Just after one o'clock Teresa came to the San Gotardo, the last bar on her round of bars this night of her fortieth birthday, July 14, 1970. The predictions overheard when she was young, about how you were going to feel when you got to be forty, had seemed false, like laughing fools' talk, and even in the last few years when that age appeared on the horizon like a sinking ship, a sailor signaling with those little flags, precisely, futilely, even then she had refused to conform to the tyranny of numbers, just as, all her life, she'd refused to conform to popular delusions. With her, the sense of mortality hadn't waited to take her by surprise at forty. It had been with her always, a seventh sense, along with the absolute preciousness of life, hers and everybody's. But who, she wondered, could possibly guess that about her, a drab woman pushing open the door to this last bar for the night, her face puffy, her no-color hair tied back with a narrow, dangling ribbon, the tail of hair hanging out over her dark, styleless coat.

The ones usually here were here now, along with a few unfamiliar ones, the dingy place as brightly lit as a café, making no attempt to hide itself in shadows, the jukebox wearily scratching up a Hawaiian song to which an old woman was dancing an impromptu hula. Teresa sat on a stool at the end of the bar. She had heard that this place and the hotel above it were in their last days, and she asked who had bought the property. The question, put to the man next to her, was like a match that set the fuse to a string of firecrackers.

"Some Chinaman!" At the top of his lungs.

"Koreans are not Chinamen!" A woman at the middle of the bar, neatly dressed in a gray suit and hat, her pumps dangling from her toes. "A filthy rich Korean bought it."

"Ho Chi Minh bought it." Away at the other end of the bar, a portly black man in a shabby suit and hat, standing. "Ho Chi Minh is taking over soon as he wins the war."

"Ho Chi Minh is dead." The caustic woman in gray, instructive again. A seat each side of her was empty.

"Japs!" The old woman, sprawled by her table after her dance. "They were snooping around upstairs. The way you tell a Jap is they all got a camera 'round their neck. That's how they tell themselves from Chinamen."

When Teresa had entered here for the first time, just twenty-one, the other patrons had been merchant seamen and cooks and stewards from the passenger vessels, and old Italians always with their hats on. Only a few of the old bars were left in this Italian neighborhood that was taken over now by the manic facades of nightclubs where nude girls danced, and whenever she came in here now she wondered if anyone present had been among the customers years ago and grown unrecognizable. On the high ceiling the paint was the same antique ivory, and behind the bar the lineup of Fun Land prizes seemed the same. The Kewpie doll, the blue plush dog, the plaster Popeye. The flowerpot, wrapped in foil, held wax flowers in an era of plastic ones, and the two little girls in the photo garlanded with a faded paper lei were women now. Over in the dark dining section, separated from the bar by a low, flimsy partition and by a flowered curtain across the doorway, the same mural of Sicilian farm country graced the dim far wall.

Half a century ago the bartender must have been a pretty young man. His dyed black hair and baby-blue eyes evoked a movie idol of her teens whose name she couldn't recall. He might *be* that one, come into his obscurity, a tinge of green on the teeth of his winning smile. Except for two young mailmen with beards, and a tall, bareheaded young black man in a long overcoat, alone at a table, no one was younger than herself. That was comforting, if only for the moment.

At the far end of the curved bar, a man sat facing Teresa. A long, thin dead-eyed man in shirtsleeves, winking at her a lewd command. "Joe Curran," he said, to nobody in particular, "got me into the Great Lakes."

"Man, don't talk to me about Joe Curran." The woman in gray spoke into her drink, contemptuously. "You want to know who was all right? I'll tell you. William Randolph Hearst was a fantastic man. You better believe it. He called me in and said I was a fantastic writer. Are you a Communist? Yes, I

said. I was always cocky honest. Nothing fuzzy. Well, he said, we just won't send you out on any labor stories. A fantastic man! But his son!"

Teresa had never seen the woman before, never in the past at demonstrations nor at any of the big parties in rented halls, benefits for this and that radical cause.

"Got to New York," the woman went on. "No job. Called Hearst in San Simeon. He put me to work on his magazine in New York. Fashion. Imagine. I retired from the Newspaper Guild because I didn't want to go through the FBI. You know who my son is? My little tiny baby boy is a big rock star. Far out. I was far out in my time. If you were far out in my time you could have got the electric chair."

"Don't die that way." The man on the woman's left, a stool between them, sat in a crouch, an uneasy man in a black suit. "You don't look so good after."

"You undertakers are 86 around here," the woman said to him. And to the bartender, "You ought to prohibit him from spreading gloom."

The man in the black suit got off his stool and moved toward the jukebox, a somber stepper, smoothing back his slick hair with slow palms.

"Play Duke Ellington!" the woman called after him without turning. "If you put anything else on I'll kill you. Your boss will be surprised when you turn up dead."

"Indian Love Call" rose up faintly from an old record, and the two mailmen got up from their table and danced a parody, cupping their ears to hear the call through dense forest.

A younger woman, Teresa's age, came out of the door of the staircase that connected the bar to the hotel rooms above and sat down at the hula dancer's table. A girl out of a fairy tale after she had come alive and become a woman and lost some teeth but not yet all her beauty. Her long black hair was parted in the center and drawn back into a bun, and her downslanting emerald eyes were made to seem even larger by the compression of the almost toothless jaws. And Teresa was drawn to her. Sweetly, keenly, the

woman was someone she would have wished to be a confidante for, back in the time of the other's young beauty when the future promised wonders.

Teresa carried her beer to that table and sat down with the two women. The old one in her housedress and shabby shoes, her pink barrette slipping from her short gray hair, was still undulating to the Hawaiian music that had been left behind, long before, by other songs. And at this table Teresa felt herself warming up to embrace all the benighted persons in this bar, embrace them as if she had never expected more of them, no change for the better.

"You live here?" she asked the fairy tale woman.

The fairy tale woman clasped her bare arms across her breasts. "I used to but I can't now. I always kept my room clean and I never made any noise except when I lost my mind. The owners, they'd be happy to have me back. I'm speaking of the social workers, they say I've got to live with a guarantor. He guaranteed them he'd take care of me, so they let me out of the asylum. If you look at him and then look at me you'll see he's old enough to be my father. Over and above that, he has an apartment and money in the bank and four suits and a pension. But he's filthy. They don't know that. I'll tell you what he's like."

The woman went silent. Teresa waited.

"If you come home with me," the woman said, "and poke your head in the door, he'll see you're a woman. It's only a few blocks from here. Otherwise he'll say I've been out with a man. If I come back without my coat he'll say I left it at my lover's. I left it at home because the sun was out and I was coming right back."

"I'll do that," Teresa promised.

"My lover hanged himself. He's up there moaning." She smiled a young smile. "He's German. They're romantics. They kill everybody and they kill themselves. He says he's going to do it over again as soon as he gets his strength back."

A commotion at the far end of the bar. The portly black man slapped the lewd winker from the Great Lakes, who lost his balance and fell to the floor,

along with his stool. The black man stepped up onto the fallen man's back and, hesitantly, as if he were only considering that which he was already doing, he jumped around up there. Then he stepped down and kicked the man in the face. No one shouted to him to stop, no one came to restrain him. But when he lifted a stool, straining to raise it above his head, a man left his table and with charitable ease gripped the upraised arms.

"Well, that's enough," he said humoringly. "You kicked the shit out of him and that's enough."

"He was asking for it."

"He sure was asking for it," the man agreed, taking the stool away. "You better get the hell out before somebody calls the cops."

Slowly, only wandering out to another bar, the portly black man left, his hat unmoved, his face unmoved, his eyes pleased. The lewd winker got up from the floor and fell backward against the dining room partition, causing it to shake. He set up his stool and sat down. His nose was bleeding.

"I'll drop you," he said to his assailant no longer there.

The man who had intervened moved toward the street door, and Teresa saw he was someone she had known. Someone on the periphery of those familiar faces always anticipating great changes for the world. The old woman got up from her chair and almost fell against him, and he set her right by his hand at her elbow. Teresa recognized him, then. A steward aboard the passenger ships, he had brought them news for the union paper, he had sat with her and the staff at their favorite bars and cheap restaurants. He was not of the periphery, he was in the midst. Mayer. She spoke his name.

When he sat down, the fairy tale woman started to get up. "I'm in the way."

"No, no, you're not," he said, quickly, gently, and the woman leaned back in a submissive arc.

"I'm out on the town," Teresa told him. "I told Ralph I wasn't coming home till late. No, I didn't tell him. I'll tell him when I get back."

Mayer's eyes, striving to concern themselves with this woman he probably barely remembered, were no longer pure of shape and color. The flesh around them made them less revealing, made them flat and noncommittal. She wondered if she had looked at him with desire, in the past. She had felt desire toward a number of men in that time when they had all conferred over how to right the world. Once in that time she might have made love with him in a dream.

The bartender swung up the empty stools and slid them upside down onto the bar. The fairy tale woman, her arms against her breasts, stood up, Teresa and Mayer stood up, and the three went out into the night, followed by the young black man in the long overcoat, who had been alone at a table.

"You want to drink some more?" the follower asked them. "I know where we can get some whiskey. You just knock on the window. It's a liquor store. He's closed but you knock on the window and he sells it to you. He says I owe him fourteen dollars but I only owe him six. He won't sell me no more till I pay up."

The fairy tale woman was hurrying on, soberly forward into the cold mist. Teresa caught up with her, and Mayer and the other man caught up. "I don't want to be nothing but drunk," the young man was saying, behind Teresa. "I got shot three times in Vietnam. They ain't supposed to shoot at you coming down. You see that red light over there? That's how a bullet feels when it hits you. Red hot. My buddy's parachute didn't open. When we found him he was flatter than this sidewalk. You know what they do with your dog tag when you're dead? They kick it into your teeth."

Teresa's lungs began to clamor with the pain of the cold fog of summer they had to take in, so fast. The fairy tale woman had got ahead again, but at the corner she turned and stood waiting, shivering. And Teresa wondered if she, herself, was an asylum inmate, on a night out just because it was her birthday and they allowed it to her. Not somebody as sane as anybody else, a woman with a good job and a scholar-husband reading into the night with the gas heater on or lying warmly asleep in his separate bed, books fallen to

the floor.

The four of them stood in a huddle on the windy corner, the fairy tale woman afraid to urge them on. Teresa saw the fear of desertion in her pinched face that, under the harsh streetlight, was the face of a woman twice as old.

The young man was reluctant to part from them. "You got some crazy city," he said. "I was working the other night where my friend works. Up the street. I was washing dishes over at Mike's when this girl walks in. I looked so hard my eyes watered. Nothing on." His shoulders raised against the cold, his hands in his overcoat pockets, he walked backward a few steps. "It's been nice talking to you."

Three abreast, Teresa and the fairy tale woman and Mayer went on, Teresa on the inside, bumping against walls, and Mayer on the outside, nimbly stepping off the curb and around hydrants.

"You want my coat?" he asked the woman.

"It smells like a man," she said. "He'd smell it on me even after it was off."

After several blocks, the woman took Teresa's hand and drew her into the marble entrance of an old apartment building. Four doors in a row faced the street. The woman pressed a button, the buzzer sounded, and she opened the door.

"My friend walked me home," she called up.

Drawn in by the woman's hand, Teresa also raised her face. Almost imperial, strong, an old man was leaning on the banister at the top of the carpeted stairs, and his very white, smooth hair and his very white shirt shone under the light. The fairy tale woman started up the stairs. Teresa closed the door.

They walked back the way they had come, unspeaking, Teresa stumbling only once, so far. She had no direction now. "I can't make it home," she said. "Over the bridge to Berkeley and another bus stop in the heart of darkness. Nothing's running this time of night. Or far between. I think I'm scared."

"You can sleep at my place," he said.

"You sleep on the bed, I'll sleep on the sofa."

"What makes you think I've got a sofa?" He told her he had a couple of rooms, a few blocks away, that he and his wife had separated a month ago, and that he was a ship's clerk now; then he was silent again.

Up three flights of stairs in an apartment building, the climbing, the key in the lock, quietly done. The bed was covered neatly with an Indian cotton spread. A clean place, a scent of toilet soap, even of apples, a Gauguin print on the wall of warm-fleshed Polynesian women. Teresa sat down in a chair and felt for cigarettes in her purse. His silence was telling her that she was a burden, unexpectedly added to some he already had, that this was a bad night for him because of her.

Mayer lit a hissing gas heater. "You can lie down."

She lay on the bed in her coat, flat on her back, shoes pointing ceilingward. And out of the blue, just like the winking man at the bar who rose up out of the Great Lakes, just like the rest with their memories that were like non sequiturs to everyone else, she said, "Some people we used to know got prosperous. Briggs is in real estate, I see his name in the papers. He wanted to change the world so he built half a million tract houses. Rupert is a restaurateur, he doesn't even have to cook anymore, he just shakes hands. Look at me, I'm a computer. Not rich yet, just upward mobility."

"How's Ralph?"

She gazed at the Gauguin print, her eyes evading the question. "Ralph's got himself a Ph.D. He's an associate professor."

"Of what?"

The long way around, tell it that way, the only way. "Well, first it was going to be Philosophy. He switched over to Economics and then he switched over to Modern European History. We felt it was all right for him to take so long. I had jobs. Anyway, I always felt he was like the favorite child of Time, if you know what I mean. I think those others, the ones who got prosperous, they're like favorites of Time, too. They just had to wait to get over their bleeding heart phase."

When it was spoken aloud it had a maudlin, abusive sound, just what was

to be expected of her at the end of her night's roaming. Some other nights, too, had their maudlin endings. Not long ago, coming home late, after having found no one in the bars whom she had known, she had thrown herself down by Ralph, asleep. She had sat on the floor, crying loudly to wake him and crying long to keep him awake.

"Mayer," she said brightly, "I bet you didn't know today was Bastille Day." She slid upward to lean against the headboard, nudged her shoes off and over the side, and shook her head to clear away the complaints. Her hair came loose from the ribbon and hung in strands to her shoulders, and, possibly, she looked young again.

"Never gave it a thought," he said.

"I know because it's my birthday. Same day. When Ralph told me a long time ago that my birthday was Bastille Day I said—listen to what I said, you won't believe it—I said, So *that's* why I've got this urge to release everybody from bondage. I said, Isn't that the day the French peasants let loose the political prisoners? And he said, They released seven and they weren't politicals. They were after ammunition. And I said, Well, they made it a holiday, it must have meant a lot for the Revolution, you know, storming the Bastille. And he said, If you want that day for your very own, it's yours."

The room went dark. He had switched off the lamp. She saw him sit down in a chair and take off his shoes. "A great day for a birthday," he said. "I wish it was mine."

"You take the bed," she said. He must be angry with himself for bringing her home. "I can sleep in the chair."

"Get under the covers," he said, wearily.

She got in under the blankets, her coat on, and he lay down on the outer edge of the bed, under the covers. She lay as close to the wall as she could get without touching it. Though she kept her face a few inches away from the wall, the cold came out of it like a ceaseless exhalation. Some nights she could scarcely breathe, and the doctor had told her that if she failed to stop drinking and failed to stop smoking, if she didn't begin to take care of her-

self, wear warm clothes in cold weather, then Oh! Beware! If she ever came down with pneumonia, she was a goner. And she knew she would die in her bed while Ralph read on and on in his room about great upheavals, debacles, revolutions, carnage. And when she was gone, he would simply go on as before, a slouchy, boyish, finical professor, and if his eyes were seen to be red-rimmed the cause would not be sorrow; he had always a problem with sties. She wanted to tell this to Mayer, to believe that he was the one she had been longing to find, the one who would care about whom she had become and what was to become of her, but her talk would seem only the ragtag end of her night's roaming. She listened to his breath change as he fell asleep. She heard his breath take over for him and, in that secretive way the sleeper knows nothing about, carry on his life.