretty fair artist fifteen years before I became what they call an enemy of society. This piece you see here was entirely finished before I had my breakdown. Item three, since you never knew me, you

don't have any goddam right to judge what kind of person I was.

*I concede item two and maybe item one. But why should I yield on number three? I know you plenty well, Hamlin. You've knocked me down, you've played games with my heart, you've attempted to seize sections of my brain, you've threatened outright to kill me. Should I love you for that? This is the first time since you surfaced that you've seemed even halfway civilized. You come on like a thug; do you blame me for being surprised you could produce a sculpture like this?*

—You really think I'm a villain?

*You're a convicted criminal.*

—Forget that shit. I mean my relationship to you. You think I'm acting out of evil impulses?

*What else can I think?*

—But I'm not, Macy. I don't dislike you, I don't want to harm you, I have no negative feelings toward you at all. It just happens that you're in the way of a man who's fighting for his life.

*Meaning you.*

—Exactly. I want to be myself again. I don't want to stay submerged inside you.

*The court decreed—*

—Fuck the court. The whole Rehab system is hysterical nonsense. Why wipe me out? Why not rehabilitate me in the real sense of the word? I wasn't hopelessly insane, Macy. Shit, yes, I did a lot of awful things, I admit that freely, I was off my head. But in the year 2007 they could have some better way of coping with insanity than the death sentence.

*But—*

—Let me finish. It was a death sentence, wasn't it? To rip me out of my own body and throw me away, and pour someone else into my head? What happened to my whole accumulation of experiences? What happened to my skills and talents? What happened to me, damn it, what happened to me? Killed. Killed. Nothing but a zombie body left. It's only by the merest fluke that I'm still here, even in this condition, hanging on inside you. What kind of humanitarianism is that? What are they saving, when they keep the body and throw away the soul?

*I didn't make the laws.*

—Agreed, Macy. But you're no fool. You can see how flagrantly unjust Rehab is. They want to separate me from society because I'm dangerous, okay, I agree, I agree, put me away, try to fix me, drain all the poison out of me. Right. But instead this. The super resources of modern science are employed to murder a great but somewhat deranged sculptor and invent a dumb holovision commentator to replace him.

*Thank you.*

—What else can I say? Look up there, at my *Antigone*. Could you do that? Could anybody else do that? I did it. My unique gift to mankind. And fifty others almost as good. I'm not bragging, Macy, I'm being as objective as hell. I was somebody valuable, I had a special gift, I had intensity, I had humanity. Maybe my gift drove me crazy after a while, but at least I had something to offer. And you? What are you? *Who* are you? You're nothing. You have no depth. You have no texture. You have no past. You have no reality. I've been sitting here inside you, taking an inventory. I know what you're made of, Macy, and it's all ersatz. You have no purpose in existing. You can't do anything that a robot couldn't do better. A holovision commentator? They can program a machine with pear-shaped tones, father, and it'll broadcast you off the map.

*I admit all this,* Macy replied. He stood stiffly, pretending to study the sculpture. He wondered how much time had elapsed during his colloquy with Hamlin. Five seconds? Five minutes? He had lost track of external things. *Granted that you were a genius and I'm a nobody, what am I supposed to do about it?*

—Vacate the premises.

*Just like that.*

—Yes. It wouldn't be hard. I could show you how. You relax, you lower your defenses, you let me administer the *coup de grace*. Then you disappear back into the limbo they whistled you out of, and I can function as Nat Hamlin wearing the mask of Paul Macy. I can begin to sculpt again. Quietly. As long as I don't harm anybody, I'd get away with it.

*You'd harm me.*

—But you have no right to exist! You're fiction, Macy. You're not real.

*I exist now. I'm here. I have feelings and ambitions and fears. When I eat a steak I taste it. When I fuck a girl I enjoy it. You know how it goes. Cut me and I bleed. I'm real, as real as anybody who ever lived.*

—How can I persuade you that you aren't?

*You can't. I'm as real to me as anybody else is to himself. Look, Hamlin, look, this isn't a thing for logic. I can't just say to you, Okay, you're a genius, I bow to the demands of culture, lop off my head and take my place. A far, far better thing, et cetera, et cetera. No. I'm here. I want to go on being here.*

—Where does that leave me?

*Up shit creek, I guess. Right now you're the one who's unreal, you know that? Officially you're dead. You're just a spook wandering around my skull. Why don't you do the noble thing? Stop fucking up a decent and inoffensive human being's life, and clear out. Vacate the premises, as you say. Lower the defenses and let me clobber you.*

—Some chance.

*You've given the world enough masterpieces.*

—I'm still young. I'm better than you. I deserve to live.

*The court said otherwise. The court sent you out of the world for God knows what kind of crimes, and—*

—For rape. That's all it was, rape.

*I don't care if it was for reusing old postage stamps. A verdict's a verdict. I'm not giving up my life to remedy what you consider to have been a miscarriage of justice.*

—You don't have a life, Macy!

*Sorry. I do.*

A long silence. Macy peered at the sculpture, at the onlookers, at the walls. His head was spinning. Hamlin's presence remained manifest within him as a steady pressure, wordless, heavy. And then, finally:

—All right. We're getting nowhere like this. Go stroll around the museum. We'll continue the discussion some other time.

Sensation of Hamlin letting go. Dropping once more into the depths. Plop. Splash. The illusion of solitude. Solemn trombone music marking the alter ego's exit. Macy was drenched in sweat. Unsteady on his feet.

Lissa: "Have you seen enough yet?"

"I think so. We can go. Wait, let me hold your hand."

"Is something wrong, Paul?"

"A little wobbly." He wasn't able to look at her. Clutching her cool fingers between his. Step. Step. Through the invisible door. In the gallery outside he found a bench and sank down on it. Lissa fluttering over him, bewildered. He said, "While I was looking at it, I had a sort of conversation with Hamlin. Very quietly. He was almost charming."

"What was he telling you?"

"A lot of insidious bullshit. He invited me to get out of our body so he could have it. On the grounds that he's a great artist and deserves to live more than I do."

"That's just the sort of thing he'd say!"

"It's just the sort of thing he did say. I told him no, and he went back to his cave. And now I realize I must have put more energy into that chat than I thought."

"Sit. Rest."

"I'm going to."

"How about the *Antigone*?" she asked.

"Incredible. Demolishing. I almost feel a kind of second-hand paternal pride in it. I mean, these hands here made it. This brain conceived it. Even if I wasn't there at the time. And—"

"No," Lissa said. "These hands made it, yes, but not this brain." She tapped his skull lightly, affectionately, with three fingertips. "A brain's just a globe of gray cheese. Brains don't conceive sculptures. *Minds* do. And this wasn't the mind that conceived the *Antigone*."

"I realize that," he told her stiffly. Somehow her quibbling upset him. A show of loyalty for Hamlin, perhaps. Arousing jealousy in him. Hard to accept the truth that she had been there while that piece was being fashioned, she posed, she was in on the white-hot hours of creation, she and Hamlin, in the days before Paul Macy was born. To think about that made him feel like an intruder in his own body. What ecstasies had Lissa and Hamlin shared, what joys and griefs, what moments of exaltation? He was shut out of all those events. Cut off by the impenetrable wall of the past. Other times, another self. But *she* could remember. Scowling, he watched the museumgoers filing by threes and fours into the Hamlin room. Hamlin is right, he thought gloomily. I'm nothing. I have no texture. I have no past. I have no reality. Abruptly standing, he said, "Is there anything else you'd like to see, as long as we're in the museum?"

"This trip was your idea."

"As long as we're here."

"No, nothing," she said. "Not really."

"Let's go, then."

"Did you learn whatever you wanted to learn from the *Antigone*?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "All that I wanted to learn. And more. Maybe too much more." They hurried from the building by a side door in the Egyptian wing.

## EIGHT

EMERGING into the sunlight revived his vigor a bit. It was still only about four in the afternoon. At Lissa's suggestion they went uptown, to her place; there were some things she needed to get, she said. Unspoken in that was the assumption that she would be moving in with him. He didn't object. He couldn't say that he loved her, as Hamlin evidently had, or that he was even on the verge of falling in love with her; but their individually precarious circumstances demanded a mutual defense treaty, and living together was the obvious logistical arrangement. For the time being, at least.

In the tube heading north she was cheerful, even a little manic: definitely up, despite the throngs of fellow travelers pressing close. Her ESP didn't seem to operate all the time. It was something like Hamlin was for him, he imagined: coming and going, ebbing and flowing, now virtually in full possession, now weak and indetectable. When the demon was on her, she came close to disruption and collapse. At other times, such as now, she was lively, alert, buoyant. Yet there was a hard fretful edge to her gaiety. As if she were contemplating at all times the possibility that her telepathic sensitivity would switch itself on, here in the tube, and plunge her once more into frenzy.

Her apartment was grim: one shabby room in an antique building on a forgotten limb of the city. Something out of Dickens. The lame, the halt, and the blind infesting the place, dirty children everywhere, fat old women, sinister cutthroat young men, dogs, cats, screams, shrieks, wild laughter from behind concave doors. A prevailing odor of urine and exotic spices. Not just the twentieth century surviving here; more like the nineteenth. The booming of

holovision sets in the halls seemed like a grotesque anachronism.

They walked up, five flights. One didn't expect to find liftshafts in this sort of house, but one hoped it dated at least from the era of elevators. Apparently not. Why did she live here? Why not go to one of the people's cooperatives, stark but at least clean, and surely no more costly than this? She preferred this, she told him. He couldn't follow her mumbled explanation, but he thought it had to do with the construction of the walls; was she saying that in an old building like this she wasn't as bothered by her neighbors' telepathic emanations as she would be in a flimsily built co-op?

Within this dismalness she had carved an equally dismal nest. A squarish high-ceilinged room with clumsy furniture, patched draperies, simple utensils. A tiny stained power-pack to cook on, a cold-sink in lieu of real refrigeration. He didn't see toilet facilities. Everything in disarray. No housekeeper she. The bed unmade, the exposed sheets carrying half a dozen layers of yellowish stains—that bothered him, he could guess at the origin of the stains—and books scattered everywhere. On the windowsill, on the floor, even under the bed.

So she was a diligent reader. Interesting. You could judge a person's character by his reading.

Macy realized he scarcely knew Lissa at all. What could he say about her? That she seemed fairly bright but had shown no signs so far of having intellectual interests, that she was a passably good lay (so far as he was capable of telling, given the synthetic nature of his available past experience), that she once had been closely associated with an important contemporary artist. Period. Had she had an education? A career of her own, goals in life, talents, skills? A model is only a cipher, a shape, a set of curves and planes and textures; Hamlin was too complicated a man to have fallen in love with her purely as model, so there had to be something back of the exterior, she must have had some kind of interior substance, she must have done something in the world other than pose for Nat Hamlin. At least until her increasingly more turbulent inner storms had driven her to take refuge in this squalid place.

But he knew nothing. Had she traveled? Did she have a family? Dreams of becoming an artist herself? Perhaps her

books might tell him something. Helplessly, he surveyed and inventoried her library while she bustled around collecting her other possessions.

Immediately he found himself in difficulties: he was no reader himself, had merely skimmed a few popular novels during his stay in the Rehab Center, and whatever Hamlin had read, if he had read anything at all, was of course gone from Macy's mind. Macy had only the *illusion* of a familiarity with literature. Dr. Brewster, the literary one, had programmed him with hazy plot summaries and dislocated images and even with the physical feel of some books, so that he knew quite clearly that the *Iliad* was a tall orange volume with cream-colored paper and elegant rounded print. But what was it about? A war, long ago. A quarrel over a woman. Proud barbarian chieftains. Who was Homer? Had he lived before Hemingway? Jesus, he was an illiterate!

And so, looking through Lissa's heaps of books, he could draw no certain conclusions, except that she seemed to read (or at least to own) a lot of novels, thick serious-looking ones, and that perhaps a fifth of the books were works of biography and history, not casual light stuff by any means. So she must be a more complex person than she had revealed herself to him thus far to be. Anybody, no matter how dim, might happen to pick up a book occasionally, but Lissa had surrounded herself with them, which argued for the presence within her of psychic hungers for knowledge.

He tried to touch up his image of her, making her less waiflike and dependent, less the hapless, whining victim of circumstances, more of a self-propelled inner-guided individual with purpose and direction and a sphere of interests. But he still had difficulty seeing her as anything other than part of the furniture in Nat Hamlin's studio, or as a pitiful casualty of modern urban life. She refused to come alive for him as a genuine, fully operative human being.

Maybe it's because I don't understand people very well, being so new in the world, he thought. Or perhaps one of the doctors built his own archaic attitudes toward women in general into me—does Gomez, say, see them only as extensions and pale reflections of the men they live with? Mere bundles of foggy emotion and woolly response? But they don't just drift from event to event, letting things happen to them. They won't forget to get out of bed if

nobody tells them to. Women have minds of their own. I'm sure they do. They must. They must. And interesting minds. Some commitment to something besides survival, meals, fucking, babies. Then why does she seem so hollow to me? I have to try to get to know her better.

She was filling a large battered green suitcase with her things. Clothes, knickknacks, a dozen books. Something large and flat, maybe a sketchpad. A folder of old letters and papers. She stuffed five more books in at the very last.

A tepid evening, an indifferent night. Dinner at a beanery a few blocks from his place. Afterward, home, a couple of golds, some desultory chatter, bed. No outbursts of telepathy to plague her. No resurgences of Hamlin to bother him. They were free to pursue one another's innerness without distractions, but somehow it didn't happen; they talked all around their troubles without coming to any of the main issues. He was surprised to learn she was not quite twenty-five years old, four or five years below his guess. Born in Pittsburgh, no less. Father some kind of scientist, mother an expert on population dynamics. Good genes. They sounded like acceptable types. Lissa hadn't seen them in years. Came to New York, age seventeen, to study art. (Aha!) Thought also of writing novels. (Ahahaha!)

Turning point in life June 15, 2004, age eighteen, meets famed artist Nathaniel Hamlin. Falls wildly in love with him. He doesn't notice her at all, so she thinks (scene is a meet-the-faculty party at the Art Students' League, everybody wildly stoned, Hamlin—guest lecturer or something that semester—urbaneely putting on all the pretty girls).

But a week later he calls her. Drinks? Stroll in Central Park? Of course. She is terrified. Hopes he'll accept her as a private student. Wants to bring him to her apartment (not this present uptown hovel) and show him her sketches. Doesn't dare. A nice chaste summertime stroll.

Afterward she is sure he found her too trivial, too adolescent, but no, he calls again, exactly seven days later. What a sweet time that was. Care to see my studio? Out in Darien, Connecticut. She has no idea where is Darien. He'll pick her up, never fear. Long sleek car. Driving it himself. She has brought her portfolio, just in case. He takes her to flamboyant country estate, unbelievable place: swimming pool, creek, pond full of mutated goldfish

in improbable colors, big stone house, medium-big studio annex.

Turns out he isn't interested in her as an artist at all, wants her as model: has some ambitious project in mind for which she would be perfect. She is awed. Her portfolio lying neglected in the car. I need to see the body, he says. Of course. Of course. Strips: blouse, slacks. Thoughtfully omitted to don underwear that day. He studies her carefully. Oh, God, my backside's too flat, my boobs are too big, or maybe not big enough! But no, he compliments her, good tight fanny, cute shape, will do, will do.

And suddenly his pants are open in front. Thick reddened organ sticking out. (Oh, you've seen it, Macy, you know it like your own!) She is thrown into panic. She's been laid before, yes, eight, ten fellows, not coming on as timid innocent at all, but yet this is the authentic erect cock of *Nathaniel Hamlin* that now approaches her, which is something very special. Admired his work all her life, never dreamed that one day he'd be presenting his mast to her. Can't take her eyes off it until it disappears into her box.

In and out. In and out. Nathaniel Hamlin's authentic thing knows its business. Such terrific intensity boiling within him, and he expresses it with his pecker. She comes a thousand times. Afterward they both run naked around the estate, swim, laugh, get stoned. He grabs a camera and photographs her for an hour. You and me, he says, we're going to make a masterpiece the world won't ever forget. Then they dress, he drives her to a restaurant near the Sound, such glamour that it dizzies her, and finally, late at night, deposits her, an exhausted astounded adolescent heap of much-fucked flesh, at her apartment. An unforgettable experience.

Then she doesn't hear from him for three months. Despair. At last an apologetic postcard from Morocco. Another, a month and a half later, from Baghdad. At Christmas time a card with Japanese stamps on it. Then, January '05, a phonecall. Back in town at last. See you at nine tonight, break all other engagements.

And from then on she is more or less his full-time mistress, living at Darien much of the time, naturally dropping out of art school, drifting away from old friends, who now seem naive and immature to her. New friends, exciting

ones. Even becoming friendly with Hamlin's wife. (A peculiar marital relation there, Macy concluded.)

Early in '06, after nearly a year of planning, he gets down to serious work on the *Antigone*.<sup>21</sup> Months of toil for him and for her; he is a demon when he works. Twelve, fifteen, eighteen hours a day. Finally almost finished. Almost finished with her, too. He has been talking of marrying her since the summer of '05, but their relationship grows increasingly tense. Physical violence: he slaps her, kicks her a couple of times, balls her once by main force when she doesn't want it, ultimately knocks her down the stairs and breaks her pelvis. Hospital. During which time he succumbs completely to the disintegration of personality that has, unknown to her, been going on in him for most of the year, and commits Dreadful Deeds upon the persons of a variety of women. He is arrested and tried; she sees him no more until that eerie day in May of 2011 when she crashed into Paul Macy on the streets of Manhattan North.

And your telepathy problem, Macy wants to ask? When did that start? When did it become severe? But obviously she doesn't want to talk about that. She will speak to him tonight only of old business, her romance with the defunct great artist. And now she has talked herself out. Silence. Lights out. Two red roaches in the darkness. Pungent smoke rising ceilingward. This would be the sort of moment, Macy thought, when Hamlin would appear. To append footnotes to Lissa's story. But Hamlin, missing his cue, did not appear. It began to occur to Macy that each of his encounters with Hamlin might drain the other's strength as much as it did his, possibly more; between colloquies, Hamlin had to lie doggo, recharging. Maybe not so, but a cheering possibility. Tire him out, wear him down, eventually eject him. An endurance contest.

Macy turned dutifully to Lissa, not particularly in need of her but feeling that they ought to commemorate her moving-in with some kind of celebration of passion; his hand slipped over one of her breasts, but she responded not at all, merely lying there in a passive stony haze, and an uncheering possibility struck him: When she makes love with me, is she really only trying to recapture those moments of fire with him? I am Nat Hamlin's well-endowed

body minus Nat Hamlin's troublesomely violent nature; is that not all she seeks from me?

The thought that he might be, for her, nothing but a dead man's reanimated penis did not amuse him. Of course she said she enjoyed him for his own sake, but of what did his own sake consist? Having loved a genius, could she love a nonentity equally well? Or at all? A young, impressionable art student would of course be drawn automatically to a magnet such as Nat Hamlin, but Paul Macy should have no pull. Who am I, what am I, wherein lies my texture, my density? I am nothing. I am unreal. Hamlin's shadowy successor. His relict. Macy attempted to check this cascade of negativisms, telling himself that Hamlin was undoubtedly causing it by releasing a river of poisons from his subcranial den. But he could not coax himself just now to a higher self-esteem. Entering her, he pushed the piston mechanically back and forth for three or four minutes, feeling wholly detached from her except at the point of entry, and since she gave no hint of being with him in any way, he let himself go off and sank into the usual bothered sleep, infested by incubi and revenants.

Many sympathetic glances at the network office the next day. Everybody tiptoeing around him, speaking in soft tones, grinning a lot, sidestepping every situation of potential stress or conflict. Obviously all of them afraid he might flip at the first jarring stimulus. It was a regression to the way they had treated him weeks ago, when he had first come here, when they thought a Rehab needed to be handled as carefully as a barrel of eggs. He wondered why. Was it because he had called in sick yesterday, and now they assumed he had been suffering from some special affliction of Rehabs, some slippage of the identity, that required extra cautious handling? Their excessive kindness, implying as it did that he was more vulnerable than they, irritated him. After two and a half hours of it he cornered Loftus, Stilton Fredericks' executive assistant, and asked her about it.

He said, "I want you to know that what kept me home yesterday was simply an upset stomach. A case of the runs and a lot of puking, okay?"

She looked at him blankly. "I don't remember asking."

"I know you didn't ask. But everybody else around this

place seems to think I had some sort of nervous breakdown. At least, that's how they've been treating me today. So fucking kind it's killing me. So I thought I'd let you spread the word that I'm all right. A mere internal indisposition."

"You don't like people to be nice to you, Macy?"

"I didn't say that. I just don't want my fellow workers making inaccurate assumptions about the state of my head."

"Okay, so you didn't have a nervous breakdown. So why do you look so strange?"

"Strange?"

"Strange," Loftus said.

"What way?"

"Look in the mirror." Then, a moment of tenderness breaking through the steel: "If anything's the matter that any of us could fix—"

"No. No. Honestly, it was only an upset stomach."

"Uh-huh. Okay, if anybody asks, I'll tell them. Nobody's going to whisper behind your back."

He thanked her and made a quick escape. Executive washroom: amid all the electronic gimmickry, the sonic shavers and the Klein-bottle urinals, he found a mirror, standard variety, silver-backed glass as in days of yore. A fierce, bloodshot face looking back at him. Furrowed forehead. nostrils flaring. Lips compressed, mouth drawn off to one side. Jesus, no wonder! He was Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jekyll both at the same time, his features all snarled up, reflecting the most intense kind of interior agonies.

And this without a buzz from Hamlin for the past eighteen hours. This double existence, this squatter occupation of the lower reaches of his mind, was corroding his face, turning him into an ambulatory flag of distress. Of course they were all being sweet to him today; they could see the signals of imminent collapse inscribed on his brow.

Yet he felt relatively relaxed today. What must he look like when Hamlin was near the surface and prodding him? Macy ventured an exploratory sweep. *Hamlin? Hamlin, you there? My private permanent bad dream. Come up where I can see you. Let's have a chat.*

But no, all quiet on the cerebral front. Feeling snubbed, Macy set out to repair his face. Stripped to the waist. Sticking his head into the hot-air blower. Loosen the

muscles, soften the scowl. A little humidity, maestro. Ah. Ah, how good that is on the tactile net. Thrust noggin now into whirlpool sink. Round and round and round, bubble bubble bubble, hold your breath and let the lovely water work its magic. Ah. Ah. Splendid. Back to the hot air to dry off. Now pop a trunk. Blow a gold. Survey the map. Better, much better. The tension draining away; a lucky thing, too, they wouldn't have let you step in front of a camera looking all screwed up.

Macy was still refurbishing himself, putting his clothes back on, when Fredericks walked into the john. A hearty phony laugh out of him, ho ho ho. "Interrupting you in a moment of relaxation, Paul?"

"No. All done relaxing now. And feeling much better."

"We were all quite concerned when you phoned in yesterday."

"Just a jumpy stomach, was all. Much better now. See?" Flashing his rehabilitated features at Fredericks. "I appreciate the concern, but I'm really pretty tough. Stilton," he added reluctantly. A hell of a name to carry through life. Fredericks addressed himself to the task of unloading his bladder. Macy went out, working hard at looking loose. The effort must have been worthwhile; people stopped pampering him.

At half past two he picked up his script for the day, ran through the visuals four or five times, rehearsed the audio. A two-minute squib on the coronation in Ethiopia, surging throngs, lions marching on chains through the streets, a herniated corner of the fifteenth century poking into the twenty-first.

Macy wondered how Mr. Bercovici, he who had selected him at the Rehab Center for this job, was making out in Addis Ababa. Was that him at the edge of the crowd, picked up by the trusty hovereye, that plump white face among the hawk-featured brown ones? Here and gone; probably the South African consul-general, or whoever. Macy carried off his voice-over nobly. *"Amid the pomp and glamor of a medieval empire, the former Prince Takla Haymanot today became the Lion of Judan, King of the Kings of Ethiopia, His Excellency the Negus Lebna Dengel II, newest monarch in a line of royalty descended from King Solomon himself . . ."* Beautiful.

And then home to Lissa through thin rain.

She was in bed, reading, wearing a tattered green house-coat that looked old enough to be one of the Queen of Sheba's hand-me-downs, nothing at all underneath it, pinkish-brown nipples peeping through. One quick look and he knew, as if by telepathic transmission, that she had had a bad day. Her face had that sullen, pouty look; her hair was uncombed, a wild auburn tangle; the stale smell of dried sweat was sharp in the air of the bedroom. He felt strangely domesticated. Hubby coming home from hard day at office, slatternly wife about to tell him of the day's petty crises.

She tossed aside her book and sat up. "Christ," she said. Her favorite expletive. "An all-day bummer, this was. Rainy weather indoors and out."

He kicked off his shoes. "Bad?"

"The anvil chorus in my head." Shrugging. "Let's not talk about it. I was going to whip up a fancy dinner, but I didn't get up the energy. I could put something together fast."

"We'll go out. Don't bother." He eased out of his over-clothes. Fifteen seconds of dead air. Despite her saying she didn't want to talk about today, she seemed obviously waiting for him to start questioning her. Gambit declined. He was tired and fretful himself: Hamlin beginning to clamber toward the surface again, maybe.

He looked at her. She at him. The silence continued, dragging on until it had attained a tangible presence of its own. Then Lissa appeared to tune the tension out; she disconnected something in herself and slumped back against the pillow, sinking into that brooding withdrawal that she affected about half the time.

Macy got himself a beer. When he returned to the bedroom she was still eighteen thousand light-years away. A curious notion came to him: that unless he made contact with her in some fashion this very minute, she would be wholly lost to him. Her closedness annoyed him, but he hid his pique and, going to her, pulled back the coverlet to caress the outside of her bare thigh. A friendly gesture, loving almost. She didn't seem to notice. He touched his cold beer to her skin. A hiss. "Hey!"

"Just wanted to find out if you were still here," he said.  
"Very funny."

"What's the matter, Lissa?" The question out of him at last.

"Nothing. Everything. This shitty rain. The air in here. I don't know." Momentary wildness in her eyes. "I've been picking up noise all day in my head. You and Hamlin, Hamlin and you. Like a kind of radioactive trace in the air. I shouldn't have moved in here."

"Surely you can't pick up telepathic impulses from someone who isn't even in the room!"

"No? How do you know? Do you know anything at all about it? Maybe your ESP waves soak into the paint, into the woodwork. And radiate back at me all day. Don't try to tell me what I've been feeling. The two of you, banging at me off the walls, blam blam blam, hour after hour." These sharp sentences were delivered in an inappropriately flat, absent tone. At the end of which she disconnected again.

"Lissa?"

Silence.

"Lissa?"

"What?"

"Remember, you came looking for *me*. I told you it wasn't good for us to be together. And you said we needed each other, right? So don't take it out on me if it doesn't work well."

"I'm sorry." A ten-year-old's insincere apology.

More silence.

He tried to make allowances for her mood. Cooped up all day. Raining. Hostile ions in the air. Her period coming on, maybe. A woman's entitled to be bitchy sometimes. Still, he didn't need to take it. If there was too much telepathic noise here, she could go back to the pigsty.

"I heard that," she said.

"Oh, Jesus."

"My period isn't due for a week. And if you want me to go to the pigsty, say it out loud and I'll pack right now."

"Do you read my mind all the time?"

"Not like that, no. What I get, it's a general hazy fuzz that I can identify as your signal, and a different fuzz that's *his*, but not usually any sharp words. Except that time it was perfectly clear. Am I really being bitchy?"

"You aren't being much fun," he said.

"I'm not having much fun, either."

"How about a shower? And then a good dinner." Trying to repair things. "A dress-up dinner, downtown. All right?" Like humoring a cranky child. Did she hear that too? Apparently not. Getting up, shucking her housecoat. Not bothering to hold herself upright; shoulders slumped, breasts dangling, belly pushed outward. Padding across and into the shower. Well, we all have our bad days. Sound of water running. Then her head sticking into the bedroom.

She said, "By the way, the Rehab Center phoned this morning."

Macy looked up, and in the same instant Hamlin awoke and did something to his heartbeat, something transient and painful, that made him gasp and clap his hand to his breastbone.

"I said, the Rehab Center phoned—"

"I heard you." Macy coughed. "Wait a second. Hamlin acting up." He shot a furious thought downward. *Let me be. Knock it off.* The pain subsided. Macy said, "Who was it?"

"A woman doctor with an Italian name."

"Ianuzzi."

"That's the one. She wanted to know why you hadn't shown up for your therapy yesterday. After making a special early appointment and everything."

"What did you tell her?" he asked.

Hopes suddenly soaring. His previous identity has surfaced and is trying to take him over, Dr. Ianuzzi. A terrible struggle going on inside him. Oh, is that so, Miss Moore? How unexpected. But we can handle it, of course. We'll have our mobile ego-smashing unit on the spot at seven o'clock sharp. Three quick bursts of rays from the egotron machine, beamed up from the street, and that'll be the end of Mr. Nat Hamlin for once and all, oh, yes, oh, yes. Tell Mr. Macy not to worry about a thing. Thank you for giving me the details, Miss Moore.

Lissa very far away. Dreamy. Macy said again, more sharply, "What did you tell her?"

"I didn't tell her anything."

"What?"

"She called at a bad time for me. I don't even know why I answered. I couldn't make much sense out of what she was asking me until afterward."

"So you just hung up?"

"No, I talked, more or less. I said I didn't know much about why you missed your appointment. Or where you were at the moment." A distant shrug. "I guess I was pretty foggy."

"Jesus, Lissa, you had a chance to help me, and you blew it! You could have told her the whole story!"

She said, "Didn't you tell me that Hamlin threatened to kill you if you brought the Rehab Center into the picture?"

"That's right. But he wouldn't have known it if *you* had given them the story while I was at work. It was a perfect chance. And you blew it. You blew it."

"Sorry." But not very.

"If they phone again, will you do things right?"

"What do you want me to tell them?"

"The straight story. Hamlin coming back. And especially the part about his saying he'll stop my heart if I go near a Rehab Center. Make sure they know he means it. How I set out to go there, how he knocked me down at the Greenwich terminal. You won't forget that part of it?"

"Maybe you better call them yourself."

"I told you, I can't. Hamlin monitors everything I think or say. The moment I pick up the phone, he'll have his clutches on my—" *Jesus!* Another twinge in the chest. Clammy invisible fingers tweaking the aorta. A cough. A gasp. A slow shivering recovery. Lissa watching, unconcerned. "There," Macy said finally. "He just did it. To let me know he's tuned in."

"What good is having them know, though, if he'll kill you if they try to help you?"

"At least they'll know. Maybe they have a remote-control way of dealing with situations like this. Maybe they can sneak up on him somehow. They've got their tricks. It can't hurt to have them realize what's happened. Provided they're aware of the risks involved for me. You won't forget that part?"

"If they call," Lissa said vaguely, "I'll try to tell them everything. I'll try." She didn't sound too sure of it.

In the night, fragmentary episodes of not-quite-nightmare, slippery bulletins issued by the psychic underground. Oddly unfrightening moments out of an unremembered past arriving on top deck for the sleeper's inspection and enlightenment. Bucolic scenes: the arrest, the arraignment,

the detention center, the courthouse, the trial, the verdict, the sentence. *Keep your fucking hands off me, I told you I'd go peacefully!*

Lights flashing in his eyes. A hovereye camera practically touching his nose. Viewers around the world enjoying the spectacle. See the famed doer of abominations! Watch justice triumph! Death to the enemies of chastity! A jury of twelve honest computers and true.

*Sweartotelltheruththewholetruthnothingbuttheruth. I do. I do I do I do. See the sobbing witnesses. Observe their haunted vindictive faces! What memories of obscene violations blaze in their souls? Yes, that's the man, he's the one! I'd know him anywhere. The courtroom silent. Your honor, I ask permission to enter as evidence the taped record of the defendant's intrusion into the home of Maria Alicia Rodriguez on the night of— Red lights flickering on the lawyerboard. Objection! Objection! Commotion. Denied. Prosecution may proceed.*

On the wallscreen the defendant appears, bent on rape. Had he but known he was performing for a camera, he would have been ever so much more stylish about it. Up onto the windowledge, hup! Pry the window open. Hands cold; this miserable winter weather. Yes. Inside. The trembling victim. And the camera descends to get a good view of the action. If they were so concerned about chastity, why did they let him consummate the rape? A good question for the victim to ask. But of course it was all taped automatically; not till later did anyone realize that the hovereye had caught the mad rapist at his trade. White thighs gleaming in the moonlight. Wiry black bush, almost blue. Push. Push. Wham!

*Will the defendant please rise. Nathaniel James Hamlin you have heard the verdict of your peers. This court now declares you guilty on eleven counts of aggravated assault fourteen counts of unsolicited carnal entry five counts of third-degree sodomy seven counts of irremediable psychic injury seventeen counts of violation of marital propriety seven counts of first-degree illicit proximity nine counts of eleven counts of sixteen counts of.*

The sleeper becomes restless. Let us perhaps turn our attention to happier times. The artist at work in his splendid studio, cascades of spring sunlight pouring through the

grand window. Cleverly constructing the armature for the latest masterpiece. First comes the all-encompassing vision, you understand, the sense of the work as a wholeness, without which it is impossible to begin. This hits you like a bolt of lightning, if it comes any other way, don't trust it. Afterward it's just plonking drudgery, a lot of soldering. I wouldn't bother except that I have to. It's the first moment, the white light falling out of heaven, that makes it all worthwhile.

But of course any shithead phony can say he has inspirations. Can he realize them? I can. You build the armature, see, which means you have to crap around with relays and solenoids and connectors and power-shunts and gate-nexuses and such. You calculate the atmospherics you want; a computer gives you the ionization tables, but then you have to make the corrections yourself, intuitively. You do the lighting. Then you put the skin on. Throughout the whole business you never lose sight of the initial impulse, which is, item one, a matter of form, of the actual goddam shape of the piece, and, item two, a matter of psychological insight, of the particular movement of the spirit you mean to express. Now you know as much about my working methods as I do. You want to know more, buy one of my pieces and take it apart.

The scene changes. At the gallery now, we are watching the elite of the art world scrambling to buy his 2002 output; that was the year of the phallic miniatures, they walk, they talk, they jerk off, eight grand apiece, every distinguished creator is entitled to have his little black jest. Sold like hotcakes. Better than hotcakes: did you ever buy a hotcake in your life? The hotcake market is extremely depressed these days.

Macy, slumbering, maybe even snoring, makes desperate mental notes. I must remember all this when I wake up. This is my genuine past, accept no substitutes. Is Hamlin sending all this stuff up by way of making friendly overtures to me, or is he trying to torment me? In any event, more. More, he cried, give me more! So more. Look at the world through a madman's eyes. Take the hallucinogenic trip for free. Breathe in, breathe out, turn on, *tilt!* What are those streaks spanning the sky? That cockeyed rainbow, black, green, turquoise, gray, purple, white. And

what colors do you see when your eyes are closed? The same. The very same.

Why is there so much pressure in the groin? You can feel the pulsations, the throbings. It's like being sixteen all over again. You want to plant it fast, you want to pump yourself dry. Insatiable. But only in strange and reluctant cunts. Why is that? Can you offer a rational explanation? Ha. Time to prowl the winter streets. A tightness in the ass, a dryness in the throat. Your own sweet wifey willing to come across for you, any time, any place, and the same is true of a myriad of others, hot available Lissa, so why endanger yourself in this fashion? But danger defines the man. I climb these peaks because they're here.

Do you realize, though, that you're out of your mind? Naturally I do. *Will the defendant please rise. Nathaniel James Hamlin you have heard the verdict of your peers.* There, you see the risks? You know what those bastards can do to you? Sure I know. I accept the risks. Let them do their worst. *It is the decision of this court that the identity known as Nathaniel James Hamlin having been found guilty of repeated and numerous instances of intolerably antisocial activity and having been declared an incurable and incorrigible sociopathic menace by a properly constituted panel of authorities shall be withdrawn permanently from access to society and shall be at once expunged under the provisions of the Federal Social Rehabilitation Act of 2001 and that in accordance with the terms of that act the physical container as legally defined of the proscribed identity be reconstructed and returned to society at the earliest possible time.*

Let me have your left arm, please, Mr. Hamlin. No, this isn't a needle, it's an ultrasonic injector, you won't feel a thing. How long will it be before it takes effect? Oh, you'll sense some effects almost immediately, I'd say, as the short-term memory processes begin to break down. The left arm, now? Thank you. There. See how easy it was? We'll be back in ten hours to begin the next phase. *What is my name? Who am I? Why are they doing this to me?* Now the right arm, please, Mr. Hamlin. Who? Mr. Hamlin. That's you, Nathaniel Hamlin. Oh. The right arm, please? No, it's not a needle, it's an ultrasonic injector, just like the last one. You don't remember the last one? Well, of course, I should have realized that. Here we go!

*They're washing away my mind! No no*

At the office the next afternoon Hamlin, who had not been heard from in any overt way for almost two full days, made another attempt at seizing the speech centers of Macy's brain. He chose his moment carefully. Late in the day; Macy trying for the tenth or twelfth time to tape his commentary for the evening news; inner tensions high.

The words weren't flowing and the tones were thorny. He was covering the presumed assassination of the Croatian prime minister, a particularly nasty incident: a gang of monadist radicals had kidnapped the man a week ago and, spiriting him away to an illegal mindpick laboratory thought to be located somewhere in the Caucasus, had subjected him to an intensive three-day personality deconstruct that had wholly obliterated his identity. His soulless shell had been picked up during the night in Istanbul and was now in Zagreb, where platoons of neurologists now were converging in the hope of summoning back his eradicated self. Scarcely any chance of success, according to a British authority on deconstruct techniques. If an identity is taken apart properly, there's no known way of reassembling it. All the king's horses and all the king's men, and so forth. A bad show.

When the story had started to come off the pipe around lunchtime, Macy had instantly volunteered to handle it. He felt he had to prove to his colleagues that he did not need to be sheltered against references to deconstructs and reconstructs, rehabilitation work, and related matters. But it was proving unexpectedly difficult for him to carry out the assignment. The story was full of lumpy Croatian names that refused to cross his tongue in the right order of syllables. Moreover, he was more sensitive to the theme of the incident than he had realized; he burst into uneasy sweats at odd moments while reading his script, usually around the place where he was doing the lead-in to the statement from the London neurologist.

Take it slow, the platform monitor kept calling out to him. You're pressing, Paul. Just go easy and let the words slide out. Everybody was being kind to him, again. A whole taping crew immobilized here for well over an hour while

he blundered and staggered his way through an infinity of faulty takes. Take it slow, take it slow.

This time he thought he had it. The polysyllabic names all safely taped. The intricate explication of Balkan politics handled without calamity. For the first time this afternoon, a single usable take covering ninety percent of the script. Now to clinch things: "This morning in London, we spoke with the celebrated British brain expert Varnum Skillings, who *vdrkh cmpm gzpzp vdrkh*—"

"Cut!"

"*Shqkm. Vtpkp. Smss! Grgg!*"

People rushing toward him from all sides of the studio. His skull ablaze. Eyes unfocused. Macy knew precisely what had happened, and after the first instinctive moment of terror he began to take counteroffensive action. Just as he had on Tuesday, he labored to pry Hamlin's mental grip loose. There was a complicating factor here, the public nature of his fit, the disturbed colleagues fluttering around him, asking him things, loosening his collar, otherwise distracting him. And the feeling of calamity that came over him at the realization that he had suffered this upheaval in front of everybody, exposed himself thoroughly as too sick to hold this job. Brushing aside those matters, he worked on Hamlin. The devil had bided his time, collected his strength, made his try when Macy was least prepared for it. All the same, Macy was more powerful. He had the leverage that controlling the body's main neural trunks provided. Back, you fucker! Back! Back! Let go!

Hamlin let go. Foiled again.

Macy's vision returned and he found himself staring into the agitated onyx face of Loftus. Asking him over and over what had happened, was he all right, should they send for a doctor, an ambulance, get him a drink, a gold.

"I'll be fine," he said. Voice like corroded copper.

"You sounded so weird just then—and your face was so twisted up—"

"I said I'd be all right." Normal tone returning.

No one must know. No one.

The platform monitor, Smith, Jones, some name like that, coming up to him. "We got a nearly perfect take, Macy. If you'd like to rest a while, and then you can do the finale for us—no problem to splice it—"

"We'll do it now," said Macy.

No one must know.

The camera crew returning to places. Confusion defused. Macy, alone under the lights, swaying a little, searched his mind for Hamlin, could not find him, decided that he really had succeeded once again in thwarting a takeover. Nevertheless, he would keep on guard. If it happened again under the cameras he'd be in trouble. No room in this organization for newsmen who throw fits at unpredictable moments.

"Roll it," said Jones or Smith.

"This morning in London," Macy said smoothly, "we spoke with the celebrated British brain expert Varnum Skillings, who gave us this assessment of the situation."

"Cut," said Smith or Jones.

Macy smiled. Almost home free, now. The platform monitor gave the signal. Macy delivered the final line. Done. Sighs of relief. People trooping out. Low whispers, everyone no doubt talking about his creepy paroxysm.

Let them talk. I beat him down again, didn't I? He loses every time.

For once Macy thought it might be almost tolerable to have Hamlin alive within him. Hamlin was the perpetual challenge that defined him. Every man needs a nemesis. He arises, I smite him. He arises again, I smite again. And so we go on together through the busy, happy days. He gives me texture and density. With him, I am a man with a unique affliction; I carry tragic *angst*. Without him I would be a shadow. And so we are comfortable with one another. Until the time when the pattern of testing, of thrust and parry, is broken. Until he conquers me. Or I him. When it comes, it will come with one quick sudden triumphant thrust, and one of us will succumb. He? I? We'll see. Home, now. A long wearying day.

## NINE

LISSA wasn't there. He looked through the apartment with great care, methodically passing several times from one room to the other and quickly doubling back, as though she might be slipping invisibly through the door just ahead of him; but no, she wasn't anywhere around. He checked the bathroom and the closets. Her things were still hanging helter-skelter among his. Not gone permanently, then. A note from her? No, nothing. Might have gone out to take a walk. Or to buy some groceries for dinner. At this hour, though? Knowing he always came home punctually? Briefly alarmed, he searched the place once again, looking now for traces of violence. No. A mystery, then.

She had her own key, and he had reprogrammed the thumbplate safety latch to accept her fingerprint; she could come and go as she pleased. But she should have been on hand when he arrived. He couldn't understand why she wasn't. What now? Notify the police? There was this girl, officer, she's been living with me since Tuesday night, she wasn't home when I returned from work, I wonder if you—No. Hardly. Ask the neighbors if they had seen her? No. Go out and look for her in the local shops? No. Search for her at her own apartment? Maybe. Do nothing, stay here, wait for her to show up? Maybe. For the time being, yes. Give her an hour, two hours. She has her moods. Maybe she went to a show. Feeling tense, just went off by herself. Odd that there's no note, anyway.

He showered, put on his worn dressing gown, poured himself a little cream sherry to blunt the edge of his appetite. Getting later all the time. Half past six, no Lissa. Worry mounting in him. They had not, in the course of

constructing him at the Rehab Center, prepared him to handle this sort of situation. He reviewed the possible options. Police. Local shops. Her apartment. Neighbors. Sit and wait. No tactic seemed adequate.

Out of the silence, the voice of the serpent:

—Don't worry about her.

Right now, in his jangled state, even the presence of Hamlin was a comfort. His other self had spoken in a casual, easy way; no challenge, at the moment, merely conversation. Macy was grateful for the muted approach. He wondered how to be properly hospitable. Offer Hamlin some sherry? A gold? Sit down, Nat, make yourself at home. An impulse of lunatic sociability.

*I can't help worrying*, Macy said.

—She can look after herself.

*Can she, though?*

—I know her better than you.

*You haven't had anything to do with her for almost five years. She's unstable, Hamlin. I don't like the idea of her wandering off by herself this way.*

—She probably felt she needed some fresh air. Bad telepathic vibrations bouncing off the walls in here, isn't that what she told you? Getting her down. So she went out.

*Without leaving a note?*

—Lissa doesn't leave notes much. Lissa's not awfully big on responsibility. Relax, Macy.

*That's easy enough to say.*

—You know, maybe she walked out for good. Sick of us both, maybe. All the tension and brawling.

*Her things are still here, though*, Macy pointed out. Grasping at straws. Lissa! Lissa!

—That wouldn't matter to her. Abandoned possessions fall from her like dandruff. Hey, cheer up, will you? The worst that can happen is that you won't ever see her again. Which maybe would be not such a terrible thing.

*You'd like it a lot, wouldn't you?*

—What's it to me?

*You don't want me to have anything to do with her. You're jealous because I'm alive and you're not. Because I have her and you don't.*

Robust interior chuckles bubbling in the brain. Derisive guffaws echoing through the involuted corridors.

—You're such a prick, Macy.

*Can you deny what I said?*

—What you said had more nonsense per square inch than is allowed under present brain-pollution laws.

*For example?*

—Where you say you “have” Lissa. Nobody “has” Lissa, ever. Lissa floats. Lissa drifts in a private orbit. Lissa lives inside a sealed airtight glass cage. She doesn’t involve herself with other people. She spends time with them, yes, she talks with them, she fucks them sometimes, but she doesn’t surrender anything that’s real to her.

*She involved herself with you.*

—That was different. She loved me. The great exception in her life. But she doesn’t love you or anybody else, herself included. You’re fooling yourself if you think you mean anything to her.

*How can you claim to know so much about her when you haven’t seen her in five years?*

—I’ve had all this week to watch her too, haven’t I? That girl is very sick. This ESP thing is pulling her apart. She thinks she has to be alone in order to keep the voices out of her head. She can’t give herself to anybody for long; she has to retreat, pull back, sink into herself. Otherwise she hurts too much. So you mustn’t be surprised that she’s walked out. It was inevitable. Believe me, Macy, I’m telling the truth.

A strange note of sincerity in Hamlin’s tone. As if he’s trying to protect me from a troublesome entanglement, Macy thought. As if he’s got my welfare at heart. Curious.

Seven o’clock, now. No Lissa. Another sherry. Feet up on the hassock. Feeling almost relaxed, despite everything. Hardly even hungry. A slight headache. Where is she? She can look after herself. She can look after herself.

—Have you done any further thinking about the proposal I made?

*What proposal?*

—On Tuesday, in the museum. That you go away and let me have my body back.

*You know the answer to that one.*

—You’re being unreasonable, Macy. I mean, look at it objectively. You may think you exist, but you actually don’t. You’re a construct. You don’t have any more

genuine reality as a person, as a human being, than that wall over there.

*So you keep telling me. If I don't exist, though, why do I worry about Lissa? Why do I enjoy sipping this sherry? Why do I work so hard at the network?*

—Because you've been programmed to. Crap, Macy, can't you see that you're only a clever machine that's been slipped into a vacant human body? Which turned out to be not quite vacant, which still had some bits of its former owner hiding in it. If you were capable of facing your own situation decently and honestly, you'd recognize that—

*Right, Macy cut in. I'd recognize that I'm a nothing and you're a genius, and I'd get the hell out of your head.*

—Yes.

*Sorry, Hamlin. You're wasting our time asking me to. Why should I commit suicide just to give you a second chance to mess up your life?*

—Suicide! Suicide! You've got to be alive before you can commit suicide!

*I'm alive.*

—Only in the most narrow technical sense.

*Fuck you, Hamlin.*

—Let's try to keep the conversation on a friendly basis, okay?

*How can I be friendly when you invite me to kill myself? Where's the advantage for me in accepting your deal? What do you have to offer that makes it worth my while to give you this body back?*

—Nothing. I can only appeal to your sense of equity. I'm more talented than you. I'm more valuable to society. I deserve to live more than you do.

*I'm not so sure of that. Society's verdict was that you had no value at all, in fact that you were dangerous and had to be destroyed. Not even rehabilitated, in the old pre-Rehab sense of the word. Destroyed.*

—A miscarriage of justice. I could have been salvaged. I went insane, I don't deny it, I did a lot of harm to a bunch of innocent women. But that's all over. If I came back now, I'd be beyond all that crap. I'd keep to myself and practice my art.

*Sure you would. Sure. Look, Hamlin, if you want this body back, take it away from me—if you can. But I'm not*

*giving it to you just for the asking. I don't think as little of myself as you do. Forget it.*

—I wish I could make you see my point of view.

Half past seven. Still no Lissa. Macy switched from sherry to bourbon. Also lit the first gold of the evening. A deep drag; instant response, lightheadedness, a loss of contact with his feet. Just a touch of pot-paranoia, too: suppose Hamlin made a grab for his brain while he was fuddled with liquor and fumes? Could he fight back properly? His skullmate had been quiet for ten or fifteen minutes now. Gathering strength for an assault, maybe. Keep your guard up.

But no assault came. The intoxicants that lulled Macy seemed to lull Hamlin as well.

*Eight o'clock.*

*Hamlin? You still there?*

—You rang, milord?

*Talk to me.*

—Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and—

*No, be serious. Tell me something. What's it like for you, inside there?*

—Crowded and nasty.

*How do you visualize yourself?*

—As an octopus. A very small octopus, Macy, maybe a millionth of an inch in diameter, sitting smack in the middle of the left side of your head. With long skinny tentacles reaching out to various parts of your brain.

*Can you see the outside world?*

—When I want to. It uses some energy, but it isn't really hard. I hook into your optic input, is all, and then I see whatever you're seeing.

*What about hearing?*

—A different kind of hookup. I keep that one patched in nearly all the time.

*Sense of touch? Smell? Taste?*

—The same. It's no great trick to cut into your sensory receptors and find out what's going on outside.

*What about reading my thoughts?*

—Easy. A tentacle into the cerebral cortex. I monitor

you constantly there, Macy. You think it, I pick it up instantly. And I can sort out your consciously directed mental impulses from the mush of mental noise that you put out steadily, too.

*How did you learn these things?*

—Trial and error. I woke up, see, not knowing where I was, what had happened to me. Lissa gave me a telepathic nudge, not even realizing she was doing it, and there I was. Locked in a dark room, a coffin, for all I knew. So I started groping around in your head. Accidentally touched something and made a connection. Hey, I can see! Touched something else. I can hear! What's this? Somebody else is wearing my body! But if I make contact here, I can pick up his thoughts. And so on. It took a few days.

*And you keep learning things all the time, eh, Hamlin?*

—Frankly, I haven't been making much progress lately. I'm finding it hard to override your conscious control, your motor centers, your speech center. To make you walk where I want you to walk, to make you say what I want you to say. I can do a little of that, but it costs me a terrific load of energy, and sooner or later you pull me loose. Maybe there's a secret to overriding you that I haven't found yet.

*You manage to mess with my heartbeat pretty easily, though.*

—Oh, yes. I've got decent control over most of your autonomic system. I could turn your heart off in five seconds. But what's the use? You die, I'd die too. I could play with your digestive juices and give you an ulcer by morning. Only this is my body as much as yours: I don't gain anything by damaging it.

*Nevertheless you can cause me plenty of pain.*

—Indeed I can. I could harass you most miserably, Macy. How would you like the sensation of a toothache, twenty-five hours a day? Not the toothache itself, nothing a dentist could fix, just the sensation of it. How would you like a premature ejaculation, every time? How would you like a feedback loop in your auditory system so that you heard everything twice with a half-second delay? I could make your life hell. But I'm not really a sadist. I don't have any hard feelings toward you. I simply want my body back. I still hope we can work things out in an

amiable way, without the need for me to apply real pressure.

*Let's not start that routine again.* Macy reached for the bourbon. *I want to know more about you. What it's like for you in there. Can you actually see the interior of my brain?*

—See it? The neurons, the synapses, the brain cells? Not really. Only in a metaphorical sense. A visionary sense. I can set up one-to-one percept equivalents, such as my perception of myself as a miniature octopus, do you follow? But I don't actually see. It's hard to explain. I'm aware of things, structures, forms, but I simply can't communicate that awareness to someone who hasn't ever been on the inside himself. You have to remember that I don't have an organic existence. I'm not a lump of something solid under your headbone, a kind of tumor. I'm just a web of electrochemical impulses, Macy, and I perceive things differently.

*But aren't we all just webs of electrochemical impulses? What am I if not that?*

—True. Except that you're linked with this brain at so many points that you don't have any sense of yourself as something distinct from the bodily organ through which you perceive things. I do. I'm dissociated, disembodied. I sense my own existence as something quite separate from the existence of this brain, here, through which I get various sensory inputs when I ask for them, and through which I can force an output by working at it. It's weird, Macy, and it's lousy, and I don't like it at all. But I can't achieve a real hookup, because you're in the way in so many places, entrenched too deeply for me to dislodge you.

*What are we going to do, then?*

—Continue annoying each other, I suppose.

Quarter to nine. Really ought to check up on Lissa somehow, go down to her apartment, ask the cops to investigate. Not very ambitious right now, though. Maybe she'll come in soon. A long long walk on a spring night, home after dark.

—You're in love with her, aren't you, Macy?

*I don't think so. A certain physical attraction, I don't deny that. And a kind of solidarity of the crippled—she's got troubles, I've got troubles, we really ought to stick together, that kind of feeling. But not love. I don't know*

*her that well. I don't even know myself that well. I have no illusions about that: I'm inexperienced, I'm emotionally immature, I'm brand new in the world.*

—And you're in love with her.

*Define your terms.*

—Don't hand me that sophomoric manure. You know what I mean. Let me tell you a few things about your Lissa, though, that somebody who is as you rightly say emotionally immature might not have noticed.

*Go ahead.*

—She's completely selfish. She exists only for the benefit of Lissa Moore. A bitch, a witch, a cunt that walks, a life-force eater. She'll try to suck the vitality out of you. She tried it with me, hoping she could drain some of my talent out of me and into her. I was fighting her all the way. I held her off pretty well. Although I think that ESP of hers infected me somehow and caused my breakdown. I didn't realize that at the time it was happening, Macy, but it occurred to me later, that she was fastening onto me, messing up my mind, robbing me of strength, pushing me over some sort of brink. And after a year or so I fell in. She won't need as long with you. She'll bleed you dry in a month.

*You make her sound like a monster. She strikes me as being an awfully pathetic monster, Hamlin.*

—That's because you've come to know her only when she's in trouble. This ESP of hers, do you think it was an accident? Something that just sprouted in her, like the measles? It's that hunger of hers. To use people, to devour people, to drain people, to engulf people. Which finally got out of hand, which ran away with her. Now she drains automatically, she pulls in impulses from all sides, more than her mind can stand, and it's killing her. It's burning her out. But she asked for it.

*How harsh you are.*

—Just realistic. I never knew a woman who wasn't some kind of vampire, and Lissa's the most dangerous one I knew. A cunt is a cunt. A little bundle of ambitions. I fell for it, for a while. And it ruined me, Macy, it used me up.

*I think your whole outlook on women is distorted.*

—Maybe yes, maybe no. But at least I came by it honestly. Through living. Through experiencing. Through drawing my own conclusions. I didn't pick up my ideas

vicariously. I didn't have them pumped into me at a Rehab Center.

*Granted. Which still doesn't make your ideas righter than mine.*

—Whatever you say. I just wanted to warn you about her.

*I'm amazed at the difference in our images of her. You see her as a marauder, a vampire, a drinker of souls. My impression is just the opposite: that she's a weak, passive, dependent girl, terrified by the world. How can they be reconciled?*

—They don't need to be. Why shouldn't my image of her be different from yours? I'm different from you. We're two very different persons.

*And if an outsider tried to make an assessment of Lissa based on what we told him?*

—He'd have to make parallax adjustments to compensate for our differences in perspective.

*But which is the real Lissa? Yours or mine?*

—Both. She can be passive and weak and still be a monster and a vampire.

*You really believe, though, that she deliberately sets out to drain vitality from people?*

—Not necessarily deliberately, Macy. She may not even realize what she's doing. I'm sure she didn't realize it until her inputs got too intense to cope with. It was just a thing she had, a telepathic thing, a need, a hunger. Which had the incidental effect of destroying people who came close to her.

*I don't feel that she's been destroying me.*

—You're welcome to her, pal.

Twenty minutes to ten. Another shot of bourbon. Smo-o-th. Another Acapulco special, long and luscious, in the all-new, improved, negative-ion-filter format. The good haziness happening now. Perhaps Lissa's dismembered body has by this time been scattered throughout the six boroughs of the city. She seems remote and unreal to him. For the past ten minutes he has allowed himself to indulge in a mood of intense nostalgia. A curious species of nostalgia for the life he did not live. Meditating on the fragments of Hamlin's experience that have bled through to him across

the boundaries that separate their identities. And yearning for more.

*Hamlin?*

—Yes.

*How hard would it be to merge our memory files entirely?*

—I don't follow you. What do you mean?

*So that I'd have access to everything you can remember. And you'd have access to all that had happened to me.*

—I imagine it wouldn't be hard.

*I'm willing if you are.*

—It would amount to a merging of identities, you realize. We wouldn't be sure where one of us ends and the other begins. We'd blend, after a while. Frankly, I'd wipe you out.

*You think so?*

—A pretty good chance of it.

*What makes you so sure?*

—Because I'd bring to the blending thirty-five years of genuine experience. Your thirty-five years of synthetic memories would overlay that like a film of dirt, and after a time I'd polish it away, leaving my real life blended to your four years in the Rehab Center, with some interplays from your ersatz existence coloring my recollections of the things I actually did. What would emerge would be a Nat Hamlin somewhat polluted by Paul Macy. Is that what you want? I'm willing if you are, Macy.

*I didn't mean such a complete joining. Just an exchange of memory banks.*

—I already have as much access to what the Rehab Center gave you as I need.

*But I don't have any access to your past, except some stuff that came floating through the barrier while I was asleep. And I want more.*

—What for?

*Because I'm starting to recognize it as my own identity. Because I feel cut off from myself. I want to know what this body did, where it traveled, what it ate, who it slept with, what it was like to be a psychosculptor. The need's been growing in me for a couple of hours now. Or maybe longer. It frustrates me to know that I was somebody important, somebody vital, and that I'm completely cut off from his life.*

—But you weren't anybody important, Macy. *I* was. You weren't anybody at all. A Rehab doctor's wet dream.

*Don't rub it in.*

—You admit it?

*I never denied I was only a construct, Hamlin.*

—Then why don't you just step aside and let me have the body, then?

*I keep telling you. My past may be a fake, but my present is real as hell, and I'm not giving it up.*

—So you want to add my past to yours, to give you that extra little dimension of reality. You want to go on being Paul Macy, but you want to be able to think you used to be Nat Hamlin, too?

*Something like that.*

—Up yours, Macy. My memories are my own property. They're all I've got. Why should I let you muck around in them? Why should I sweat to make you feel realer?

Ten-fifteen. How quiet it is at this time of night. Somehow went without dinner and never even noticed. Sleepy. Sleepy. Phone the police? Tomorrow, maybe. She must have gone back to her own place, I guess. Mmmm. Mmmmm.

—I have a new proposition for you.

*Eh? Huh?*

—Wake up, Macy.

*What's the matter?*

—I want to talk to you. You've been dozing.

*Okay. So talk. I'm listening.*

—Let's make a deal. Let's share the body on an alternating basis. First you run it, then me, then you again, then me again, and so on indefinitely. Operating it under the Paul Macy identity, naturally, so we don't get into legal difficulties.

*You mean we switch every day? Monday Wednesday Friday it's me in charge, Tuesday Thursday Saturday it's you, Sunday we hold dialogs?*

—Not exactly like that. You need the body four days a week to do your job, right? Those four days it's yours. Saturdays and Sundays and holidays are mine. Weekday evenings we divide in such a way that you get some, I

get some. We can work out ad-hoc arrangements for swapping time back and forth as the occasion demands.

*I don't see why I have to give you any time at all, Hamlin. The court awarded your body to me.*

—But I'm still in it. And I'm prepared to be a mammoth pain in the ass unless I'm allowed to take charge some of the time.

*You want me to yield half my lifespan to you under duress.*

—I want you to be sensible and cooperative, that's all. Can you function freely with me playing games inside your nervous system? Do you enjoy being harassed? I can cripple your life, Macy. And what about me? Must I be condemned to be bottled up without any autonomy, with my gifts? Listen, even if you run the body for half the time, that's three and a half days a week more than fate originally intended. By rights you shouldn't be here at all. So why not accept a reasonable compromise? Half the time you'll be you, and you can do any fucking thing you please. The other half you'll surrender autonomy and ride as a passenger while I go about my business. Sculpting, screwing, eating, whatever I feel like doing. We'll both benefit. I'll get to live again, a little, and you'll be free from the annoyance of having me constantly interfering with you.

*Well—*

—Another incentive. I'll give you the free run of my memory bank. What you were asking for a little while ago. You can find out who you really were, before you became you.

*Get thee behind me, Satan!*

—Will you tell me what's wrong with the goddam deal?

*Nothing wrong with it. It's too damned tempting, that's what.*

—Then why not go along with it?

A taut uneasy moment. Considering, weighing, mulling. Blinking his eyes a lot. Aware that his head is really too foggy now for such perilous negotiations. Why surrender a chunk of his life to a condemned criminal? Wouldn't it be better to fight it out, to try to expel Hamlin altogether, to break his grip once and for all? Maybe I can't. Maybe when the showdown comes he'll expel me. Perhaps it makes more sense to accept the half-and-half. But even so—a flood of suspicions, suddenly—

*How would we work this switch?*

—Easy. I'd penetrate the limbic system. You know what that is? Down underneath, in the depths of the folds. Controls your pituitary, your olfactory system, a lot of other things, blood pressure, digestion, and so forth. Also the seat of the self, so far as I can tell. You have it pretty well guarded, whether you know it or not. A wall of electrical charge sealing it off. But I could come in by way of the thalamus, reverse the charge—if we cooperate, it would be just a matter of a few seconds and we'd have our shift of identity polarity—I've worked out the mechanisms, I know where the levers are—

*All right. Let's say I cooperate and you take over. What assurance do I have that you'd let me back on top again when your time was up?*

—Why, if I didn't, you could pull all the stuff I've been pulling on you! The situations would be entirely reversed. You could mess around with my heart, my sex life—you'd learn the right linkups fast, Macy, you aren't dumb—

*I'm not convinced what you say is true. Maybe you'd have a natural advantage, because it was your body originally. Maybe when you were in charge again you could evict me altogether.*

—What an untrusting bastard you are.

*My life's at stake.*

—All I can say is you've got to have more faith in my good intentions.

*How can I?*

—Look, I'll open wide to you for a minute. I'll give you a complete unshielded entry into my personality. Poke around in there, make your own evaluation of my intentions—you'll see them right up front—decide for yourself whether you can trust me. Okay?

*Go ahead. But no funny stuff.*

—I'm baring my soul to him, and he's still suspicious as hell.

*Go ahead, I said. How do we work this?*

—First, we make some little electrical adjustments in the corpus callosum—

Odd sensations along the back of the neck. Prickling, tingling, a mild stiffening of the skin. Not entirely unpleasant; a certain agreeable feel to it, in fact. Unseen

fingers stroking the lobes of his brain, caressing the prominences and corrugations. A tickling on the underside of the skull. Moss beginning to sprout between the white jagged cranial ridges and the soft cerebral folds below. And the oozing of warm fluids. Pulse. Pulse. A wonderful sleepy feeling. Passivity, yes, how splendid a thing is passivity. We are merging. We are opening the gates. How could one have thought that this admirable human being meant to do one harm? When now his soul is thuswise displayed. Its peaks and valleys. Its exaltations and depressions. Its hungers and fears. See, see, I am as human as thou! And I yearn. And I lament. Come let me enfold you. Come. Put aside these unworthy untrustingnesses. Open. Open. Open. Bathed in the warm river. Lulled on the gentle tide. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. This is how we come together. The avoidance of all friction. The total lubrication of the universe. And we dissolve into one another. And we dissolve.

What's that sound?

Buzz saw at work in the forest! Dentist's drill raping a bicuspid! Jackhammers unpeeling the street! Braked wheels squealing! The fury of clawed cats!

Key turning in the lock!

Lissa! Lissa! Lissa!

Standing on the threshold. Fingertips pressed to lips in alarm. Body curved backward, recoiling in shock. Then the scream. And then:

"Leave him alone! Get your filthy hands off him, Nat!"

Followed by a sudden instinctive bombardment of mental force, a single massive jolt out of her that sent Macy crumpling stunned to the floor. Blackout. Internal churning. Clicking of defective gears. Slow return to semiconsciousness. Lissa embracing him, cradling his throbbing head. A coppery taste in his throat. Incredible lancing pain between the eyes. Her face, smudged, strained, close to his. Her faint worried smile. And Hamlin nowhere within reach. There was in Macy's head the strange blessed aloneness that he had experienced so few times since the first awakening of his other self. Alone. Alone. How quiet it is in here.

# TEN

"PAUL? Can you hear me?"

"From a million miles away."

"Are you all right?"

"Dazed. Groggy. Jesus, groggy!" Trying to sit up. She tugging him back into his chair. Surprising how strong she is. He looked at his hands. Quivering and twitching. As if a powerful electrical current had passed through his body and was still recycling itself through the peripheral circuits, touching off a muscular spasm here and here and here.

Searching for Hamlin. No, not in evidence. Not at the moment.

"What happened?" he said.

"I was at the door," said Lissa. "And from outside, I could feel the waves coming from his mind and yours. Mostly from his. You were—asleep, drugged, drunk, I don't know. Passive, anyway. And he was taking you over, Paul. His mind was wrapped around yours, and he was turning you off switch by switch—that's the only way I can describe it—and you were about half gone already. Submerged, dismantled, switched off, whatever word is best."

"We made a deal. We were going to share the body, half the time him running the show, and me the rest of the time. He promised me that if I let him take over, he'd turn the body back to me when it was my time to have control."

"He was tricking you," she said. "What were you, drunk? Stoned?"

"Both."

"Both. It figures. He was just getting you to lower your defenses so that he could get full control. I felt the whole thing from outside. I opened the door. It was much stronger

in here. You sitting there with an idiot smile on your face. Eyes open, but you couldn't see. Hamlin swarming all over you. So I—I don't know, I didn't stop to think, I just hit him. With my mind."

"I think you killed him," Macy said.

"No. I hurt him, but I didn't kill him."

"I can't feel him any more."

"I can," she said. "He's very weak, but I can sense him down at the bottom of your brain. It's like he fell off a twenty-five-foot wall. I don't know how I did it. I just lashed out."

"Like you did that time in the restaurant."

"I suppose," she said. "Why did you let him do that to you?"

Macy shrugged. "We were talking to each other all evening. While I waited for you to come home. Getting chummy with him. We were proposing deals to each other, compromises, arrangements. And then. This talk of sharing came up. I was pretty stoned by then, I suppose. Lucky thing you came in." He glanced up at her and said, after a moment, "Where the hell were you, anyway?"

Out, she told him. She just decided to go out, around five o'clock. Back to her apartment to pick up some of her things. He gave her a fishy look. Even in his present shell-shocked condition he was able to see that she had come in emptyhanded. He taxed her with the inconsistency, and she made a stagy attempt to seem innocent, with much shrugging and tossing of the head, telling him that when she reached her place she had decided she didn't need those things after all, and had left them there. And the rest of the evening? From six o'clock till now? Chatting with old friends down at the house, she said. Sure, he thought, remembering the sort of neighbors she had had there, the slummies, the bandits.

Without in so many words accusing her of lying to him, he accused her of lying to him. She was indignant and then at once contrite. Admitting everything. Left here without intending to come back. The strain, too much strain, too much mental noise, the yammering of the double soul within the single brain getting to be more than she can handle. All night long, lying next to him, picking up the blurred shapeless echoes of the conflict going on within his head. You maybe don't even realize it yourself, she

told him. How Hamlin hammers all the time, let me out, let me out, let me out. Deep down below the levels of consciousness. That constant agonized cry. And you fighting back, Paul. Suppressing him, squashing him. Don't you know it's going on?

And he shook his head, no, no, I'm only aware when he surfaces and starts talking to me, or when he grabs parts of my nervous system. Tell me more about this. And Lissa told him more. Conveying to him, in short nervous blurts of half-sentences, how much she was suffering from her mere proximity to him, how much it had cost her in extrasensory anguish since she had moved in. It would be bad enough if there was only one of him, but the double identity, no, too much, too fucking much, all that telepathic pressure, her head was splitting.

And it got worse every day. Cumulative. Rebirth of the old overpowering impulse to hide herself away from the whole human race. Not your fault, Paul, I know, not your fault, I asked you to take pity on me and help me, but yet, but yet, this is what happens. Even when you aren't here I feel you and Hamlin hemming me in. Pushing against my temples.

Like a kind of air pollution, it was: he gathered that she felt the sweaty residue of their grappling selves enfogging and enfouling the place, greasy molecules of disembodied consciousness drifting in the rooms, sucked into her lungs with every breath. A daily poisoning. So at last she simply had to get out and clear her head. Setting out at five, a long twilight walk downtown, hour after hour, mechanically moving along, lift foot put foot down lift other foot. Finally reaching the vicinity of West 116th Street by nightfall. A somber prowl in darkness through the ruins of the old university.

He stared at her in alarm. You really went there? Those charred shells of buildings were, they said, a rapist's heaven, a mugger's paradise. Suicidal to stroll there alone after dark. And she gave him an odd masked look, faintly guilty. What had she done this evening? His imagination supplied a possible answer—or was Hamlin planting the thought, or had it come from her, bleeding across the line of mental contact? A dimly perceived figure, say, pursuing her through the shattered campus. But Lissa crazily unafraid, perhaps half eager to court death or mutilation,

defiant, turning to the unkown pursuer, winking, pulling up her tunic, wagging her hips. Here, man, bang away, what do I care? Thrust and thrust and thrust on a bed of rubble. Afterward the man giving her a funny look. You must be real weird, lady. And running away from her, leaving her to proceed on her solitary wandering way. Had it happened? Her clothes weren't rumpled or stained or soiled.

Macy told himself that it was all his own ugly fantasy; she had merely been out for a walk, hadn't spread her legs for a stranger, hadn't purged her head of echoes by inviting rape. Go on, he told her. You walked through the ruins. And then? I did a lot of thinking, she said. Wondering if I ought to head back to my old place and stay there. Or go uptown to you. Maybe even to kill myself. The easiest way. Misery no matter what I do, you see, that's no joke. And finally, beginning to tire, to regret her long nocturnal expedition, beginning to worry about worrying him by her disappearance. Getting on the tube, returning. Standing outside the door and becoming aware of the tricky takeover in progress within. The entry. The last-minute rescue. Tarantara!

"Why did you come back here?" he asked.

A shrug. Vague. "I can't say. Because I was lonely, maybe. Because I had a premonition, maybe, that you were in trouble. I didn't think about it. I just came."

"Do you want to move out for good?"

"I don't know. I'd like to be able to stay with you, Paul. If only. The pain. Would. Stop." Drifting away from him again. Her voice dreamy and halting. "A river of mud flowing through my head," she murmured. Flopping down on the bed, face in arms. Macy went to her with comfort. Such as he could offer. Stroking her tenderly despite the ache behind his eyes. Again, it seemed, the curious flow of strength had taken place. From her to him. The odd sudden reversal of roles, the comforter becoming the comforted. Ten minutes ago she had been striving to put him back together, now she was crumpled and flaccid. And Hamlin thinks this girl is destructive. A monster, a villainess. Poor pitiful monster.

She said indistinctly, not looking up, "Your Rehab Center phoned again this morning. A doctor with a Spanish name."

"Gomez."

"Gomez, yes, I think so."

"And?"

Pause. "I told him the whole thing. He was very upset."

"What did he say?"

"He wanted to see you right away. I said no, it was impossible, Hamlin would attack you if you went near the Rehab Center. He didn't appear to believe that. I think I convinced him after a while."

"And then?"

"He said finally he'd have to discuss things with his colleagues, he'd call back in a day or two. Said I should phone him if there were any important new developments."

Macy considered calling him now. Wake the bastard up. Yank him from his bed of pleasure. He could be at the Rehab Center by one, half past one in the morning; maybe they could give him a shot of something while Hamlin was dormant, knock him out for keeps. Lissa vetoed the idea. Hamlin's not as dormant as you think, she said. He's down, but not out. Sitting there trying to collect some of his power. No telling what he'll do if he feels threatened.

Macy searched his cerebral crannies for Hamlin and could not find him, but left Gomez unphoned anyway. The risks were too great. Lissa probably was right: Hamlin still maintaining surveillance down there, capable of taking severe and possibly mutually fatal defensive action if attempt was made to reach the Center. Paul didn't dare try calling his bluff.

They prepared for bed. Flesh against flesh, but no copulatory gestures. He was carrying too heavy a burden of fatigue to think about mounting the doubtfully willing Lissa just now. Still obsessed by the image of the stranger balling her in the university ruins, too. Tomorrow's another day, heigh-ho! As Macy was falling asleep he heard her say, "Gomez doesn't want me to stay with you any more. He thinks I'm dangerous for you."

"Because you awakened Hamlin in me?"

"No, I didn't go into that with him. I didn't say anything to him about my—gift."

"Then why?"

"Because I'm out of your other life, is why. You aren't supposed to be seeing Nat Hamlin's cast of characters, remember? They conditioned you against it."

"He knew who you were?"

"I told him I used to model for Nat. Our accidental meeting on the street. He pretty much ordered me to go away from you."

"Is that why you walked out tonight?"

"How do I know?" she said petulantly. Curling close against him. Tips of her breasts grazing his back. Turn around and do her? No. Not tonight. That lousy meddling fucker Gomez. Like to tell him a thing or two. If only I could. If only. What a bitching mess. But tomorrow's another day. She's snoring already, anyway. Let her rest. Maybe I will too. To sleep. Perchance to dream.

Three days of relative tranquillity. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. His first weekend with Lissa. No news out of Hamlin, save only some irregular psychic belchings and rumblings. Obviously the shot that Lissa had given him had left him pretty feeble. No news out of Gomez, either. A quiet weekend together. Where to go, what to do? The first edge of summer heat lapping the city. We stay in bed late. We screw to Mozart. Dee-dum-dee-dum-dee-*dum-dum*, diddy-dum diddy-dum diddy-*dum*. Her legs up over his shoulders in a nicely wanton way. Her eyes aglow afterward in the shower. Playful, kittenish. Soaping his cock, trying to get him up again and succeeding. For a man of my mature years I'm pretty virile, *hein?* Laughter. Breakfast. The morning news coming out of the slot.

Then out of the house. Her mood already descending; he could sense her turning sullen, starting to withdraw. It just didn't seem possible to keep her happy more than two hours at a stretch. He tried to ignore her darkening outlook, hoping it would go away. Such a beautiful day. The golden sunlight spilling out of the Bronx.

"Where do you want to go, Lissa?" She didn't answer. It seemed almost that she hadn't heard him. He asked again.

"Voices," she muttered. "These fucking voices. I'm a crapped-up Joan of Arc." Lissa? Lissa? Turning toward him, torment in the ocean-colored eyes. "A river of mud," she said. "Thick brown mud piling up in my head. Coming out my ears, soon. A delta on each side."

"It's such a beautiful day, Lissa. The whole city's ours."

"Wherever you want to go," she said.

At his random suggestion they went to the Bronx Zoo. Wandering hand in hand past the cunning habitat groups. Hard to believe that those lions really had no way of jumping the moat. And what kept those birds from flying out of their dome? Wide open on one side, for Christ's sake! But of course they did clever things with air pressure and ion-flows these days. The zoo was crowded. Families, lovers, kids. Most of them funnier-looking than the population behind the moats. The raucousness of the animals. Wet twitching noses, sad eyes.

Every third cage or so was marked with a grim black star, signifying that the species was extinct except in captivity. White rhinoceros. Pygmy hippo. Reticulated giraffe. European bison. Black rhinoceros. South American tapir. Wombat. Arabian oryx. Caspian tiger. Red kangaroo. Bandicoot. Musk-ox. Grizzly bear. So many species gone. Another hundred years, nothing left but dogs and cats and sheep and cattle. But of course the Africans had needed meat in the famine years, before the Population Correction. The South Americans, the Asians. All those babies, all those hungry mouths, and still it hadn't done any good, by the end of it they were eating each other after the animals were gone. Now the zoos were the last refuge. And for some it was too late.

Macy remembered a trip with his father, when he was a boy, ten, twelve years old, the San Diego Zoo, seeing the giant panda they had there. "That's the last one left in the world, son. Smuggled out of Commie China just before the blowup." A big two-toned fuzzy toy sitting in the cage. No giant pandas left anywhere, now. Some stuffed ones, as reminders. His father? The San Diego Zoo? Really? Who was his father? Where had he grown up? Had he ever been to the San Diego Zoo? Did they truly have a giant panda there, once? The oscillations of memory. Surely it had never happened. Perhaps there had never been any such animal.

Lissa said, "I can feel their minds. The animals."

"Can you?"

"I never realized I could. I never went to the zoo before."

He was poised, wary, ready to rush her toward the tube if the impact overwhelmed her. It wasn't necessary. She was joyful, ecstatic, standing in the plaza by the seal tank and drinking in the oinks and bleats and honks and nyaaas

of a hundred alien species. "Maybe I can transmit some of what I'm getting to you," she said, and held both his hands and frowned earnestly at him and peered into his eyes, so that passersby nodded and smiled at the sight of true love being expressed between the seals and the tigers, but he was unable to pick up a shred of what she sent him.

So she described it, in intermittent bursts, whenever she could spare him a moment out of her contemplations. The high piping throaty thoughts of the giraffe. The dull booming ruminations of the rhino. The dense, complex, bleak, and bitter output of the African elephant, he of the big ears, a Kierkegaard of zoology. The sparkling twitter of the chimps. The flippant outbursts of the raccoon. The Galapagos tortoise pondered eternity; the brown bear was surprisingly sensual; the penguins dreamed icy dreams.

"Are you making all this up?" he asked her, and she laughed in his face, like Aquinas accused of inventing the Trinity. Within an hour she was wholly spent. They snacked on algae-burgers and Lenin soda, and took the conveyer to the exit. Lissa giggling, manic, stoned on her beasts. "The orang-utan," she said. "I could tell you exactly how he'd vote in the next election. And if I could only let you hear the gnu! Oh, shit, the gnu!"

But she was brooding again before dark. They went into Manhattan in the afternoon, circling around the burned-out places and drifting through the flamboyant new downtown section, and he tried to interest her in the amusement parlors, the sniffer palaces, the swimming tanks, and such, only she was glassy and distant. They had dinner at a Chinese restaurant on one of the Hudson piers, and she picked idly at her food, leaving most of it, getting clucked at by the waiter. A quiet evening at home. We have no friends, Macy realized. They played Bach and smoked a lot.

Just before bedtime Hamlin seemed to stretch and yawn within him, or was it an illusion? Bad sex that night, Lissa very far down, he not much better, both of them clumsy and halfhearted as they groped each other in bed. He tried to go into her and she was dry. Persevered, God knows why. Finally some lubrication. Not much response from her, though. Like fucking a robot; he was tempted to quit in the middle, but thought it would be impolite, and he chased himself on to a solitary, unrewarding coming. Some nasty dreams later, but nothing he hadn't had before.

Saturday a fizzle. Lissa vacant, absent. An endless day. Sunday much better. Throwing herself on him at sunrise, straddling him, lowering herself until impaled. Good morning, good morning, good morning! Up and down, up and down. Breasts jiggling overhead. His startled fingers encircling the smooth cool globes of her ass. After which she fixed a hearty breakfast. Bouncy, a breathless adolescent giddiness about her, perhaps fake: trying hard to be a good companion, he suspected. After that sulking bitchy day she gave me yesterday. Lose one, win one.

"Where to?" she asked.

"Museum of Modern Art," he suggested. "They've got some Hamlins there, don't they?"

"Five or six, yes. But do you really think it's wise to go? I mean, he's been so quiet the last couple of days. The sight of his work might stir him up again."

"That's exactly what I want to find out," he told her. They went. The museum, it developed, had seven Hamlins, two big pieces almost though not quite as impressive as the *Antigone*, and five minor objects. They all were on display in the same room, four grouped in one corner and three assembled against the opposite wall, which gave Macy the opportunity for a critical test: would the presence of so much of Nat Hamlin's handiwork arouse the submerged artist by some process of psychic leverage?

Boldly Macy planted himself between the two groupings, where he would be exposed to the maximum output of the pieces. Well, Hamlin? Where are you? But though Macy detected some cloudy subliminal squirmings, there was nothing else to indicate Hamlin's existence within him. He studied the sculptures closely. The connoisseur making his lofty observations. Only a few weeks ago, in Harold Griswold's office, the sight of a Hamlin piece had knocked him slappy, and here he was listening critically to the resonances, noting the subtle recurvings of the contours, doing the whole art-appreciation number with great aplomb.

Some kids in the room, researching a report on Hamlin, maybe. Apparently recognizing him. Looking at his face, then at his Rehab badge, then at his face again, then at the sculptures, then at each other. Whispering. Even that didn't bother him, being found out as the walking zombie relict of the great artist. The kids didn't dare approach him. Macy gave them a benevolent smile. I'd give you my autograph

if you asked. With these very hands, you know, those masterpieces were created.

He was impressed by his own newfound resilience. To come here, to confront Hamlin's work, to take it all so calmly. Although not entirely calmly. He found the sight of these pieces gradually stirring in him that dismal depressing nostalgia, that yearning to have access to the past in which this body had brought into being those sculptures. His true past. As he was starting to regard it. Implying that his own past was unsatisfactory, insufficient, insubstantial, inadequate. As if he too had come to agree with Hamlin that he was mere fiction, a freakish aberrant unreality that had been appended to Nat Hamlin's authentic life. So he craved knowledge of that other time. Who was I when I was he? How did I bring forth these works? What was it like to be Hamlin? A bad moment. The subtle corrosive influence of Hamlin within me, undermining me even when he's quiescent. So that I have begun to doubt myself. So that I have started to scorn myself. And hunger to be him. This is the road to surrender; let me turn from it.

Lissa seemed troubled by the Hamlin group too. Remembering a jollier past, perhaps. The happy days of first love. The awesome sensation of being chosen by Nathaniel Hamlin for his bed, for his studio. A world of endless sunrises before her. All highways open. And to have come to this. How great the contrast. Macy could see the bleakness spreading across her face. A mistake to inflict Hamlin's art on her? Or maybe she merely felt oppressed by the museum's Sunday throng. We will go now, I think.

Midmorning, Monday, Macy hard at work. Griswold had just assigned him to a new story. Preliminary charisma-level statistics for the 2012 election came out last night, late; let's do a feature on all the candidates, run up a chart of pulse-figures, hormone counts, recognition profile, the whole multivalent works, right? Right. And so to the task. Research assistants scurrying madly. Their pretty pink boobies bobbling. Stacks of documents. Fredericks stopping by to offer bland, useless suggestions. Loftus staggering in with a load of simulations and color overlays for his approval. The hours whisking swiftly by; the mind fully engaged in purposeful activity.

And then an unscheduled interruption. Someone down

here to see you, Mr. Macy. No appointment. A visitor for me? Who? Image of Lissa, bedraggled, obsessed, freaking out in the reception hall. Please, I must see him, matter of life and death, I'm going to snap, I'm going to blow, let me go upstairs! A messy scene. Only his visitor wasn't Lissa. His visitor turned out to be a Dr. Gomez.

Panic. Gomez, here? Hamlin'll kill me!

After the first quick surge of fright, some rethinking. Hamlin had warned him not to go to the Rehab Center, or to telephone his doctors, yes. But the doctor had come to him. Was that covered by the threat? A debatable point. In any case, Hamlin didn't seem to be raising objections. Macy waited a long troubled moment, expecting a sign from within, a squeeze of his heart, a pinching of his nerves, some sort of don't-fool-around signal. Nothing. He sensed Hamlin's presence like a dull heavy weight in his gut, but he got no specific instructions about seeing Gomez. Perhaps Hamlin wants to find out what Gomez will say. Maybe he's still recovering from the jolt Lissa gave him. Anyway. Tell Dr. Gomez he can come up.

Gomez, out of context, looked unfamiliar. At the Rehab Center, surrounded by his phalanxes of computers and his electronic pharmacopoeia, Gomez was dynamic, formidable, aggressive, indomitable, confidently vulgar. Entering Macy's sleek office he was almost meek. Without his throne and scepter a king's but a bifurcated radish. Gomez came slipping hesitantly through the fancy sliding door. Dressed in excessively contemporary business clothes, greens and reds, much too young for him, instead of the customary monochrome lab outfit. Looking shorter and more plump than in his own domain. His thick drooping mustache seedy and in need of trimming. The weakness of his chin somehow mattering much more here. Ten feet apart; eyes meet eyes. Gomez moistening his lips. How strange to see him on the defensive.

Macy said, "I guess you've decided to believe me after all."

"We've been discussing your case nonstop for three days," said Gomez hoarsely. "But I had to have firsthand data. And since you wouldn't come to us—"

"Couldn't."

"Couldn't." Gomez nodded. Scowled. Not at Macy but at himself. His distress was apparent. Coming here today

was a considerable gesture. The cocky doctor eating crow. He said, voice ragged, "I didn't want to chance phoning you. In case it might provide too much time for the former ego to build up negative reactions. Is my presence here causing any repercussions?"

"Not so far."

"If it does, tell me and I'll leave. I don't want to endanger you."

"Don't worry, Gomez, I'll tell you fast if anything begins." Checking to see if Hamlin is stirring. All calm. "Hamlin hasn't been very active since Thursday night."

"But he's still there?"

"He's there, all right. Despite your loud assurance that it wasn't possible for him to come back."

"We all make mistakes, Macy."

"That was a pretty fucking big one. I asked you to run an EEG. You said no, I was merely hallucinating, merely having a fantasy, there was no chance in the world that Hamlin was intact and surfacing. And then you said—"

"All right. Let's not go into that now." Dabbing at his sweaty forehead. "I'm concerned with therapy for this, not with placing blame. When did it start?"

"The day I left the Center. When I met the girl, Hamlin's old model, mistress, the one you spoke to a couple of times on the telephone."

"Miss Moore."

"Yes. Bumped into her, literally, on the street. I told you all this. She kept calling me Nat, ignoring my badge—you remember?"

"I remember."

"I saw her again, last Monday. She said she was in trouble and wanted me to help her. I didn't want to get involved and started to leave. She hit me with a two-pronged blast of telepathy. Which woke him up fully, completing the job of arousing him that had started when—"

"Telepathy?"

"ESP. Communication between minds. You know."

"I know. This girl's a telepath?"

"I'm trying to tell you."

"You knew she was a telepath, and also that she was a figure out of Hamlin's past who you therefore were under

instructions not to see, and nevertheless you arranged to meet her and—”

“I *didn't* know she was a telepath. Until it was too late. Not that I'd have had any particular reason to avoid her because of that. You never said anything about telepaths, Gomez. I didn't even know there were such things as telepaths, not real ones, not walking around in New York City.”

Gomez closed his eyes. “All right. I get the picture. What we have here is an apparent case of induced identity reestablishment under telepathic stimulus. Of all the shit. A minute theoretical possibility, but who ever expected to run into an actual case of—no fucking literature on the whole subject—no tests, no background, no data—”

“You can write a wonderful paper on me some day,” Macy said bitterly.

“Spare me the crap. You think I'm happy about this?” Indeed genuine agony was visible in Gomez' fleshy features. “Okay, so she woke Hamlin. Meaning what? Give me the symptomatology.”

“He talks to me.”

“Out loud?”

“In my head. A silent voice, but it doesn't seem silent. Twice now he's tried to grab my speech centers. All he can say is gibberish, though, and I knock him away. He also took hold of the muscles of the right side of my face once. I made him let go. Two or three times he's given me a physical shock, a jolt, knocked me down. Last Tuesday, when I set out to the Rehab Center, he staged a little heart attack for me, telling me that he'd give me a niftier one if I persisted in going to the Center. This is no goddam hallucination, Gomez. I've had conversations with him, long rational conversations. He's got very ambitious ideas. He's been inviting me to let him finish me off so he can have his body back.”

“Obviously we can't allow that.”

“Obviously there isn't a fucking thing you can do. If I let you make any hostile moves toward him at all, he'll kill me. It's like I'm carrying a bomb inside me.”

“He's bluffing.”

“You're very sure of that,” Macy said.

“If your body dies, he'll die with it. Whatever he is, he can't survive the decay of your brain cells.”

"He can't survive another round in the Rehab Center, either. So he'd be willing to take any step to keep me from going there, right up to and including killing us both. If I go to you, he dies. Why shouldn't he kill me anyway and take me along? Or at least threaten to, knowing it'll stop me from going to the Center?"

Gomez considered that. He didn't seem to arrive at any immediate conclusions.

Macy said, "I'll tell you what's going to happen. One of two things. He'll knock me out and take over the body, or I'll find some way of chopping him up so he can't hurt me."

"You're playing dangerous games, Macy. Come to the Center. I know Hamlin better than you do: he won't carry out his threat, he won't do anything ultimately to harm you. Killing you would mean the decay and ruin of his own physical self, the last legitimate vestige of Nat Hamlin in the world. He wouldn't do it. He's always been body-proud."

"Balls. I'm no gambler. He said keep away from you and I'm going to keep away."

"We can't let you remain at large with the ego of a condemned criminal in partial control of your brain," Gomez said.

"What will you do, then? Order my arrest? He'll kill me. I believe him when he says that. Do you want to take the chance? It isn't your life on the line, Gomez. You've been wrong in this case once already."

Twitchings of the mustache tips. The tongue moving restlessly between teeth and lips. Gomez in a pickle. Macy staring across the desk at him. He felt his heart hammering. Was it Hamlin, waking up? Or just the excitement, the adrenalin flow?

Gomez said finally, "We'll have to put you under surveillance, Macy. The legal problems, the presence of a potentially dangerous criminal in you. But we'll keep our distance. We won't jeopardize you."

"How will you know whether you're jeopardizing me or not?"

"A signal," Gomez suggested. "Wait." Frowning. "Let's say that when Hamlin is threatening you, you clap your right hand to your left shoulder. So."

"So." Clap.

"That'll tell us to back off, so we don't provoke him. And when you want us to withdraw from the vicinity entirely, that is, when you feel that you're in extreme danger, you also clap your left hand to your right shoulder. So."

"So." Clap. Clap. Idiocy. "How about a secret password, too?"

"I'm trying to help you, Macy. Don't be clever."

"Is there anything else you want to tell me, or can I get back to my work now?"

"One more signal, if you don't mind."

"The one that I use in asking for permission to take a crap?"

"The one to tell us that Hamlin is dormant and that it would be safe for us to seize you. Do you agree that it's possible such a situation might arise? All right, then. That would be our opportunity to grab you and try to exorcise him completely, fast. But only when you give the signal."

"Which is?"

Gomez thought a moment. Deep concentration. All this Boy Scout stuff must really strain his mind. Finally: "Hands locked together behind neck. Like so."

"So," Macy said, imitating. "You won't let your goons mix up the signals, will you?"

"Just keep them straight in your own head and we'll manage to look after ourselves," Gomez said. He moved toward the door. Looking back, shaking his head. "A case of demonic possession, that's what this is. Holy shit. The seventeenth century rides again! But we'll get this corrected, Macy. We owe you an uncrapped-up life, a life without these complications." Pausing by the exit. "If you want to know what's good for you, by the way, I recommend you stop screwing around with Miss Moore. You're living with her, aren't you?"

"More or less."

"You were strongly advised not to get into any entanglements linked to your body's former identity. Specifically including picking up Nat Hamlin's old mistresses, telepaths or not."

"Should I boot her out on her ass? She's a human being. She's got problems. She needs help."

"She's the cause of all your problems, too. It's about ten to one you wouldn't be saddled with Hamlin in the first place if you hadn't gotten involved with her."

"That's easy to tell me now. But I *have* Hamlin, and I feel a responsibility toward her, too. She's a wreck. She needs an anchor, Gomez, somebody to keep her from drifting away."

"What's the matter with her?"

"The ESP. It's driving her out of her mind. She picks up voices—half the time she doesn't know who she is—she has to hide from people, to shield herself—the telepathy comes and goes, random, not under her conscious control at all. It's like a curse."

"And this you need?" Gomez asked. "You're such a solidly established individual yourself that you can keep company with dynamite like this?"

"It wasn't my idea, believe me. But now that I'm involved with her, I'm not going to toss her out. I want to help her."

"How?"

"Maybe there's some way of disconnecting this ESP of hers. It's burning out her mind. What do you say, Gomez? Could it be done?"

"I don't know item one about ESP. I'm a Rehab specialist."

"Who does know?"

"I suppose I could find out if there are any hospitals in the metropolitan area with experience in this. Some neuro-psychiatric division must be pissing around with ESP. If she hates it so much, why hasn't she gone in to be examined?"

"She's afraid to let anyone fool with her mind. Afraid that she'll end up losing her whole personality if they try to rip out the telepathy."

"Shit. You tell me you want to help her, and two seconds later you tell me she's scared of being helped. This is crazy, man. The girl is poison. Get her into a hospital."

"Tell me where to send her," Macy said. "I'll see if I want to do it. And if she does." He gave Gomez a sudden savage grin and clapped his right hand to his left shoulder. A moment afterward he put his left hand on his right shoulder. Gomez stared at him, blinking, not moving at all. "Well, dummy?" Macy asked. "You forgot your own signals? That's the one for withdrawing from the vicinity."

"Has Hamlin begun to threaten you?"

"Don't stand there asking stupid questions. You got the signal. Go. Go. I have work to do. Let me be, Gomez."

"You poor schmuck," Gomez said. "What a lousy thing this is. For all of us." And went. Macy cradled his head in his hands. An ache behind each ear. An ache in his forehead, as though the front of his brain were swollen and pushing against the bone. Practice the signals. Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Lock hands behind back of neck. Surveillance. The friendly Rehab Center haunting me too. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. He thought he could hear Nat Hamlin's ghostly laughter reverberating through the interstices of his frazzled mind. Hey, are you awake, Nat? Did you listen to what Gomez said? Listening now? They're out to get you, Nat. Gomez is after you. To finish the job that he didn't do right the first time. Scared, Nat? I don't mind telling you I am. Because only one of us is going to come out of this whole, at the very best. At the very best only one of us.

# ELEVEN

IF they really did have him under surveillance, he wasn't aware of it. He went through his daily routines. Finished preparing the script for the charisma story on Monday. Taping on Tuesday. Everything smooth. Back and forth from apartment to the office without trouble. Hamlin, surfacing coherently early Tuesday evening for the first time since Thursday, had a pleasant little chat with him, saying nothing about his conference with Gomez or about the abortive takeover attempt of that stoned Thursday evening. Fair is fair, Macy thought. You try to finesse me, I try to sandbag you, but we don't talk about such sordid things. Hamlin chose to turn on the charm, reminiscing a bit about his life and good times. Selected segments of his autobiography come dancing along the identity interface. With subtitles.

## THE ARTIST DISCOVERS HIS GIFT

1984, Orwell's year, the global situation quite thoroughly fucked up on schedule, although not quite as fucked up as the pessimistic old bastard had imagined, and in this small town is twelve-year-old Nat Hamlin, barely pubescent, full of ungrounded wattage and churning unfocused needs. Which small town, where? Mind your own business. The boy is slim and tall for his age. Long sensitive fingers. Father wants him to be a brain surgeon. It's a good living, son, especially now, with all the psychosis flapping in the breeze. You open the skull, you see, and you stick your long sensitive fingers inside and you chop this and you splice that and you amputate this, three thousand dollars, please, and put your money in good growth stocks.

The boy isn't listening. In the attic he models little clay figurines. He has never been to a museum; he has no inter-

est in art. But there is sensual pleasure in squeezing and twisting the clay. He feels a lusty tickle in his crotch and a delicious tension in his jaws when he works with it. Filling the attic with grotesque little images. You sure see the world a funny way, boy. You been looking at some Pee-cas-so, hey? Pee-cas-so, who he? He that old mother from France, he make a million bucks a year turning out this junk. No shit? Where can I see some? And going to the museum, two hours away. Pee-cas-so. That's not how it's spelled. He's pretty good, yeah, yeah. But I'm just as good as he is. And I'm just starting out.

#### SOLITARY PLEASURES

The first major piece now adorns the attic. Three and a half feet high. Adapted from one of Picasso's paintings: woman with two faces, body twisted weirdly on its perpendicular axis, a veritable bitch of a challenge for a fourteen-year-old boy no matter how good he is. The creator lies naked before it. Straggly mustache. Pimples on his ass. Act of homage to the muse. Seizes rising organ in left hand. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Oooh and ahhh. Sixty seconds: close to his record for speed. And accuracy of aim. He baptizes the masterpiece with jets of salty fluid. Ah. Ah. Ah.

#### AN END TO SUBLIMATION

She has long straight silken golden hair in the out-of-date style favored by girls of this town. Rimless glasses, fuzzy green cashmere sweater, short skirt. They are fifteen. He has lured her to the attic after telling her, shyly, anesthetized by pot, that he is a sculptor. She is a poet whose work appears regularly in the town newspaper. Appreciates the arts. This village of philistines; the two of us against them all. Look, this I took from Picasso, and these are my early works, and here's what I'm doing now. How strange, Nat, what brilliant work. You mean nobody knows about this? Hardly anybody. Who would understand? I understand, Nat. I knew you would, Helene.

You know what? Never worked from a live model. An important step forward in my career. Oh, no, I couldn't, I just couldn't. I mean, I'd be embarrassed to death! But why? God gave you the body. Look, all through history girls have been posing for famous artists. And I have to. How else will I grow as an artist? She hesitates. Well,

maybe. Let's smoke first. He brings out stash. She takes two puffs for every one of his. Giggling. He is deadly serious. Reminds her. Yes, yes, yes. You're sure your mother won't come upstairs? Not a chance, she doesn't give a crap what I do up here.

And then. The clothes coming off. Her incandescent body. He can barely look. Fifteen and he's never seen it. Backward for his age, too much time spent alone in the attic. Sweater, bra. Her breasts are heavy; they don't stick out straight when they're bare, they dangle a little. The nipples very tiny, not much bigger than his. Dimples in her ass. The hair down there darker than on her head, and woolier. She looks so incomplete without a prick. His cheeks are blazing. Here, stand like this. Doesn't dare to touch her. Poses her by waving his hands in air. Wishes she'd stand with her legs apart: he isn't sure what it looks like, and he can't see. But she doesn't. She's so stoned, though.

He attacks the clay. Yes. Yes. Works furiously. Meanwhile this posing is turning her on. The artist ought to be naked too, she says. It's only fair. He just laughs. An absurd idea. Couldn't concentrate if. Half an hour. Sweat running down. Tired of posing, she says. Can I stop? They stop. She comes over to him. Leads him on. Put your hand here. And here. Oh. Oh. Oh. Unzipping him. His dong will explode. Quick, on top of me. Oh. Oh, God!

#### THE BIG CITY

A small apartment. Dozens of his favorite works crammed around everywhere. The famous art critic visiting him. Tall, serious, silver-haired. The artist is tall and serious too. Nineteen. Why should you go to art school, the critic asks? My boy, you are already a master! Paternal hand fondling Hamlin's shoulder. What you need now is a dealer. With the right sponsorship you could go places. And how young you are. Cheeks still downy. So saying the famous art critic rubs the downy cheek. Staring intently into young artist's eyes. You could make me the happiest man in the world tonight, says famous art critic in tender tones.

#### AT THE GALLERY

Little red circles pasted on every label. Sold. Sold. Sold. Sold. An auspicious debut. All the best people buying. The

dealer, fat, glorying in flesh, slapping his back. Twenty-two years old. An instant success. Now scene follows scene helter-skelter, one blurring into the next, sometimes two running at once, split-screen.

THE ADVENT OF PSYCHOSCULPTURE

UNREQUITED LOVE

THE SEDUCTIONS OF WEALTH

THE CELEBRATED ACTRESS

ALONE ON THE PINNACLE

THE TORMENTS OF FAME

THE DAY THE MUSEUM BOUGHT EVERYTHING  
MEETING HELENE AGAIN, FIFTEEN YEARS

LATER

THE WORLD TRAVELER

KICKING THE HABIT

FOUR'S COMPANY, FIVE'S A CROWD

MY NAME IS LISSA

And the camera speeding up, running wild.

THE ANTIGONE

THE HEADACHE

THE BREAKDOWN

THE FIRST RAPE

FREAKING OUT ON TERROR

THE QUARREL WITH HIS WIFE

FINISHING ANTIGONE

KNOCKING LISSA DOWNSTAIRS

OUT OF HIS MIND

RAPE UPON RAPE

CAUGHT

CONVICTED

OBLITERATED

AWAKENED

And the sequences jumbled.

ALONE ON THE PINNACLE

AN END TO SUBLIMATION

THE BIG CITY

KICKING THE HABIT

OUT OF HIS MIND

AT THE GALLERY

SOLITARY PLEASURES

THE ARTIST DISCOVERS HIS GIFT

Faster and faster. Names, dates, events, aspirations, swirl-

ing in a thick soup of memory, everything merging, all detail lost. Perhaps none of it had ever happened.

—Good night, old buddy.

Lissa was crying softly to herself when he got into bed Tuesday night. He touched her arm and she pulled away from him. Afterward she told him she was sorry for being so unfriendly.

On Wednesday morning, setting out for work, Macy thought he saw one of the Rehab Center minions who Gomez had said would be keeping watch over him. A squat, potbellied man standing at the entrance to the building across the street, holding a newspaper. An awkward exchange of guarded glances. From Macy a flicker of a smile. Me and my shadow. Right hand to left shoulder, hup! Left hand to right shoulder, hup! Hands clasped at back of neck, hup, hup, hup!

That night he suggested that they go downtown to a sniffer palace, but Lissa didn't want to. A quiet evening at home with Brahms and Shostakovich. Near bedtime Lissa said that she had figured out one way for him to get rid of Hamlin.

"How?"

"You could rape somebody and arrange to get caught. And blame it on him. The authorities would see to it that he was completely erased."

"He'd kill me if we were taken into custody," Macy said. A crazy idea. A crazy girl. You could rape somebody and arrange to get caught. Within him Hamlin laughed. Lissa cried again that night, and when Macy asked her if he could help her in any way she made no reply.

There wasn't much for him to do at the network on Thursday—just a half-hour patch-job on a story he had taped the week before. He consumed the rest of the day in trying to look busy. Mainly, with another weekend coming up, he tried to think of things that would divert Lissa and perhaps yank her from the mood of withdrawal that was so frequently enveloping her lately.

He sensed that he was losing her. That she was losing herself. Slipping away into some tepid shoreless sea

blanketed by thick blue fog. She hadn't left his apartment in three days. He suspected that she stayed in bed until noon, one in the afternoon, then sat around smoking, playing music, turning pages, daydreaming. Drifting. Floating. She seldom spoke anymore. Or even answered his questions: just a grunt or two. Last week Macy had felt hemmed in by other people, what with Lissa sharing his apartment and Hamlin sharing his brain; but now Lissa was spinning this cocoon about herself, and Hamlin too was withdrawn and remote. Macy was experienced in solitude but didn't necessarily like it.

This weekend, he decided, we will explore the wonders of the world beyond my door. Rent a car, drive up into the country, two hundred miles, three hundred, however far one must go to find uncluttered pastures. Picnic on the grass. A bosky dell. Romantic fornications beneath the boughs of murmuring fragrant pine trees. If there are any left. And we'll go to fine restaurants. I'll ask Hamlin to suggest a few. Hello, hello, are you there? And Saturday night at a Times Square sniffer palace, all glowlight and tinsel, we will inhale the most modern hallucinogens and enjoy two hours of earthy fantasy. Perhaps we will visit the aquarium so that Lissa can eavesdrop on the ponderous leathery reveries of the walruses and the whales. Oh, a fine zealous weekend! Recreation and invigoration and the restoration of our depleted souls!

But when Macy reached his apartment that evening Lissa wasn't there. A feeling of *déjà vu*: she did this last Thursday too, didn't she? A week gone by and nothing altered. But there is a difference this time, as his quick search of the closets reveals. She has taken her belongings with her. Cleared out for good.

The easiest thing now was also the hardest. To sit tight, to forget her, to make a life without her. Nothing but trouble and turmoil, wasn't she? The steamy feminine complexities, compounded and exponentialized by the inexplicabilities of telepathy. Let her go. Let her go. A high probability that she'll come back, even as last time. But he couldn't. Damnation. Must go looking for her. The most logical place. Her apartment.

A sweet soft spring night.

Stars on display beyond the towers' tips. Peddlers of blurry dreams sauntering in the streets. Down we go into the tube. Whoosh whoosh whoosh. Transfer to East Side line. Double back on tracks. Her exit. The narrow streets, the decaying buildings, survivors of all the cultural upheavals. Scaly erections protruding from the corpus of the abolished past. Which of these houses is hers? They all look alike. Mysterious figures flitting in alleyways. A visit here is like a journey backward in time. A district of shady deeds and unfathomable espionage; an Istanbul, a Lisbon of the mind, embedded in the quivering fabric of New York. This looks like the right place. I'll go in.

Directory of residents? Don't make me laugh!

Macy squinted through the Jurassic dimness of the cavernous lobby. He caught sight of a figure far away, bent and distorted, which hobbled toward him as he proceeded warily inward. And then the shock of recognition: himself approaching. What he sees is the image of Paul Macy, reflected in a cracked and warped mirror occupying the nether wall. Laughter. Applause. On six levels of this hostelry holovision sets give forth their offerings with numbing simultaneity. Lissa? Lissa? She lived on the fifth floor, didn't she? I'll go up. Knock on her door, if I can find it. Or else ask the neighbors. Miss Moore, the red-haired girl, been away for a week or so? You seen her around here tonight? Not me, man, haven't seen a thing. Up the stairs. Where else could she have fled but here? Her nest. Her hermitage.

On the fourth landing he paused. Had the hirelings of Gomez followed him here? No doubt. Keeping close watch. Maybe creeping up the stairs behind him, not wanting to let him get out of sight. It was entirely possible that some orderly of the Rehab Center was at this moment a flight or two below him, frozen, waiting for him to resume his climb. And when I take a step he takes a step. And when I stop he stops. And so up and up and up. Gripping the banister, Macy swung his body halfway out over it and peered down the stairwell. In this darkness impossible to tell. Did somebody pull his head in fast, down there? Let's check it. Wait a minute, then pop my head out again. There. Still not sure, though. Well, fuck it. I don't care if they follow me or not. Up we go. Step. Step. *Stop*. Listen. That time I was sure I heard someone behind me. Com-

forting to know that they look after me where'er I go. Up.

He halted again on the fifth-floor landing. Double row of doors receding into infinity. Lissa behind one of them, maybe. Perhaps it would be best to give her some warning that he had come for her. Perhaps then she'll come out into the hall, I won't have to go knocking on doors. A deep breath. Sending forth the most intense mental signal he could manage, hoping that it would be on her wavelength. *Lissa. Lissa. It's me, Paul, out by the stairs. I came to get you, baby. You hear me, Lissa?*

No response from anywhere.

Okay. Now we look. He began strolling down the corridor, studying the faceless doors. In a hole like this you don't put nameplates out. He couldn't remember where her room was. At the far end of the hall, somewhere, away from the stairs, but there were dozens of doors down there. Here's one that looks like it might be right. He started to knock, but held back. Shyness? Fear? These strange savage slum people here. Maybe they don't even speak English. And me intruding on their shabby dinnertime. But yet if I don't I'll never find her.

Again he started to knock. No. Holovision blasting away in there. Couldn't be her. I'll move on. Here? But they're cooking something in this one. Curried squid. Spider patties. *Lissa? Lissa? Where are you?*

Footsteps in the hall behind him.

Someone running toward him.

Mugger. Slasher. The shadowy pursuer on the stairs. Macy tried to swing around to face his attacker, but before he had completed half a turn the other was upon him, seizing his arms, pulling them up, pinioning him. A big man, as big as he was. They struggled silently in the dark, grunting. A knee rose and jammed itself into the small of Macy's back. He ripped one arm free, clawed at the assailant, tried to get an ear, an eye, any kind of grip. Before the knife flashes. Before the stungun.

Lurching, Macy managed to push the other up against the hallway wall, hard, ramming him with his shoulder, but then he felt his arm, the captive one, being bent back beyond its limits. Wild burst of pain. Desperately Macy banged the other again with his shoulder. Tried to knock his head against the other, hoping to drop him with a single stony smash. No use. No use. The fierce combat

raged. Pointless even to call for help; who would open a door in a place like this? Slam and slam and slam. He was fully engaged in the task of defense. Such total concentration. Both of them breathing hard. Putting up more of a fight than he expected, I am! Stalemate. Lucky thing for me there's only one of them. If I could just get my hand free, and bash his head against the hallway wall—

And then. In the most frantic moment of the struggle. An inner convulsion.

Hamlin.

Making his move.

Time fell to stasis, so that Macy could perceive each phase of the conquest in a leisurely, detached way. Hamlin, having collected his strength for some days now, was taking advantage of the hallway battle, of Macy's full absorption in his difficulties, to seize the motor centers of their shared brain. Ripping out connections with both hands, replugging them under his own administration. Macy was tumbling through a timeless abyss. And Hamlin steadily and efficiently consummating what must have been a carefully planned takeover. Right leg. Left leg. Right arm. Left arm. Paralysis setting in, an unexpected summer freeze. Macy sinking and sinking and sinking. No way to defend himself; he had left his flank unguarded, and the enemy was pouring over the palisade. Down. Down. Down. Very cold now, very still. Where was Gomez' surveillance? Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Extreme danger. Hah. Much good that would be. Macy realized that he and Gomez had completely forgotten to devise one important signal, the one that said, *Help, he's taking me over!* Not that anybody was here to help him. Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Extreme danger. Down. Down. He has me.

## TWELVE

HE was submerged in a sea of smooth green glass. Wholly engulfed, unable to break through to the surface: above his head a solid sheet, impermeable, infrangible, sealing him away from the air. Choking, lungs bursting, head throbbing. A dull pounding sensation in both his calves; swelling of the toes. Below his dangling feet a fathomless abyss, dark, dense. From far overhead came faint greenish-gold strands of light. Blurred, indistinct images of the upper world. All perceptions refracted and distorted and transformed. His hands pushing desperately at the glassy layer above him. Which would not yield. Oh, God, I must be in hell! How can I breathe? How did he do this to me? How will I get out of here? I must be sinking. Slowly down and down. Toothy fish to pick my bones. He could feel the surging of the currents, rivers in the sea buffeting him as they swept past. He shivered. Terror invaded him. So this is it. He has me. He has me. I am within him.

Macy felt a sharp pang of loss, of displacement. It had been so good living in the world. The sunlight, the people, laughter, even the uncertainties, the tensions. To be alive, at least. And then to be overthrown, cast down, evicted, disinherited. He took it all away from me when I wasn't ready to go. It wasn't fair. And now? The pain of this place. The gasping. The choking. The fear.

But he survived the first lurch of terror and discovered that there was no second one. He grew calm. Gradually Macy refined and clarified his awareness of his new condition. He realized that although he could not reach the air, neither would he sink any deeper, nor was the feeling that he was about to drown to be taken literally. In fact this was no sea. All the marine imagery, he understood now,

was purely metaphorical. He was indeed submerged, he did indeed dangle between somewhere and somewhere, but he had become a mere electrochemical network spread thinly through the recesses of what he was forced at this stage to regard as the brain of Nat Hamlin. Hamlin was in charge, on top. Macy occupied some indefinable cranny or series of crannies. He could not see. He could not feel. He could not speak. He could not hear. He could not move. He was nothing but an abstraction, a disembodied identity. Whether he could properly be said to exist at all was questionable.

Now that the first shock was past, he was startled that the loss of his independence brought no despair. Surprise, yes. Irritation and annoyance, yes. (How slickly Hamlin had outmaneuvered him!) Dismay, yes. (How strange it is to be trapped in here. How claustrophobic. Will I ever be able to get out again?) But not despair. Not even fear. Hamlin had once been in this very predicament himself, had he not, and he had endured it and mastered it and escaped. Then why not I? There was of course a great temptation to accept the situation complacently and passively. Telling oneself that one had never been entitled to a real existence anyway. That it would be best for everyone concerned, now that the upheaval of selves had come about, if he sat tight in this womblike place. Placidly letting Hamlin have the body to which he held the original birthright. But the temptation did not tempt Macy greatly. Easy though it might be to take up a vegetable existence, he preferred a more active life. A body *of* his own. The brief taste of living that he had had left him hungry for more.

I never really began, after all. Just a few weeks on my own away from the Center. With *him* bothering me most of that. And now this. I'll fight back. I'll push him out as he pushed me. I may not have been born, but I was real and I wish to return to existence.

Patiently he sought to examine his available options. Was it possible to establish sensory input? Let us see. Let us muster our powers of concentration. If we gather our energy—so—and direct it purposefully in a single direction—so—do we make contact with anything? No. No. Glassy darkness is all. And yet. Now. What do we have here? A node, a handle. Which we can seize. To which we

can apply a subtle interior pressure. Yes! And we perceive. The inward-rushing flood of sensation. But what do we perceive? Our surroundings.

Yes, just as Hamlin said, you arrive at a kind of percept-surrogate image of the brain you're in. If only you had paid more attention, at the Center, when they were trying to teach you a little structural anatomy so that they could explain what they'd been doing to your head. The synaptic vesicles. The synaptic cleft. Dendritic spine. Axon terminal. Organelles, filaments, and tubules. Neural mitochondria. Corpus callosum. Anterior commissure. Limbic cortex. Centrencephlic system. Words. Words. This baffling torrent of referentless nouns. But somehow a little comprehension slides through. You poke around, you insinuate yourself, you learn a thing or two. And the darkness clears.

Macy sent a tendril of himself down a narrow moist corridor and found, at the end of it, a pulsing pink wall on which a golden honeycomb-textured plate was mounted. The tip of the tendril went into one of the apertures of the honeycomb and a tiny explosion of light resulted. Progress, no? Now we subdivide the tendril, and poke one end of it in here, and one in here, and one in here. Flash flash and flash. Presto jingo, we get an input! A bright cluster of sensory data. As yet what comes in is undifferentiated; it might be sight, sound, touch, smell, anything. But at least there is an input. We will continue. Macy tirelessly probing. Seeking out new avenues of exploration. More honeycombs; more subdividing tendrils slipping into slots; more bursts of light.

Will any sense ever come out of this? You are trying to tap a television image, and you can succeed in making contact only with widely scattered phosphors, a dot here and a dot there. Little spiky blurts of information, not enough for comprehension. Not yet. But no one is rushing you. You have no sense of the passage of time. Take an hour, a minute, a century, a year. Sooner or later you'll have a good hookup. It's just a matter of—what was that? A flash of coherence! Here and gone, but it was a total image. Audio? Visual? You still can't tell, but you know that you had all the information, even if you weren't able to interpret it. It was, say, a complete sentence, subject predicate adverbs adjectives expletives articles punctuation dependent clauses, which Hamlin read or heard or spoke

out loud. It was, say, a full sweep of Hamlin's optical reservoir taking in the entire visual input of a fiftieth of a second. It was, say, a spear of abstract thought crossing Hamlin's consciousness from northwest to southeast. Let us now relate such random rootless inputs to our own bank of data. So that we may evaluate. So that we may interpret. So that we can tell sight from sound from cognition. Thus. And thus. We string our telegraph wire across miles and miles of desert and at last it brings us messages.

Such as:

A sense of motion. Jolt jolt jolt, stride stride stride, Hamlin is going somewhere.

A sense of position. Hamlin is standing upright.

A sense of muscular activity. Hips and thighs in action, soles of feet hitting pavement. Hamlin is walking.

A sense of environment. Bright light. Sunlight? General warmth and humidity. Morning? A summer morning? Street noises. He is walking along a street.

A sense of vision, coming jerkily into focus, now clear. Office buildings, pedestrians, vehicles. A street in Old Manhattan?

Riding along as though seated on Hamlin's back, legs around his neck, Macy felt a sharp pang of discontinuity at the absence of proper transitions. At the moment of loss of consciousness this body had been grappling in a slum-building corridor with an unknown assailant, late at night. Now it was walking down a busy daytime street. How much time had passed? What was the outcome of that struggle? What injuries, if any, did the body sustain? Where is Hamlin heading now? None of these things could readily be determined with the resources presently at Macy's command. One can try to improve one's resources, though.

The logical next step, Macy told himself, is to hook into Hamlin's consciousness. So I can read him and maybe hamper him if not entirely control him. A tentacle into the cerebral cortex. But where is the cerebral cortex? Macy could only repeat his previous trial-and-error tactics, groping here, groping there. No luck, though. Impossible to grasp the handles of Hamlin's cerebration. Macy's efforts succeeded only in giving Hamlin's memory-storage regions a high colonic, stirring turbid strata of ancient events. Across the screen of Macy's awareness floated a cloud of

mucky particles of experience, miscellaneous rapes, seductions, artistic triumphs, investment decisions, childhood traumas, and indignations, drifting murkily about. While the sensory inputs continued to show Hamlin swinging jauntily along down the sunny street.

Now for the first time came desolate moments for Macy. A feeling of hopelessness. A realization of the reality of this unreal captivity. Admissions of defeat, the inevitability and finality of. It was to be expected that he'd catch me and lock me up in here. A stronger ego than mine. Wilier. He lived thirty-five years and I lived only four. A criminal mentality, too. He knows how to defend himself. I'll never be able to meddle with him as he did with me. I'll never get out of here.

But as he mourned for himself Macy automatically went on searching for the right place to plug in, trying this and that and this, marching into one blind alley after another, battering himself against dead ends and withdrawing to try again. And abruptly he made his connection, tapping into the line he sought and drawing a staggering numbing dizzying but ultimately satisfying current, the pure juice, the unimpeded flow, the hefty amperage of Hamlin's unfettered soul.

Go to see Gargantua first almost there ten minutes more find out what's been going on the business the buying and selling my price these days it must have gone up plenty I bet they figure I'm dead the cocksuckers no more Hamlins so double the price every week well why not why not why not and then out to the studio all boarded up I bet just take a little look of course I'll have to pose as Macy that will present some problems won't even be able to let Gargan know the truth outright although I'll drop him some hints that fucking mass of meat he's clever he's clever he'll figure it out won't say a word a buck or two in it for him you bet your fat ass there is so then to the studio a sentimental journey I mean I need to go there like a shrine like my own shrine like like all dusty I bet the Goths and the Vandals fuck fuck fuck they bust everything up maybe I wasn't so pleasant a guy but I had a decent respect for property except of course all those cunts if you consider a cunt property and anyway I was crazy then much better now purified by adversity my head clear

at last rid of Macy stuck him where he belongs the poor dumb shit no personality at all just a construct a plastic man well it wasn't his fault but it wasn't mine either the survival of the fittest don't you see Darwin was no dope and then I'll visit Noreen old time's sake I'll have to play it very cagy with her that bitch is perfectly capable of turning me in but maybe not after all nobody ever gave it to her in her life the way I did even if toward the end we were somewhat estranged nevertheless that's part of the normal risks of marriage especially when you marry an officially accredited genius a member of the international elite of artistic achievement high intensity sometimes boils over I'm almost at Gargantua's now I think unless he's moved the gallery four years shit the whole shitting universe changes in four years every cell in the body turns over doesn't it or is it seven years anyway we aren't the same and Gargan probably sells his schlock out of Philadelphia now Chicago Karachi who knows but we'll find out fast enough God it's good just to walk the streets again breathe the air throw my shoulders back and tonight we'll find some friendly hole for dicky dunking yes indeed four years without a piece that's quite a long time for a man of my ability artistic and physical well maybe out in Darien I'll find Noreen willing to come across or one of the others God that creepy Lissa I guess she'd do it she'd do it for anyone even Macy thinking she's really fucking me of course but I don't want her I don't want to go within a million miles of her too dangerous what a shot in the head she gave me that time I don't want her ever again ever ever I wonder what kind of work I'll turn out as soon as I'm back in the swing of things it better be good if I can't maintain quality might as well give the body back to Macy but I think I'll pick up fast enough do some small pieces first recover my grasp of perspective my perspective of grasp and then we'll see anyway the important thing is that I'm back

—But you still have me, Hamlin.

*Macy. Oh, shit! Macy. I didn't think I'd be hearing from you so soon.*

—Sorry to disappoint you.

*Why don't you just erode away? Dissolve. Let yourself be absorbed by the cranial phagocytes,* Hamlin suggested.

*You're over and done with, anyway. Your nebulous existence has ceased to be, Macy. Admit it and go.*

—The Rehab Center failed to program me for auto-destruct.

*I don't need you, though.*

—But I do, Macy said.

*What good are you? What imaginable value do you have to the world? To anyone?*

—I have immense value to me. I'm the only me I have. And I want to survive. I'm going to beat you, Hamlin. I'm going to throw you out again and this time I'll abolish you. Just watch and see.

*Please. Your buzzing is giving me a headache and it's such a beautiful day.*

—I'll give you a lot more than a headache.

Noisy threats were pointless. Macy wanted to make some dramatic demonstration of his ability to harass Hamlin. Give him as good as he got when the tables were turned. Clutch his heart, grab a bundle of muscles in his cheek, shut his eyes, make him piss in his pants. Jolt him, but without, naturally, doing real harm to the body they shared. Only he couldn't. Macy's harassment quotient was close to zero. All he could do was ride gain on Hamlin's sensory input and pipe messages directly into his conscious brain. Buzzing. But no control of the motor sectors whatever. No grip on the autonomic system. Merely a passenger who hasn't the foggiest where the throttle might be, or the brakes, or even the switch for the headlights. Meanwhile Hamlin, untroubled, turned a corner and entered the vestibule of a glossy-fronted shop on the smoked-glass window of which danced the words OMNIMUM GALLERIES, LTD. in free-floating globules of green capillary light. Inside, a battery of safety mechanisms bathed him in scanner-glow. An inner door finally rolled aside, and he entered the gallery, pausing not at all to inspect the treasures of contemporary art it displayed. He said to the girl at the desk, "Is Mr. Gargan here?"

"Is he expecting you, sir?"

"I don't think so. But he'll see me."

"Your name?"

Hamlin faltered at that. Macy picked up the scathing tides of chagrin. A dilemma, yes. After a moment Hamlin

said, "My name is Macy, Paul Macy." With a meaningful glance at the Rehab badge in his lapel. "Tell him I used to be Nat Hamlin, though."

"Oh." A little gasp. A flutter of confusion; a pretty spasm of embarrassment that turned the girl scarlet down to her fashionably exposed breasts. A quick recovery. Jeweled finger to the intercom. "Mr. Macy to see you, Mr. Gargan. Paul Macy. Formerly Mr. Nat Hamlin."

From some inner office, a bellow of surprise that needed no amplification. Hamlin was speedily ushered in. A spherical room, dense mossy black carpet installed 360°-wise everywhere, a man of implausible corpulence lolling along the curved left wall with a meaty hand held languidly over a control panel bristling with jeweled switches. Not rising when Hamlin entered. An ocean of blubber; flesh hanging in folds over folds of flesh. The features barely discernible within that mass: piggy little eyes, puggy little nose, narrow pinched puritan lips. Out of the vastness a thin man's piping voice: "God's own cock, what are you doing here? You aren't supposed to be coming here, Nat!"

"Do you mind?"

"Do I mind? Do I mind? You know I love you. Only I don't follow this at all. They took you in for Rehab; I thought that was the end of you. When did you get out, anyway?"

"Early in May. I would have seen you before this but there were problems."

"You look okay. You sound okay. Just like your old self. But you've got the badge. You're somebody else now, right? What's your new name?"

"Macy. Paul Macy."

"Don't like it. It's a name without any balls."

"I didn't pick it, Gargantua."

The fat man tugged at his dewlaps. "Am I supposed to call you Nat or Paul?"

"You better call me Paul."

"Paul. Paul. Well, I'll try. Sit down, Paul. Jesus, what a fruity name! Sit down, anyway." Hamlin sat. Macy, a helpless spectator within him, sat also. Listening to every word of the conversation but unable to speak. As though watching it on a screen. He had seen this fat man, this gallery owner, before, drifting around in the debris of Hamlin's memory; but he seemed much fatter now. This man and

Hamlin had grown rich together on the proceeds of Hamlin's genius. Now Hamlin stretched out voluptuously. In full command of his recaptured body. The black carpeting seemed to be a foot thick: bouncy, lush. Gargan touched one of the switches on the panel in front of him and the room silently revolved, changing its axis by some 15°. Hamlin's side of the sphere went up and Gargan's descended. Macy experienced some vertigo. The fat man lay pleasantly sprawled, kneading his belly. Shortly he belched and said, "How do you like the setup here? Or don't you remember the old one?"

"I remember. This is tremendous, Gargantua. Like a fucking Babylonian palace. A gallery for sybarites, eh?"

"We get a good clientele here."

"You're prospering. And you've gained some weight, haven't you? Unless I'm mistaken, quite a lot of weight."

"Quite. Two or three hundred pounds since you last saw me."

"You're beautiful."

"I think so."

"How the crap do you have the patience to eat so much, though?"

"Oh, I don't waste time overeating," Gargan said. "I've had my lipostat surgically adjusted. My whole body-fat-and-glucose equation has been changed. I burn slowly, my friend, I burn very slowly. The eating it takes to give you an ounce gives me a pound. And I grow lovely, eh, more lovely every day. I want to weigh a thousand pounds, Nat! Paul. I must call you Paul."

"Paul, yes."

"But none of this makes any sense." Gargan stirred ever so slightly, craning his neck. "How can you remember me? Why didn't Rehab wipe you out?"

"It did."

"But you sound just like—"

"I'm a special case. Don't ask too many questions."

"I follow you, Nat."

"Paul."

"Paul."

"Be more careful about my name, will you? I'm a brand-new man. The loathsome countersocial rapist who did such grievous damage to so many innocent women has been

humanely destroyed, Gargantua, and will never walk the earth again."

"I follow. Where are you living?"

"Way uptown. A temporary place. You can have the address if you want."

"Please. And the phone."

"I won't be there long. As soon as I've got some cash together I'll find something a little more suitable."

"Are you working yet?"

"As a holovision commentator," Hamlin said. "Maybe you've seen me. The late news."

"I mean *working*."

"No. I have no equipment, no studio. I haven't even had a chance to think about work in a serious way."

"But soon?"

"Soon, yes." Macy felt Hamlin's lips curve into a sly, malicious smile. "Would you like to represent me when I get started again, Gargantua?"

"Why ask? You know we have a contract."

"We don't," said Hamlin.

"I could show it to you. Wait, let me punch the retrieve." Gargan's meaty fingers hovered over the console buttons. As he started to stab a stud Hamlin reached out and stopped him.

"You had a contract with Nat Hamlin," Hamlin said. "Hamlin's dead. You can't represent his ghost. My name is Paul Macy, and I'm looking for a dealer. You interested?"

Gargan's face looked puffier. "You know I am."

"Fifteen percent."

"The old contract said thirty."

"The old contract was signed twenty years ago. The situation then doesn't apply now. Fifteen."

Lengthy tugging at dewlaps. "I never take less than thirty."

"You will if you want me to come back to you." The voice very flat now. "All Hamlin's contracts were legally dissolved when his personality underwent deconstruct. I'm not bound by anything. Also I'm without assets and I need to rebuild my capital in a hurry. Fifteen. Take it or leave it."

In Gargan's eyes a countervailing slyness. "Nat Hamlin was an established master with a line of museum credits

longer than my cock. Paul—what is it, Macy?—Paul Macy is a nobody. I had a waiting list for Hamlins, for anything he'd turn out. Why should people buy you?"

"Because I'm as good as Hamlin."

"How do I know that?"

"Because I tell you so. Business may be slow at first until the word-of-mouth starts, but when the public realizes that Macy is as good as Hamlin, even better than Hamlin because he's been through an extra hell and knows how to make use of it, the public will come around and clean you out. You'll cover your nut with plenty to spare. Do we have a deal at fifteen or don't we?"

"I want to see some of Paul Macy's work," Gargan said slowly, "before I offer a contract."

"Contract first or you don't see a thing."

A tut and a tut from the narrow lips. "Artists aren't supposed to be rapacious. That's why they need dealers, to be sons of bitches on their behalf."

"I can be my own son of a bitch," Hamlin said. "Look, Gargantua, don't waltz around with me. You know who I am and you know how good I am. I've had a rough time and I need money, and anyway at this stage of my career it's crazy for me to be cutting my dealer in for thirty. Give me a contract and advance me ten thousand so I can set up a studio, and let's not crap around any more."

"And if I don't?"

"There are two dozen dealers within five blocks of here."

"Who would jump at the chance of taking on somebody named Paul Macy, I suppose?"

"They'd know who I really was."

"Would they? The Rehab process is supposed to be foolproof. Suppose this is all a clever hoax? Suppose you *are* Paul Macy, and somebody's coached you on how to sound like Nat Hamlin, and you're just trying to sweat some quick cash out of me?"

"Test me. Ask me anything about Hamlin's life." Macy sensed Hamlin's distress now. Adrenalin flooding. Pores opening. Genitals contracting.

"I don't play guessing games," said Gargan. Idly he punched a button: the room tilted the other way. Hamlin's intestine lolled. The dealer said, "You've got no leverage, friend. No reputable dealer would trust a Rehab recon-

struct who says he's still got the skills of his old self. So the take-it-or-leave-it is on my side. I'll sign you, Paul, because I'm sentimental and I love you, loved you in the old days, anyway, and I'll give you some money to start you up again. But I won't be blackjacked. Twenty-five percent and nothing lower."

"Twenty."

"Twenty-five." A gargantuan yawn. "You're starting to bore me, Paul."

"Don't get snotty. Remember who you're talking to, what kind of talent you've got sitting next to you here. A year from now you'll regret having muscled me. Twenty percent, Gargantua."

"Twenty-five."

Now Hamlin was plainly upset. The swagger was gone; his ductless glands were working overtime. Macy, who had not ceased to probe avenues of neural connections, thought he had found a good one and that this might be a suitable moment for making a try at retaking the body. He pressed hard. Lunged. Claws outstretched, attacking the cerebral switchboard. But no go. Hamlin brushed him away as though he were a mosquito and said aloud, "Let's split the difference. Twenty-two and a half and I'm yours."

An hour's smooth drive in a rented car brought Hamlin to his old Connecticut estate. The car did its best to cope with Hamlin's surprising ineptness as a driver. He handled the steering-stick crudely, overpushing it, frequently trying to override the car's gyroscopic mind, constantly messing up the delicate homeostasis that kept the vehicle in its proper lane. Macy, from his vantage-point within, monitored Hamlin's performance with mixed feelings. Obviously Hamlin, four or five years away from driving, had lost whatever skill at it he once had had, and that was worrying him, for it had occurred to him that in his absence he might have lost other skills also. Therefore he was working himself into a singleminded frenzy of concentration, gripping the stick in sweaty palm and trying to psych himself into complete mastery over the car. Macy knew he could play on Hamlin's fears, intensifying his distress. *You think you've come back to life, Nat, but nothing came back except your ego and your dirty mouth. You've lost your manual skills. You couldn't cut paper dolls now, let alone*

*turn out museum masterpieces.* And so on. Undermining Hamlin's self-confidence, attacking his main justification for having expelled his reconstruct. Weakening his grip on the body's central nervous system, setting him up for a push. *You think you're still a great artist? Jesus, you don't even know how to drive! The Rehab Center smashed you to bits, Nat, and you won't ever be whole again.* And then, getting Hamlin fuddled and panicky, he could make a try for a takeover.

The process was already well under way. The fumes of Hamlin's tensions drifted through Macy's interior holdfast. The oily smell of fear and doubt. Go on, give him a shove, he's vulnerable now. But the scheme was futile, Macy knew. He hadn't yet found the handles with which he could flip Hamlin out of his dominant position. Even if he had, he wouldn't dare attempt a takeover at 120 miles an hour; no matter how good this car's homeostasis was supposed to be, it wasn't programmed for self-drive, and while he and Hamlin struggled for control the auto might go over the edge of the embankment, or up a wall, or into the oncoming flow, in some wild uncorrected orgy of positive feedback.

So Macy sat passive while Hamlin shakily negotiated the highway and more capably guided the car up the winding leafy country lanes to the place where he once had lived. Parking the car perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Leaving the road, walking cautiously through the woods. Heartbreaking summeriness here. The foliage so green and new. Bright yellow and white flowers. Chipmunks and squirrels. Clumps of frondy ferns. They had held back the urban tide here, the surging sea of concrete and pollution, the onslaught of extinctions. An outpost of natural life, maintained for the very rich.

And there, beyond that blinding white stand of stunning birches, the house. Lofty walls of high-piled gray-brown boulders set in ancient gray mortar. Leaded-glass windows agleam in the noonlight. Hamlin's heart leaping and bouncing. Old memories in an agitated dance. Look, look there. The pond, the creek, the pool. Exactly as Lissa had described it, exactly as Macy had seen it through the lens of Hamlin's reminiscing mind. And the studio annex. Where so many miracles were worked.

—Why did you come here?

*A pilgrimage. A sentimental journey.*

—It's somebody else's house now.

*Why don't you go fuck yourself, Macy?*

—I have your welfare at heart. You can't just prowl around here. It may be patrolled by dogs. Scanners everywhere. You know what'll happen to you if you're caught?

Hamlin didn't reply. He edged toward the studio, and Macy picked up an inchoate scheme for forcing a window and getting inside. Hamlin seemed to expect to find his workshop intact, all the elaborate psychosculpting apparatus still sitting where he had left it. Folly. The studio was probably some blithery suburbanite matron's greenhouse now. Hamlin continued to slink through the copse bordering the creek. Let him try, let him just try. The alarm will go off and the place will be full of cops in ten minutes. A frantic chase through the woods. Snub-nosed shiny cyber-hounds snuffing on silent treads over last year's fallen leaves, homing in on the fleeing man's telltale thermals. The fugitive encircled, entrapped, seized. Identified as Paul Macy, Rehab reconstruct, but the police, checking with Gomez & Co., would swiftly discover that Macy had been plagued by a resurgence of his prior identity. And then. Swift action. Wham! Needles in his arm. Hamlin reamed out a second time.

What about his threat to destroy their shared body in case of trouble? No, Macy thought, he can't do it, not while he's up there running the conscious brain. A man can't simply shut off his own heartbeat by willing it. He could when he was down here where I am, plugged into all the neural connections, but he can't do it now. So Hamlin will die a second time, and the body will survive. For me to have. Go on, Nat, creep and creep and creep, bust into your studio, trip the alarm, summon the hounds, start me on the road back to independent life. Yes. I'll be so very grateful.

What's this rising from the pool, though? Blithery suburban matron herself! Venus on the half shell. Woman in her middle forties, tall, not exactly plump but well endowed, dark hair, long arching waist, thickish thighs, amiable vacuous face. Her snatch chastely shielded by a skimpy cache-sexe; breasts bare, full, probably not as high as they used to be. Staring in surprise at Hamlin advancing toward her.

Quick adrenal response from Hamlin, too. Pupils dilated, heartbeat accelerated, prick stiffening. No wonder he's excited. The quintessential rape situation. Daytime, suburbs, woman alone, scantily clad, man emerges out of woods. Fling her down, hand over mouth, spread the thighs, give her the ram. *Ooom.* Load the box and prance away. Another notch carved in your cock.

—Ahaha! Still at it. Your old tricks.

*Don't bother me,* Hamlin snapped. Making an effort, recovering his sexual equilibrium, his social poise. Giving her a sexosocial smile and a little genteel nod. Everything under control. "I hope I didn't startle you, ma'am." The voice unctuous.

"Not fatally." Her eyes fluttering from his face to the Rehab badge and back to face. A little confused but not alarmed. She didn't try to cover her breasts despite the potential provocativeness of the situation. The cheerful poise of the upper crust. "Forgive me if I'm making a terrible mistake, but aren't you—weren't you—"

"Nat Hamlin, yes. Who used to live here. But my name is Paul Macy now."

—Liar!

"I recognized you at once. How pleasant of you to visit us!" Obviously unaware of the impropriety of a reconstruct's visiting his earlier self's old haunts. Or not caring. "Lynn Bryson, by the way. We've been here two years now. My husband is a helix surgeon. Shall I get you a drink, Mr. ah Macy? Or something to smoke?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Bryson. You bought the place from Hamlin's ah widow?"

"From Mrs. Hamlin, yes. Such a fascinating woman! Naturally she didn't care to stay here any longer, with such terrible memories on all sides. We struck up a wonderful friendship during the time when the house was changing hands."

"I've heard many fine things about her," Hamlin said. "Of course I have no recollection of her. You understand."

"Of course."

"Hamlin's past is a closed book to me. But you understand I have a certain natural curiosity about the people and places of his life. As if he were, in a sense, a famous ancestor of mine, and I felt I should know more about him."

"Of course."

"Does Mrs. Hamlin still live in this area?"

"Oh, no, she's in Westchester now. Bedford City, I believe."

"Remarried?"

"Yes, of course."

The knife turning in Hamlin's gut.

"You happen to know her new husband's name?" Very carefully, concealing all traces of tension.

"I could find it," the woman said. "A Jewish name. Klein, Schmidt, Katz, something like that, a short word, Germanic. A person in the theater, a producer maybe, a very fine man." Her smile grew broader. Her eyes appraised Hamlin's body with complacent sensuality. As if she wouldn't mind some pronging. Her vicarious way of attaining intimacy with the departed great artist. She should only know. Off with that bit of plastic about her waist, down on the grass, the white fleshy thighs parting. *Oom.* "Won't you come with me?" she said airily. "I have it in the house. And you'll want to see the house, anyway. The studio. Do you know, we've kept Mr. Hamlin's studio exactly as it was when he—before he—when his troubles started—"

"You have?" A wild interior leap. Excited. "Everything still intact?"

"Mrs. Hamlin didn't want any of his things, so they came to us with the house. And we thought, well, the way they have Rembrandt's house on display in Amsterdam, or the house of Rubens in what is it Antwerp, so we would keep Nathaniel Hamlin's studio intact here, not for public display of course, but simply as a kind of shrine, a memorial, and in case some scholar wished to see it, some great admirer of Hamlin, well, we would make it accessible. And then of course future generations. Won't you come with me?" Smiling, turning, striding across the barbered lawn. Meaty buttocks waggle waggle waggle. Hamlin, sweating, adrenalized, following. The familiar old stone house. The squat spacious annex. A cheery wave of her hand. "There's an entrance to the studio on the far side of—" Hamlin was already on his way around there. "Oh, I see you know that." But how is it that he knows it? No indication that she suspects anything. "I'll look for Mrs.

Hamlin's new name, and her address too, I suppose, and I'll meet you in a couple of minutes in the—"

Studio. Exactly as he had left it. To the left of the door, the big rectangular window. Floods of light. Facing the window, the posing dais with the microphones and scanners and sensors still in place and even his last chalk-marks still on the floor. On the right-hand wall his command console, levers and knobs and studs and dials that would surely have perplexed Rembrandt or Rubens or for that matter Leonardo da Vinci. The headphones. The ionization controller. The unjacked connectors. The data-screen. The light-pen. The sonic generator. Such a tangle of apparatus. In back, the other little room, the annex of the annex, more things visible, coils of wire, metal struts, mounds of modeling clay, the big electropantograph, the photomultiplier, the image intensifier, and other things which Hamlin did not seem to recognize. Hamlin wandered numbly among it all. Macy picked up his somber thoughts. The artist was frightened, even appalled, by the complexity of the studio. Trying to adjust to the idea that he had once used all this stuff by second nature. What was this thing for? And this? And this? Shit, how does it all work? I can't remember a thing.

—Rehab wrecked you, Nat, more than you realize.

*Shut your hole. I could pick all this up again in three hours.* A note of false bravado, though. Powerful currents of uncertainty coming from him. Hamlin broke off a chunk of modeling clay and began to knead it. Stiff, after all this time. The clay. And he was too. The fingers unresponsive. Let's sculpt Mrs. Bryson. Here, we roll a long tube of clay like so, and we. No. Instantly the proportions were awry. Hamlin nibbled his lip. Correcting his intuitive beginning. She's tall, yes, and wide through the hips, and we'll need some clay here for the boobs.

—Give up, Nat, you don't have it any more.

*Piss off, Macy. What do you know?*

Yet Hamlin was unable to conceal the extent of his uneasiness from his passenger. He was fumbling with the clay, mangling it, blundering at this elementary task of modeling, straining to get the image in his mind transferred to the lump in his hands. In that tense moment Macy made new connections and for the first time gained some control over Hamlin's central nervous system. *Plink.*

Strumming the neurons. Hamlin's elbow jerked. The tube of clay bent double at the sudden accidental convulsion. *Plink.* Another twitch. Hamlin shouting silently at him now, bellowing in rage. Macy was enjoying this. He continued to tug at Hamlin's synapses while the artist trembled and shivered in mounting wrath and frustration. The half-shaped model of Mrs. Bryson a ruin. Hamlin glancing around nervously at his own equipment, so alien to him, so terrifying. Telling himself that in four, four and a half years it was possible for a person to forget all sorts of superficial mechanical things, but that you never lost the real talent, the basic underlying inborn gift, the set of perceptions and insights that is the real material to which the artist applies his learned craftsmanship.

—Go on, Nat, keep saying it, you may even start to believe it soon.

*Let me alone. Let me alone. I could learn all this machinery again in half a day!*

—Sure you could, sweetheart. Who ever doubted it?

Giving Hamlin another twong in the medulla, a blork in the autonomic, a whonk in the limbic. Yes! Really learning my way around in here, now! Just as he did in me. The shoe on the other cortex, though. I'll get him. I'll get him good. Hamlin was doing a manic dance, twitching around the room as Macy toyed with him. He couldn't seem to get himself together enough to deliver a retaliatory shot; it was as if the vibrations emanated by all the psycho-sculpting apparatus kept him dizzy and off balance. Keep hammering away, Macy told himself. This may be your chance to get back on top. Twong and twong and twong! Arms whipping about wildly. Knees jerking. I think I could make him crap in his undies now. A nice psychological point to score, but why shit things up for myself in case I take over?

And then Hamlin began to fight back. Coldly, furiously, ramming Macy down into subservience once more. Sweeping from his mind the distractions of this dismayng studio in order to regain inner discipline. There. There. There. Macy saw that he did not yet have the power to vanquish the other, although he was constantly learning and gaining strength. Later. Another time. He has me now.

“Isn’t the studio *absolutely fascinating*, Mr. Macy?”

An idiot warble, a gay contralto trill. Enter Mrs. Bryson.

A slip of paper in her hand. By no accident, she has rid herself of her loincloth, and she comes jollying in, starkers, with flatfooted buoyancy. Eyes sparkling, breasts heaving expectantly. Thick curling deep-piled black triangle. Her nipples turning to turrets. The hot scent of a rutting bitch spreading in the warm air. We're very casual about nudity out here, you see, Mr. Macy. Clothes are so primitive, don't you think! And then maybe making a quick grab for his crotch, getting the pole out in the open, down on the floor amid the paraphernalia of the great artist. To be had by his simulacrum. *Ooom.* But not this time, lady. "I had some trouble finding Mrs. Hamlin's new name and address," she said. "It was with our papers on the house, you know, tucked away, but I dug everything out, and now—"

"Yes," Hamlin said. Blurted. A frantic need to get out of here. Throat dry; face flushed; eyes unfocused. Defending himself simultaneously against Macy's assaults from within and the mockeries of this equipment from without. Her black bush and hot slot of no interest to him now. The unexpectedly overbearing atmosphere of his studio had unmanned him utterly. To escape, fast. Snatching the slip of paper from her startled hand. "Thankyouverymuch-gottogonow." Moving rapidly past her toward the door. Her face suddenly a rigid mask of surprise and anger: she knows she will be denied. Hell hath no fury.

She looks ten years older. Deep lines from cheeks to chin. The nipples going soft; the shoulders slumping. All her nakedness wasted on him. Her arm outstretched, the fingers working eagerly as if to pull him back. No chance. Hamlin had reached the exit. Out into the midday brightness. Pursued by phantom tendrils of feminine libido. "You needn't leave so soon!" she calls to him. Hamlin made no reply. Glanced back once, saw her outside the studio door, naked well-endowed idle-rich lass on the threshold of middle age, bewildered by his panic, astounded by his rejection of her body. His panic bewildered him too. Head awhirl. Macy did his best to make things worse, yanking on all the neural lines at once. Hamlin yelped, but stayed in control, and went on running. Running. Run. Ning.

In the car again, jouncing helter-skelter westward across several counties, Macy wondered if they were going to

survive this trip. These back roads didn't have any protective strips, and thus the auto's homeostasis mechanisms were essentially cancelled out; if the car started to slide off the road, nothing would keep it from smashing into the bulky oaks that awaited it.

And Hamlin was in a ghastly state. Madly gripping the stick. Eyes glazed in Dostoevskian fixity. Jaws clenched. He was driving on reflex alone, employing one tiny plaque of cerebral tissue to operate the vehicle while the rest of his mind wildly revolved the events of the past half hour. The car teetered from side to side on the narrow road, now and then crossing the center line or running onto the shoulder.

Most of Hamlin's defenses were relaxed, but as before Macy feared to make a takeover attempt in a moving car. He hunkered down inside Hamlin's brain as though it were a storm-shelter and temporarily disconnected his optical hookup, for the view of the madly slewing road through Hamlin's eyes was making him seasick. Better, this way. To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock. About him still flashed the lightnings and eruptions of Hamlin's distress. The studio visit had really shaken him. Moving among his implements, his elaborate sculpting apparatus, Hamlin had seemed not to know what from which or up from down. Macy wondered why. Had the Rehab process done irreversible damage to the Hamlin persona? Was there actually nothing left of the original Nat Hamlin except a clutch of old memories, a cluster of attitudes and phrases, some tics and twitches of the spirit? The sculptor, the man of genius, had he been irretrievably demolished, and was this comeback merely a delusion?

On the other hand, Macy thought, it might have been the strain of maintaining control of their shared body that had so severely drained Hamlin's psychic energy. There had been definite signs all day that Hamlin's grip was none too strong and was slipping from hour to hour. In the morning, striding jauntily down the street to Gargan's gallery, presenting the contract ultimatum to the fat dealer, all that hard bargaining—Hamlin had appeared to be in full command then, but by the end of the encounter with Gargan he had started to show some fatigue, and the troubles he had had in driving from the city to his Connecticut studio had revealed a further weakening of control.

And then the disastrous studio visit. Continued slippage. The battery running down and no time for recharging. It must take a constant terrific effort for Hamlin to operate this body, injured as he had been by the Rehab obliteration experts. Macy knew that he himself was nowhere near the point where he could regain the body, but the way things were going that moment couldn't be very far away. It was coming. It was coming. Or was he fooling himself?

He reconnected the visuals. The car still careening along the suburban back roads. Hamlin sitting rigidly, lost in contemplation, paying minimal attention. Horrifying. The body wouldn't be worth shit to them if Hamlin smashed up the car. Certainly fatal to both of them. But there was nothing Macy could do about that right now. He blanked the scene again, escaping. Diving down deep, burrowing into Hamlin's memory bank. Everything there was accessible to him, all the stored scenes of his prior self's active life. Failures and triumphs, mostly triumphs. The women. The critics. The press clippings. The one-man shows. The money. The accumulation of possessions. All the surface glamour. Yet beneath the shiny shallow business of career-making Macy could see in Hamlin the authentic artistic impluse, the hunger to make his visions real. Give Hamlin credit for that. He had been a bastard, sure, still was, but he pursued a vision, he realized it, he gave it to the world. There are those who make and give, and those who take and consume, and Hamlin had been a maker and giver.

Macy envied that. Who are the real ones among us, anyway, if not those who create, who give, who enrich those about them? Regardless of their motives. Doing it for the money, for the ego trip, for whatever unworthy reason, but *doing* it. Having something worth doing and doing it. Hamlin was one of those.

I'm one of the consumers thought Macy. Blame Gomez & Co., I guess: they could have made me someone worthwhile. Their own artistic achievement, their creative self-justification. But of course they aren't paid to do that. Just to fill up vacant bodies with reasonably functional human beings. Gomez isn't an artist, he's a doctor, and he can't transcend himself when he does a reconstruct. If I am second-rate, it's because my makers were second-raters too.

Unlike this bastard Hamlin. Whose darker side was also visible: the inner collapse, the breaking free from moorings.

Roaming the quiet streets. The artist as predator. Each rape neatly labeled and catalogued in the archives. And not just mere rape, either. Not just the shoving of Blunt Object X into Unwilling Orifice Y, but also the associated stuff, the peripherals, the leering, the mocking, the capering, the perversions, the garbage. Even in a permissive age there still are such things as abominations. Hamlin must have been out of his mind. The big-eyed twelve-year-old forced to watch her pretty young blond mother blowing the famous artist: what kind of scars does that leave on an unformed psyche? And all this buggery. A trail of torn sphincters across four states. Not even greasing it first. That's sadism, Hamlin. Out of your fucking mind.

But how crazy were you, really? Didn't you have a clear conscious awareness of what was going on, and didn't you enjoy it? Yes. And wasn't all this crap latent in you all along? Yes. Okay, something brought you out. Suddenly it was Monster Time in your head, and you went forth to fulfill all the steamy dreams you had nurtured since your cramped lonely adolescence. Right? Right. And filed everything away for subsequent gloating. No wonder they sentenced you to deconstruct. Jesus, I feel filthy just rummaging through this stuff. Maker of masterpieces. Giver of unique visions. And your demonic laughter underneath. Telling the court you were insane, that you were in the grip of an irresistible impulse, an obsessive compulsion, but were you? Perhaps you thought you were creating a new kind of work of art, made not out of paint or clay or plastic or bronze but out of bleeding invaded female bodies, an abstract sculpture composed of dozens of victims, forming a pattern you alone could have designed. Jesus. What a case for obliteration you were!

Macy noticed that the car no longer was moving. Hastily he plugged in the visuals again.

They were parked in the central shopping plaza of a medium-sized suburban city, with two- and three-story Westchester Tudor half-timbered shops, freshly white-washed and their brown beams newly painted, glistening in the amber light of late afternoon. Hamlin had his head out the side door; he was asking a policeman—a *policeman!*—how to find Lotus Lane. A rapid-fire stream of instructions. Turn left at the computer stanchion, follow Colonial Avenue to Route 4480, turn right at the yellow blinker, go

about ten blocks, no, twelve, you'll come to the industrial park, you turn right there past the tall building and you drive on to the sniffer palace—a grin, we've even got that stuff up here!—and make a left and that puts you on Route 519, all the cross streets there are marked, you won't miss Lotus. On the left.

Thank you, officer. And off we go. Left, right, right, left. Quiet country lanes again. Hamlin tense. No difficulty following the instructions, though. Left, right, right, left, the sniffer palace, the residential area, Cypress Walk, Redbud Drive, Oak Pond Road, Lotus Lane. Lotus. Number 55. A trim stucco house twenty or thirty years old, with a perspex sundome and glossy oval opaquer-windows. A sign out front: THE KRAFFTS. Hamlin presented himself to the door-scanner. From within, via intercom, a warm firm sweetly modulated mezzo voice: "Who is it?"

"Paul Macy."

"Paul. Macy." Doubtfully. "Paul Macy? Oh, my God! My God, you shouldn't have come here!"

"Please," Hamlin said. "Just a few minutes. To talk."

A moment of empty humming from the intercom. Then, hesitantly, "Well, I suppose. All right. Although this is probably a big mistake." Two moments more; then the door began to open. In the same instant Hamlin's left hand rose toward his throat. For the purpose, Macy sensed, of ripping the tell-tale Rehab badge from his clothing. Macy blocked the attempt with a fierce neural jab, the accuracy of which surprised him; Hamlin, his arm arrested in midclimb, stiffened and let the arm sag to his side, while simultaneously snapping a furious silent curse at Macy. The door was open. Framed in the vaulted entrance-way stood a woman of extraordinary poise and beauty. Tall, nearly to his shoulder, but slender, fine-boned, a delicate tiny-featured face, alert ironic eyes, sleek glossy black hair in tumbling cascades, full sardonic lips, strong chin, long columnar neck. An aristocrat. Paul guessed her age at thirty-one or thirty-two. She held herself well.

"Why did you come here?" she asked.

"To see you, Noreen."

"Noreen?" The lips quirking with distaste. "Are we so intimate, then, that we use first names?"

"Formality's foolish. We were married once," Hamlin said.

"I was married to Nathaniel Hamlin, God help me." She conspicuously eyed the Rehab badge. "Your name is Paul Macy, and I have a stack of data cubes inside containing the documents that indicate that Paul Macy is in no way an heir or assign of the former Nat Hamlin. I don't know you. I never did."

"Don't be too sure of that. Won't you ask me in?"

"My husband isn't home."

"What of it? Am I some kind of wild beast? I'm housebroken, Noreen. You can let me in."

Her invisible shrug was unmistakable. A quick grudging nod. "All right. For a few moments."

The house was small but handsomely and expensively furnished. Hamlin's gaze traveled quickly along the walls, taking in a pair of nightmarish masks from New Guinea, an African figurine, a baffling shaped painting in the form of a tesseract, and three magnificent little crystallines. Macy would have liked to linger and study the tesseract, but he was the prisoner of Hamlin's eyes, and Hamlin continued turning until he came to rest on one of his works, an exquisite porcelain-finish image of Noreen, half life size, nude. Small high breasts, flaring waist, and, coming from the cloud of airborne speakers mounted in the dark hair, an ominously sensual viewer-responsive hundred-cycle rumble. Hamlin turned from Noreen to Noreen. "I wondered whether you'd kept it," he said.

"Why wouldn't I? It's superb." Clouds crossing her face. "You remember it?"

"I remember plenty."

"But the Rehab—"

"Let's not talk about that. Who's your new husband?"

"Sy Krafft. I don't think you knew him." Pausing. As if to run the tape of her conversation back a bit for a correction. "I don't think *Hamlin* knew him. He does floating spectaculairs. A charming and cultivated person." Pausing again. "How did you find me?"

"I went to the old house. The woman who owned it gave me your name and address."

"The Rehab Center assured me that I'd never be troubled by you."

"Am I making trouble?"

"You're here," she said. "That's enough. What is it you want with me, Mr. Macy?"

"Don't call me Macy. You know who I am."

She stepped back from him, doing it artfully, so that she seemed merely to be moving about the room and not retreating. She looked like a bird thinking of taking wing. In a low voice she said, "I never expected this. They assured me you were gone forever."

"They made a mistake."

"Rehab doesn't make mistakes. I saw your body after they burned you out of it. No, you aren't Nat. You're Macy, the new one, and you're trying to play a joke on me, and I assure you it's not in the least funny."

"I'm Nat Hamlin. His ghost walks the earth."

"You're Paul Macy."

"Hamlin."

"It can't be."

"You're so fucking beautiful, Noreen. What is it, five years, and you haven't changed at all. I get hard just standing in the same room with you. Are you making any films these days?"

"I think it's time you left."

"You still love me, don't you? I know, I know, you feel uncomfortable having me here, you're edgy and tense because you think Mr. Sy Krafft is going to walk in on us, but you want me as much as ever. I could prove it. I could put my hand between your legs and it would come away wet. It was always easy for me to smell a woman in heat, Noreen."

"You're crazy, whoever you are. I want you to go."

"And I love you too, even more than before. Listen, don't play-act with me, don't give me that icy I-want-you-to-go crap. I'm *back*, Noreen. Don't ask me how I managed it. I'm back. I'll be going under the name of Macy, but it's me, the real me here, and I'm going to start working again soon. I've already seen Gargantua. He's signing me, he's giving me money to open a studio. Very quietly I'll reestablish myself. No rapes any more. None of that. I'll be sedate and bourgeois, Mr. Paul Macy, Mr. Nobody, only underneath it'll be Nat Hamlin. And you'll come visit me, won't you?"

"I'll visit you in jail, yes."

"You'll visit me in my studio. We'll sit and talk about how good it was before I crapped everything up. Remember, '02, '03, when we were just starting out? Lying on the

beach in Antigua, and we couldn't leave each other alone, we did it right out there. Sand in your snatch, eh, Noreen? You didn't like that so much, but even so, you loved it. And then. The other times. I've got them all up here in my head. They banged me around at Rehab, but they didn't destroy me. They tried hard enough, but they didn't destroy me." He took a step toward her. Throat dry, finger-tips cold. Getting harder and harder down below. "Don't be afraid of me. I love you. *I love you.* I wouldn't hurt you for anything. Stop backing away. Listen, it'll be our secret, you and me, the world will think I'm Macy, you can go on being Mrs. Sy Krafft, this cute little house, kids—do you have kids?—whatever you want, only on the side it'll be you and me again, Nat and Noreen, at my studio.

"I'll do another nude of you. Life-size. It'll be better than the *Antigone*. Remember how sore you were, because I used Lissa for the *Antigone* instead of you? But we were drifting apart then. I didn't know what was good for me. I had to go through hell to find out. But now. You'll pose. Shit, I can see it now. You standing over there. Those sweet little tits of yours. Ten electrodes on you. And I'm at the machine, sweating like a bastard. Getting you down, immortalizing your body and your soul. An hour for work, an hour for screwing, an hour for work, an hour for screwing. Oh, Jesus, Noreen, stop staring at me like that!"

"I'll call the police. When they catch you, Nat, they'll finish you for good. They won't even put you through Rehab. They'll chop you up and flush you away."

"No. A silver bullet in my head. A stake through the heart."

"I'll call them, Nat."

"Wait. Please, no. Look, I don't mean to frighten you. I came here to tell you how much I love you. I've been in hell, Noreen, literally in hell, and now I'm coming out, I'm going to live again. And I had to come to you. Why be afraid? Tell me you love me."

"I don't love you. Nat. You disgust me."

Hamlin began to shake.

"Brava!" he cried. "Brava! Bravissima!" He started to applaud. "What an actress! What fire in your reading! What steel in your voice!" Imitating her: " 'I don't love you, Nat. You disgust me.' " Wildly applauding. "Curtain. End of

Act Two. Now tell me the real stuff, Noreen. How much you want me. You're scared, yes, you remember me when I was crazy, when I was doing all that hideous crap, but you've got to remember the other me, too, the one you loved, the one you married, everything we did together, the places we saw, the people, the stuff in bed, remember, even the weird stuff, you and me and Donna in the same bed, and then you and me and Alex, eh, Noreen? Love. Trust. Passion." He reached toward her. "Come on. Now. Where's the bedroom? Or right here on the floor. Let me prove it to you, that you still turn on for me. Okay? Why the hell not? You opened your gate for me five hundred times. Eight hundred. So one more won't cost you anything."

He was shouting now. Her cool poise was deserting her. She looked terrified, moving away from him, stumbling over things. He lunged at her. Seizing her wrist, pulling her close. The sweet fragrance of her body mixed with fear-sweat. Her eyes glazed with fright. "Noreen," he muttered. "Noreen. Noreen. Noreen." The syllables losing meaning and becoming hollow sounds. His skull aflame. His jaws aching. His hands clutching at her clothing. Ripping. The little round breasts popping into view. Oh, Christ, how tender they are! His hands on them. Squeezing. She flailed at him with her fists, clubbing him on the mouth, the nose, the ears. He had one arm locked around her waist; the other, having laid bare her bosom, went for her crotch. To see if she was wet there. To prove to her how wrong she was to refuse him. He was snorting. Like the old days, the bad old days. Hamlin the animal. Hamlin the horny Minotaur. Fragile woman struggling in his arms. A red haze before his eyes. Sweat running down his sides. Noreen kicking, screaming, clawing.

Now, Macy thought, and shoved with all his might. Hamlin toppled from his perch. Fell moaning into the abyss. A moment of total disorientation, infinite in duration. Who am I? What am I? Where am I? He let go of the woman he held. She slumped to the floor; he lurched backward and slammed against the wall, and stood there, gasping, exhausted. Blood draining from his skull.

But it was all right. He was in charge again. He was Paul Macy, and he was back in charge.

## THIRTEEN

To get away from there, fast, that was the important thing now. But first some peace making. Gestures of reassurance. Noreen Hamlin Krafft lay looking up dazedly at him, a dribble of bright red on her swelling lower lip, hair in disarray, angry blotches on her exposed white breasts where Hamlin had clutched her. They would be dark bruises tomorrow. She didn't move. Waiting numbly for the next onslaught. Resigned to her fate. He said, his voice coming out oddly furry and unfocused, "It's okay now. I've taken control away from him. I'm Macy. I won't hurt you."

"Macy."

"Paul Macy. The Rehab reconstruct. They did a bad deconstruct job on Hamlin and he's still loose in my head. He grabbed the body's motor and speech centers last night." Last night? Last week, last month? How long had Hamlin been running things, anyway? "But he's down underneath again, where he can't make trouble. While he was fighting with you I was able to take over." Gently helping her to her feet. He wondered if she had gone into shock. Making no attempt to cover herself. Tip of her tongue licking at the cut on her lip. He said, "I'm sorry you had to go through all this. Are you badly injured?"

"No. No." Staring at him. Trying to come to terms with his abrupt transformation. Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde. "Just shaken up." With trembling fingers she concealed her bosom, tidied her hair. Staring at him. Was his face different now? The lunatic glare of Hamlin gone from his eyes? He knew it wasn't easy for her to understand any of what had taken place. These shifts of identity: he had come to accept them as part of the human condition, but to her they must be alien, incredible, bizarre. Maybe

she thought he had been Macy all along, playing insane pranks on her. Or that he was still Hamlin.

He said, "It would be best if you didn't tell anyone about this. The police, your husband, anyone. I'm trying to have Hamlin permanently eradicated before he can do some real harm, but there are problems, and getting the police into things would only make it worse for me. You see, I'm in constant danger from him, and if I went to the authorities he might force the destruction of this body, so—" He stopped. She didn't seem to be comprehending. "Just don't say anything, yes? If it's at all in my power I'll see to it you never go through a scene like this again. Do you follow me?"

She nodded distantly. Pacing about, now, working off her fright. Time for him to go. At the front door he turned and said, "One last thing, though. Can you tell me today's date?"

"Today's date." She repeated it in a flat empty tone. As if he had asked her the name of the planet they were currently on.

"Yes, please. The date. It's important."

She shrugged. "The fourth of June, I think."

"Friday?"

"Friday, yes."

He thanked her gravely and went out. His body was stiff and he moved gracelessly toward the car, arms flailing spastically, shoulders ramming the air. He and Hamlin evidently had different notions of physical coordination, and his muscles, having taken orders from another mind for eighteen hours or so, were reluctant to go back to the mode he preferred. Not surprising: Hamlin's way was this body's normal way, and his own was something imposed from without. He concentrated on reimposing it. Damned good thing Hamlin had only been running the show since last night, since that takeover during the mugging in the hallway of Lissa's house. Macy had been afraid he might have been unconscious for a week or more before surfacing this morning. In which case he'd have an endless trail of Hamlin's deeds and misdeeds to trace and follow.

But no. It seemed that he had been awake for most of the period of Hamlin's dominance, missing only the first eight hours or so after the takeover. Some comfort in that.

Where had Hamlin been in those eight hours? Most likely at my place, getting some rest. And the mugging? It couldn't have been too serious. Macy patted his pocket. Wallet gone. Okay, so he must have collapsed at the moment of takeover, the mugger cleaned him out, then Hamlin picked himself up and left unharmed. The wallet was no big loss. Identity papers, credit cards—all replaceable, all useless to the assailant. Macy didn't even need them himself, so long as he had a thumb with a finger-print on it. Why, Hamlin had even managed to rent this car using only his thumbprint, not even his, *my* thumbprint. Ours, I guess. But the charge is debited to me. Macy felt vaguely sorry for the mugger, living a squalid lower-class life on a level of society where cash still called the tune. Fine lot of good it must have been for him to lift an executive's wallet, the wallet of a thumb-tripper, five or six dollars in it at most. Oh, well.

Moving more easily now, Macy reached the car and thumbed the doorplate. The door slid open. He got behind the controls and tentatively grasped the steering-stick. The prospect of having to drive scared him suddenly. They had taught him how to drive at the Rehab Center, a couple of year ago, but he hadn't had much chance to practice lately; and just now there was the special risk that Hamlin might surface and screw him up on the highway. I hit him pretty hard when I grabbed control, but even so.

*Hamlin? You awake?*

No reply from the depths. Macy felt his other self's presence, though: a tinny faint reverberation out of the far-below, like the cries of an angry djinn who has been conjured back into his bottle.

*Good. Stay like that. I don't need any static from you while I'm driving.*

If only I can keep the goddam stopper in place on the bottle this time.

He put his thumb to the ignition panel, and the car, scanning the print and finding it to be that of its duly licensed present master, came to life. Warily Macy let out the brake. Cautiously he rolled forward. The car responded well, great snorting beast under harness. Which way New York, now? Long afternoon shadows. The sun halfway down the sky on his right. Pick a direction, any direction.

He found his way out of the residential area, cut off two drivers as he blurted into the business road, was rudely but deservedly screeched at, and discovered a green-on-white sign directing him to the city. Onward. Homeward. A ticklish trip. He survived it.

He hoped to find Lissa waiting for him at his apartment, slouched in bed in her pleasant wanton way, music playing, her hair a tangle, the aroma of pot in the air. Throw himself wearily down on top of her, bury his aching head between her bouncy boobs. Some chance. The apartment, empty, deserted for a mere twenty-odd hours, had the forlorn and abandoned look of a fifth-rate catacomb. Off with the sweaty crumpled clothing. Shower. Shave. Vague thoughts of dinner. The last meal he remembered having eaten was lunch on Thursday. Now it was dinnertime on Friday. Had Hamlin bothered to refuel their body at all during his eighteen hours ~~or~~ top? Macy wasn't particularly hungry. All this shuttling about of identities. It must have wrecked my appetite. Odd. You'd think that much mental exertion would have burned up a lot of energy. A drink might be in order, though.

He poured himself a hefty bourbon and, naked, flopped down in a chair. A little of the liquor went sloshing out onto his thigh. Cold brown drops on the golden hairs. He felt not at all triumphant at having ousted Hamlin from control. What good was it, being in charge again? Who was he, anyway, that he needed so badly to live? An oppressive sense of having come to the end of the line grew in him. Paul Macy, born 1972 Idaho Falls, Idaho, father a propulsion engineer mother a schoolteacher, no brothers no sisters.

False. False. False shit. I wasn't born anywhere. I am a thing out of a testtube. I am a golem, a dybbuk, a construct. Without friends, without family, without purpose. At least he was real. He'd fuck his kid sister, he'd steal toys from a baby, but he had an identity, a personality that he had earned by living. An artistic gift.

*What about it, Hamlin? You want to have it all back? Why do I insist on getting in your way? Maybe you're right: maybe I should let you win.*

Hamlin respondeth not. Only the tinny echoes, *ex profundis*. He must be dormant, worn out by everything he

was doing. Well, fuck him. He's no good. His soul is full of poison. Damned if I'll step aside for him, genius or no genius. The world has enough great artists. It's only got one Paul Macy, for what that's worth. This would be a good moment to go to the Rehab Center, While Hamlin's groggy. Get him carved out of me for once and all. And if he surfaces? And if he gives me that coronary he's been threatening? Fuck him. If he wants to, he can. So go ahead, coronary. So we'll both be dead. *Pax vobiscum.* We shall sleep the eternal sleep, he and I. Anything would be better than this. Nodding solemnly, Macy reached for the phone to call Gomez.

The phone rang with his arm still in midstretch.

Lissa, he thought. Calling to find out where I've been, asking if she can come back!

Joy. Excitement. That startled him: the intensity of his wish that it be Lissa calling. What was all this crap about dying? He wanted to live. He had someone to look after. And to look after him. They needed each other.

"Hello?" he said eagerly.

On the green screen bloomed the swarthy face of Dr. Gomez. The angel of death himself. Speak of the devil.

"I've been phoning all day," Gomez said. "Where the fuck have you been?"

"Driving around the suburbs. Weren't you supposed to be keeping me under surveillance?"

"We lost track of you."

"Is that a fact?" Macy said harshly. "Well, let me be the first to tell you, then. Hamlin got me last night and kept control until late this afternoon."

Gomez made elaborate facial gestures of exasperation. "And did what?"

"Visited his dealer, his old studio, and his former wife. Who he was in the process of raping when I got control again."

"He's still a psychopath, you mean?"

"He still gets a kick out of manhandling women, anyway."

"All right. All right. Too fucking much, Macy. Taking you over, running around the countryside. I'm having the van sent for you. Sit tight and if Hamlin makes another try at you, fight him off somehow. We'll have you safely

inside the Center under sedation in an hour and a half, and then—”

“No.”

“What, no?”

“Keep away from me if you want me to go on living. I tell you, Gomez, he's a wild man. If he thinks you're seriously after him he'll shut off my heart.”

“That isn't a realistic fear.”

“It's realistic enough for me.”

“I assure you, Macy, he wouldn't do any such thing. We've let this situation drag on too long as it is. We'll come and get you, and we'll do a proper job of deconstructing Hamlin, and I assure you—”

“Shove your assurances, Gomez. We're talking about *my survival* that's being gambled with. *My survival*. I refuse to let you have me. Where's your authority for picking me up without my consent? Where's your court order? No, Gomez. No. Keep away.”

Gomez was silent a moment. A crafty look flickered into his eyes; he immediately tried to hide it, but not before Macy had picked it up. At length Gomez said in his heaviest I-know-this-will-hurt-but-it's-for-the-general-welfare manner, “You realize, Macy, that your safety isn't the only thing we have to consider here. A court has ruled that society must be protected against Nat Hamlin. The moment you notified me that Hamlin wasn't entirely gone, it became my obligation to take him into custody and carry out the court's sentence the right way. Okay, so you said you felt you were in jeopardy, you asked me to leave you alone until we worked out some sure-thing way of coping, and I let you have your way. It was against every rule, but I gave in. Out of friendship for you, Macy. Will you buy that? Out of friendship. Out of concern. And we've been trying since Monday to figure out a way of handling the situation without endangering you. But now you tell me that Hamlin actually regained command of his body for a little while, for long enough to commit an assault against a human being. Okay. Friendship can go only so far. Can you guarantee Hamlin won't take you over again half an hour from now? Can you guarantee he won't be out banging housewives tomorrow? We *have* to seize him now, Macy, we *have* to finish him off.”

“Even if it entails danger for me?”

"Even if it entails danger for you."

"I see," Macy said. "You figure what the hell, I'm only a construct anyway and if I get wiped out, tough shit on me. The important thing is catching Hamlin. Nothing doing, doctor. I'm not going to be the innocent bystander who gets zapped while you and Hamlin shoot it out. Keep away from me."

"Macy—"

Macy hung up. Gomez' image shrank and vanished like a photo being sucked into a whirlpool. Macy gulped the last of his drink, dropped the glass, and looked around for some clothing. He understood that his conversation with Gomez had worked a significant and perilous change in his status. The Rehab man had served notice that they were going to come after Hamlin, no matter what risks were in it for anyone else who happened to be inhabiting Hamlin's body. He could wait here meekly for the van, of course. Let himself be hauled off to the Rehab Center. Taking his chances that Gomez would be able to get Hamlin before Hamlin got *him*. But how chancy a chance that was! He knew Hamlin. They hadn't shared a brain all these weeks for nothing. And he knew that if Hamlin surfaced and found himself at the Center, being readied for a new deconstruct job, he'd explode with destructive fury. Samson pulling the pillars down around his ears. If Hamlin couldn't have the body, he'd see to it that no one would have it. So it didn't make sense to surrender to Gomez, not now. His fatalism of half an hour ago had gone from him. He didn't want to die or even to risk dying. He wasn't sure what it was he had to live for, but even so. He would have to run. He was going to have to become a fugitive.

Night had come. Everything was washed in a peculiar faded gray light. Out the side way, down the alley. Macy looked in all directions as he left the building. Feeling faintly absurd about it. This silly skulking, so melodramatic, so unreal. But what if Gomez had a man watching the main entrance? More than a touch of paranoia. They'll have hovereyes searching for me, a ten-state alarm, all the airports being watched. And where can I go? Jesus, where can I go? Macy wanted to laugh. Some fugitive. What am I going to do, camp out in Central Park? Eat squirrels and acorns?

He thought of going to the crumbling roominghouse where Lissa had lived. A double advantage to that: he might find her there, his only friend, his only ally, and in any case the place was such an armpit, such a ghastly hole, that he'd be beyond the reach of the slick computerized search processes of the contemporary age. Hiding deep down in a rotting pretechnological subterranea. But there was one huge disadvantage, too. Gomez, knowing about Lissa, knowing that her place was where he'd be most likely to go, would certainly set up a stakeout there. Waiting for him. Too risky. So where, then? He didn't know.

He walked north. Keeping close to the darkened buildings, trying to attract no attention. One shoulder higher than the other as if he might shield his face that way. Randomly north as night closed in. Or not so randomly. He realized that his feet were taking him up Broadway, across the bridge, into Manhattan North. Toward the only other point on his compass, the vicinity of the network office.

Landmarks of his slender tattered past. Here he had walked that uneasy hopeful Maytime day. One-and-two-and-one-and-two. Step. Step. Feeling clumsy and uncertain within his own body. Trying to be natural about it. This is how Paul Macy walks. Proudly down the goddam street. Shoulders square. Belly sucked in. Opportunity beckons you. A second trip, a second start. The bad dream is over; now you're awake. Step. Step. Coming to an abrupt stop, he turned to his left and picked his reflection off the mirror-bright pilaster beside an office building's entrance. Wide-cheeked, thin-lipped, standard sort of Anglo-Saxon face. And the girl, coming up behind him, caught short by his sudden halt, crashing into him. Nat, she said. Nat Hamlin, for God's sake! The long cold needle slipping into his eye. Telling her politely but firmly, I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. My name's Paul Macy. People flowing smoothly around them. She was tall and slender, with long straight hair, troubled green eyes, fine features. Attractive in a tired, frayed way. Telling him not to play around with her: I know you're Nat Hamlin, she said. Leaning toward him, fingertips clutching hard into the bones of his right wrist. A baffling sensation in the top of his skull. A sort

of intrusion. A tickling. A mild glow of heat. Along with it a disturbing blurring of identity, a doubling of self. The first surfacing of Hamlin, only he hadn't known that then. Clinging to the side of the building with one hand and making a little shooing gesture at her with the other. Go on. Away. Out of my life. Whoever you were, there's no room now.

And he hurried on toward the network office. Block after block, and there it was. Grim black tower. Windowless walls. He didn't go in, not now, certainly not now. Fredericks. Griswold. Loftus. My colleagues. Smith or Jones. The Hamlin over there. One of my favorites, Griswold said. A gift from my first wife, ten years back, when Hamlin was still an unknown. Coughing. If you don't mind—some cold water. Forgive me. You know, it's only my first day on the outside. The strain, the tension. No, we'll keep away from the network office tonight.

And here, the corner of Broadway and 227th, northeast side. Where he met her on a Monday evening. Pacing in a taut little circle. A self-contained zone of tension on the busy street. Looking at him in mingled amazement and delight. Color stippling her cheeks. Eyes fluttering: she's scared of me, he realized. Oh, Nat, thank God you came! No, he said, let's get this established once and for all. My name's Paul Macy. What do you want? We can't talk here, she said. Not in the middle of a crowd. Where, then? Your place? He shook his head. Absolutely not. Mine, then. We can be there in fifteen minutes. But everything's filthy, she said, and he said, What about a restaurant? There's a people's restaurant two blocks from here, she said. I've been having lunch at it a lot. You know it? He didn't. We could go there, she said. Yes.

I could go there again, too. Now. Now. The sudden call of hunger. Two blocks. Macy walked quickly. One shoulder higher than the other. Reaching the restaurant. A spartan socialist front, a plain glass window. Within, a deep narrow room with tarnishing brass walls and a bunch of sputtering defective light-loops threaded through the thatchwork ceiling. All right. Let's get some dinner. In here he had dinner with Lissa that night. Standing up, turning, walking away from her. And her scream. No! Come back! Paul! Paul! *Nat!* Her words leaping across the gulf between them like a flight of arrows. Six direct hits.

St. Sebastian stumbling in the restaurant aisle. His brain on fire. And Hamlin's voice, quite distinct, from a point just above his left shoulder. —How could you walk out on her like that, you snotty creep.

So here is where he first manifested himself. Very well. Let's go in.

He thought he was hungry, and loaded his tray accordingly, stacking it with meat and vegetables and rolls and more. But when he had taken a seat at one of the long tables he found he had no desire for food. He nibbled a little. He let his eyes drift out of focus and disconnected himself from reality. How restful this is. I could sit here forever. But someone was touching his shoulder. A quick impudent prod, a withdrawal, another prod. Why can't people leave me alone? One of Gomez' flunkies, maybe. If I pay no attention perhaps he'll go away. He tried to sink deeper into disconnection. Another prod, more insistent. A hoarse harsh voice. "You. Hey, you, will you look at me a second? You stoned or something?" Reluctantly Macy let himself slip back into focus. A fat, stale-smelling girl in a gray dress stood beside him. Her face was as flat as a Mongol's, but her skin was pasty white, her eyes did not slant. She said, "There's a girl upstairs needs some help from you. You're the one."

"Upstairs? Girl?"

"You, yes. I know you. You were in here two, three weeks ago with that girl, that redhead, that Lisa. You're the one who collapsed, fell flat on your sniffer, we had to carry you out, me and the redhead and the cabdriver. Lisa, her name is."

"Lissa," Macy corrected, blinking.

"Lisa, Lissa, I don't know. Look, she helped you, now you help her."

A floating film of memory. Standing by the restaurant's credit console at the end of the counter that other time, authorizing it to charge his account ten dollars for his dinner. And a fat flat-faced girl waiting behind him in line snorting contemptuously. Was he paying too much? Too little? This girl.

"Where is she?" Macy asked.

"I told you. Upstairs. She came in yesterday, she was crying a lot, a big fuss. Passed out, finally. We got her a

room and she's still there. Won't eat. Won't talk. You must know her, so you go look after her."

"But where? Upstairs, you said."

"The people's co-op, moron," the fat girl said. "Where else? Where else do you think?" And strode away.

## FOURTEEN

THE people's co-op, moron. Where else? Leaving his laden tray, he went outside and looked around. Of course: there was a hotel associated with the restaurant. Or vice-versa. They shared the building. Stark green-tiled facade; a separate entrance for the hotel, escalator going up, the office on the second floor. In a wide low empty lobby, much too brightly lit, a directory screen offered sketchy information about the present residents of the building. Macy, frowning, checked the *M* column first. Moore, Lissa? Not there. He glanced at *L* and, yes, there was an entry for "Lisa," nothing else, no surname, checked in June 3, eleven p.m., room 1114. There's a girl upstairs needs some help from you. And how to get upstairs?

A door to his left opened and a blind man came in, moving confidently and swiftly around table and chairs and other obstacles. The sonar mounted in his headband going boing boing boing. Tan jacket, yellow pants, fleshy face, eyes half-closed showing only the whites. "Excuse me," Macy said, "can you tell me where the liftshaft is?" The blind man, without stopping, pointed over his right shoulder and said, "Elevator's back there," and disappeared through a door to Macy's right. Macy went through the other door. Elevator. Eleventh floor. Up.

Room 1114.

No fancy communication or scanning devices here, just a plain wooden door. He knocked and got no response from within. He knocked again. "Lissa? It's me, Paul." Knock knock. Silence. As he stood there, puzzled, a girl stepped out of the room across the hall, a thin bony girl, naked and casual about it, towel draped over one shoulder, ribs prominent, hipbones sharp, small pointed breasts.

"Looking for Lisa?" she asked, and when Macy nodded the girl said, "She's in there. Go on in."

"I knocked. She didn't answer."

"No, she won't answer. Just go on in."

"The door—"

"No locks *here*, brother." The girl winked and sauntered down the hall. Her backbone standing sharply out against her skin. Pushing open another door; sound of water running, from within; the showerroom, Macy guessed. No locks here, brother. Okay. He tried the door of room 1114 and found that it was indeed open.

"Lissa?" he said.

This was what he imagined a jail cell would be like. His room at the Rehab Center had been palatial by comparison. A low narrow bed—a cot, really. A flimsy green plastic chair. A small squat brown dresser. A chipped yellow-white washstand. A grimy sliver of window. Bare flooring; cruel naked lights. Lissa was naked too, slouched on the bed, knees up, arms locked across them. She looked gaunt, almost frail, as if she had dropped eight or ten pounds in the thirty-six hours since he last had seen her. Her hair was a knotted mess and her eyes were red and raw. The room reeked of sweat. Her clothes lay in a heap near the window; the closet, its door ajar, was empty; near the washstand stood the big dilapidated green suitcase that she had used in bringing her things from her apartment to his, and from his place to here. Its sides bulged: she hadn't bothered to unpack. As he entered, her head moved slowly in his direction, and she looked at him and did not look. And her head moved back so that she stared again at the brown dresser.

Macy walked past the foot of the bed and tried to open the window, but there was no way of doing it. He spoke her name again; she gave no sign of hearing him. Crouching beside her, he took one of her feet in his hand, lifted it six inches, watched it drop heavily back, and slid the hand upward to the meaty part of her calf. Her skin blazed. Fever was consuming her. His hand went to her thigh. His fingertips dug in high, just below the curling auburn thatch, but she took no notice. He shook her thigh. Nothing. He stroked her breasts, he cupped one. Nothing. He rubbed the tip of his thumb back and forth over the nipple. Zero. He fanned his fingers in front of her eyes. She blinked once,

absently. "Lissa?" he said a third time. She was gone, lost, cocooned in introspection. Beyond his reach. Anyone could do anything to her now and probably she wouldn't react. How to break through? No way. No way.

He stood by the window with his back to her.

A long time later she said, voice thin and distant, "The talking in my head was driving me crazy. Bouncing off the walls. I couldn't stay."

He swung around to face her. She was wholly expressionless. Still staring at the dresser. Her words might have been those of a ventriloquist. "You didn't need to run away," he said. "I was trying to help you."

"You had no help to give. And I couldn't help you either. We were destroying each other."

"No."

"I opened you to Hamlin."

"It doesn't matter. We needed each other."

"I needed to go," she said. "I was choking there, I had to get out. So I went. So I came here."

"Why?"

"To hide. To rest." Murmured words, windsounds. "Go away, now. I have the voices again. The pressure building up. Can't you feel it? The pressure. The pressure building up."

He caught her hand in his. The fever raging. The muscles of her arm entirely limp. Like holding a length of rope. "You're ill, Lissa, physically ill. Let me get a doctor for you." He wasn't sure she heard him. Floating away from him again. "I'll call a doctor," he said. "All right."

Her eyes like glass spheres. She was adrift, heading out on the tide. He shook her, he fondled her, he talked to her. Zero. Talked *at* her. An urgent torrent. Flooding her with words, trying to talk her back into some sort of contact wth him. Come on, snap out of it. Telling her of love, of need, of second starts, of new tomorrows, of shared anguishes, of an end to self-pity and vulnerability. Anything. Inspirational words. The old sunny platitudes. Why not tell her such things? To reach her. We'll go far away and try again, you and me, me and you. A whole world of happiness. Come, Lissa. Come.

Knowing that he is losing her, moment by moment. Has lost her. A million million miles away on her planetoid of ice. Yet he continued. Striving to pour his frantic energy

into her, to fill her with enough stamina to return and rise. Visions of hope, daydreams of health and joy. A shimmering rainbow curving across the room from door to window. On and on and on, his voice growing rasping and edgy and desperate, Lissa paying no attention; the ice now entombed her, she could only dimly be seen within the sparkling wall of the glacier. He was tiring. Why go on? She didn't want to hear this.

He became angry with her, hostile, irritated, begrudging her the resources of strength she was draining from him. And for what, this tremendous effort of his? What good? Everything he gave her the fever ate. She was the conduit through which his energies rushed uselessly into a shoreless sea. Now there was loud in him the voice of temptation, telling him to leave her while he still could, to forget her, to make his own difficult way through the world without dragging her on his back.

You owe her nothing. You have troubles of your own, many of them caused by her. Why this quixotic desire to rescue and repair her? Let her sink. Let her fry. Let her freeze. Let her stew. Go. She told you to go: therefore go. This shabby burned-out girl with her implausible affliction, her ESP. Her chattering angry voices. The necklace of grime on her chest. Vacant glassy eyes. Go.

To this Macy answered, not releasing Lissa's sweating palm, that he would hear no counsel of defeat, nor would he abandon her now. He went on urging her to come out of her trance; he pleaded with her not to give up. Here I am: take strength from me. Let me be your shield and your support. He conceived the notion of hauling her from the bed and carrying her out of the room, to that shower in the hall, where he would let the cool cleansing water sluice her from her lethargy. He naked beside her as the purifying deluge descended.

Up, then. To the shower. Grunting, he seized her by the shoulders, but her body was a dead weight and there was suddenly a terrific fiery bolus in his chest and a band of hot steel across his forehead, and he realized that she had already drained too much from him, that he was no longer strong enough to lift her. He let her fall back and collapsed across her, panting. His eyes were wet, he knew not whether from pain or despair or frustration or rage. Saving her was beyond him. He was too weak. He was too weary.

He was too empty. He had given all he could give, and it had not been enough, and now he could give no more. Perhaps if I rest. Perhaps in a little while.

But he knew he was being foolish. He was drained. He would not soon recover. And now, too, he knew who it was who had tempted him to turn back before reaching this point, for he felt the presence hot within him, rising, expanding, glowing, the dark presence of his other self coming forth from his hidden lair, whispering wordlessly to him, crooning, inviting him to yield.

Shall I fight him? *Can I fight him?* I must. I must. Macy readied himself to resist. Searching the corridors of his soul for forgotten reservoirs of strength. But he feared it was too late, that the takeover was already beginning. Already he felt a familiar sensation, a prickling at the back of his neck, a tingling, a mild stiffening of the skin. The unseen fingers were at work, stroking the lobes of his brain, caressing the prominences and corrugations. Inviting him to yield. Yes. Yes. Temptation. An end to turmoil and torment. *No, Macy said, I will not let you have me.*

He attempted to get to his feet, but the best he could manage was to roll heavily free of Lissa and lie beside her. She seemed to be unconscious. A sleep beyond all dreams. How peaceful she looks. And I could sleep that sleep. Come, said the voiceless voice in wordless words, let me enfold you, let me supplant you. Let there no longer be struggle between us. Give way to me. *No! You will not have me!*

And Macy reached out toward Lissa, seeking her, asking alliance. The two of us against him. We can strike at him, we can destroy him. Lissa was a million million miles away. Her planetoid of ice. The cold light of the distant sun dancing on the walls of the glacier. The tempter said, You see, there is no help to be had from her. Now is the time. Step aside for me. Be realistic, Macy, be realistic! Macy attempted to be realistic. Where shall I go? How shall I fight? Who shall I be? And saw how little hope there was. He could not save himself. He had not been designed for this sort of stress. They had sent him on this second trip laden with an impossible burden, and was it then any surprise that the trip was a bummer? Let us end it. Let us fight no more. He would rest, he would close himself to struggling and hoping, he would surrender. The odds

were too high against him. Outside waited Gomez, the van, the long cold needles, the drugs, all the machinery of deconstruction. Inside lurked Hamlin. Beside him lay this shattered girl. All right. I yield. I will fight no more.

—Then get out of the way, Hamlin said, and let me become you.

The mixing of selves was beginning. The dissolving, the blending. Paul Hamlin. Nat Macy, I am he. He is I. Maelstrom. Blinded by churning debris raining upon them out of their entangled pasts. A holocaust of dislocated events. As we dissolve into one another. Jeanie Grossman beneath the snows of Mount Rainier. And the girl with the long straight silken golden hair. Look, all through history girls have been posing for famous artists. Let me show you these charts, ma'am, explaining the special advantages of our encyclopedia. Why should you go to art school? My boy, you are already a master! Members of the class of '93, welcome to the UCLA campus. Hey, no, officer! Put that stunner down! I surrender, damn you, I surrender! I'll go peacefully! It isn't a matter of opinion, it's a matter of voltage thresholds. A voltage doesn't lie. Amperes don't have opinions. Resistances don't fuck around with you for sly tactical reasons. We're dealing in objective facts, and the objective facts tell me that Nat Hamlin has been wiped out. One-and-two-and-one-and-two. Proudly down the god-dam street. Your new career. Your new life. *Shqkm. Vtpkp. Smss! Grgg!* Will the defendant please rise. Nathaniel James Hamlin you have heard the verdict of your peers. Don't play around with me. I know you're Nat Hamlin. You're looking good, Nat. THE TORMENTS OF FAME. THE DAY THE MUSEUM BOUGHT EVERYTHING. MY NAME IS LISSA. No! Come back! Paul! Paul! *Nat!* Paul Hamlin. Nat Macy. We are becoming one. We are dissolving each into each. I will be you and you will be nothing. And there will be peace at last.

Lissa! LISSA!

Abruptly the sky darkened and without warning bolts of lightning flashed and terrible thunder came and a sword swept down, trailing streamers of fire, to cleave the hemispheres of his brain one from the other. Between the two there loomed an unbridgeable gap, and on the far side of it Macy beheld Hamlin, stunned, dazed, wandering through

a charred and blasted meadow as lightning struck all about him. That sudden fierce blow had severed all connection between them just at the instant of merger. I am Paul Macy. He is Nat Hamlin. And the crashing of the lightning. Blinding white streaks splitting the sky. Is that Lissa up there? Yes. Yes. Yes. She hurls the bolts. Crash! Crash! Hamlin tries to dodge. Across the great gulf drifts the scent of burning flesh. He is wounded. He moves more slowly. Crash! She has hemmed him in by a zone of fire on every side. Now Hamlin offers resistance. He shakes his fist; he shouts; he seizes her bolts and hurls them back at her. But each act of defiance brings redoubled furies out of the heavens. Her aim is deadly. Lightning spears his toes. Lightning licks at his heels. He hops. He dances. He screams in rage and then in pain. His arm is blackened by a bolt; he can no longer return her shafts. Now he writhes on the smouldering earth; now he shrieks for mercy. But there will be no mercy. Lissa is the avenging goddess. Hamlin will be destroyed.

But what's this? In the moment of triumph she tires. She weakens. The bolts lose intensity, and Hamlin still lives! He regains strength. She cries out for help. *Paul, Paul, Paul, Paul.* Yes, he replies, from his place beyond the zone of combat. Hamlin has risen. He is hideously disfigured, he is maimed and ruined, but yet there is demonic power in him, and now he lashes back at her, trying to bring her tumbling down to his own level. Crackling energies climb the sky. Help me, Paul!

And Macy opens himself to her, letting her take from him whatever she must have, and he arms her so that she can return to the attack. Again her lightnings flash. Again Hamlin howls. His thrusts are beaten back. He cannot fight on. He falls. A bolt pierces his back. He twists and coils in frightful convulsions. Lissa transfixes him again. Again. He is burning. He is dying. The odor of charred flesh on the wind. The sky is a sheet of white fire. She is spending herself, emptying herself, to eradicate him. She is cutting him to pieces.

Hamlin still moves, but now only in the random galvanic twitches of the dead. The meadow is a blazing pyre. He burns. He burns. He dwindles. He is gone. The sky grows still. Lissa can no longer be seen. A strange silence has come; a gentle cooling rain begins to fall. The air is sweet.

The clouds part; the rain ends; the soft sunlight returns. There is no gulf between the regions of the brain. Macy crosses over. He sees no trace of Hamlin but only a dark place on the ground, a blackened scar in the grass, and quickly the grass grows to hide it, tall green blades moving swiftly in, sprouting tender new shoots that rise and meet, and soon there is no sign of destruction anywhere, although Macy knows that beneath the graceful grassy carpet one might find a layer of ash, if one chose to excavate. He walks away from that place. He is utterly alone. Lissa? he calls. Lissa? But there is no reply. Silence governs. He is utterly alone.

After a time he sat up and got carefully to his feet. The sense of being alone remained with him. There was a faint throbbing in his head, of the sort one might feel if one were transported suddenly from the heart of some great city to the eerie soundless wastelands of the polar plateau, but otherwise he was aware of no aftereffects of the battle. Except one. Hamlin was gone from him. That much was certain: Hamlin was gone.

He looked at Lissa. She lay as before, limp, glassy-eyed, self-isolated. Her bare skin glistened with sweat. The feverish look had left her, and, touching her side, he found that she was indeed cooler. Not only the fever had departed from her, though. For the first time since he had known her, Macy was unable to detect that look of terrible strain in her features, that expression of barely suppressed despair. She was calm. Her inner storms, as well as his, were over. But her calmness was of a frightening sort. She seemed vacant, almost entirely absent.

"Lissa?" he said. "Can you hear me?"

"Lis—Lis—"

"Lissa."

"Lissa," he said. "Lissa is you."

"Lissa is you." Her voice was high, childish, fluting, toneless.

"No. No. I'm Paul. You're Lissa."

"I'm Paul. You're Lissa."

He sat beside her. He took her hands in his. Her fingers were very cold. Her eyes closed a moment; then the lids fluttered and she opened them and looked at him in a sunny, uncomprehending way, and she smiled. He said,

"You've burned yourself out, haven't you? You just used up everything you had. To save me. And now there's nothing left but a husk."

"Husk."

"Is the ESP gone too, I wonder? Can you still hear the voices? Do you hear them, Lissa?"

"Voices. Do you. Hear them. Lissa."

"You don't, do you? Not any more."

"No," she said unexpectedly. "I don't hear. Anything."

Her response startled him. "You can understand me now? The voices are really gone?"

A smile. A fluttering of the eyelids. A babyish giggle. "The. Voices. Are. Really. Gone." She had slipped away from him once more.

He searched the room for a telephone. None. He went to the door and looked into the hall. A phone out there, yes. Someone using it. Chattering away. All right, I'll wait. A few minutes. And then phone Gomez. Send your van, I'll tell him. Manhattan North People's Co-op, and hurry. Not for me. For her, for Lissa. Yes. Burned out, hardly knows her own name. But there's something still intact down deep inside her. Not much, but enough, maybe, for you to work with, Gomez. No, you don't have to bother with me. I'm okay. It's over. Hamlin's gone, obliterated for keeps, gone, really gone. A total deconstruct. But the girl. Can you fix her, Gomez? Can you put her back together? It won't be like a reconstruct, exactly. You won't have to pour a new identity into an old body, just put an old identity back where it belongs. Okay, Gomez? You'll do it? Good. Good. And how long will it take? Five months, six, a year? Whatever. Just do it.

Five months. Six. November. December. Macy saw himself waiting at the main building of the Rehab Center. Snow on the ground, the branches of the trees heavy with whiteness, the sky a wintry blue. And Lissa, renewed, repaired, coming toward him out of the inner wing. No longer a telepath. A brand-new Lissa, stripped of her gift and of her torment. Uncertain of herself as she goes forth to face the world. Hello, he'll say. Hello, she'll say. An awkward little kiss. Button up, he'll tell her, it's cold. I've got a car. She'll look worried. Are we going into the city? she'll ask. My first day out. I'm nervous. You know what it's like, Paul, coming out. Sure, he'll say, I know just

what it's like. But you'll be all right. New people, new lives. The second trip. Paul and Lissa, Lissa and Paul. Minus our old friend Nat. A great artist has gone from the world. How quiet it is inside my head. Five months. Six. November. December. Lissa?

She was giggling softly, and her hands were exploring her body, discovering this and that as a baby might. Lightly he touched her cheek. She wriggled in pleasure. You wait, he said. Gomez will fix you better than you were before. Macy peered into the hall again. The phone still busy. Come on, get off the line, get off, get off! He didn't say it. He stood in the doorway, waiting to make his call, half expecting Hamlin to rise from somewhere, but Hamlin did not arise. Gone. Gone. My other self, my dark twin. He has left the world, and I have his place. Macy almost felt guilty about it. The merest flicker of regret. Farewell to you, Nat, a long farewell to Mr. Hyde. And I will go on through life without you. Wearing your skin, wearing your face. I am you, Nat, and you are nothing.

Macy looked back at Lissa. She was drooling. As I must have drooled, he thought. Four years ago when I was very new. He went to her and mopped her chin. It's all right, he said to her without bothering to speak aloud. December isn't so far away. And then hello, and then we start again. Two ordinary people. Trip two, yours, mine. The second trip. The good one, maybe. From the hall came the click of the receiver. The phone was free at last. He went out to call Gomez.



# TWO MEN IN ONE BODY

When he went into the Rehab Center he was Nat Hamlin—famous sculptor convicted of heinous crimes. And now, after four years, he was Paul Macy, a new man ready to re-enter the world. Nat Hamlin had been completely eradicated.

Only something was wrong.

Nat Hamlin wasn't gone.

He was still there, trying

to gain control. It all

came back when

he saw Lissa

on the

street.

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