### THE PURSUER

In memoriam Ch. P. Be thou faithful unto death

Apocalypse z: 10

0 make me a mask

Dylan Thomas

DiiniE K\D CALLED me in the afternoon saying that Johnny wasn't very well, and I'd gone to the hotel right away. Johnny and Dedee have been living in a hotel in the me Lagrange for a few days now, they have a room on the fomth floor. All I have to do is see the door to the room to realize that Johnny's in worse shape than usual; the window opens onto an almost black courtyard, and at one in the afternoon you have to keep the light on if you want to rend the newspaper or see someone else's face. It's not that cold out, but I found Johnny wrapped up in a blanket, and squeezed into a raunchy chair that's shed­ ding yellowed hunks of old bmlap all over the place. Dedee's gotten older, and the red dress doesn't suit her at all: it's a dress for working under spotlights; in that hotel room it turns into a repulsive kind of coagulation.

"Faithful old buddy Bruno, regular as bad breath," Johnny said by way of hello, bringing his knees up until his chin was resting on them. Dedee reached me a chair and I pulled out a pack of Gauloises. I'd brought a bottle of rum too, had it in the overcoat pocket, but I didn't want to bring it out until I had some idea of how things were go­ ing. I think the lightbulb was the worst irritation, its eye pulled out and hanging suspended from a long cord dir­ tied by flies. After looking at it once or twice, and putting my hand up to shade my eyes, I asked Dedee if we couldn't put out the damned light and wouldn't the light from the window be okay. Johnny followed my words and gestures with a large, distracted attention, like a cat who

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is looking fixedly, but you know it's something else com­ pletely; that it is something else. Finally Dedee got up and turned oil the light. Under what was left, some mishmash of black and grey, we recognized one another better. Johnny had pulled one of his big hands out from under the blanket and I felt the limber warmth of his skin. Then Dedee said she'd make us some nescafe. I was happy to know that at least they had a tin of nescafe. I always know, whatever the score is, when somebody has a can of nescafe it's not fatal yet; they can still hold out.

"We haven't seen one another for a while," I said to Johnny. "It's been a month at least."

"You got nothin' to do but tell time," he answered. He was in a bad mood. "The first, the two, the tlu·ee, the twenty-one. You, you put a number on everything. An' that's cool. You wanna know why she's sore? 'Cause I lost the horn. She's right, after all."

"Lost it, but how could you lose it?" I asked, realizing at the same moment that that was just what you couldn't ask Johnny.

"In the metro," Johnny said. "I shoved it under the seat so it'd be safe. It was great to ride that way, knowing I had it good and safe down there between my legs."

"He finally missed it when he was coming up the stairs in the hotel," Dedee said, her voice a little hoarse. "And I had to go running out like a nut to report it to the metro lost-and-found and to the police." By the silence that fol­ lowed I figured out that it'd been a waste of time. But Johnny began to laugh like his old self, a deep laugh back of the lips and teeth.

"Some poor devil's probably trying to get some sound out of it," he said. "It was one of the worst horns I ever had; you know that Doc Rodriguez played it? Blew all the soul out of it. As an insh·ument, it wasn't awful, but Rod­ riguez could ruin a Sh·adivarius just by hming it."

"And you can't get ahold of another?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Dedee said. "It

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might be Rory Friend has one. The awful thing is that Johnny's contract "

"The contract," Jolmny mimicked. "What's this with the contTact? I gotta play and that's it, and I haven't got a horn or any bread to buy one with, and the boys are in the same shape I am."

This last was not the huth, and the three of us knew it. Nobody would risk lending Jolmny an instrument, be­ cause he lost it or ruined it light off. He lost Louis Roll­ ing's sax in Bordeaux, the sax Dedee bought him when he had that conu·act for a tour in England he broke into three

pieces, whacking it against a wall and trampling on it.

Nobody knew how many insb·trments had already been

lost, pawned, or smashed up. And on all of them he played like I imagine only a god can play an alto sax, given that they quit using lyres and flutes.

"When do you start, Johnny?"

::r dunno. Today, I think; huh D e?" No, day after tomorrow.

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"Everybody knows the dates except me," Johnny grum­ bled, covering himself up to the ears in his blanket. 'Td've sworn it was tonight, and this afternoon we had to go in to rehearse."

"It amounts to the same thing," Dedee said. "The thing

is that you haven't got a horn."

"What do you mean, the same thing? It isn't the same thing. Day after tomorrow is the day after tomorrow, and tomorrow is much later than today. And today is later than right now, because here we are yakking with our old buddy Bruno, and I'd feel a lot better if I could forget about time and have something hot to drink."

''I'll boil some water, hold on for a little."

"I was not referring to boiling water," Johnny said. So I pulled out the bottle of rum, and it was as though we'd turned the light on; Johnny opened his mouth wide, aston­ ished, and his teeth shone, until even Dcdee had to smile at seeing him, so surprised and happy. Rum and nescafe

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isn't really terrible, and all three of us felt a lot better after the second swallow and a cigarette, Then I noticed that Johnny was withdrawing little by little and kept on refer­ ring to time, a subject which is a preoccupation of his ever since I've known him. I've seen very few men as occupied as he is with everything having to do with time. It's a ma­ nia of his, the worst of his manias, of which he has plenty. But he explains and develops it with a charm hard to re­ sist. I remember a rehearsal before a recording session in

Cincinnati, long before he came to Paris, in forty-nine or

fifty. Johnny was in great shape in those days and I'd gone to the rehearsal just to talk to him and also to Miles D avis. Everybody wanted to play, they were happy, and well­ dressed ( this occurs to me maybe by conh·as t with how Johnny goes around now, dirty and messed up ) , they were playing for the pleasure of it, without the slightest impa­ tience, and the sound technician was making happy signs from behind his glass window, like a satisfied baboon. And just at that moment when Johnny was like gone in his joy, suddenly he stopped playing and threw a punch at I don't know who and said, ''I'm playing this tomorrow," and the boys stopped short, two or three of them went on for a few measures, like a train slowly coming to a halt, and Johnny was hitting himself in the forehead and re­ peating, "I ah·eacly played this tomorrow, it's horrible, Miles, I ah·eady played tllis tomorrow," and they couldn't get him out of that, and everything was lousy from then on, Johnny was playing without any spirit and wanted to leave ( to shoot up again, the sound technician said, mad as hell), and when I saw him go out, reeling and his face like ashes, I wondered how much longer that business could go on.

"I think I'll call Dr. Bernard," Dedee said, looking at Johnny out of the corner of her eye, he was taking his rum in small sips. "You've got a fever and you're not eating anything."

"Dr. Bernard is a sad-assed idiot," Johnny said, licking his glass. "He's going to give me aspirin and then he'll tell

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me how very much he digs jazz, for example Ray Noble. Got the idea, Bruno? If I had the hom I'd give him some music that'd send him back down the four flights with his ass bumping on every step."

"It won't do you any harm to take some aspirin in any case," I said, looking out of the corner of my eye at Dedee. "If you want, I'll telephone when I leave so Dedee won't have to go down. But look, tltis contract . . . If you have to start day after tomorrow, I think something can be done. Also I can try to get a sax from Rory Friend. And at

worst . . . The whole thing is you have to take it easier, Johnny."

"Not today," Johnny said, looking at the rum bottle. "Tomorrow, when I have the horn. So don't you talk about that now. Bruno, every time I notice that time I

think the music always helps me understand this business a little better. Well, not unders tand, because the truth of the matter is, I don't understand anything. The only thing I do is notice that there is something. Like those dreams, fm not sure, where you begin to figure that everything is going to smash up now, and you're a little afraid just to be ready for it; but at the same time nothing's certain, and maybe it'll flip over like a pancake and all of a sudden, there you are, sleeping with a beautiful chick and every­ thing's cool."

Dedee's washing the cups and glasses in one corner of the room. I noticed they don't even have running water in the place; I see a stand with pink flowers, and a wash­ basin which makes me think of an embalmed animal. And Johnny goes on talking with his mouth half stopped up by the bottle, and he looks stuffed too, with his knees up under his chin and his black smooth face which the rum and the fever are beginning to sweat up a little.

"I read some things about all that, Bruno. It's weird, and really awful complicated . . . I think the music helps, you know. Not to understand, because the truth is I don't understand anything." He knocks on his head with a closed £st. His head sounds like a coconut.

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"Got nothing inside here, Bmno, what they call, noth­ ing. It doesn't think and don't understand nothing. I've never missed it, tell you the h·uth. I begin to understand from the eyes down, and the lower it goes the better I understand. But that's not really understanding, oh, I'm with you there."

"You're going to get your fever up," Dedee muttered from the back of the place.

"Oh, shut up. It's true, Bruno. I never thought of no th­ ing, only all at once I realize what I thought of, but that's not funny, right? How's it funny to realize that you've thought of something? Because it's all the same thing whether you think, or someone else. I am not I, me. I just use what I think, but always afterwards, and that's what I can't stand. Oh it's hard, it's so hard . . . Not even a slug left?"

I'd poured him the last drops of rum just as Dedee came back to turn on the light; you could hardly see in the place. Johnny's sweating, but keeps wrapped up in the blanket, and from time to time he starts shaking and the chair legs chatter on the floor.

"I remember when I was just a kid, almost as soon as I'd learned to play sax. There was always a helluva fight going on at home, and all they ever talked about was debts and mortgages. You know what a mortgage is? It must be something terrible, because the old lady blew her wig every time the old man mentioned mortgage, and they'd end up in a Bstfight. I was thirteen then . . . but you al­ ready heard all that."

Damned right I'd heard it; and damned right fd h·ied to write it well and truly in my biography of Johnny.

"Because of the way things were at home, time never stopped, dig? From one fistfight to the next, almost not stopping for meals. And to top it all off, religion, aw, you can't imagine. V/hen the boss got me a sax, you'd have laughed yourself to death if you'd seen it, then I think I noticed the thing right off. Music got me out of time, but that's only a way of putting it. If you want to know what I

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think, really, I believe that music put me into time. But then you have to believe that this time had nothing to do with . . . well, with us, as they say."

For some time now I've recognized Johnny's hallucina­ tions, all those that constitute his own life, I listen to him attentively, but without bothering too much about what he's saying. On the other hand, I was wondering where he'd made a connection in Paris. I'd have to ask Dedee, ignoring her possible complicity. Johnny isn't going to be able to stand this much Ionger. Heroin and poverty just don't get along very well together. I'm thinking of the music being lost, the dozens of sides Johnny would be able to cut, leaving that presence, that astonishing step for­ ward where he had it over any other musician. ''I'm play­ ing that tomorrow" suddenly fills me with a very clear sense of it, because Johnny is always blowing tomorrow, and the rest of them are chasing his tail, in this today he just jumps over, effortlessly, with the first notes of his music.

I'm sensitive enough a jazz critic when it comes to un­ derstanding my limitations, and I realize that what I'm thinking is on a lower level than where poor Johnny is trying to move forward with his decapitated sentences, his sighs, his impatient angers and his tears. He gives a damn where I think everything ought to go easy, and he's never come on smug that his music is much farther out than his contemporaries are playing. It drags me to think that he's at the beginning of his sax-work, and I'm going along and have to stick it out to the end. He's the mouth and I'm the ear, so as not to say he's the mouth and I'm the . . .

Every critic, yeah, is the sad-assed end of something that

starts as taste, like the pleasure of biting into something and chewing on it. And the mouth moves again, relishing it, Johnny's big tongue sucks back a little sb·ing of saliva from the lips. The bands make a little picture in the air.

"Bruno, maybe someday you'll WTite . . . Not for me, dig, what the hell does it matter to me. But it has to be beautiful, I feel it's gotta be beautiful. I was telling you

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how when I was a kid learning to play, I noticed that time changed. I told that to Jim once and he said that everybody in the world feels the same way and when he gets lost in it . . . He said that, when somebody gets lost in it . . . Hell no, I don't get lost when I'm playing. Only the place changes. It's like in an elevator, you're in an ele­ vator talking with people, you don't feel anything strange, meanwhile you've passed the first floor, the tenth, the twenty-first, and the city's down there below you, and you're finishing the sentence you began when you stepped into it, and between the first words and the last ones, there're fifty-two floors. I realized that when I started to play I was stepping into an elevator, but the elevator was time, if I can put it that way. Now realize that I haven't forgotten the mortgage or the religion. Like it's the mort­ gage and the religion are a suit I'm not wearing at the mo­ ment; I know that the suit's in the closet, but at that mo­ ment you can't tell me that that suit exists. The suit exists when I put it on, and the mortgage and religion existed when I got finished playing and the old lady came in with her hair, dangling big hunks of hair all over me and com­ plaining I'm busting her ears with that goddamned music."

Dedee had brought another cup of nescafe, but Johnny was looking with misery at his empty glass.

"This time business is complicated, it grabs me. I'm be­ ginning to notice, little by little, that time is not like a bag that keeps filling up. What I mean is, even though the con­ tents change, in the bag there's never more than a certain amount, and that's it. You see my suitcase, Bruno? It holds two suits and two pairs of shoes. Now, imagine that you empty it, okay? And afterwards you're going to put back the two suits and the two pairs of shoes, and then you realize that only one suit and one pair of shoes fit in there. But that's not the best of it. The best is when you realize you can put a whole store full of suits and shoes in there, in that suitcase, hundreds and hundreds of suits, like I get into the music when fro blowing sometimes.

The *Pursuer* 16g Music, and what I'm thinking about when I ride the meh·o."

"When you ride the meh·o."

"Oh yeah, that, now there's the thing," Johnny said, get­ ting crafty. "The metro is a great invention, Bruno. Riding the metro you notice everything that might end up in the s uitcase. Maybe I didn't lose the horn in the metro, maybe . . ,"

He breaks into laughter, coughs, and Dedee looks at hini uneasily. But he's making gestures, laughing and coughing at the s ame time, shivering away under the blanket like a chimpanzee. His eyes are running and he's drinking the tears, laughing the whole time.

"Don't confuse the two things," he says after a spell. "I lost it and that's it. But the metro was helpful, it made me notice the suitcase bit. Look, this bit of things being elastic is very weird, I feel it everyplace I go. It's all elastic, baby. Things that look solid have an elasticity . . ."

He's thinking, concentrating.

", . . a sort of delayed stretch," he concludes surpris­ ingly. I make a gesture of admiring approval. Bravo, Johnny. The man who claims he's not capable of thinking. Wow. And now I'm really interested in what he's going to say, and he notices that and looks at me more cunning than ever.

"You think I'll be able to come by another horn so I can play day after tomonow, Bruno?"

"Sure, but you'll have to take care of it." "Sure, I'll have to take care of it."

"A month's conh·act," explains poor Dedee. "Two weeks in Remy's club, two concerts and the record dates. We could clean up."

"A month's contract," Johnny imitates her with broad gestures. "Remy's club, two concerts, and the record dates. Be-bata-bop bop bop, chrrr. vVhat I got is a thirst, a thirst, a thirst. And I feel like smoking, like smoking. More'n anything else, I feel like a smoke."

I offer him my pack of Gauloises, though I know per-

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fectly well that he's thinking of pot. It's already dark out, people are beginning to come and go in the hallway, con­ versations in Arabic, singing. Dedee's left, probably to buy something to eat for that night. I feel Johnny's hand on my knee.

"She's a good chick, you know? But I've had enough. It's some time now I'm not in love with her, and I can't stand her. She still excites me, she knows how to make love like . . ." he brought his forefinger and middle finger to­ gether, Italian-fashion. "But I gotta split, go back to New York. Everything else aside, I gotta get back to New York, Bruno."

"What for? There you were worse off than you are here. I'm not talking about work but about your own life. Here, it looks like you have more friends."

"Sure, there's you, and the marquesa, and the guys at the club . • . Did you ever make love with the marquesa, Bruno?"

"No."

"Well, it's something that . • . But I was talking about the meh·o, and I don't know, how did we change the sub­ ject? The metro is a great invention, Bruno. One day I began to feel something in the metro, then I forgot . . . Then it happened again, two or three days later. And finally I realized. It's easy to explain, you dig, but it's easy because it's not the right answer. The right answer simply can't be explained. You have to take the metro and wait until it happens to you, though it seems to me that that only would happen to me. It's a little like that, see. But honestly, you never made love with the marquesa? You have to ask her to get up on that gilt footstool that she has in the corner of her bedroom, next to that pretty lamp and then . . . Oh shit, she's back ah·eady."

Dedee comes in with a package and looks at Johnny. "Your fever's higher. I telephoned the doctor aheady,

he's going to come at ten. He says you should stay quiet." "Okay, okay, but first I'm going to tell Bruno about the subway. The o ther day I noticed what was happening. I

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started to think about my old lady, then about Lan and the guys, an' whup, it was me walking through my old neigh­ borhood again, and I saw the kids' faces, the ones from then. It wasn't thinking, it seems to me I told you a lot of times, I never think; I'm like s tanding on a corner watch­ ing what I think go by, but I'm not thinking what I see. You dig? Jim says that we're all the same, that in general ( as they say) one doesn't think on his own. Let's say that's so, the thing is I'd took the metro at Saint-Michel, and right away I began to think about Lan and the guys, and to see the old neighborhood. I'd hardly sat down and I began to think about them. But at the same tinle I realized that I

was in the metro, and I saw that in a minute or two we

had got to Odeon, and that people were getting on and off. Then I went on thinking about Lan, and I saw my old lady when she was coming back from doing the shopping, and I began to see them all around, to be with them in a very beautiful way. I hadn't felt that way in a long time. Memo­ ries are always a drag, but this time I liked thinking about the guys and seeing them. If I start telling you everything I saw you're not going to believe it because I would take a long time doing it. And that would be if I economized on details. For example, just to tell you one thing, I saw Lan in a green suit that she wore when she came to Club 33 where I was playing with Ramp. I was seeing the suit with some ribbons, a loop, a sort of trim down the side and a collar . . . Not at the same time, though, really, I was walking around Lan's suit and looking at it pretty slow. Then I looked at Lan's face and at the boys' faces, and

then I remembered Mike who lived in the next room, and bow Mike had told me a story about some wild horses in Colorado, once he worked on a ranch, and talked about the balls it took for cowboys to break wild horses . . ,"

"Johnny," Dedee said from her far corner.

"Now figure I've told you only a little piece of everything that I was thinking and seeing. How much'll that take, what I'm telling you, this little piece?"

"I don't know, let's say about two minutes."

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"Let's say about two minutes," Johnny mimicked. "Two minutes and I've told you just a little bitty piece, no more.

If I were to tell you everything I saw the boys doing, and

bow Hamp played Save it, pretty mama, and listened to every note, you dig, every note, and Ramp's not one of them who gets tired, if I told you I heard an endless ha­ rangue of my old lady's, she was saying some thing about cabbages, if I remember, she was asking pardon for my old man and for me, and was saying something about some heads of cabbage . . . Okay, if I told you all that in detail, that'd take more than two minutes, huh, Bruno?"

"If you really beard and saw all that, it'd take a good quarter-hour," I said, laughing to myself.

"It'd take a good quarter-hour, hub, Bruno. Then tell me how it can be that I feel suddenly the metro stop and I come away from my old lady and Lan and all that, and I see that we're at Saint-Gennain-des-Pres, which is just a minute and a half from Odeon."

I never pay too much attention to the things Johnny says but now, with his way of staring at me, I felt cold.

"Hardly a minute and a half in your time, in her time,"

Johnny said nastily. "And also the metro's time and my watch's, damn them both. Then bow could I have been thinking a quarter of an hour, hub, Bruno? How can you think a quarter of an hour in a minute and a half? That day I swear I hadn't smoked even a roach, not a crumb," he finished like a boy excusing himself. "And then it hap­ pened to me again, now it's beginning to happen to me everyplace. But," be added astutely, "I can only notice in the metro, because to ride the metro is like being put in a clock. The stations are minutes, dig, it's that time of yours, now's time; but I know there's another, and I've been thinking, thinking . . ."

He covers his face with his bands and shakes. I wish I'd gone already, and I don't know bow to get out now without Johnny resenting it, he's tenibly touchy with his friends. If be goes on this way he's going to make a mess of him-

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self, at least with Dedee he's not going to talk about things like that.

"Bruno, if I could only live al the time like in those mo­ ments, or like when I'm playing and the time changes then too . . . Now you know what can happen in a min­ ute and a half . . . Then a man, not just me but her and you and all the boys, they could live hundreds of years, if we could find the way we could live a thousand times

faster than we're living because of the damned clocks, that mania for minutes and for the day after tomor- row ,

I smile the best I can, understanding fuzzily that he's right, but what he suspects and the hunch I have about

what he suspects is going to be deleted as soon as I'm in

the street and've gotten back into my everyday life. At that moment I'm sure that what Johnny's saying doesn't just come from his being half-crazy, that he's escaping from reality; I'm sure that, in the exchange, what he thinks

leaves him with a kind of parody which he changes into a

hope. Everything Johnny says to me at such moments (and it's been five years now Johnny's been saying things like this to me and to people) you can't just listen and

promise yourself to think about it later. You hardly get

down into the street, the memmy of it barely exists and no Johnny repeating the words, everything turns into a pot­ ch·eam, a monotonous gesticulating (because there're others who say things like that, every minute you hear similar testimony) and after the wonder of it's gone you get an initation, and for me at leas t it feels as though Johnny's been pulling my leg. But this always happens the next day, not when Johnny's talking to me about it, be­ cause then I feel that there's something that fd like to ad­

mit at some point, a light that's looking to be lit, or better yet, as though it were necessary to break something, split it from top to bottom like a log, setting a wedge in and

hammering it until the job's done. And Johnny hasn't got the s h·ength to hammer anything in, and me, I don't know

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where the hammer is to tap in the wedge, which I can't imagine either.

So finally I left the place, but before I left one of those things that have to happen happened-if not that, then something else-and it was when I was s aying goodbye to Dedee and had my back turned to Johnny that I felt some­ thing was happening, I saw it in Dedee's eyes and swung around quickly (because maybe I'm a little afraid of Johnny, this angel who's like my brother, this brother who's like my angel) and I saw Johnny had thrown off the blanket around him in one motion, and I saw him sitting in the easy-chair completely nude, his legs pulled up and the knees underneath his chin, shivering but laughing to himself, naked from top to bottom in that grimy chair.

"It's beginning to get warm," Johnny said. "Bruno, look

what a pretty scar I got between my ribs."

"Cover yomself," Dedee ordered him, embarrassed and not knowing what to say. We know one another well enough and a naked man is a naked man, that's all, but anyway Dedee was scandalized and I didn't know how to not give the impression that what Johnny was doing had shocked me. And he knew it and laughed uproariously, mouth wide open, obscenely keeping his legs up so that his prick hung down over the edge of the chair like a mon­ key in the zoo, and the skin of his thighs had some weird blemishes which disgusted me completely. Then Dedee grabbed the blanket and wrapped it tightly around him, while Johnny was laughing and seemed very cheerful. I said goodbye hesitatingly, promised to come back the next day, and Dedee accompanied me to the landing, closing the door so Johnny couldn't hear what she was going to say to me.

"He's been like this since we got back from the Belgian tom. He'd played very well everyplace, and I was so happy."

"I wonder where he got the heroin from," I said, looking her right in the eye.

"Don't know. He'd been drinking wine and cognac al-

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most constantly. He's been shooting up too, but less than there "

There was Baltimore and New York, three months in

Bellevue psychiatric, and a long sh·etch in Camarillo. "Did Johnny play really well in Belgium, Dedee?" "Yes, Bruno, better than ever, seems to me. The people

went off their heads, and the guys in the band told me so,

too, a number of times. Then all at once some weird things were happening, like always \vith Johnny, but luck­ ily never in front of an audience. I thought . . . but you see now, he's worse than ever.»

"Worse than in New York? You didn't know him those years."

Dedee's not stupid, but no woman likes you to talk about her man before she knew him, aside from the fact that now she has to put up \vith him and whatever "be­ fore" was is just words. I don't know how to say it to her, I don't even trust her fully, but finally I decide.

"I guess you're short of cash."

We've got that conh·act beginning day after tomor­ row," said Dedee.

"You think he's going to be able to record and do the gig with an audience too?"

"Oh, sure." Dedee seemed a bit surprised. "Johnny can play better than ever if Dr. Bernard can get rid of that flu. The problem is the horn."

'Til take care of that. Here, take this, Dedee. Only . . .

Maybe better Johnny doesn't know about it." "Bruno . . \_.,,

I made a motion with my hand and began to go down the stairway, I'd cut off the predictable words, the hope­ less gratitude. Separated from her by four or five steps, made it easier for me to say it to her.

"He can't shoot up before the first concert, not for any­ thing in the world. You can let him smoke a little, but no money for the other thing."

Dedee didn't answer at all, though I saw how her hands were twisting and twisting the bil as though she were

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h-ying to make them disappear. At least I was sure that

Dedee wasn't on m·ugs. If she went along with it, it was only out of love or fear. If Johnny gets down on his knees,

like I saw once in Chicago, and begs her with tears . . . But that's a chance, like everything else with Johnny, and for the moment they'd have enough money to eat, and for medicines. In the street I turned up the collar on my raincoat because it was beginning to drizzle, and took a breath so deep that my lungs hurt; Paris smelled clean, like fresh bread. Only then I noticed how Johnny's place had smelled, of Johnny's body sweating under the blanket. I went into a cafe for a shot of cognac and to wash my mouth out, maybe also the memory that insisted and in­ sisted in Johnny's words, his stories, his way of seeing what I didn't see and, at bottom, didn't want to see. I be­ gan to think of the day after tomorrow and it was like tranquillity descending, like a bridge stretching beauti­ fully from the zinc counter into the future.

When one is not too sure of anything, the best thing to do is to make obligations for oneself that'll act as pon­

toons. Two or three days later I thought that I had an obli­ gation to find out if the marquesa was helping Johnny Carter score for heroin, and I went to her studio down in Montparnasse. The marquesa is really a marquesa, she's

got mountains of money from the marquis, though it's been some time they've been divorced because of dope and other, similar, reasons. Her friendship with Johnny dates from New York, probably from the year when Johnny got famous overnight simply because someone had given him the chance to get four or five guys together who dug his

s tyle, and Johnny could work comfortably for the first time, and what he blew left everyone in a state of shock. This is not the place to be a jazz critic, and anyone who's

interested can read my book on Johnny and the new post­

war style, but I can say that forty-eight-le t's say until fifty-was like an explosion in music, but a cold, silent explosion, an explosion where everything remained in its

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place and there were no screams or debris flying, but the crust of habit splintered into a million pieces until its de­ fenders ( in the bands and among the public) made hip­ ness a question of self-esteem over something which didn't feel to them as it had before. Because after Johnny's step with the alto sax you couldn't keep on listening to earlier musicians and think that they were the end; one must submit and apply that sort of disguised resignation which is called the historical sense, and say that any one of those musicians had been stupendous, and kept on be­ ing so, in his moment. Johnny had passed over jazz like a hand turning a page, that was it.

The marquesa had the ears of a greyhound for every­ thing that might be music, she'd always admired Johnny and his friends in the group enormously. I imagine she must have "loaned" them no small amount of dollars in the Club 33 days, when the majority of critics were screaming bloody murder at Johnny's recordings, and

were criticizing his jazz by worse-than-rotten criteria. Probably also, in that period, the marquesa began sleeping with Johnny from time to time, and shooting up with him. I saw them together often before recording sessions or during inte1missions at concerts, and Johnny seemed enormously happy at the marquesa's side, even though Lan and the kids were waiting for him on another floor or at his house. But Johnny never had the vaguest idea of what it is to wait for anything, he couldn't even imagine that anyone was somewhere waiting for him. Even to his way of dropping Lan, which tells it like it really is with him. I saw the postcard that he sent from Rome after be­ ing gone for four months (after climbing onto a plane with two other musicians, Lan knowing nothing about it) . The postcard showed Romulus and Remus, which had al­ ways been a big joke with Johnny (one of his numbers has that title), said: "Waking alone in a multitude of loves," which is part of a first line of a Dylan Thomas poem, Johnny was reading Dylan all the time then; Johnny's agents in the States agreed to deduct a part of

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their percentages and give it to Lan, who, for her palt, understood quickly enough that it hadn't been such a bad piece of business to have gotten loose from Johnny. Some­ body told me that the marquesa had given L:m money too, without Lan knowing where it had come from. \Vhich didn't surprise me at all, because the marquesa was ab­ surdly generous and understood the world, a little like those omelets she makes at her studio when the boys be­ gin to arrive in droves, and which begins to take on the aspect of a kind of permanent omelet that you throw different things into and you go on cutting out hunks and o£Iering them in place of what's really missing.

I found the marquesa with Marcel Gavoty and Art Bou­

caya, and they happened just at that moment to be talking about the sides Johnny had recorded the previous after­ noon. They fell all over me as if I were the archangel him­ self arriving, the marquesa necked with me until it was beginning to get tedious, and the boys applauded the per­ fonnance, bassist and baritone sax. I had to take refuge behind an easy-chair and stand them off as best I could, all because they'd learned that I'd provided the magnifi­ cent sax with which Johnny had cut four or five of the best. The marquesa said immediately that Johnny was a dirty rat, and how they'd had a fight ( she didn't say over what) and that the dirty rat knew very well that all he had to do was beg her pardon properly and there would have been a check immediately to buy a new horn. Naturally Johnny hadn't wanted to beg her pardon since his return to Paris-the fight appears to have taken place in London, two months back-and so nobody'd known that he lost his goddamned horn in the metro, etcetera. When the mar­ quesa started yakking you wondered if Dizzy's style hadn't glued up her diction, it was such an interminable series of variations in the most unexpected registers, until the end when the marquesa slapped her thighs mightily, opened her mouth wide and began to laugh as if someone were tickling her to death. Then Art Boucaya took advantage of the break to give me details of the session the day before,

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which I'd missed on account of my wife having pneu­ monia.

"Tica can tell you," Art said, pointing to the marquesa who was still squirming about with laughter. "Bruno, you can't imagine what it was like until you hear the discs. If God was anywhere yes terday, I think it was in that damned recording studio where it was as hot as ten thou­ sand devils, by the way. You remember Willow Tree, Marcel?"

"Sure, I remember," Marcel said. "The fuck's asking me

if I remember. I'm tattooed from head to foot with Willow

Tree."

Tica brought us highballs and we got ourselves com­ fortable to chat. Actually we talked very little about the recording session, because any musician knows you can't talk about things like that, but what little they did say re­ stored my hope and I thought maybe my horn would bring Johnny some good luck. Anyway, there was no lack of an­ ecdotes which stomped that hope a bit, for example, Johnny had taken his shoes off between one cutting and the next and walked around the studio barefoot. On the other hand, he'd made up with the marquesa and prom­ ised to come to her place to have a drink before the con­ cert tonight.

"Do you know the girl Johnny has now?" Tica wanted to know. I gave the most succinct possible description of the French girl, but Marcel filled it in with all sorts of nuances and allusions which amused the marquesa very much. There was not the slightest reference to drugs, though I'm so up tight that it seemed to me I could smell pot in Tica's studio, besides which Tica laughed in a way I've noted in Johnny at times, and in Art, which gives the

teahead away. I wondered how Johnny would have gotten heroin, though, if he'd had a fight with the marquesa; my confidence in Dedee hit the ground floor, if really I'd ever had any confidence in her. They're all the same, at bot­ tom.

I was a little envious of the equality that brought them

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closer together, which turned them into accomplices so easily; from my puritanical world-! don't need to admit it, anyone who knows me knows that I'm horrified by vice

-I see them as sick angels, irritating in their irresponsi­ bility, but ultima tely valuable to the community because of, s ay, Johimy's records, the marquesa's generosity. But I'm not telling it all and I want to force myself to say it

out: I envy them, I envy Johnny, that Johnny on the other

side, even though nobody knows exactly what tha t is, the other side. I envy everything except his anguish, some­ thing no one can fail to understand, but even in his p ain

he's got to have some kind of in to things that's denied me. I envy Johnny and at the same time I get sore as hell

watching him destroy himself, misusing his gifts, and the stupid accumulation of nonsense the pressure of his life requires. I think that if Jolmny could sb·aighten out his

life, not even sacrificing anything, not even heroin, if he

could pilot that plane he's been flying blind for the last five years better, maybe he'd end up worse, maybe go crazy altogether, or die, but not without having played it to the depth, what he's looking for in those sad a *posteriori* mon­ ologues, in his retelling of great, fascinating experiences which, however, stop right there, in the middle of the road. And all tllis I back up with my own cowardice, and maybe basically I want Johnny to wind up all at once like a nova that explodes into a thousand pieces and turns as­ b·onomers into idiots for a whole week, and then one can go off to sleep and tomorrow is another day.

It felt as though Johnny had surmised everything I'd been thinking, because he gave me a big hello when he came in, and almost immediately came over and sat be­ side me, after kissing the marquesa and whirling her around in the air, and exchanging with Art and her a

complicated onomatopoetic ritual which made everybody

feel great.

"Bruno," Johnny said, settling down on the best sofa, "that's a beautiful piece of equipment, and they tell me I was dragging it up out of my balls yesterday. Tica was

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crying electric-light bulbs, and I don't think it was because she owed bread to her dressmaker, huh, Tica?"

I wanted to know more about the session, but Johnny was satisfied with this bit of braggadocio. Almost immedi­ ately he turned to Marcel and started coming on about that night's program and how well both of them looked in their brand-new grey suits in which they were going to appear at the theater. Johnny was really in great shape, and you could see he hadn't used a needle overmuch in days; he has to take exactly the right amount to put him in the mood to play. And just as I was thinking that, Johnny

dropped his hand on my shoulder and leaned over: "Dedee,told me I was very rough with you the o ther

afternoon.

"Aw, you don't even remember."

"Sure. I remember very well. You want my opinion, ac­ tually I was terrific. You ought to have been happy I put on that act with you; I don't do that with anybody, believe me. It just shows how much I appreciate you. We have to go someplace soon where we can talk over a pile of things. Here . . ." He stuck out his lower lip contemptuously, laughed, shrugged his shoulders, it looked like he was dancing on the couch. "Good old Bruno. Dedee told me I acted very bad, honestly."

"You had the flu. You better now?"

"It wasn't flu. The doc arrived and right away began telling me how he liked jazz enormously, and that one night I'd have to come to his house and listen to records. Dedee told me that you gave her money."

"So you could get through all right until you get paid.

How do you feel about tonight?"

"Good, shit, I feel like playing, I'd play right now if I had the horn, but Dedee insisted she'd bring it to the thea­ ter herself. It's a great hom, yes terday it felt like I was making love when I was playing it. You should have seen Tica's face when I finished. \Vere you jealous, Tica?"

They began to laugh like hell again, and Johnny thought it an opportune moment to race across the studio

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with great leaps of happiness, and between him and Art they staTted dancing without the music, raising and low­ ering therr eyebrows to set the beat. It's il"npossible to get il"npatient with either Johnny or Art; it'd be like getting annoyed with the wind for blowing your hair into a mess. Tica, Marcel and I, in low voices, h·aded our conceptions of what was going to happen that night. Marcel is certain that Johnny's going to repeat his terrific success of 1951, when he first came to Paris. After yesterday's job, he's sure everything is going to be A-okay. I'd like to feel as confident as he does, but anyway there's nothing I can do except sit in one of the front rows and listen to the con­ cert. At least I have the assurance that Johnny isn't out of it like that night in Baltimore. When I mentioned this to Tica, she grabbed my hand like she was going to fall into the water. Art and Johnny had gone over to the piano, and Art was showing him a new tune, Johnny was moving his

head and humming. Both of them in their new grey suits

were elegant as hell, although Johnny's shape was spoiled a bit by the fat he'd been laying on these days.

We talked with Tica about that night in Baltimore, when Jolmny had his first big crisis. I looked Tica right in the eye as we were talking, because I wanted to be sure she understood what I was talking about, and that she shouldn't give in to him this time. If Johnny managed to drink too much cognac, or smoke some tea, or go off on shit, the concert would flop and everything fall on its ass. Paris isn't a casino in the provinces, and everybody has his eye on Johnny. And while I'm thinking that, I can't help having a bad taste in my mouth, anger, not against Johnny nor the things that happen to him; rather against the people who hang around him, myself, the marquesa and Marcel, for example. Basically we're a bunch of ego­ tists; under the pretext of watching out for Johnny what we're doing is protecting our idea of him, getting ourselves ready for the pleasure Johnny's going to give us, to reflect the brilliance from the statue we've erected among us all and defend it till the last gasp. If Jolmny zonked, it would

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be bad for my book ( the h·anslation into English or Italian was coming out any minute), and part of my concern for Johnny was put together from such things . Art and M ar­ cel needed him to help them earn bread, and the mar­ quesa, well, dig what the marquesa saw in Johnny besides his talent. All this has no thing to do with the other Johnny, and suddenly I realized that maybe that was what Johnny was trying to tell me when he yanked off the blan­ ket and left himself as naked as a wmm, Johnny with no born, Johnny with no money and no clothes, Johnny ob­ sessed by something that his intelligence was not equal to comprehending, but which floats slowly into his music, caresses his skin, perhaps is readying for an unpredictable

leap which we wil never understand.

And when one thinks things out that way, one really ends up with a bad taste in the mouth, and all the sincer­ ity in the world won't equalize the sudden discovery that next to Johnny Carter one is a piss-poor piece of shit, that now he's come to have a drink of cognac and is looking at me from the sofa with an amused expression. Now it's time for us to go to the Pleyel Hall. That the music at least will save the rest of the night, and ful£Il basically one of its worst missions, to lay down a good smokescreen in front of the miJ.Tor, to clear us off the map for a couple of homs.

As is natural, I'll write a review of tonight's concert to­ morrow for Jazz. But now at intermission, with this short­ hand scrawl on my knee, I don't feel exactly like talking

like a critic, no comparative criticisms. I know very well that, for me, Johnny has ceased being a jazzman and that

his musical genius is a fac;ade, something that everyone can manage to understand eventually and admire, but which conceals something else, and that other thing is the only one I ought to care for, maybe because it's the only thing really important to Johnny himself.

It's easy to say it, while I'm still in Johnny's music. When you cool off . . . Why can't I do like him, why

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can't I beat my bead against the wall? Pickily enough, I prefer the words to the reality that I'm hying to describe, I protect myself, shielded by considerations and conjec­ tures that are nothing other than a stupid dialectic. I think I understand why prayer demands instinctively that one fall on one's knees. The change of position is a symbol of the change in the tone of voice, in what the voice is about to articulate, in the diction itself. When I reach the point of specifying the insight into that change, things which seemed to have been arbitrary a second before are filled with a feeling of depth, simplify themselves in an ex­ h·aordinary manner and at the same time go still deeper. Neither Marcel nor Art noticed yesterday that Johnny was not crazy to take his shoes off at the recording session. At that moment, Jolmny had to touch the floor with his own skin, to fasten himself to the earth so that his music was a reaffirmation, not a flight. Because I feel this also in Johnny, he never runs from anything, be doesn't shoot up to get out of it like most junkies, be doesn't blow horn to squat behind a ditch of music, he doesn't spend weeks in psychiah·ic clinics to feel protected from the pressures he can't put up with. Even his style, the most authentic thing he has, that s tyle which deserves all the absurd names it's ever gotten, and doesn't need any of them, proves that

Johnny's art is neither a substitute nor a finished thing.

Johnny abandoned the language of *That Old Fashioned Love* more or less current ten years ago, because that vio­ lently erotic language was too passive for him. In his case he prefened desire rather than pleasure and it hung him up, because desire necessitated his advancing, experi­ menting, denying in advance the easy rushing around of traditional jazz. For that reason, I don't think Johnny was terribly fond of the blues, where masochism and nostalgia

. . . But I've spoken of all that in my book, showing how the denial of immediate satisfaction led Johnny to elabo­ rate a language which he and other musicians are carry­ ing today to its ultimate possibilities. This jazz cuts across all easy eroticism, all Wagnerian romanticism, so to speak,

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to settle firmly into what seems to be a very loose level where the music stands in absolute liberty, as when painting got away from the representational, it stayed clear by not being more than painting. But then, being master of a music not designed to facilitate orgasms or nostalgia, of a music which I should like to call metaphys­ ical, Johnny seems to use that to explore himself, to bite into the reality that escapes every day. I see here the ulti­

mate paradox of his style, his aggressive vigor. Incapable of satisfying itself, useful as a continual spur, an infinite construction, the pleasure of which is not in its highest pinnacle but in the exploratory repetitions, in the use of

faculties which leave the suddenly human behind without losing humanity. And when Johnny, like tonight, loses himself in the continuous creation of his music, I know best of all that he's not losing himself in anything, nothing escapes him. To go to a date you can't get away from, even though you change the place you're going to meet each time. And as far as what is left behind, can be left, Johnny doesn't 1.now or puts it down supremely. The marquesa, for example, thinks that Johnny's afraid of poverty, with­ out knowing that the only thing Johnny can be afraid of is maybe not finding the pork chop on the end of the fork when it happens he would like to eat it, or not finding a

bed when he's sleepy, or a hundred dollars in his wallet

when it seems he ought to be the owner of a hundred dol­ lars. Johnny doesn't move in a world of abs tractions like we do; the reason for his music, that incredible music I've listened to tonight, has nothing to do with abstractions. But only he can make the inventory of what he's taken in

while he was blowing, and more likely, he's aheady onto

something else, losing that already in a new conjechrre or a new doubt. His conquests are like a dream, when be wakes up he forgets them, when the applause brings him back from his spin, that man who goes so far out, living his quarter of an hour in a minute and a half.

It would be like living connected to a lightning rod in

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the middle of a thunderstorm and expecting that noth­ ing's going to happen. Four or five days later I ran into Art Boucaya at the Dupont in the Latin Quarter, and he had no opportunity to make his expression blank as he gave

me the bad news. For the first second I felt a kind of satis­ faction which I find no other way of qualifying except to call it spi teful, because I knew perfectly well that the calm could not last long; but then I thought of the consequences and my fondness for Johnny, thinking of them, made my

stomach chum; then I downed two cognacs while Art was telling me what had happened. In short, it seems that Delaunay called a recording session to put out a new quin­ tet under Johnny's name, with Art, Marcel Gavoty and a pair of very good sidemen from Pads on piano and ill·urns. The thing was supposed to begin at three in the afternoon, and they were counting on having the whole day and part

of the night for watmup and to cut a number of tunes. And what happened? It started when Johnny arrived at five, Delaunay was boiling ah·eady, then Johnny sat down

on a chair and said he didn't feel very well and that the only reason he carne was not to queer the day's work for the boys, but HE didn't feel up to playing.

"Between Marcel and me, we h·ied to convince him to lie down for a bit and rest, but be wouldn't do anything but talk about, I don't know, he'd found some fields with

urns, and he gave us those goddarnned urns for about a

quarter of an hour. Finally, he started to haul out piles of leaves that he'd gathered in some park or another and had jammed into his pockets. The floor of the goddamned stu­ dio looked like a botanical garden, the studio personnel were h·omping around looking as mean as dogs, and all this without laying anything down on the acetate; just im­ agine the engineer sitting in his booth for three hours smoking, and in Paris that's a helluva lot for an engineer. "Finally Marcel convinced Johnny it'd be better to hy something, the two of them started to play and we moved in after a bit, be tter that than sitting around getting tired of doing no thing. After a while I noticed that Johnny was

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having a kind of contraction in his right arm, and when he began to blow it was terrible to watch, I'm not shitting you. His face all grey, you dig, and every once in a while a chill'd shake him; and I didn't catch that moment when it got him on the floor. After a few tries he lets loose with a

yell, looks at each of us one by one, slowly, and asks us what the hell we're waiting for, begin Amorous. You know, that tune of Alamo's. Well, Delaunay signals the

engineer, we all start out the best possible, and Jolmny opens his legs, stands up as though he were goin g to sleep in a boat rocking away, and lets loose with a sound I swear I'd never heard before or since. That goes on for three minutes, then all of a sudden he lets go with a blast, could of split the fuckin' celestial harmonies, and he goes off into one corner leaving the rest of us blowing away in the middle of the take, which we finish up best we can.

"But now the worst part, when we get finished, the first thing Johnny says was that it was all awful, that it came out like a piece of shit, and that the recording was not worth a damn. Naturally, neither \Ve nor Delatmay paid any attention because, in spite of the defects, Johnny's solo was worth any thousand of what you can hear today. Something all by itself, I can't explain it to you . . .

You'll hear it, I guess. I don't imagine that either Delau­

nay or the technicians thought of wiping out the acetate. But Johnny insisted like a nut, he was gonna break the

glass in the control booth if they didn't show him that the acetate had been wiped. Finally the engineer showed him something or other and convinced him, and then Johnny suggested we record Streptomycin, which came out much better, and at the same time much worse, I mean it's clean

and full, but still it hasn't got that incredible thing Johnny blew on Amorous."

Breathing hard, Art had finished his beer and looked at me, very depressed. I asked him what Johnny had done after that, and he told me that after boring them all to tears with his stories about the leaves and the fields full of mns, he had refused to play any more and went stumbling

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out of the studio. Marcel had taken his horn away from him so that he couldn't lose it or stomp on it again, and between him and one of the French sidemen, they'd gotten him back to the hotel.

What else was there to do except to go see him immedi­ ately? But what the bell, I left it for the next day. And the next morning I found Johnny in the Police Notices in Fig­ aro, because Johnny'd set fire to the hotel room during the night and had escaped running naked down the halls. Both he and Dedee had gotten out unhurt, but Johnny's in the hospital under observation. I showed the news report to my wife so as to cheer her up in her convalescence, and dashed off immediately to the hospital where my press pass got me exactly nowhere. The most I managed to find out was that Johnny was delirious and had enough junk in him to drive ten people out of their heads. Poor Dedee had not been able to resist him, or to convince him to not shoot up; all Johnny's women ended up his accomplices, and I'm sure as can be that the marquesa was the one who got the junk for him.

Finally I ended up by going immediately to Delaunay's place to ask if I could hear Amorous as soon as possible. To see if Amorous would turn out to be Johnny's last will and tes tament. In which case, my professional duty would

be . . .

But not yet, no. Five days later Dedee's phoned me say­ ing that Johnny is much better and that he wants to see me. I'd rather not reproach her, firs t of all because I imag­ ine it'd be a waste of time, and secondly because poor Dedee's voice sounds as though it were coming out of a cracked teakettle. I promised to go immediately, and said that perhaps when Johnny was better, we could organize a tour through the provinces, a lot of cities. I hung up when Dedee started crying into the phone.

Johnny's sitting up in bed, in a semi-private with two other patients who are sleeping, luckily. Before I can say anything to him, he's grabbed my head with both paws

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and kissed me on the forehead and cheeks numerous times. He's terribly emaciated, although he tells me that he's got a good appetite and that they give him plenty to eat. For the moment the thing that worries him most is whether the boys are bad-mouthing him, if his crisis has hurt anyone, things like that. It's almost useless to answer him, he knows well enough that the concerts have been canceled and that that hurt Art and Marcel and the others; but he asks me like he expected that something good had happened meanwhile, anything that would put things together again. And at the same time he isn't play­ ing me a b"ick, because back of everything else is his su­ preme indifference; Jolmny doesn't give a good goddamn

if everything goes to hell, and I know him too well to pay any attention to his coming on.

"What do you want me to tell you, Johnny? Things could have worked out better, except you have this talent for fucking up."

"Okay, I don't deny that," Johnny said tiredly. "And all because of the urns."

I remembered Art's account of it and stood there look­ ing at him.

"Fields filled with urns, Bruno. Piles of invisible urns buried in an immense field. I was wandering around there and once in a while I'd stumble across something. You'd say that I'd dreamt it, huh? It was just like that, believe it: every once in a while I'd s tumble across an urn, until I

realized that the whole field was full of urns, that there were miles and miles of them, and there were a dead man's ashes inside every urn. Then I remember I got down on my knees and began to dig up the ground with my nails until one of the urns appeared. Then I remember thinking, 'This one's going to be empty because i t's the one for me.' But no, it was filled with a grey dust like I knew all the others were I hadn't seen yet. Then . . . then that

was when we began to record Amorous, If I remember." I glanced discreetly at the temperah1re chart. Accord­ ing to it, reasonably normal. A young intem showed up in

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the doorway, acknowledging me with a nod, and made a gesture indicating food to Johnny, an almost sporty ges­ ture, a good kid, etc. But when Johnny didn't answer him, when the intern had left, not even entering the door, I saw Johnny's hands were clenched tight.

"They'll never understand," he said. "They're like a monkey with a feather duster, like the chicks in the Kan­ sas City Conservatory who think they're playing Chopin, nothing less. Bruno, in Camarillo they put me in a room with another three people, and in the morning an intern came in all washed up and all rosy, he looked so good. He looked like the son of Tampax out of Kleenex, you be­ lieve it. A kind of specimen, an immense idiot that sat down on the edge of the bed and was going to cheer me up, I mean that was wl1en I wanted to kill myself, and I hadn't thought of Lan or of anyone, I mean, forget it. And the worst was, the poor cat was offended because I wasn't

paying attention to him. He seemed to think I should sit up in bed en-goddamn-chanted with his white skin and beautifully combed hair and his nails all b·immed, and that way I'd get better like the poor bastards who come to

Lourdes and tlu·ow away the crutches and leave, really jumping . . .

"Bruno, this cat and all the cats at Camarillo were con­ vinced. You know what I'm saying? What of? I swear I don't know, but they were convinced. Of what they were, I imagine, of what they were worth, of their having a di­ ploma. No, it's not that. Some were modest and didn't

think they were infallible. But even the most humble were sure. That made me jumpy, Bruno, that they felt sure of themselves. Sure of what, tell me what now, when a poor devil like me with more plagues than the devil under his skin had enough awareness to feel that everything was like a jelly, that everything was very shaky everywhere, you only had to concentrate a little, feel a little, be quiet for a little bit, to find the holes. In the door, in the bed: holes. In the hand, in the newspaper, in time, in the air: everything full of holes, everything spongy, like a colander

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straining it�elf . . . But they were American science, Bruno, dig? White coats were protecting them from the holes; didn't see anything, they accepted what had been seen by others, they imagined that they were living. And naturally they couldn't see the holes, and they were very sme of themselves, completely convinced of their pre­ scriptions, their syringes, their goddamned psychoanalysis, their don't smoke and don't drink . . . Ah, the beautiful day when I was able to move my ass out of that place, get on the b·ain, look out the window how everything was moving backward, I don't know, have you seen how the landscape breaks up when you see it moving away from you "

'vVe're smoking Gauloises. They've given Johnny per­ mission to drink a little cognac and smoke eight or Len cigarettes a day. But you can see it's not him, just his body that's smoking, and he's somewhere else almost as if he'd refuse to climb out of the mine shaft. I'm wondering what he's seen, what he's felt these last few days. I don't want to get him excited, if he could speak for himself We

smoke silently, and occasionally he moves his arm and runs his fingers over my face as though he were identify­ ing me. Then he plays with his wrist watch, he looks at it tenderly.

"What happens to them is that they get to think of themselves as wise," he said sharply. "They think it's wis­ dom because they've piled up a lot of books and eaten them. It m akes me laugh, because really they're good kids and are really convinced that what they study and what they do are really very difficult and profound things. In the circus, Bruno, it's all the same, and betveen us it's the same. People figure that some things are the height of difficulty, and so they applaud trapeze artists, or me. I don't know what they're thinking about, do they imagine that you break yomself up to play well, or that the trapeze artist sprains tendons every time he takes a leap? The really difficult things are something else entirely, every­ thing that people think they can do anytime. To look, for

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ins tance, or to understand a dog or a cat. Those are the difcult things, the big difficul ties. Last night I happened to look in this little mirror, and I swear, it was so terribly difficult I almost threw myself out of bed. Imagine that you're looking at yourself; that alone is enough to freeze you up for half an hour. In reality, this guy's not me, the first second I felt very clearly that he wasn't me. I took it by surprise, obliquely, and I knew it wasn't me. I felt that, and when something like that's felt . . . But it's like at Atlantic City, on top of one wave the second one falls on you, and then another . . . You've hardly felt and al­ ready another one comes, the words come . . . No, not words, but what's in the words, a kind of glue, that slime. And the slime comes and covers you and convinces you that that's you in the mirror. Sure, but not to realize it. But sure, I am, with my hair, this scar. And people don't real­ ize that the only thing that they accept is the slime, and that's why they think it's easy to look in a mirror. Or cut a bunk of bread with a knife. Have you ever cut a hunk of bread with a knife?"

''I'm in the habit of it," I said, amused.

"And you've stayed all that calm. Not me, Bll.lno, I can't. One night I shot all of it so far that the knife ahnost knocked the eye out of a Japanese at the next table. That was in Los Angeles, and there was such a fantastic brawl

, . . When I e}.:plained to them, they dumped me. And it seemed to me so simple to explain it all to them. At that time I knew Dr. Christie. A terrific guy, and you know bow I am about doctors . . ."

One hand waves through the air, touching it on all sides, laying it down as though marking its time. He smiles. I have the feeling that he's alone, completely alone. I feel hollow beside him. If it had occtmed to Johnny to pass his hand through me I would have cut like butter, like smoke. Maybe that's why once in a while he grazes my face with his fingers, cautiously.

"You have the loaf of bread there, on the tablecloth,"

Johnny says looking down into the air. "It's solid, no deny-

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ing it, toasted a lovely color, smells beautiful. Something that's not me, something apart, outside me. But if I touch it, if I move my fingers and grasp it, then something changes, don't you think so? The bread is outside me, but I touch it with my fingers, I feel it, I feel that that's the world, but if I can touch it and feel it, then you can't really say it's something else, or do you think you can say it's something else?"

"Oh baby, for thousands of years now, whole mmies of greybeards have been beating their heads to solve that problem."

"There's some day in the bread," mmmured Johnny, covering his face. "And I dared to touch it, to cut it in two, to put some in my mouth. Nothing happened, I know; that's what's terrible. Do you realize it's terrible that noth­ ing happened? You cut the bread, you stick the knife into it, and everything goes on as before. I don't understand, Bruno."

Johnny's face was beginning to upset me, his excite­ ment. Every time, it was getting more difficult to get him to talk about jazz, about his memories, his plans, to drag him back to reality. (To reality: I barely get that written down and it disgusts me. Johnny's right, reality can't be this way, it's impossible to be a jazz critic if there's any reality, because then someone's pulling your leg. Bnt at the same time, as for Johnny, you can't go on buying it out of his bag or we'll all end up crazy. )

Then he fell asleep, or at least he's closed his eyes and is pretending to be asleep. Ag:1in I realize how difficult it is to tell where Johnny is from what he's doing. If he's asleep, if he's pretending to sleep, if he thinks he's asleep. One is much further away from Johnny than from any o ther friend. No one can be more vulgar, more common, more strung out by the circumstances of a miserable life; apparently accessible on all sides. Apparently, he's no ex­ ception. Anyone can be like Johnny if he just resigns him-

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self to being a poor devil, sick, hung up on drugs, and without will power-and full of poetry and talent. Appar­ ently. I, who've gone through life admiring geniuses, the Picassos, the Einsteins, the whole blessed list anyone could make up in a minute (and Gandhi, and Chaplin, and Stravinsky), like everyone else, I tend to think that these exceptions walk in the clouds somewhere, and there's no point in being surprised at anything they do. They're different, there's no other trip to take. On the other hand, the difference with Johnny is secret, irritating by its mys­ tery, because there's no explanation for it. Johnny's no genius, he didn't discover anything, he plays jazz like sev­ eral thousand other black and white men, though he's bet­ ter than any of them, and you have to recognize that that depends somewhat on public taste, on the styles, in short, the times. Panassie, for example, has decided that Johnny is outright bad, and although we believe that if anyone's oub'ight bad it's Panassie, in any case there's an area open to conb·oversy. All this goes to prove is that Johnny is not from some other world, but the moment I think that, then I wonder if precisely so there is not in Johnny something of another world ( he'd be the first to deny it) . Likely he'd

laugh his ass off if you told him so. I know fairly well

what he thinks, which of these things he lives. I say: which of these things he lives, because Johnny . . . But I'm not going that far, what I would like to eJo.:plain to my­ self is the distance between Johnny and ourselves that has no easy answer, is not based in explainable differences. And it seems to me that he's the first to pay for the conse­ quences of that, that it affects him as much as it does us. I really feel like saying sb·aight off that Johnny is some kind of angel come among men, until some elementary honesty forces me to swallow the sentence, turn it around nicely and realize that maybe what is really happening is that Jolmny is a man among angels, one reality among the un­ realities that are the rest of us. Maybe that's why Johnny touches my face with his fingers and makes me feel so unhappy, so b·ansparent, so damned small, in spite of my

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good health, my house, my wife, my prestige. My prestige above nil. Above all, my prestige.

But it turns out the same old way, I leave the hospital and hardly do I hit the street, check the time, remember what all I have to do, the omelet huns smoothly in the air

and we're right side up again. Poor Johnny, he's so far out of it. (That's the way it is, the way it is. It's easier for me to believe that that's the \Vay it really is, now I'm in the cafe and the visit to the hospital was two hours ago, with everything that I wrote up there forcing me, like a con­ demned prisoner, to be at least a little decent with my own self. )

Luckily, the business about the fire got fixed up okay, or it seemed reasonable to imagine that the marquesa did her best to see that the fire business would be fixed up okay. Dedee and Art Boucaya came looking for me at the paper, and the three of us went over to Vix to listen to the already famous-s till secret-recording of Amorous. Dedee told me, not much caring to, in the taxi, how the marquesa had gotten Johnny out of the h·ouble over the fire, that anyway there was nothing worse than a scorched mattress and a terrible scare thrown into all the Algerians living in the hotel in the rue Lagrange. The fine ( already paid ), another hotel (already arranged for by Tica) , and Johnny is convalescing in an enmmous bed, very pretty, drinking milk out of a milkcan and reading Paris Match and The New Yorker, once in a while changing off to his famous

{and scroungy ) pocket notebook with Dylan Thomas

poems and penciled notations all through it.

After all this news and a cognac in the corner cafe, we settled dO\vn in the audition room to listen to Amorous

and Streptomycin. Art had asked them to put out the lights, and lay down on the floor to bear better. And then Johnny came in and his music moved over our faces, he came in there even though he was back in the hotel propped up in bed, and scuttled us with his music for a quarter of an hour. I understand why the idea that they

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were going to release Amorous infuriated him, anyone could hear its deficiencies, the breathing perfectly audible at the end of the plu·ase, and especially the final savage drop, that short dull note which sounded to me like a heart being broken, a knife biting into the bread (and he was speaking about bread a few days b.,"lck ) . But on the other hand, and it would escape Jolmny, there was what seemed to us a terrible beauty, the anxiety looking for an outlet in an improvisation full of flights in all directions, of interrogation, of desperate gestures. Johnny can't un­

derstand (because what for him is a calamity, for us looks like a road, at least a road-sign, a direction ) that Amorous is going to stand as one of jazz's great moments. The artis t inside him is going to blow his stack every time he hears this mockery of his desire, of everything that he'd wanted to say while he was fighting, the saliva running out of his mouth along with the music, more than ever

alone up against what he was pursuing, against vvhat was h·ying to escape him while he was chasing it. That hard. Curious, it had been indispensable to listen to this, even though already everything was converging into this, this solo in Amorous, so that I realized that Johnny was no victim, not persecuted as everyone thought, as I'd even in­ sisted upon in my biography of him ( the English edition has just appeared and is bound to sell like Coca-Cola ) . I know now that's not the way it is, that Johnny pursues and is not pursued, that all the things happening in his life are lhe hunter's disasters, not the accidents of the harassed animal. No one can know what Johnny's after, but that's how it is, it's there, in Amorous, in the jnnk, in his absurd conversations on anv subject, in his breakdowns, in the Dylan Thomas nolebook, in the whole of the poor sonofabitch that Johnny is, which makes him larger than life, and changes him into a living weirdo, into a hunter with no arms and legs, into a rabbit running pas t a sleep­ ing tiger's nose. And I find it absolutely necessary to say that, at bottom, Amorous made me want to go vomit, as if that might free me of him, of everything in him that was

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going up against me and against everybody, that shapeless black mass without feet or hands, that crazy chimp that puts his fingers on my face and looks at me tenderly.

Art and Dedee don't see (I think they don't want to see) more than the formal loveliness of Amorous. Dedee even liked *Streptomycin* better, where Johnny improvises with his usual ease and freedom, which the audience under­ stands perfectly well and which to me sounds more like Johnny's dish·acted, he just lets the music run itself out, that he's on the other side. When we got into the street, I asked Dedee what their plans were, and she said that as soon as Johnny was out of the hotel (for the moment the police had him under surveillance ), a new record com­ p any wanted to have him record anything he wanted to and it'd pay him ve1y well. Art backed her up, said Johnny

was full of terrific ideas, and that he and Marcel Gavoty

were going to do this new bit with Johnny, though after the past few weeks you could see that Art wasn't banking

on it, and privately I knew that he'd been having conversa­ tions with his agent about going back to New York as soon as possible. Something I more than understood, poor guy. "Tica's doing very well," Dedee said bitterly. "Of course, it's easy for her. She always arrives at the last minute and all she has to do is open her handbag and it's all fixed up.

On the other hand, I "

Art and I looked at one another. What in hell could we say? Women spend their whole lives circling around

Johnny and people like Johnny. It's not weird, it's not nec­ essary to be a woman to feel atb·acted to Johnny. What's hard is to circle about him and not lose your distance, like a good satellite, like a good critic. Art wasn't in Baltimore at that time, but I remember from the times I knew Johnny when he was living with Lan and the kids. To look at Lan really hurt. But after dealing with Johnny for a while, after accepting little by little his music's influence, his dragged-out terrors, his inconceivable explanations of

things that had never happened, his sudden fits of tender­

ness, then one understood why Lan wore that face and

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how it was impossible that she live with Johnny and have any other face at all. Tica's something else, she gets out from under by being promiscuous, by living the dolce vita, and besides she's got the dollar bill by the short hairs, and that's a better scene than owning a machine gun, at least if you believe what Art Boucaya says when he gets pissed

off at Tica or when he's got a hangover.

"Come as soon as you can," Dedee said, "He'd like to talk with you."

I would have liked to lecture the hell out of him about the first ( the cause of the fire, in which he was most cer­ tainly involved ), but it would have been almost as hope­ less to try to convince Johnny that he should become a useful citizen. For the moment everything's going well ( it makes me uneasy) and it's strange that whenever every­ thing goes well for Johnny, I feel inimensely content. I'm not so innocent as to think this is merely a friendly reac­ tion. It's more like a b·uce, a breather. I don't need to look for explanations when I can feel it as clearly as the nose on my face. It makes me sore to be the only person who feels this, who is hung with it the whole time. It makes me sore that Art Boucaya, Tica or Dedee don't realize that every time Johnny gets hurt, goes to jail, wants to kill himself, sets a mattress on fire or runs naked down the corridors of a hotel, he's paying off something for them, he's killing himself for them. Without knowing it, and not like he was making great speeches from the gallows or writing books denouncing the evils of mankind or playing the piano with the air of someone washing away the sins of the world. Without knowing it, poor saxophonist, as ri­ diculous as that word is, however little a thing it is, just one among so many other poor saxophonists.

What's terrible is if I go on like that, I'm going to end up

writing more about myself than about Johnny. I'm begin­ ning to compare myself to a preacher and that doesn't give me too big a laugh, I'm telling you. By the time I got home I was thinking cynically enough to restore my confidence, that in my book on Jolmny I mention the pathological side

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of his personality only in passing and very discreetly. It didn't seem necessary to explain to people that Johnny thinks he's walking through fields full of urns, or that pic­ tures move when he looks at them; junk-dreams, Hnally, which stop with the cure. But one could say that Johnny leaves these phantoms with me in pawn, lays them on me like putting a number of handkerchiefs in a pocket until the time comes to take them back. And I think I'm the only one who can stand them, who lives with them and is scared shitless of them; and nobody knows this, not even Johnny. One can't admit things like that to Johnny, as one might confess them to a really great man, a master before whom we humiliate ourselves so as to obtain some advice

in exchange. What is this world I have to cart around like a burden? 'vVhat kind of preacher am I? There's not the slightest bit of greatness in Johnny, I've known that since I've known him, since I began to admire him. And for a

while now this hasn't surprised me, although at the begin­ ning the lack of greatness upset me, perhaps because i t's one quality one is not likely to apply to the first comer, and especially to jazzmen. I don't know why (I don't know why) I believed at one time that Johnny had a kind of greatness which he contradicts day after day ( or which we contradict, it's not the same thing really; because, let's be honest, there is in Johnny the phantom of another who could be, and this other Johnny is very great indeed; one's attention is drawn to the phantom by the lack of that quality which nevertheless he evokes and contains nega­ tively).

I say this hecause the hies Johnny has made to change his life, from his unsuccessful suicide to using junk, are ones you finally expect from someone with as little great­ ness as he. I think I admire hini all the more for that, be­ cause he really is the chimpanzee who wants to learn to read, a poor guy who looks at all the walls around him, can't convince himself, and starts all over again.

Ah, but what if one day the chimp does begin to read, what a crack in the dam, what a commotion, every man

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for himself, head for the hills, and I first of all. It's terrible to see a man lacking all greatness beat his he�1d against the wall that way. He is the critic of us all with his bones cracking, he tears us to shreds with the opening notes of his music. (Martyrs, heroes, fine, right: one is certain with them. But Jolmnyl )

Sequences. I don't know how better to say it, it's like an idea of what abruptly brings about terrible or idiotic se­ quences in a man's life, without his knowing what law outside the categories labeled "law" decides that a certain telephone call is going to be followed immediately by the arrival of one's sister who lives in the Auvergne, or that

the milk is going to be upset into the fire, or that from a balcony we're going to see a boy fall w1der an automobile. As on football teams or boards of directors, it appears that destiny always appoints a few substitutes when those named to the positions fall out as if by themselves. And so it's this morning, when I'm still happy knowing that things are going better and more cheerfully with Johnny Carter, there's an urgent telephone call for me at the paper, and it's Tica calling, and the news is that Bee, Johnny and Lan's youngest daughter, has just died in Chi­ cago, and that naturally Johnny's off his head and it would be good of me to drop by and give his friends a hand.

I was back climbing the hotel stairs-and Lhere have been a lot of them during my friendship with Johnny-to find Tica drinking tea, D6dee soaking a towel, and Art, Delaunay, and Pepe Ramirez talking in low voices about the latest news of Lester Young, Johnny very quiet on the bed, a towel on his forehead, and wearing a perfectly tran­ quil and almost disdainful air. I immediately put my sym­ pathetic face back into my pocket, resb·icting myself to squeezing Johnny's hand very bard, lighting a cigarette, and waiting.

"Bruno, I burt here," Johnny said after a while, touch­

ing his chest in the conventional location. "Bruno, she was like a small white stone in my band. I'm nothing but a

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pale horse with granulated eyelids whose eyes'll run for­ ever."

All of this said solemnly, almost recited off, and Tica looking at Art, and both of them making gestures of ten­ der forbearance, taking advantage of the fact that Johnny has his face covered with the towel and can't see them. Personally, I dislike cheap sentimentality and its whole vocabulary, but everything that Johnny had just said, aside from the impression that I'd read it somewhere, felt to me like a mask that he'd put on to speak through, that empty, that useless. Dedee had come over with another towel to replace the one plastered on there, and in the in­ terval I caught a glimpse of Johnny's face uncovered and I saw an ashy greyness, the mouth twisted, and the eyes shut so tight they made wrinkles on his forehead. As al­ ways with Johnny, things had happened in a way other than what one had ell.-pected, and Pepe Ramirez who doesn't know him very well is still flipped out and I think from the scandal, because after a time Johnny sat up in bed and started slowly, chewing every word, and then blew it out like a trumpet solo, insulting everyone con­ nected with recording Amorous, without looking at any­ one but nailin g us all down like bugs in a box with just the incredible obscenity of his words, and so for two full min­ utes he continued cursing everyone on Amorous, starting with Art and Delaunay, passing over me (but I . . . ) and ending with Dedee, Chirst omnipotent and the whore who without excep tion gave birth to us all. And this was pro­ foundly, this and the small white stone, the funeral ora­ tion for Bee, dead from pneumonia in Chicago.

Two empty weeks will pass; piles of work, journalism, magazine articles, visits here and there-a good resume of a critic's life, a man who only lives on bonowed time, borrowed everything, on novelties for the news-hungry and decisions not of one's making. I'm talking about what happened one night Tica, Baby Lennox and I were to­ gether in the Cafe de Flore huming Out of Nowhere

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very contentedly and talking about a piano solo of Bud Powell's which sounded particularly good to all three of us, especially to Baby Lennox who, on top of being other­ wise spectacular, had done herself up a Ia Saint-Germain­ des-Pres, and you should have seen how great it looked on her. Baby will see Johnny show up with the rapturous ad­ miration of her twenty years, and Johnny look at her without seeing her and continue wide of us and sit alone at ano ther table, dead drunk or asleep. I'll feel Tica's hand on my knee.

"You see, he started shoving needles in his arm again last night. Or this afternoon. Damn that woman . . ."

I answered grudgingly that Dedee was as guilty as any­ one else, starting with her, she'd turned on with Johnny dozens of times and would continue to do so whenever she goddamn well felt like it. I'd feel an overwhelmin g im­ pulse to go out and be by myself, as always when i t's im­ possible to get close to Johnny, to be with him and beside him. I'll watch him making designs on the table with his finger, sit staring at the waiter who's asking him what he would like to drink, and finally Johnny']] draw a sort of arrow in the air and hold it up with both hands as though it weighed a ton, and people at other tables would begin to be discreetly amused, which is the normal reaction in the Flore. Then Tica will say, "Shit," and go over to Johnny's table, and after placing an order with the waiter, she'll begin to talk into Johnny's ear. Not to mention that Baby will hasten to confide in me her clearest hopes, but then I'll tell her vaguely that she has to leave Johnny alone and that nice girls are supposed to be in bed early, and if pos­ sible with a jazz critic. Baby will laugh amiably, her hand stroking my hair, and then we'll sit quietly and watch the chick go by who wears the white-leaded cape up over her face and who has green eyeshadow and green lipstick even. Baby will say it really doesn't look so bad on her, and I'll ask her to sing me very quietly one of those blues that have already made her famous in London and Stock­ holm. And then we'll go back to Out of Nowhere, which is

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following us around tonight like a dog which would also be the chick in the cape and green eyes .

Two of the guys from Johnny's new quintet wil also show up, and I'll take advantage of the moment to ask how the gig went tonight; that way I'll find out that Johnny was barely able to play anything, but that what he had been able to play was worth the collected ideas and works of a John Lewis, assuming that the last-named could manage any idea whatsoever, like one of the boys said, the only one he having always close at hand being to push in enough notes to plug the hole, which is not the same thing. Meanwhile I'll wonder how much of this is

Johnny going to be able to put up with, not to mention the

audience that believes in Johnny. The boys will not sit down and have a beer, Baby and I'll be sitting there alone again, and I'll end up by answering her questions and ex­ plain to Baby, who is really worthy of her nickname, why Johnny is so sick and washed up, why the guys in the quintet are getting more fed up every day, why one day the whole shebang is going to blow up, in one of those scenes that had ah·eady blown up San Francisco, Balti­ more and New York half-a-dozen times.

Other musicians who work in the quarter'Il come in, and some'll go to Johnny's table to say hello to him, but he'll look at them from far off like some idiot with wet mild eyes, his mouth unable to keep back the saliva glis­ tening off his lips. It will be interesting to watch the dou­ ble maneuvers of Tica and Baby, Tica having recourse to her domination of men to keep them away from Johnny, turning them off with a quick explanation and a smile, Baby whispering her admiration of Johnny in my ear and how good it would be to get him ofF to a sanitorium for a cure, and all because she's jealous and would like to sleep with Jolmny tonight even, something impossible further­ more as anyone can see and which pleases me consider­ ably. For ever since I've known her, I've been thinking of how nice it would be to caress, to run my hand over Baby's thighs, and I'll be a step away from suggesting that we

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leave and have a drink someplace quieter ( she won't care to, and at bottom, neither will I, because that other table will hold us there, attached and unhappy) until suddenly, no notice of what's coming, we'll see Johnny get up slowly, looking at us, recognizing us, coming toward us-I should say towards me, Baby doesn't count-and reaching the table he'll bend over a little naturally as if he were about to take a fried potato off the plate, and we'll see him go to his knees just in &-ont of me, with all naturalness he'll get down on his knees in front of me and look me in the eye, and I'll see that he's crying and'II know without any say-so that Johnny is crying for little Bee.

My reaction is that human, I wanted to get Johnny up, keep him from making an ass of himself, and finally I make myself the ass, because there's absolutely nothing more ridiculous than a man trying to move another who is very well off where he is and comfortable and feels per­ fectly natural in that position, he likes it down there, so that the customers at the Flore, who never get upset over b·ifles, looked at me in a rather unfriendly fashion, none of them knowing, however, that the Negro on his knees there is Johnny Carter, they all look at me as if they were looking at someone climbing up on the altar to tug Christ down from his cross. Johnny was the first to reproach me, just weeping silently he raised his eyes and looked at me,

and between that and the evident disapproval of the cus­ tomers I was left with the sole option of sitting down again in front of Johnny, feeling worse than he did, want­ ing to be an)'\vhere else in the world but in that chair face to face with Johnny on his knees.

The rest hadn't been so bad, though it's hard to tell how many centuries passed with no one moving, with the tears coursing down Johnny's face, with his eyes fixed on mine continuously, meanwhile I was b·ying to offer him a ciga­ rette, to light one for myself, to make an understanding gesture toward Baby who, it seemed to me, was on the point of racing out or of breaking into tears herself. As usual, it was Tica who settled the problem, sitting herself

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down at our table in all her b·anquillity, drawing a chair over next to Johnny and putting a hand on his shoulder, not pushing it, until finally Johnny rose a little and changed from that horror into the conventional attitude of a friend sitting down with us, it was a matter only of rais­ ing his knees a few centimeters and allowing the honor­ able comfort of a chair to be edged between his buttocks and the floor (I almost said "and the cross," really this is getting contagious ) . People had gotten tired of looking at

Johnny, he'd gotten tired of crying, and we of sitting around like dogs. I suddenly understood the loving atti­ tude some painters have for chairs, any one of the chairs in the Flore suddenly seemed to me a miraculous object, a flower, a perfume, the perfect insbument of order and up­ rightness for men in their city.

Johnny pulled out a handkerchief, made his apologies without undue siTess, and Tica had a large cofFee brought and gave it to him to drink. Baby was marvelous, all at once dropping her stupidity when it came to Johnny, she began to hum Mamie's Blues without giving the impres­ sion that she was doing it on pmpose, and Johnny looked at her and smiled, and it felt to me that Tica and I at the same time thought that Bee's image was fading slowly at the back of Johnny's eyes, and that once again Johnny was willing to return to us for a spell, keep us company until the next Hight. As usual, the moment of feeling like a dog had hardly passed, when my superiority to Johnny al­ lowed me to be indulgent, talking a little with everyone without getting into areas rather too personal (it would have been horrible to see Johnny slip off the chair back onto his . . . ) , and luckily Tica and Baby were both act­ ing like angels and the people at the Flore had been going and coming for at least the length of an hour, being re­

placed, until the customers at one in the morning didn't even realize that something had just happened, although really it hadn't been a big scene if you think of it rightly. Baby was the first to leave (Baby is a chick full of applica­ tion, she'll be rehearsing with Fred Callender at nine in

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the morning for a recording session in the afternoon) and Tica had downed her thil·d cognac and offered to take us home. When Johnny said no, he'd rather stay and bat tb.e breeze with me, Tica thought that was fine and left, not without paying the rounds for us all, as befits a marquesa. And Johnny and I ordered a glass of chartreuse apiece, among friends such weaknesses are forgiven, and we be­ gan to walk down Saint-Germain-des-Pres because Johnny had insisted that he could walk fine and I'm not

the kind of guy to let a friend drop under such circmn­ stances.

We go down the rue de l'Abbaye as far as the place Fur­ stenberg, which reminds Johnny dangerously of a play­ theater which his godfather seems to have given him when he was eight years old. I h·y to head for the rue Jacob afraid that his memories will get him back onto Bee, but you could say that Johnny had closed that chap­ ter for what was left of the night. He's walking along peacefully, not staggering ( at other times I've seen him stmnble in the street, and not from being drunk; some­ thing in his reflexes that doesn't function) and the night's heat and the silence of the streets makes us both feel good. We're smoking Gauloises, we drift down toward the river, and opposite one of those . galvanized iron coffins the book­ sellers use as stands along the quai de Conti, some mem­ ory or another or maybe a student whistling reminds us of a Vivaldi theme, humming it, then the two of us begin to sing it with a great deal of feeling and enthusiasm, and

Johnny says that if he had the horn there he'd spend the night playing Vivaldi, I find the suggestion exaggerated. "Well, okay, I'd also play a little Bach and Charles Ives," Johnny says condescendingly. "I don't know why the

French are not interested in Charles Ives. Do you know his songs? The one about the leopard, you have to know the one about the leopard. 'A leopard . . .' "

And in his weak tenor voice he goes on at great length about the leopard, needless to say, many of the phrases he's singing are not absolutely Ives, something Johnny's

The Pursuer *zo7* not very careful about while he's sure that what he's sing­ ing is something good. Finally we sit down on the rail op­ posite the rue G!t-le-Coeur and smoke another cigarette because the night is magnificent and shortly thereafter the taste of the cigarette is forcing us to think of having a beer at a cafe, just thinking of the taste of it is a pleasure for Johnny and me. I pay almost not attention when he mentions my book the first time, because right away he goes back to talking about Charles Ives and how numer­ ous times he'd enjoyed working Ives's themes into his rec­ ords, with nobody even noticing ( not even Ives, I sup­ pose), but after a bit I get to thinking about the business of the book and b·y to get him back onto the subject.

"Oh, I've read a few pages," Johnny says. "At Tica's they talk a lot about your book, but I didn't even understand the title. Art brought me the English edition yesterday and then I found out about some things. It's very good, your book."

I adopt the attih1de nahlral in such a situation, an air of displeased modesty mixed with a certain amount of inter­ est, as if his opinion were about to reveal to me-the au­ thor-the bc1th about my book.

"It's like in a mirror," Johnny says. "At first I thought that to read something that'd been written about you would be more or less like looking at yourself and not into a mirror. I admire writers very much, it's incredible the things they say. That whole section about the origins of bebop . . ."

"Well, all I did was b·anscribe literally what you told me in Baltimore," I say defensively, not knowing what I'm be­ ing defensive about.

"Sure, that's all, but in reality it's like in a minor," Johnny persists stubbornly.

"What more do you want? Mirrors give faithful reflec­ tions."

"There're things missing, Bruno," Johnny says. "Your're much better informed than I am, but it seems to me like something's missing."

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"The things that you've forgotten to tell me," I answer, reasonably annoyed. This uncivilized monkey is capable of . . . (I would have to speak with Delaunay, it would be regrettable if an imprudent statement about a sane, forceful criticism that . . . For example Lan's reel dress, Johnny is saying. And in any case take advantage of the enlightening details from this evening to put into a new edition; that wouldn't be bad. It stank like an old washrag, Johnny's saying, and that's the only value on the record. Yes, listen closely and proceed rapidly, because in o ther people's hands any possible conh·adiction might have ter­ rible consequences. And the ttrn in the middle, full of dust that's almost blue, Johnny is saying, and very close to the color of a compact my sister had once. As long as he wasn't going into hallucinations, the worst that could hap­ pen would be that he might conh·adict the basic ideas, the aesthetic system so many people have praised . . . And furthermore, cool doesn't mean, even by accident ever,

what you've written, Johnny is saying. Attention. )

"How is it not what I've written, Johnny? It's fine that

things change, but not sLx months ago, you . . ."

"Six months ago," Johnny says, getting down from the rail and setting his elbows on it to rest his head between his hands. "Six months ago. Oh Bruno, what I could play now if I had the kids with me . . . And by the way: the way you wrote 'the sax, the sex,' very ingenious, very pretty, that, the world-play. Six months ago. Six, sax, sex. Positively lovely. Fuck you, Bruno."

I'm not going to start to say that his mental age does not permit him to understand that this innocent word-play conceals a system of ideas that's rather profound (it seemed perfectly precise to Leonard Feather when I ex­ plained it to him in New York ) and that the para­ eroticism of jazz evolved from the washboard days, etc. As usual, immediately I'm pleased to think that critics are much more necessary than I myself am disposed to recog­ nize (privately, in this that I'm writing) because the crea­ tors, from the composer to Johnny, passing thwugh the

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whole damned gradation, are incapable of exh·apolating the dialectical consequences of their work, of postulating the fundamentals and the b·anscendency of what they're writing clown or improvising. I should remember this in moments of depression when I feel dragged that I'm noth­ ing more than a critic. The name of the star is called Wormwood, Johnny is saying, and suddenly I hear his other voice, the voice that comes when he's . . . how say this? how describe Johnny when he's beside himself, al­ ready out of it, ah·eady gone? Uneasy, I get clown off the

rail and look at him closely. And the name of the star is

called Wormwood, nothing you can do for him.

"The name of the star is called vVormwood," says

Johnny, using both hands to talk. "And their dead bodi�s shall lie in the streets of the great city. Six months ago."

Though no one see me, though no one knows I'm there, I shrug my shoulders at the stars (the star's name is Wormwood) . We're back to the old song: ''I'm playing this tomorrow." The name of the star is \Vormwood and their bodies'Il be left lying six months ago. In the s h·eets of the great city. Out, very far out. And I've got blood in my eye just because he hasn't wanted to say any more to me about the hook, and b·ulv, I don't know what he thirties of the

book, which thotL�ands of fans are reading in two lan­

guages ( three pretty soon, and a Spanish edition is being discussed, it seems that they play something besides tangos in Buenos Aires ).

"It was a lovely dress," Johnny says. "You do not want to know how beautifully it fit on Lan, but it'll be easier to explain it to you over a whiskey, if you got the money. Dedee sent me out with hardly tlu·ee hundred francs."

He laughs sarcastically, looking at the Seine. As if he hadn't the vaguest idea of how to get drink or dope when

he wanted it. He begins to e:>.JJ. lain to me that really Dedee

is very goodhearted ( nothing about the book) and that she does it out of kindness, but luckily there's old buddy Bruno (who's written a book, but who needs it) and it'd be great to go to the Arab quarter and sit in a cafe, where they al-

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ways leave you alone if they see that you belong a little to the star called Wormwood ( I'm thinking this, and we're going in by the Saint-S6v6rin side and it's two in the moming, an hom at which my wife is very used to getting up and rehearsing everything she's going to give me at breakfast, along with the cup of coll'ee, light) . So I'm walking with Johnny, so we drink a terrible cognac, very cheap, so we order double shots and feel very content. But nothing about the book, only the compact shaped like a swan, the star, bits and hunks of things, that flow on with hunks of sentences, hunks of looks, hunks of smiles, drops of saliva on the table and dried on the edge of the

glass (Johnny's glass) . Sure, there are moments when I wish he were already dead. I imagine there are plenty of people who would think the same if they were in my posi­ tion. But how can we resign ourselves to the fact that Johnny would die carrying with him what he doesn't want to tell me tonight, that from death he'd continue hunting, would con tinue flipping out (I swear I don't know how to WTite all this ) though his death would mean peace to me, prestige, the status incontrovertibly bestowed upon one by unbeatable theses and efficiently arranged funerals.

Every once in a while Johnny stops his constant drum­ ming on the tabletop, looks over at me, makes an incom­ prehensible face and resumes his drumming. The cafe owner knows us from the clays when we used to come there with an Arab guitarist. It's been some time now that Ben Aifa has wanted to go home and sleep, we're the last customers in the filthy place that smells of chili and greasy meat pies. Besides, I'm dropping from sleepiness, but the anger keeps me awake, a dull rage that isn't di­ rected against Johnny, more like when you've made love all afternoon and feel like a shower so that the soap and water will scrub ofr everything that's beginning to turn rancid, beginning to show too clearly what, at the begin­ ning . . . And Johnny beats a sh1bborn rhythm on the tabletop, and hums once in a while, almost without seeing me. It could very well happen that he's not going to make

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any more comments on the book. Things go on shifting hom one side to another, tomorrow it'll be ano ther woman, another brawl of some sort, a trip. The wisest thing to do would be to get the English edition away from him on the sly, speak to Dedee about that, ask it as a favor in exchange for so many I've done her. This uneasiness is absurd, it's almost a rage. I can't expect any enthusiasm on Johnny's part at all; as matter of fact, it had never occurred to me that he'd read the book. I know perfectly well that the book doesn't tell the truth about Jolmny (it doesn't lie either), it just limits itself to Johnny's music. Out of discretion, out of charity, I've not wanted to show his incurable schizophrenia nakedly, the sordid, ultimate depths of his addiction, the promiscuity in that regrettable life. I set out to show the essential lines, emphasizing what really counts, Johnny's incomparable art. What more could anyone say? But maybe it's exactly there that he's expecting something of me, lying in ambush as usual, waiting for something, crouched ready for one of those ridiculous jumps in which all of us get hurt eventually. That's where he's waiting for me, maybe, to deny all the aesthetic bases on which I've built the ultimate shucture of his music, the great theory of contemporary jazz which has resulted in such acclaim from everywhere it's ap­ peared so far.

To be honest, what does his life matter to me? The only

thing that bothers me is that if he continues to let llimself go on living as he has been, a style I'm not capable of fol­ lowing ( let's say I don't want to follow it), he'll end up by making lies out of the conclusions I've reached in my book. He might let it drop somewhere that my statements are ·wrong, that his music's something else.

"Hey, you said a bit back that there were things missing in the book."

(Attention now. )

"Things are missing, Bruno? Oh yeah, I said there were things missing. Look, it's not just Lan's red dl'ess. Therc're

• . . Wil there really be urns, Bruno? I saw them again

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last night, an enormous field, but they weren't so buried tllis time. Some had inscriptions and pich1res on them, you could see giants with helmets like in the movies, and monstrous cudgels in their hands. It's terrible to walk around between the urns and know there's no one else, that I'm the only one walking around in them and looking for . . . Don't get upset, Bruno, it's not important that you forgot to put all that in. But Bruno," and he lifts a finger that does not shake, "what you forgot to put in is me."

"Come on, Johnny."

"About me, Bnmo, about me. And it's not your fault that you couldn't write what I myself can't blow. When you say there that my h·ue biography is in my records, I know you think that's b·ue and besides it sounds very pretty, but that's not how it is. And if I myself didn't know how to blow it like it should be, blow what I really am

. . . you dig, they can't ask you for miracles, Bruno. It's hot inside here, let's go."

I follow him into the s treet, we wander a few feet off and a white cat comes out of an alley and meows at us; Johnny stays there a long time petting it. Well, that does it; I'll find a taxi in the place Saint-Michel, take him back to the hotel and go home myself. It hasn't been so awful after all; for a moment there I was afraid that J olmny had constructed a sort of antitheory to the book's and that he was h·ying it out on me before spilling it at full speed. Poor Johnny petting a white cat. Basically, the only tiling he said was that no one can know anything about anyone, big deal. That's the basic assumption of any biography, then it takes oiT, what the hell. Let's go, Johny, let's go home, it's late.

"Don't think that that's all it is," Johnny says, standing up suddenly as if he knew what I was thinking. "It's God, baby. Now that's where you missed out."

"Let's go, Johnny, let's go home, it's late."

"It's vvhat you and people like my buddy Bruno call God. The tube of toothpaste in the morning, they call that God.

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The garbage can, they caii that God. Afraid of kicking the bucket, they caii that God. And you have the barefaced nerve to mess me up with that pigsty, you've written that my childhood, and my family, and I don't know what an­ cestral heritage of the Negro . . . shit. A mountain of rotten eggs and you in the middle of it crowing, very happy with your God. I don't want your God, he's never been mine."

"The only thing I said is that Negro music . . ,"

"I don't want your God," Johnny says again. "Why've you made me accept him in your book? I don't know if there's a God, I play my music, I make my God, I don't need your inventions, leave those to Mahalia Jackson and the Pope, and right now you're going to take that part out of your book."

"If you insist," I say, to say something. "In the second edition."

''I'm as alone as that cat, much more alone because I know it and he doesn't. Damn, he's digging his nails into my hand. Bruno, jazz is not only music, I'm not only Johnny Carter."

"Exactly what I was b·ying to say when I wrote that sometimes you play like "

"Like it's raining up my asshole," Johnny says, and it's the first time ali night that I feel he's getting really sore. "A man can't say anything, right away you translate it into your filthy language. If I play and you see angels, that's not my fault. If the others open their fat yaps and say that I've reached p erfection, it's not my fault. And that's the worst thing, the thing you really and b·uly left out of your

book, Bruno, and that's that I'm not worth a damn, that what I play and what the people applaud me for is not worth a damn, really not worth a damn."

Truly a very rare modesty at this hour of the morning.

This Johnny . . .

"How can I explain it to you?" Johnny yells, putting his hands on my shoulders, jerking me to the right and to the left. ( Cut out the noise! they scream from a window) . "It

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isn't a question of more music or less music, it's some­ thing else . . . for example, it's the difference between Bee being dead and being alive. What I'm playing is Bee dead, you dig, while what I want to, what I want to . . , And sometimes because of that I wreck the horn and people think that I'm up to my ears in booze. Really, of course, I'm always smashed when I do it, because, after all, a horn costs a lot of bread."

"Let's go this way. I'll get a taxi and drop you at the hotel."

"You're a mother of goodness, Bruno," Johnny sneers. "Old buddy Bruno writes everything down in his notebook that you say, except the important things. I never would have believed you could be so wrong until Art passed that book on to me. At the beginning I thought you were talk­ ing about someone else, about Ronnie or about Marcel, and then Johnny here and Johnny there, I mean it was about me and I wondered, but where am I?, and you dish it out about me in Baltimore, and at Birdlancl, and my style . . . Listen," he added almost coldly, "it isn't that I didn't realize that you'd written a book for the public. That's very fine, and everything you say about my way of playing and feeling jazz seems perfectly okay to me. 'Why are we going on talking about the book? A piece of garbage floating in the Seine, that piece of s traw float­ ing beside the clock, your book;. And I'm that other straw, and you're that bottle going by bobbing over there. Bruno, I'm going to die without having found . . . without . . ." I catch him under his arms and hold him up, I prop him against the railing above the pier. He's slipping into his usual delirium, he mutters parts of words, spits. "\V"ithout having found," he repeats. "Without having

found . . ."

"'What is it you want to find, brother," I tell him. "You don't have to ask the impossible, what you have found is enough for . . ."

"For you, I know," Johnny says bitterly. "For Art, for Dedee, for Lan . . . You donna how . . . Sure, every

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once in a while the door opens a little bit . . . Look at the two straws, they've met, see they're dancing, one in front of the other . . . It's pretty, huh . . . It began to open out . . . Time . . . I told you, it seems to me that time business . . . Bruno, all my life in my music I looked for that door to open finally. Nothing, a crack . . . I remem­ ber in New York one night . . . A red dress. Yeah, red, and it fit her beautifuly. Okay, one night we were with Miles and Hal . . . we were carrying it for about an hour I think, playing the same piece, all by ourselves, happy

. . . �.files played something so lovely it almost pulled

me out of my chair, then I let loose, I just closed my eyes and I flew. Bruno, I swear I was flying . . . And I was hearing it like from a place very far away, but inside me just the same, beside myself, someone was standing there

. . . Not exactly someone . . . Look, the bottle, it's in­

credible how it bobs along . . . It wasn't anyone, just that you look for comparisons . . . It was the sureness, the meeting, like in some dreams, what do you think?, when everything's resolved, Lan and the chicks waiting

for you with a turkey in the oven, you get in the car and never hit a red light, everything running as smooth as a billiard ball. And who I bad beside me was like myself but not taking up any space, without being in New York at all, and especially without time, without afterwards

without there having to be an afterwards . . . for a while there wasn't anything but always . . . And I didn't know that it was a lie, that that happened because I was lost in the music, and that I hardly finish playing, because after all I had to give Hal his chance to do his thing at the

piano, at that same moment my head would fall out, I'd be plunged into myself "

He's crying softly, he rubs his eyes with his filthy hands. Me, I don't know what to do, it's so late, the damp­ ness coming up from the river, we're going to catch cold, both of us.

"It felt like I wanted to S\virn with no water," Johnny murmurs. "It felt like I wanted to have Lan's red dress but

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without Lan inside it. And Bee's dead, Bruno. And I think you're right, your book really is very good."

"Let's go, Johnny, I'm not getting offended at what you think's bad about the book."

"It's not that, your book is okay because . . . because it doesn't have urns, Bruno. It's like what Satchmo blows, that clean, that pure. Doesn't it seem so you that what Satch's playing is like a birthday party or a decent action? We . . . I tell you I felt like I wanted to swim without water. It seemed to me . . . no you have to be an idiot

. . . it seemed to me that one day I was going to find something else. I wasn't satisfied, I thought that the good things, Lan's red dress, even Bee, were like rat h·aps, I don't know how to put it any other way . . . Traps so that you would conform, dig, so that you would say every­ thing's all right, baby. Bruno, I think that Lan and jazz, yeah, even jazz, were like advertisements in a magazine, pretty things so that I would stay conformed like you stay because you've got Paris and your wife and your work

. . . I got my sax . . . and my sex, like the good book say. Everything that's missing. Traps, baby . . . because it's impossible there's nothing else, it can't be we're that close to it, that much on the other side of the door . . ." "The only thing that counts is to give whatever one has

that's possible," I say, feeling incredibly stupid.

"And win the poll every year in Down Beat, right," Johnny agrees. "Sure, baby. Sure. Sure. Sure. Sure."

I'm moving little by little toward the square. With any luck there'll be a taxi on the corner.

"On top of everything, I don't buy your God," murmured

Johnny. "Don't come on to me that way, I won't put up with it. If it's really him on the other side of the door, fuck it. There's no use getting past that door if it's him on the other side opening it. Kick the goddamn thing in, right? Break the mo ther down with your fist, come all over the door, piss all day long against the door. Right? That time in New York I think I opened the door with my music, until I had to stop and then the sonofabitch closed it in my

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face only because I hadn't prayed to him ever, because I'm never going to pray to him, because I don't wanna know nothing about that goddamned uniformed doorman, that opener of doors in exchange for a goddamned tip, that "

Poor Johnny, then he complains that you can't put these things in a book. Three o'clock in the morning, Jesus Christ.

Tica went back to New York, Johnny went back to New York (without Dedee, now happily settled at Louis Per­ ron's, a very promising trombonis t) . Baby Lennox went back to New York. The season in Paris was very dull and I missed my friends. My book on Johnny was selling very well all over, and naturally Sammy Pretzal was already talking about the possibility of an adaptation for Holly­ wood; when you think of the relation of the franc-rate to the dollar, that's always an interesting proposition. My wife was still furious over my passage with Baby Lennox, nothing too serious overall finally, Baby is promiscuous in a reasonably marked manner and any intelligent woman would have to understand that things like that don't com­ promise the conjugal equilibrium, aside from which, Baby had already gone back to New York with Johnny, she'd decided that she'd enjoy returning on the same boat with Johnny. She'd already be shooting junk with Johnny, and

lost like him, poor doll. And Amorous had just been re­

leased in Paris, just as the second edition of my book went to press and they were talking about translating it into German. I had thought a great deal about the changes possible in second edition. To be hones t within the limits permitted by the profession, I wondered whether it would not be necessary to show the personality of my subject in another light. I discussed it at different times with Delau­ nay and with Hodeir, they didn't really know what to ad­ vise me because they thought the book terrific and realized that the public liked it the way it was. It seemed I was being warned that they were both afraid of a literary in-

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fection, that I would end up by riddling the work with nuances which would have little or nothing to do with Johnny's music, at least as all of us understood it. It ap­ peared to me that the opinion of people in authority ( and my own personal decision, it would be dumb to negate that at this level of consideration) justiled putting the

second edition to bed as was. A close reading of the trade

magazines from the States (four stories on Johnny, news of a new suicide attempt, tlus time with tincture of iodine, stomach pump and three weeks in the hospital, working in Baltimore again as though nothing had happened) calmed me sufficiently, aside from the anguish I felt at

these ghastly backslidings. Johnny had not said one com­ promising word about the book. Example ( in Stomping Around, a music magazine out of Chicago, Teddy Rogers'

interview with Johnny) : "Have you read what Bruno V-- in Paris wrote about you?" "Yes, it's very good." "Nothing to say about the book?' "Nothing, except that it's

fine. Bruno's a great guy." It remained to be seen what Johnny might say if he were walking around drunk or high, but at least there were no rumors of the slightest contradiction from him. I decided not to touch the second edition, to go on putting Johnny forth as he was at bot­ tom: a poor sonofabitch with barely mediocre intelli­ gence, endowed like so many musicians, so many chess players and poets, with the gift of creating incredible things without the slightest consciousness ( at most, the pride of a boxer who knows how sh·ong he is ) of the di­ mensions of his work. Everything convinced me to keep, no matter what, this porh·ait of Johnny; it wasn't worth it to create complications with an audience that was crazy about jazz but cared nothing for either musical or psycho­ logical analysis, nothing that wasn't instant satisfaction and clear-cut besides, hands clapping to keep the beat, faces gone beatillc and relaxed, the music that was driv­

ing t1u·ough the skin, seeping into the blood and breath,

and then finish, to hell with profound motives.

First two telegrams came (one to Delauney, one to me,

in the afternoon the newspapers came out with their idi­ otic comments ); twenty days later I had a letter from Baby Lennox, who had not forgotten me. "They treated him wonderfully at Bellevue and I went to fetch him when he got out. vVe were living in Mike Russolo's apartment,

he's gone on tour to Norway. Johnny was in very good shape, and even though he didn't want to play dates, he agreed to record with the boys at Club 28. You I can tell this, really he was pre tty weak"-I can imagine what Baby meant by that after our affair in Paris-"and at night he scared me, the way he'd breathe and moan. The only thing that softens it for me," Baby summed it up beautifully, "is that he died happy and without knowing it was coming. He was watching TV and all of a sudden slumped to the floor. They told me it was instantaneous." From which one inferred that Baby had not been present, and the assumption was conect because later we found out that Johnny was living at Tica's place and that he'd been there with her for five days, depressed and preoccu­ pied, talking about quitting jazz, going to live in Mexico and work in the fields (he'd handed that to everybody at some time or other in his life, it's almost boring) , and that Tica was taking care of him and doing everything possible to keep him quiet, making him think of the future ( tllis is

what Tica said later, as if she or Johnny had ever had the

slightest idea of the future) . In the middle of a television program which Johnny was enjoying, he started to cough, all at once he slumped down all of a sudden, etc. I'm no t all that sure that death was as instantaneous as Tica de­ clared to the police ( Johnny's death in her apartment had put her in an unusually tight spot she was trying to get out of, pot was always within reach, and probably a stash of heroin somewhere, poor Tica'd had several o ther bad scenes there, and the not completely convincing results of the autopsy. One can imagine completely what a doctor would find in Johnny's lungs and liver). "You vvouldn't want to know how painful his death is to me, although I could tell you some o ther things," sweet Baby addedgently, "but sometime when I feel better I'll write you or tell you ( it looks like Rogers wants to get me contracts in Paris and Berlin) everything you need to know, you were Johnny's best friend." And after a page dedicated to insult­ ing Tica, you'd believe she not only caused Johnny's death but was responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Black Plague, poor Baby ended up : "Before I forget, one day in Bellevue he asked after you a lot, he was mixed up and thought you were in New York and didn't want to

come see him, he was talking all the time about fields full of things, and after he was calling for you, even cussing you out, poor baby. You know what a fever's like. Tica told Bob Carey that Johnny's last words were something like: 'Oh, make me a mask,' but you can imagine how at that moment . . ." I sure could imagine it. "He'd gotten very

fat," Baby added at the end of her letter, "and panted out of breath when he walked." These were details you might expect from a person as scrupulous as Baby Lennox.

All this happened at the same time that the second edi­ tion of my book was published, but luckily I had time to incorporate an obituary note edited under full steam and inserted, along with a newsphoto of the funeral in which many famous jazzmen were identifiable. In that format the biography remained, so to speak, intact and finished.

Perhaps i t's not right that I say this, but naturally I was speaking from a merely aesthetic point of view. They're already talking of a new translation, into Swedish or Nor­ wegian, I think. My wife is delighted at the news.