

# The Frolic

In a beautiful home in a beautiful part of town—the town of Nolgate, site of the state prison—Dr. Munck examined the evening newspaper while his young wife lounged on a sofa nearby, lazily flipping through the colorful parade of a fashion magazine. Their daughter Norleen was upstairs asleep, or perhaps she was illicitly enjoying an after-hours session with the new television she'd received on her birthday the week before. If so, her violation went undetected by her parents in the living room, where all was quiet. The neighborhood outside the house was quiet, too, as it was day and night. All of Nolgate was quiet, for it was not a place with much of a night life, save perhaps at the bar where the prison's correctional officers congregated. Such persistent quiet made the doctor's wife fidgety with her existence in a locale that seemed light-years from the nearest metropolis. But thus far Leslie did not complain of the lethargy of their lives. She knew her husband was quite dedicated to his new professional duties in this new place. Perhaps tonight, though, he would exhibit more of those symptoms of disenchantment with his work that she had been meticulously observing in him of late.

"How did it go today, David?" she asked, her radiant eyes peeking over the magazine cover, where another pair of eyes radiated a glossy gaze. "You were pretty quiet at dinner."

"It went about the same," said Dr. Munck without lowering the small-town newspaper to look at his wife.

"Does that mean you don't want to talk about it?"

He folded the newspaper backwards and his upper body appeared. "That's how it sounded, didn't it?"

"Yes, it certainly did. Are you okay?" Leslie asked, laying aside the magazine on the coffee table and offering her complete attention.

"Severely doubting, that's how I am." He said this with a kind of far-off reflectiveness. Leslie now saw a chance to delve a little deeper.

"Anything particularly doubtful?"

"Only everything," he answered.

"Shall I make us drinks?"

"That would be much appreciated."

Leslie walked to another part of the living room and from a large cabinet pulled out some bottles and some glasses. From the kitchen she brought out a supply of ice cubes in a brown plastic bucket. The sounds of drink-making were the only intrusion upon the living room's plush quiet. The drapes were drawn on all windows except the one in the corner where an Aphrodite sculpture posed. Beyond that window was a deserted streetlight street and a piece of moon above the opulent leafage of spring trees.

"Here you go. A little drinky for my hard-working darling," she said, handing him a glass that was very thick at its base and tapered almost undetectably toward its rim.

"Thanks, I really needed one of these."

"Why? Problems at the hospital?"

"I wish you'd stop calling it a hospital. It's a prison, as you well know."

"Yes, of course."

"You could say the word prison once in a while."

"All right, then. How's things at the prison, dear? Boss on your case? Inmates acting up?" Leslie checked herself before things spiraled into an argument. She took a deep gulp from her drink and calmed herself. "I'm sorry about the snideness, David."

"No, I deserved it. I'm projecting my anger onto you. I think you've known for some time what I can't bring myself to admit."

"Which is?" Leslie prompted.

“Which is that maybe it was not the wisest decision to move here and take this saintly mission upon my psychologist’s shoulders.”

Her husband’s remark indicated an even more acute mood of demoralization than Leslie had hoped for. But somehow his words did not cheer her the way she thought they would. She could distantly hear the moving van pulling up to the house, but the sound was no longer as pleasing as it once was.

“You said you wanted to do something more than treat urban neuroses. Something more meaningful, more challenging.”

“What I wanted, masochistically, was a thankless job, an impossible one. And I got it.”

“Is it really that bad?” Leslie inquired, not quite believing she asked the question with such encouraging skepticism about the actual severity of the situation. She congratulated herself for placing David’s self-esteem above her own desire for a change of venue, important as she felt this was.

“I’m afraid it is that bad. When I first visited the prison’s psychiatric unit and met the other doctors, I swore I wouldn’t become as hopelessly cynical as they were. Things would be different with me. I overestimated myself by a wide margin, though. Today one of the orderlies was beaten up again by two of the prisoners, excuse me, ‘patients.’ Last week it was Dr. Valdman. That’s why I was so edgy on Norleen’s birthday. So far I’ve been lucky. All they do is spit at me. Well, they can all rot in that hellhole as far as I’m concerned.”

David felt his own words lingering atmospherically in the room, tainting the serenity of the house. Until then their home had been an insular haven beyond the contamination of the prison, an imposing structure outside the town limits. Now its psychic imposition transcended the limits of physical distance. Inner distance constricted, and David sensed the massive prison walls shadowing the cozy neighborhood outside.

“Do you know why I was late tonight?” he asked his wife.

“No, why?”

“Because I had an overlong chat with a fellow who hasn’t got a name yet.”

“The one you told me about who won’t tell anyone where he’s from or what his real name is?”

“That’s him. He’s the standout example of the pernicious monstrosity of that place. A real beauty, that guy. One for the books. Absolute madness paired with a sharp cunning. Because of his cute little name game, he was classified as unsuitable for the general prison population and thus we in the psychiatric section ended up with him. According to him, though, he has plenty of names, no less than a thousand, none of which he’s condescended to speak in anyone’s presence. It’s hard to imagine that he has a name like everyone else. And we’re stuck with him, no name and all.”

“Do you call him that, ‘no name’?”

“Maybe we should, but no, we don’t.”

“So what do you call him, then?”

“Well, he was convicted as John Doe, and since then everyone refers to him as that. They’ve yet to uncover any official documentation on him. It’s as if he just dropped out of nowhere. His fingerprints don’t match any record of previous convictions. He was picked up in a stolen car parked in front of an elementary school. An observant neighbor reported him as a suspicious character frequently seen in the area. Everyone was on the alert, I guess, after the first few disappearances from the school, and the police were watching him just as he was walking a new victim to his car. That’s when they made the arrest. But his version of the story is a little different. He says he was fully aware of his pursuers and expected, even wanted, to be caught, convicted, and put in a penitentiary.”

“Why?”

“Why? Who knows? When you ask a psychopath to explain himself, it only becomes more confusing. And John Doe is chaos itself.”

“What do you mean?” asked Leslie. Her husband emitted a short burst of laughter and then fell silent, as if scouring his mind for the right words.

“Okay, here’s a little scene from an interview I had with him today. I asked him if he knew why he was in prison.”

“‘For frolicking,’ he said.

“‘What does that mean?’ I asked.

“His reply was: ‘Mean, mean, mean. You’re a meany, that’s what you are.’

“That childish ranting somehow sounded to me as if he were mimicking his victims. I’d really had enough right then but foolishly continued the interview.

“‘Do you know why you can’t leave here?’ I calmly asked with a poor variant of my original inquiry.

“‘Who says I can’t? I’ll just go when I want to. But I don’t want to go yet.’

“‘Why not?’ I naturally questioned.

“‘I just got here,’ he said. ‘Thought I’d take a holiday. Frolicking the way I do can be exhausting sometimes. I want to be in with all the others. Quite a rousing atmosphere, I expect. When can I go with them, when can I?’

“Can you believe that? It would be cruel, though, to put him in general population, not to say he doesn’t deserve such cruelty. The average inmate doesn’t look favorably on Doe’s kind of crime. They see it as reflecting badly on them, being that they’re just your garden variety armed robbers, murderers, and whatnot. Everyone needs to feel they’re better than someone else. There’s really no predicting what would happen if we put him in there and the others found out what he was convicted for.”

“So he has to stay in the psychiatric unit for the rest of his term?” asked Leslie.

“He doesn’t think so. Being interred in a maximum security correctional facility is his idea of a holiday, remember? He thinks he can leave whenever he wants.”

“And can he?” asked Leslie with a firm absence of facetiousness in her voice. This had always been one of her weightiest fears about living in a prison town—that not far from their own backyard there was a horde of fiends plotting to escape through what she envisioned as rather papery walls. To raise a child in such surroundings was the prime objection she had to her husband’s work.

"I told you before, Leslie, there have been very few successful escapes from that prison. If an inmate does get beyond the walls, his first impulse is always one of practical self-preservation. So he tries to get as far away as possible from this town, which is probably the safest place to be in the event of an escape. Anyway, most escapees are apprehended within hours after they've broken out."

"What about a prisoner like John Doe? Does he have a sense of 'practical self-preservation,' or would he rather just hang around and do what he does somewhere that's conveniently located?"

"Prisoners like that don't escape in the normal course of things. They just bounce off the walls but not over them. You know what I mean?"

Leslie said she understood, but this did not in the least lessen the potency of her fears, which found their source in an imaginary prison in an imaginary town, one where anything could happen as long as it approached the hideous. Morbidity had never been her strong suit, and she loathed its intrusion on her character. And for all his ready reassurance about the able security of the prison, David also seemed to be profoundly uneasy. He was sitting very still now, holding his drink between his knees and appearing to listen for something.

"What's wrong, David?" asked Leslie.

"I thought I heard...a sound."

"A sound like what?"

"Can't describe it exactly. A faraway noise."

He stood up and looked around, as if to see whether the sound had left some tell-tale clue in the surrounding stillness of the house, perhaps a smeary sonic print somewhere.

"I'm going to check on Norleen," he said, setting his glass down on the table beside his chair. He then walked across the living room, up the three segments of the stairway, and down the upstairs hall. Peeping into his daughter's room, he saw her tiny figure resting comfortably, a sleepy embrace wrapped about the form of a stuffed Bambi. She still occasionally slept with an inanimate companion, even though she was getting a little old for this. But

her psychologist father was careful not to question her right to this childish comfort. Before leaving the room, Dr. Munck lowered the window which was partially open on that warm spring evening.

When he returned to the living room, he delivered the wonderfully routine message that Norleen was peacefully asleep. In a gesture containing faint overtones of celebratory relief, Leslie made them two fresh drinks, after which she said:

“David, you said you had an ‘overlong chat’ with that John Doe. Not that I’m morbidly curious or anything, but did you ever get him to reveal anything about himself? Anything at all?”

“Oh, sure,” Dr. Munck replied, rolling an ice cube around in his mouth. His voice was now more relaxed.

“You could say he told me everything about himself, but all of it was nonsense—the blathering of a maniac. I asked him in a casually interested sort of way where he was from.”

“‘No place,’ he replied like a psychotic simpleton.

“‘No place?’ I probed.

“‘Yes, precisely, Herr Doktor. I’m not some snob who puts on airs and pretends to emanate from some high-flown patch of geography. Ge-og-ra-phy. That’s a funny word. I like all the languages you have.’

“‘Where were you born?’ I asked in another brilliant alternate form of the question.

“‘Which time do you mean, you meany?’ he said back to me, and so forth. I could go on with this dialogue—

“You do a pretty good John Doe imitation, I must say.

“Thank you, but I couldn’t keep it up for very long. It wouldn’t be easy to imitate all his different voices, accents, and degrees of articulacy. He may be something akin to a multiple personality, I’m not sure. I’d have to go over the tapes of my interviews with him to see if any patterns of coherency turn up, possibly something the detectives could use to establish who this guy really is. The tragic part is that knowing Doe’s legal identity is a formality at this point, just tying up loose ends. His victims are dead, and they died horribly. That’s

all that counts now. Sure, he was somebody's baby boy at one time. But I can't pretend to care anymore about biographical details—the name on his birth certificate, where he grew up, what made him the way he is. I'm no aesthete of pathology. It's never been my ambition to study mental disease without effecting some improvement. So why should I waste my time trying to help someone like John Doe, who doesn't live in the same world as we do, psychologically speaking. I used to believe in rehabilitation, not a purely punitive approach to criminal behavior. But those people, those things at the prison are only an ugly stain on our world. The hell with them. Just plow them all under for fertilizer, I say." Dr. Munck then drained his glass until the ice cubes rattled.

"Want another?" Leslie asked with a smooth therapeutic tone to her voice.

David smiled now, his illiberal outburst having purged him somewhat of his ire. "Let's get drunk and fool around, shall we?"

Leslie collected her husband's glass for a refill. Now there was reason to celebrate, she thought. David was not giving up his work from a sense of ineffectual failure but from anger, an anger that was melting into indifference. Now everything would be as it had been before; they could leave the prison town and move back home. In fact, they could move anywhere they liked, maybe take a long vacation first, treat Norleen to some sunny place. Leslie thought of all these things as she made two more drinks in the quiet of that beautiful room. This quiet was no longer an indication of soundless stagnancy but a delicious, lulling prelude to the promising days to come. The indistinct happiness of the future glowed inside her along with the alcohol; she was gravid with pleasant prophecies. Perhaps the time was now right to have another child, a little brother or sister for Norleen. But that could wait just a while longer...a lifetime of possibilities lay ahead. An amiable genie seemed to be on standby. They had only to make their wishes, and their bidding would be done.

Before returning with the drinks, Leslie went in the kitchen. She had something she wanted to give her husband, and this seemed the perfect time



to do it. A little token to show David that though his job had proved a sad waste of his worthy effort, she had supported his work in her own way. With a drink in each hand, she held under her left elbow the small box she had got from the kitchen.

“What’s that?” asked David, taking his drink.

“Just a little something for the art lover in you. I bought it at that little shop where they sell things the inmates at the prison make. Some of it is quality merchandise—belts, jewelry, ashtrays, you know.”

“I know,” said David, his voice at a distance from Leslie’s enthusiasm. “I didn’t think anyone actually bought that stuff.”

“Well, I did. I thought it would help to support those prisoners who are doing something creative, instead of...well, instead of destructive things.”

“Creativity isn’t always an index of niceness, Leslie,” David warned his wife.

“Wait’ll you see it before passing judgment,” she said, opening the flap of the box. “There— isn’t that nice work?” She set the piece on the coffee table.

Dr. Munck now plunged into that depth of sobriety which can only be reached by falling from a prior alcoholic height. He looked at the object. Of course he had seen it before, watched it being tenderly molded and caressed by creative hands, until he sickened and could watch no more. It was the head of a young boy, a lovely piece discovered in gray formless clay and glazed in blue. The work radiated an extraordinary and intense beauty, the subject’s face expressing a kind of ecstatic serenity, the convoluted simplicity of a visionary’s gaze.

“Well, what do you think of it?” asked Leslie.

David looked at his wife and said solemnly: “Please put it back in the box. And then get rid of it.”

“Get rid of it? Why?”

“Why? Because I know which of the inmates did this work. He was very proud of it, and I even forced a grudging compliment for the craftsmanship of the thing. But then he told me the source of his model. That expression of sky-blue peacefulness wasn’t on the boy’s face when they found him lying in a

field about six months ago.”

“No, David,” said Leslie as a premature denial of what she was expecting her husband to reveal.

“This was his most recent—and according to him most memorable—‘frolic.’”

“Oh my God,” Leslie murmured softly, placing her right hand to her forehead. Then with both hands she gently placed the boy of blue back in his box. “I’ll return it to the shop,” she said quietly.

“Do it soon, Leslie. I don’t know how much longer we’ll be residing at this address.”

In the moody silence that followed, Leslie briefly mused upon the now openly expressed departure from the town of Nolgate, their escape. Then she said: “David, did he actually talk about the things he did. I mean about—”

“I know what you mean. Yes, he did,” answered Dr. Munck with a professional gravity.

“Poor David,” Leslie said, lovingly sympathetic now that machinations were no longer required to achieve her ends.

“Actually, it wasn’t that much of an ordeal, strange to say. The conversation we had could even be called stimulating in a clinical sense. He described his ‘frolicking’ in a highly imaginative manner that was rather engrossing. The strange beauty of this thing in the box here—disturbing as it is—somewhat parallels the language he used when talking about those poor kids. At times I couldn’t help being fascinated, though maybe I was shielding my true feelings with a psychologist’s detachment. Sometimes you just have to keep some distance from yourself and reality, even if it means becoming a little less human.

“Anyway, nothing he said was sickeningly graphic in the way you might imagine. When told me about his ‘most memorable frolic,’ it was with a powerful sense of wonder and nostalgia, shocking as that sounds to me now. He seemed to feel a kind of homesickness, though his ‘home’ is a ramshackle ruin of his decayed mind. His psychosis has evidently bred an atrocious fairyland which exists in a powerful way for him. And despite the demented

grandeur of his thousand names, he actually sees himself as only a minor figure in this world—a mediocre courtier in a broken-down kingdom of miracles and horrors. This modesty is very interesting when you consider the egotistical magnificence that a lot of psychopaths would attribute to themselves given a limitless imaginary orbit where they could play any imaginary role. But not John Doe. He's a comparatively lazy demi-demon from a Neverland where dizzy chaos is the norm, a state of affairs on which he gluttonously thrives. Which is as good a description as any of the metaphysical economy of a psychotic's universe.

“There's actually quite a poetic geography to his interior dreamland as he describes it. He talked about a place that sounded like a cosmos of crooked houses and littered alleys, a slum among the stars. Which may be his distorted rendering of a life spent growing up in a shabby neighborhood—an attempt on his part to recast the traumatic memories of his childhood into a realm that cross-breeds a mean-street reality with a fantasy world of his imagination, a phantasmagoric mingling of heaven and hell. This is where he does his ‘frolicking’ with what he calls his ‘awestruck company.’ The place where he took his victims might possibly have been an abandoned building, or even an accommodating sewer. I say this based on his repeated mentioning of ‘the jolly river of refuse’ and ‘the jagged heaps in shadows,’ which could certainly be mad transmutations of a literal wasteland, some grubby and secluded environment that his mind turned into a funhouse of bizarre marvels. Less fathomable are his memories of a moonlit corridor where mirrors scream and laugh, dark peaks of some kind that won't remain still, a stairway that's ‘broken’ in a very strange way, though this last one fits in with the background of a dilapidated slum. There is always a paradoxical blend of forsaken topographies and shining sanctuaries in his mind, almost a self-hypnotic—” Dr. Munck caught himself before continuing in this vein of reluctant admiration.

“But despite all these dreamy back-drops in Doe's imagination, the mundane evidence of his frolics still points to crimes of a very familiar, down-to-earth type. Run-of-the-mill atrocities, if one can speak of the deeds he

committed as such. Doe denies there was anything pedestrian about his mayhem. He says he just made the evidence look that way for the dull masses, that what he really means by 'frolicking' is a type of activity quite different from, even opposed to, the crimes for which he was convicted. This term probably has some private associations rooted in his past."

Dr. Munck paused and rattled around the ice cubes in his empty glass. Leslie seemed to have drifted into herself while he was speaking. She had lit a cigarette and was now leaning on the arm of the sofa with her legs up on its cushions, so that her knees pointed at her husband.

"You should really quit smoking someday," he said.

Leslie lowered her eyes like a child mildly chastised. "I promise that as soon as we move—I'll quit. Is that a deal?"

"Deal," said David. "And I have another proposal for you. First let me tell you that I've definitely decided to give notice of my resignation."

"Isn't that a little soon," asked Leslie, hoping it wasn't.

"Believe me, no one will be surprised. I don't think anyone will even care. Anyway, my proposal is that tomorrow we take Norleen and rent a place up north for a few days or so. We could go horseback riding. Remember how she loved it last summer? What do you say?"

"That sounds nice," Leslie agreed with a ripple of enthusiasm. "Very nice, in fact."

"And on the way back we can drop off Norleen at your parents'. She can stay there while we take care of the business of moving out of this house, maybe find an apartment temporarily. I don't think they'll mind having her for a week or so, do you?"

"No, of course not, they'll love it. But what's the great rush? Norleen's still in school, you know. Maybe we should wait till she gets out. It's just a month away."

David sat in silence for a moment, apparently ordering his thoughts.

"What's wrong?" asked Leslie with just a slight quiver of anxiety in her voice.

"Nothing is actually wrong, nothing at all. But—"

“But what?”

“Well, it has to do with the prison. I know I sounded very smug in telling you how safe we are from that place, and I still maintain that we are. But this John Doe character I’ve told you about is very strange, as I’m sure you’ve gathered. He’s positively a child-murdering psychopath...and then again. I really don’t know what to say that would make any sense.”

Leslie quizzed her husband with her eyes. “I thought you said that inmates like him just bounce off the walls, not—”

“Yes, much of the time he’s like that. But sometimes...”

“What are you trying to say, David?” asked Leslie, who was becoming infected by the uneasiness her husband was trying to hide.

“It’s something that Doe said when I was talking with him today. Nothing really definite. But I’d feel infinitely more comfortable about the whole thing if Norleen stayed with your parents until we can organize ourselves.”

Leslie lit another cigarette. “Tell me what he said that bothers you so much,” she said firmly. “I should know, too.”

“When I tell you, you’ll probably just think I’m a little crazy myself. You didn’t talk to him, though, and I did. The mannerisms of his speech, or rather the many different mannerisms. The shifting expressions on that lean face. Much of the time I talked to him I had the feeling he was playing at some game that was beyond me, though I’m sure it just seemed that way. This is a common tactic of the psychopath—messing with the doctor. It gives them a sense of power.”

“Tell me what he said,” Leslie insisted.

“All right, I’ll tell you. I think it would be a mistake, though, to read too much into it. But toward the end of the interview today, when we were talking about those kids, he said something I didn’t like at all. He enunciated his words in one of his affected accents, Scottish this time with a little German flavor thrown in. What he said, and I’m reciting it verbatim, was this: ‘You wouldn’t be havin’ a misbehavin’ laddie nor a little colleen of your own, now would you, Professor von Munck?’ Then he grinned at me silently.

“Now I’m sure he was deliberately trying to upset me. Nothing more than that.”

“But what he said, David: ‘nor a little colleen.’”

“Grammatically, of course, it should have been ‘or’ not ‘nor,’ but I’m sure it wasn’t anything except a case of bad grammar.”

“You didn’t mention anything about Norleen, did you?”

“Of course I didn’t. That’s not exactly the kind of thing I would talk about with these people.”

“Then why did he say it like that?”

“I have no idea. He possesses a very weird sort of cleverness, speaking much of the time with vague suggestions and subtle jokes. He could have heard things about me from someone on the staff, I suppose. Then again, it might be just an innocent coincidence.” He looked to his wife for comment.

“You’re probably right,” Leslie agreed with an ambivalent eagerness to believe in this conclusion. “All the same, I think I understand why you want Norleen to stay with my parents. Not that anything might happen—”

“Not at all. There’s no reason to think anything would happen. No doubt this is a case of the doctor being out-psyched by his patient, but I don’t really care anymore. Any reasonable person would be a little spooked after spending day after day in the pandemonium and often physical danger of that place. The murderers, the rapists, the dregs of the dregs. It’s impossible to lead a normal family life while working under those conditions. You saw how I was on Norleen’s birthday.”

“I know. Not the best neighborhood in which to bring up a child.”

David nodded slowly. “When I went to check on her a little while ago, I felt, I don’t know, vulnerable in some way. She was hugging one of those stuffed security blankets of hers.” He took a sip of his drink. “It was a new one, I noticed. Did you buy it when you were out shopping today?”

Leslie gazed blankly. “The only thing I bought was that,” she said, pointing at the box on the coffee table. “What ‘new one’ do you mean?”

“The stuffed Bambi. Maybe she had it before and I just never noticed it,” he said, partially dismissing the issue.

"Well, if she had it before, it didn't come from me," Leslie said quite resolutely.

"Nor me."

"I don't remember her having it when I put her to bed," said Leslie.

"Well, she had it when I looked in on her after hearing..."

David paused. From the expression on his face, he seemed to be contemplating a thousand thoughts at once, as if he were engaged in some frantic, rummaging search within every cell of his brain.

"What's the matter, David?" Leslie asked, her voice weakening.

"I'm not sure exactly. It's as if I know something and don't know it at the same time."

But Dr. Munck was beginning to know. With his left hand he covered the back of his neck, warming it. Was there a draft coming from another part of the house? There was not the kind of place to be drafty, not a broken-down, hole-in-the-wall hovel where the wind gets in through ancient attic boards and warped window-frames. There actually was quite a wind blowing now; he could hear it hunting around outside and could see the restless trees through the window behind the Aphrodite sculpture. The goddess posed languidly with her flawless head leaning back, her blind eyes contemplating the ceiling and beyond. But beyond the ceiling? Beyond the hollow snoozing of the wind, cold and dead? And the draft?

What?

"David, do you feel a draft?" asked his wife.

"Yes," he replied as if some sobering thought had just come to mind. "Yes," he repeated as he rose out of his chair and walked across the living room, ever hurrying as he approached the stairway, leaped up its three segments, and ran down second-floor hall. "Norleen, Norleen," he chanted before reaching the half-closed door of her room. He could feel the breeze coming from there.

He knew and did not know.

He groped for the light switch. It was low, the height of a child. He turned on the light. The child was gone. Across the room the window was

wide open, the white translucent curtains flapping upwards on the invading wind. Alone on the bed was the stuffed animal, torn, its soft entrails littering the mattress. Now stuffed inside, blooming out like a flower, was a crumpled piece of paper. And Dr. Munck could discern within the folds of that page a fragment of the prison's letterhead. But the note was not a typed message of official business: the handwriting varied from a neat italic script to a child's scrawl. He desperately stared at the words for what seemed a timeless interval without comprehending their message. Then, finally, the meaning of the note sank heavily in.

Dr. Monk, read the note from inside the animal, We leave this behind in your capable hands, for in the black-foaming gutters and back alley of paradise, in the dank windowless gloom of some intergalactic cellar, in the hollow pearly whorls found in sewerlike seas, in starless cities of insanity, and in their slums . . . my awestruck little deer and I have gone frolicking. See you anon. Jonathan Doe.

"David?" he heard his wife's voice inquire from the bottom of the stairs. "Is everything all right?"

Then the beautiful house was no longer quiet, for there rang a bright freezing scream of laughter, the perfect sound to accompany a passing anecdote of some obscure hell.