Dancing with Mr. Penrose and other stories

Geoffrey Becker

Colby College

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DANCING WITH MR. PENROSE
AND OTHER STORIES

by

Geoff Becker

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Senior Scholars Program

COLBY COLLEGE
1980
Stories:

Fallen Angel
The Inheritance
Schlog's Dance
The New World
Dancing With Mr. Penrose
FALLEN ANGEL
Angel watched as her mother, in curlers and a faded housedress, chopped away at an onion. A small portable radio on top of the stove droned indistinctly. Angel pulled at one of her fingers.

"Why not," she asked.
"Because I don't want you going off alone, and besides, I ain't got the money to give you."
"Tanya's going."
"And you ain't."

Angel did not move, but stood and stared at her mother, who began peeling the skin from another onion. As if to make matters worse, the radio crackled out another announcement of the concert, interspersed with clips from some of Angel's favorite songs. Her lip began to tremble from the effort of holding back the tears.

Her mother spoke without looking up from her chopping.
"You take a dollar out of my purse and go buy some more potatoes: I'm going to run out. Martin's is still open, but you hurry. And come right back. I don't want you wandering around all by yourself at night. You hear me?"

Angel nodded.

"Well say something girl, people'll think you're stupid. Ouch!" She dropped the knife to the table and brought a bleeding finger to her mouth. As she paced around the room cursing, Angel ran and took two dollars out of her purse, and then quietly slipped out the kitchen door.

The news that Tommy G. was coming to Portland had been on all the radio stations for weeks. Angel had heard about it first at school from her friend Tanya. Angel went to the Brookside School, a school for "special" children. At fourteen, she was one of the oldest students there. She didn't mind Brookside, it was better than the regular school where she used to go. There the kids had made fun of her for not talking, and had nicknamed her "retard." She knew what the name meant, but she had put up with it, keeping quietly to herself until the teacher had suggested she might do better
at Brookside. Her appearance had not helped. She was a large girl and slightly overweight. She had very plain features: small eyes and mouth and a very round face. At Brookside most of the kids left her alone, which was fine with her. Sometimes she and Tanya would go into the girl's room and smoke cigarettes Tanya had stolen from her mother. There they would comb each other's hair, taking turns standing in front of the mirror while the other girl combed. Angel had long brown hair, and Tanya particularly loved to comb it. This made Angel feel better, because her mother did not smoke so she could never bring cigarettes.

It was in the bathroom that Tanya had told Angel about the concert.

"Tommy G.'s coming to Portland."

"He is?"

"Sure. I heard it on the radio this morning. Tickets are eight and ten dollars." She stopped combing and leaned in close to Angel. "I'm going to go," she whispered.

"You are?"

"Sure. My mom gets her check next week, and I know where she hides the money. I'll just borrow some from her, if you know what I mean."

Angel looked at her friend's face, carefully searching for a sign that she was joking with her. "How you going to get there?" she asked finally. Portland was over an hour's drive away.

"Hitch." Tanya pronounced the word with an indifference that said she did it all the time. Angel said nothing, but looked at her friend.

"Sure, it's easy," Tanya went on. "Girls can get rides like that!" She snapped her fingers under Angel's nose. "It's no problem at all, just put out your thumb and you got a ride. Yeah man, I wouldn't miss that concert for anything!"

Tommy G. was Angel's idol. He was her idol even before her uncle brought her the little black record player that sat in the corner of her room. Her uncle had brought her a record too, a recording of children's stories read aloud. In the corner of the record jacket were printed the words, "Recommend-
ed for children ages 3 - 7." Angel never listened to the record, but began saving her money to buy her own. She had four now: three by Tommy G. and one collection of themes from movie-musicals that Tanya had given her, saying she "just picked it up somewhere." Angel's records were her most prized possessions. She knew all the words to all the songs, and sometimes when she was alone or with Tanya she would sing along with them. She had read all the words on the album covers and had studied the various pictures of Tommy G. countless times until she had memorized every line of his face, every curl of his hair.

The thought that she could actually see him, be in the same auditorium with him, seemed to her completely impossible. For days she shut her mind to it. But the concert received an enormous amount of publicity. On the other side of the railroad tracks near her house an old peeling billboard was replaced with a huge poster of Tommy holding his guitar and a caption that simply read "Portland," and then the date and time of the concert. In the back of her mind she began to believe that she too might actually go.

The forecast was for a chance of snow flurries, but as Angel made her way toward Marin's she found herself in a very fine, old rain. It was an ugly night, no one else was out on the streets. Everything seemed to her to be cold and unfriendly. She hurried past each streetlamp she came to so as not to be caught in the gray-white trap of its light on the sidewalk. Her mother's voice echoed in her mind, "You ain't going." She felt miserable. Ahead of her a neon beer sign that read Martin's Market flickered hesitantly.

She bought a small bag of potatoes and stepped back out into the night. Martin's Market was only a short way from the turnpike that bypassed the town, and as she began to walk back to her home Angel stopped to listen to the distant sound of the trucks as they sped by. The noise as each one passed was gentle, like a soft breath. She closed her eyes and imagined what they looked like up close, huge gleaming
monsters, the spray from their tires flying high in the air, and she wondered if Tanya would go to the concert in one of those trucks.

She thought of her mother, calmly chopping onions without looking up, as though Angel were not even there, and she suddenly became angry. Now she could not go to the concert, she knew it was hopeless. She looked at the bag in her arms and felt like hurling it to the ground. She felt she had to cry, but she forced herself not to.

Less than a block from Martin's, Angel stopped walking and began to hitch. She held out her left arm, her thumb extended meaninglessly toward the sky. In her other arm she cradled the bag of potatoes. The vagueness of her stance made it look almost as if she were not hitching down the road, but into the vacant lot that stretched out behind her. She tightened her muscles against the cold and set her face to the wind that blew the icy rain at her in gusts. She was determined to defy her mother, to break away.

As the cars passed by she found she was unafraid. Her heart beat quickly, but only with excitement. As each new car approached she tried to see if it were slowing down, but it was too dark to be able to tell for sure. She shifted the potatoes from her right arm to her left and extended the right. A car stopped a little way past her, then, its tail-lights brightening like raised eyebrows, backed up until it was alongside her. The front door opened and Angel got in.

She recognized the driver at once. His name was Joey LaCroix and he lived a block away from her. He played on the high school basketball team, and almost every morning Angel saw him as he walked by her house, his basketball sneakers tied together by the laces and slung over his shoulder. He was tall, over six feet, yet Angel had always thought he moved gracefully. She had seen him play once with Tanya at the high school gym. He was the best one on the team. On the court he had quick, subtle movements, almost like a deer. Angel pulled the car door shut and, the potatoes
nestled in her lap, looked straight ahead out the windshield. Joey put the car in gear and pulled out.

"Where are you going?" he asked after a few moments. He did not recognize her, there was no reason that he should. Angel looked at him. For all his talent he was not particularly handsome. He had curly dark hair and a long thin face with a pointed nose that made him look somewhat birdlike. He wore sideburns that extended well down the sides of his face, making it seem even longer.

"Portland," she said. No sooner had she said it than she realized her mistake. The concert was not for days yet.

"Portland!" said Joey. "Jesus, you're turned around. You want the turnpike going South, this here's Main Street. I'll take you over to the exit though, if you want."

Angel bit her lip, embarrassed, and said nothing.

"That O.K.?" he asked.

She nodded that it was.

Joey pulled the car into a driveway and turned around. They drove in silence for a while. Angel watched as moisture gathered on the windshield, only to be slapped away by the wipers. Joey reached behind him to the back seat and brought out a bottle of beer. He held it out toward Angel.

"Like one?" he asked.

"Sure," said Angel. She took the bottle from him. He reached back and brought out another for himself. Angel sipped on the cold beer and looked around the inside of the car. In the space between the two front seats a pair of sunglasses lay open, amidst scattered change. On the dashboard hung a little metal disc with the names "Joey" and "Cyndi" on it. She tried to imagine what "Cyndi" looked like. She would be blonde of course, tall and slim, with lots of makeup. Angel looked out the window and saw that they were rapidly approaching the turnpike exit. Joey slowed down and pulled over to the side of the road.

"Well, here you go," he said.

"Thank you," said Angel. She made no move to get out.
He looked at her carefully. "Don't you live down the street from me?" he asked.

Angel nodded.

"And you're going where? Portland?"
She nodded again.

"I know it's none of my business, but hitchhiking all that way at night, a girl like you, all alone, I don't know..." He scratched his leg. "I guess you know what you're doing. By the way, my name's Joey. What's yours?"

"Angel."

"Angel. That's a pretty name. Look Angel, what's so important that you're hitching all the way down to Portland?"

"I'm going to a concert."

His eyes brightened. "Oh yeah? Who?"

"Tommy G."

"Oh right," he nodded. "I heard about that." A huge truck flew by them, making Joey's car rock from side to side. "Well, have a good time. I wish I was seeing a concert tonight."

"What are you doing," asked Angel.

"What, you mean tonight?"

She nodded.

"Well, uh, nothing really. I was going to go to this bar, that's all, maybe do a little dancing."

"Take me with you."

"What?"

"Take me with you. Please?"

Joey looked around the car awkwardly. "I thought you were going to a concert."

"Take me with you," repeated Angel. She did not look at him, but stared instead at the bag in her lap.

"You're not old enough. You couldn't get in."

"I am too."

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen," she lied.
"Anyway," said Joey, "I have a girlfriend. I couldn't go with you. How would it look?"

"Please," said Angel. She looked up at him. His face was worried, almost embarrassed looking. They looked at each other silently for what seemed to Angel like minutes. Finally he sighed deeply.

"O.K.," he said. "For a little while."

Angel smiled and sat back in the seat. Joey put the car in gear and pulled out into the road. "Oh boy," he said out loud as they drove off.

The bar they went to was called the King's Court. It had a bright red carpet and the walls were decorated with huge replicas of playing cards. In one corner stood a suit of armor. Angel had no trouble getting in. They took seats in a booth in the corner, close to the dance floor. While Joey went to the bar to get them drinks, she sat and looked around. She had never been to a bar before, but she had heard about this one. Tanya had told her about it. It was the place where the younger crowd went to dance; older people went to the Holiday Inn. On weekends they had bands at the King's Court, but tonight the music was recorded. A few couples danced together under the mirrored globe over their heads. Joey came back with two bottles of beer.

"So, are you happy?" he asked her.

"Uh huh."

He sipped on his beer. "Where are you in school?"

She started to say "Brookside," but caught herself. "At the High School."

"That's funny, I've never seen you around."

She looked around nervously, trying to think of a way to change the subjects. "Would you want to dance?" she asked.

He looked at her carefully as though, Angel thought, he were trying to see right into her. "How old are you really?"

he said finally.

"I told you already. Come on, let's dance."

For close to two hours they danced every dance, stopping only to dip their drinks. Joey danced clumsily, his long limbs swinging around in all directions, bumping into people and stepping on feet. Angel remembered how graceful he had looked on the basketball court, and had to suppress her laughter. She too felt awkward at first, but soon she was at ease, leaping wildly to the music, making Joey come back out every time he tried to stop and rest. "You're a dancing fool" he told her, and she laughed. She forgot all about her mother, the concert, even about Tanya. She felt like she was a different person, a character from a movie, or a fairy tale.

At one point, when Joey was glancing around nervously, Angel asked him about his girlfriend.

"She's at home," he said.
"Why doesn't she go out with you?"
"Because, she was busy, that's all."
"We could leave if you want to."
"Why?"
"I mean maybe if you're not having a good time."
"Angel," he said smiling at her, "I'm having a blast."

At eleven thirty Joey said it was time to leave. He had basketball practice in the morning and had to get up early. He helped her on with her coat and they walked out the door.

Outside a good four inches of thick, heavy snow had fallen. The plows were out, their flashing orange lights reflecting off the smooth white snow. They walked across the parking lot to Joey's car. The freezing rain had left a layer of sheet ice beneath the snow, and as they walked Angel suddenly felt her feet slide out from under her. She landed flat on her back.

"Are you all right?" Joey stood over her.
She had bumped her head, but she laughed. "I'm O.K."
Then, putting her arms out to either side, she slid them up and down. Carefully, with the aid of Joey's outstretched
arm, she stood up. Together, they surveyed the impression she had left in the snow.

"An Angel angel," said Joey.

But looking down at the graceful pattern, Angel had trouble believing the impression was her own.

Joey let her off where he had picked her up; she said she wanted to walk the rest of the way herself. As she opened the car door, she paused and looked back at him.

"Thanks a lot for letting me come with you," she said.

"That's O.K."

"I hope your girlfriend won't mind."

"Don't worry about that."

"Goodnight," said Angel.

"Goodnight."

Angel started to get out, then quickly leaned in and kissed Joey lightly on the cheek. He smelled of aftershave.

"Goodbye," she said as she closed the car door. The car's tires spun in the wet snow. As he pulled out into the street he gave a couple of quick honks on the horn.

It was late, far later than Angel had ever been out, but rather than going home, she began walking in the direction of Tanya's house. She felt excited and happy, but at the same time it seemed that if she were not careful, it might all just slip away. She needed to share her excitement with someone, and she knew Tanya would want to listen. The snow was thick and hard to walk in, and Angel's legs were tired. Still, she kicked her feet forward as she went, sending showers of snow up as high as her head in front of her.

Tanya lived in a tiny house right near the tracks that sagged to one side so that it looked almost as if it might topple over. Angel slipped in the side door and made her way quietly to Tanya's room. She paused for a moment by the door and listened to her slow, rhythmic breathing, then she quietly eased into the room. She stood over Tanya's sleeping form and looked down. The lighted dial of the clock by the
bed read 12:15.
"Girl, where you been?"
Angel jumped slightly. Tanya's eyes were wide open and
she was smiling.
"Your mom's been over here twice already looking for
you. Where you been?"
"Hitching."
"Yeah?"
Angel nodded and sat down on the bed. Tanya sat up next
to her.
"Where'd you go?"
"Nowhere. I went dancing with Joey LaCroix."
"Shit. Where'd you go really?"
Angel grinned and leaned in closer. "It's true. And he
kissed me."
"God'll get you for lying."
"I ain't lying. We drank beer too."
"Let me smell your breath."
Angel opened her mouth and let Tanya smell.
"Damn," she said excitedly, "you're not lying, are you?
Where'd you go?"
"King's Court."
"And Joey LaCroix kissed you? You let him do anything
else?"
Angel shook her head.
"Was it fun?"
"It was O.K."
Suddenly Tanya grabbed her and pulled her down to the
bed, wrestling her and tickling her. Angel tried to fight
back, but she was laughing too hard. Finally Tanya stopped
and they both lay side by side, exhausted. Tanya rolled over
on her side and whispered in Angel's ear.
"You know what you are now? You're a fallen woman." She
began to tickle her some more.
When they had both laughed until tears ran down their
cheeks, Tanya said, "You'd better go ... Your mom's really
pissed."
Angel stood up and pulled at her hair with her fingers, trying to comb it into place. "Hey Tanya," she said quietly, "I'm not going to the concert."

"No? Why not?"

"I can't."

"Why not? I'm going."

"I don't really feel like it, and I can't afford it."

"Why don't you get Joey to take you?"

"Joe?"

"Yeah, Joey LaCroix. The guy you went dancing with."

"Because, he's busy."

"My ass. Why would Joey LaCroix want to go anywhere with you?"

"I don't know."

"Angel, everyone knows he has a girlfriend."

"I'm not lying. We went dancing tonight."

"I ain't saying you didn't, only don't get too excited about it girl." She sat up. "He probably took you out of pity."

"I'm going now," said Angel. "O.K.?"

"O.K."

"Goodnight, Tanya."

Outside it had begun to snow again. As Angel made her way home through the thick flakes, she realized that she had lost the bag of potatoes she had set out to buy hours earlier. She thought she must have left it in Joey's car. Tanya's whispered words echoed in her ears, "a fallen woman." Angel caught a snowflake on her tongue. The roads were empty and silent, except for the rumble of plows in the distance. As she turned the corner onto her street, Angel stopped and did a little dance, all by herself.
THE INHERITANCE
Cal Fisher was counting the days to his birthday on the motor parts calendar behind the cash register when the stranger walked in. Cal heard the jingle as the door opened and closed, but he didn't look up until the man slapped the furs down onto the counter in front of him. There were about ten of them, all different kinds. Cal looked up at the man: he was large, tall and thin, with huge flat hands that dangled from the arms of his coat and gave the impression of great strength. The lower part of his face was obscured by a thick black beard. His cheeks and nose were red and weatherbeaten, his eyebrows thick and in disarray. He wore hunter's clothes: a checked wool jacket and a blaze orange cap with ear flaps that stuck out so it seemed like at any moment it might simply fly away.

Cal looked down at the furs again, then up at the stranger. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"How much?" said the man. There was a hint of an accent in his voice, but Cal did not recognize it.

"How much?" repeated Cal.

"For my furs."

Cal paused a moment. "This is a grocery store."

The stranger looked around the store, seeming to weigh the truth of the statement. Finally he looked back at Cal.

"You won't take my furs?"

"Wouldn't know what to do with them, to tell you the truth." Cal laughed. The stranger remained expressionless.

"Know where I can sell them?"

"No sir."

With a kind of sigh the man gathered up the furs and left the store. Cal watched him go. He was on foot, walking in toward town. He seemed to limp slightly, yet he walked quickly and firmly. For a stranger in town, he seemed to know exactly where he was going. Cal pulled a stick of gum out of his shirt pocket and slid it slowly into his mouth.

Cal had been working the cash register of Dick's Shure-Rite for over a year now. The only grocery store in Carlton, it stood on the edge of town, right at the foot of Succotash.
Mountain. Cal didn't mind the job, it was easy and it passed the time. But Cal's main love was cars -- driving them, fixing them, selling them and just looking at them. At age twenty he already had the reputation of being the best mechanic in Carlton. Eventually he planned to open his own garage. The town already had two gas stations, and they were enough to handle the vacationers who wandered into town and during the summer months gave Carlton its livelihood. But neither station had a real mechanic, and Cal was sure he would do well with a garage of his own.

In just over three weeks Cal would have the money. Cal's father and mother had both died in an automobile accident when he was fifteen. His father, an insurance salesman, had himself carried a large life insurance policy. Cal's father had been a firm believer in the necessity of adequate coverage, and Cal had grown up with a healthy respect for the future. Since his parents' death, the money from his father's policy was being held in trust for Cal by a lawyer named Reiker in Claremont, the next town over, until he turned twenty-one. Cal was not entirely sure how much money there was, but he figured it would be enough for him to start setting up his garage.

After the accident there had been talk of sending Cal away. He had an aunt in Burlington who offered to take him in. But Cal had no desire to leave Carlton, he had grown up there and he felt that it was his home. He had moved in with neighbors while he finished high school, and after that took an apartment in the center of town. He received monthly checks from the lawyer in Claremont, and they were more than enough for him to live on. Cal had not needed the job at the Shure-Rite, but he wanted something to keep him busy, and he could put his whole salary in the bank toward the day he bought his garage.

But lately Cal had again been considering leaving Carlton. When the Reiker had come by the store the week before to bring Cal his check, he had also come with advice. Reiker
was a tiny man whose New York style business suits always looked out of place in such a rural environment. Cal was eating lunch.

"Cal," he had said after giving him the check, "you're not serious about this idea of yours, this garage, are you?"

"Yes sir," said Cal, swallowing a bite of sandwich.

"Because I want you to know I think it would be a mistake. What's the furthest away you've ever been from here?"

Cal thought for a moment. "Burlington I guess. I was in Florida once, but I was too little to know it."

"That's exactly why I think you should leave. Get the hell out of here and do some travelling. Then you can make your decision. That's what I did when I was your age and I've never regretted it."

"But I'm saving my money, you know that."

"Cal, you have more than enough. Besides, this town already has two gas stations, that's more than they need already. I just think you should give it some more thought, that's all. I'd hate to see you stuck in this town the rest of your life because of a lousy garage." He reached into his briefcase and pulled out a manilla envelope with the words "Cal Fisher" written on it in magic marker. "I had my secretary stop by the travel agent's and pick these up. They're travel brochures, organized tours, that sort of thing." He slapped Cal on the shoulder. "Look through them Cal, and if anything looks interesting, give me a call." He walked to the door to leave, then turned. "And Cal, don't worry about the money. You're in good shape."

Cal had not seen Reiker since then, neither had he opened the envelope. Rather he had put it next to the cash register, casually placing a price list over it so he did not have to see it every time he opened the register. Cal respected Reiker, respected his opinions and his advice. But he had never thought twice about leaving Carlton. He began to wonder if maybe his desire to stay in the town was only because he was afraid to leave. He tried to forget the envelope, but the question kept nagging at his mind. When he thought about it logically, he could see no reason why he should not leave.
He had a few friends in town, but in general he had always been somewhat of a loner, preferring to spend his time tinkering with cars rather than hanging out with the locals. Still, Cal felt comfortable in Carlton. He left the envelope untouched.

The evening after the stranger had first come into the market, Cal was supposed to do a tune-up on Sheriff Watson's pickup. Cal did not care too much for the Sheriff. Overweight and balding, Sheriff Watson never appeared in public without his tan Stetson and mirrored sunglasses. He was Carlton's police force, and although maintaining law and order usually meant no more than keeping the high school kids out of the laundromat at night, he was a respected local figure. From his outfit to the way he talked, the Sheriff was like someone from a television cop show. Cal sometimes wondered if the Sheriff might just be some average guy who watched too much t.v. and had got it into his head that he was a cop. All he'd have to do was go out and buy the hat and sunglasses and presto: one Sheriff. The Sheriff lived in one of the modular homes on the far side of town. When Cal arrived he was on his way out.

"Hey Cal," he said. "The keys are in the ignition. I got to head out, someone reported seeing some smoke coming off the mountain."

"Smoke?"

"If it weren't so damn cold I'd say it was campers, but who'd want to camp out in this weather is beyond me. Tune her up good Cal, and check the fuel line. I thought I smelled gas the other day."

Cal watched as the sheriff got into his patrol car and drove off. He thought about the man with the furs. It seemed to him entirely likely that the stranger had something to do with the smoke on the mountain. Cal pulled out a cigarette and lit it. The Sheriff was right; it was too cold for anyone to be camping on the mountain. Although camping on Succotash Mountain was prohibited, people did manage to get
away with it. In summertime Cal had spent many nights on the mountain: he'd been doing it since the age of twelve. But he never built a fire, it was too easy to spot. A steep dirt road wound around the mountain, running all the way to an abandoned weather station at the top. While it took an hour and a half to hike up by trail, a good pickup or jeep like Cal's could reach the top in just over ten minutes. Using that road the Sheriff had a good chance of catching anyone camping on the mountain, and often did.

Cal pulled the pickup into the Sheriff's heated garage and put up the hood. He wondered if the man was really a trapper. It didn't seem possible. More likely, he thought, he was a thief who had stolen the furs. But why he would try to sell them in a supermarket was beyond Cal. As he pulled the spark plugs he tried to picture what it would be like to skin an animal. It seemed so monstrous, and yet the sight of the furs on the counter hadn't bothered him at all. Cal wondered if maybe he ought to say something to Sheriff Watson about the stranger. He replaced a clamp on the fuel line. On a rack on the far wall of the garage hung a large hunting rifle and a couple of duck decoys. The Sheriff was a man who hunted for fun. Cal decided not to say anything. If the fire belonged to the stranger, Sheriff Watson would have no trouble finding him by himself.

Saturday morning when Cal came in to open up he found the Shure-Rite had been robbed. It really wasn't much of a robbery. After a quick inventory was taken only a few articles turned up missing: a case of pork and beans, two dozen eggs, some cheese, a package of bacon and a box of twinkies. Not counting the price of repairing the busted lock on the back door, the total loss came to about twenty dollars. The cash register was untouched. Cal spent the morning repeating his story to various parties: Sheriff Watson, Mr. Clayton who owned the store, at least five local residents who just stopped in to see if the rumors were true, and a dis-
appointed reporter from the Claremont Bugle (Carlton was too small a town to have their own paper) who would not believe so little had been stolen.

Sheriff Watson was in and out a number of times during the morning, taking fingerprints and filling out forms. Toward lunchtime he came back with the official theft report for Cal to sign. He pushed the paper across the counter to Cal. Taking his Stetson off and placing it carefully on the counter next to him, he watched him sign.

"You notice any strangers hanging around town lately Cal?"

Cal looked up from the paper. "No."

"Joe Cartwright over at the five and dime says a man tried to sell him some furs the other day."

"Furs?" Cal watched himself pronounce the word in the reflection on the Sheriff's sunglasses.

"Yeah that's right, furs. Raccoon and fox mostly. Joe said he didn't look much like a salesman either."

"Joe buy any?" Joe Cartwright did most of his business selling "authentic" Indian moccasins and T-shirts with bright colored maps of New Hampshire on them. Cal smiled trying to picture him striking a deal with the stranger.

"No. Says he didn't see any use to them, just furs like that, except as souvenirs. Joe thought he looked suspicious. He's a big guy, with a beard." He took the paper from Cal and folded it neatly in thirds.

"You saying this might be the same guy that broke in?"

The Sheriff picked his hat off the counter and put it on, then adjusted the angle. "Seems like a good possibility."

Cal paused a moment. "Did you ever find those campers up on the mountain the other night?"

"False alarm Cal, false alarm. Mrs. Rogers called it in, and you know how she is, getting old and so forth." He leaned in close to Cal. "Tell you the truth, I think the smoke she saw was coming out of her neighbor's chimney!" He laughed loudly, the hairs of his thin moustach spreading wide
apart and revealing the skin beneath them. "You notice anything, you let me know, O.K.?" He pushed open the glass door and walked out.

For his own part, Cal was beginning to be convinced it was the stranger who had broken into the store. It made sense: if the man was really a trapper, then he would try to sell his furs to buy food. When no one was willing to buy them he must have broken into the store. But at the same time it all seemed so logical, it didn't make any sense at all. It was as if the stranger had walked right out of the nineteenth century and into Dick's Shure-Rite.

That evening, after he had closed up, Cal got out the envelope Reiker had given him. He was moved not by a sudden change of heart, but simply out of curiosity. He took it into the back room and, sitting on a crate of empty bottles, he carefully opened it. There were six brochures inside, lavishly illustrated with color photographs of beaches, well-tanned men and women enjoying themselves in expensive surroundings, huge oceanfront hotels, and close-ups of bright red lobsters on bone white china. They all looked the same and Cal found himself flipping through them without even bothering to read the print. Then a full page picture caught his eye. It showed a huge, snow-capped mountain at sunset, and in the foreground a single backpacker stood, his back to the camera, staring up at it. The brochure advertised adventure tours of the far East, the picture was of a mountain in Nepal. Cal did not read the brochure, but instead turned back to the picture. It was stunningly beautiful, like an image from a fairy tale. Cal looked at the picture for a long time, then slipped it back into the envelope with the rest of the brochures.

He locked the new lock on the rear door and was about to leave when he caught a glimpse of orange poking out from under a case of empty bottles. Pulling it out he recognized it as the same hat the trapper had worn the day he had brought the furs. Cal examined the hat for some kind of marks or initials, but it was just a standard hunting cap, the kind you could
buy in any sporting goods store. Putting it under his arm he went out to his car.

Outside, he stood and looked up at the mountain. It stood out huge and black against the sky. Cal had never thought of it as a wild place, it had always seemed more like a big toy to him, and the thought that someone might actually be living there, in spite of all the rules, made him want to laugh. Carlton, Carlton, Claremont, hell, the whole state of New Hampshire had been founded by men who hunted their food and did things on their own. As he looked up at the mountain he suddenly noticed a thin trail of smoke drifting off from near the top. Cal shivered in recognition. So he was up there. As he watched, the smoke grew thicker. It would have to be a big fire to kick off that much smoke. And the only open space on the mountain big enough for a large fire was up by the weather station. Cal got in his jeep and tossed the orange cap onto the seat next to him. The Sheriff was bound to see the smoke this time. Cal figured if he hurried there'd be just enough time to warn the trapper and get back down before the Sheriff got there. He put the jeep in gear and drove toward the mountain.

He bumped his way up the steep road in four wheel drive, pushing the accelerator to the floor. A few hundred yards from the top he pulled over and cut the engine. Taking a flashlight from the glove compartment he got out and started walking. When he reached the clearing at the top he stopped and stood, staring. The trapper sat on a small rock with his back to Cal, in front of a huge campfire. He was drinking from a mug. Cal stood where he was, unsure how to announce his presence.

"Don't just stand there, come on over. You couldn't have made more noise if you'd rung the doorbell." The man had not turned around, but remained seated, his back to Cal. Cal walked over to him. The man looked up.

"Well?" he said.

"I came to warn you, the Sheriff knows you're here."
"Coffee?" said the man, holding up his cup.

"No thanks."

"I'd offer you a twinkie, but I'm all out."

Cal looked into the fire. Among the burned pieces of wood he noticed what looked like burned articles of clothing, and sticking up out of the center was the neck of a guitar.

"My worldly possessions," said the man. "I keep burning them, but they just keep accumulating."

"The Sheriff..."

"My name's Mike. What's yours?"

"Cal."

"I got an Indian name too, means "Where the bear pisses at midnight" or something. I just go by Mike. It's easier. Hey, I recognize you."

"I'm cashier down at the market. Listen, I know it was you broke in the other night. I think the Sheriff knows it too. That's why I came up."

The stranger's face showed no reaction. "It's all right. I'm leaving soon anyway." They both watched as a log shifted and the guitar neck tipped then fell into the flames.

"Been here long?" asked Cal.

"On God's earth?"

Cal looked at his face. It was red from the heat of the fire. "On the mountain."

"Not so long."

Cal stood and watched as the man stared into the fire. He seemed to shift moods quickly, talkative one moment, silent the next. He didn't look much like an Indian. On the other side of the fire, leaning up against a boulder, was a green army-style backpack. Scattered on the ground next to it were some of the things that had been stolen from the store. Cal listened anxiously for the sound of Sheriff Watson's pickup, but all he heard was the deep breath of the fire.

"Look, Mike, I just came up to warn you, that's all. When the Sheriff sees all this smoke he'll be up here like that." Cal snapped his fingers but the stranger did not turn
his head. "Hey," he raised his voice, "he knows it was you bust into the store. You want to go to jail?"

"You live here all your life?" the stranger asked quietly, turning to face Cal. Cal nodded. "It must be nice. This is a good mountain, it's got a feel to it. Believe me I know, I've been up a few. Grew up out West myself, on a reservation. I'm only half Indian really though."

"That when you learned to hunt?"

The stranger looked at Cal intently, as though noticing him for the first time. "That's right. Then I went in the army for two years. Over in Viet Nam."

"Those furs you had, you caught those up here?"

"Caught 'em, skinned 'em and ate 'em." He opened his eyes wide and in the orange glow of the fire he suddenly looked very strange.

"Listen, you better go, the Sheriff will be here any minute."

"I'll be going soon as I burn a couple more things." Cal thought he heard the sound of an engine in the distance. "I got to go," he said.

"So soon? You're the first company I've had in weeks."

"If the Sheriff catches me up here I'll get in trouble too. I told him I didn't know anything about you." Cal stuck his hands in his pockets and nervously played with his car keys. It seemed to him that he had forgotten something, or left something unsaid. "Where are you going to go?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm just passing through. I have a lot more to see."

"You just travel around and hunt?"

"That's right."

"And people buy your furs?"

"No."

"Well, what do you do then, steal all your food?" Cal felt himself growing angry. The stranger wasn't even paying attention; rather, he picked at something on his shoe.

"If you want to know the truth, I've been carrying those same furs around with me for years now. They were my grand-
father's. He shot them. He used a bow and arrow."
Cal edged away. "I've got to go," he said.
"I keep trying to sell them, everywhere I go. One of these days someone might actually buy them." He laughed.
"Boy, that would be something."
He seemed to drift off, lost in his own thoughts, laughing softly to himself. Cal moved quietly away from the fire, toward the road.

As he walked to his car Cal played his flashlight randomly around the trees, catching a particular area in its light and freezing it in time for an instant, then letting it go. Although he knew the road well, he felt unnerved, as if each shadow, each strange shape held within it something threatening. At last he caught a glimpse of the jeep's reflectors. He walked to it and got in.

It was not until he was down the mountain and back on paved road that Cal noticed the orange hunting cap on the seat beside him. He had meant to give it back to the stranger, but had forgotten. Cal wondered if perhaps, had he given it back to him, he would only have burned it. Reaching over with his right hand, Cal picked up the cap and put it on his head. It came down well over his forehead. He adjusted the flaps so that they stuck out, the same way they had the day the stranger had first come in with the furs. He still had it on when he passed Sheriff Watson going the other direction, toward the mountain. The Sheriff flashed his lights at him, but Cal kept going.

It began to rain lightly. Cal watched as Succotash Mountain grew smaller in his rearview mirror. Reiker was right, it was time he did some travelling. He needed to see other places, meet new people. But as he caught sight of the dim scattered lights of the tiny town of Carlton, he knew that soon he would return.
SCHLOG'S DANCE
It was very early on Tuesday morning that Schlog noticed the girl. It was his custom to go for an early run before work. He would run down to the end of his street, make a left at the fancy sign that said American Ballet Academy, and then continue down until he came to the small park that nestled incongruously between 14th and 15th street. There he would sit on one of the benches and distribute a package of sunflower seeds to the pigeons. Schlog had always loved birds, and while he didn't find the fat city pigeons particularly exciting or beautiful, he liked the idea that he had established a special communication with these particular birds. All day long they would be tossed bread crumbs by elderly women, but Schlog was always there first, and he always brought seeds. At first there had only been six or seven birds, but Schlog was regular and punctual, and his following grew quickly. He estimated that about forty hungry birds awaited his arrival every morning, and Schlog never let them down. After visiting with the pigeons he would run back to his apartment, take a quick shower and walk the eleven blocks to "The Great Crepe," the restaurant where he worked. It was a routine he enjoyed, and one that he felt helped give perspective to the rest of the day.

The thing Schlog liked most about the early hours of the morning was the silence. He had decided that what he disliked most about New York was its constant din. "New Yorkers," he told his roommate Larry, "learn to ignore the sound around them because there is so much of it. It's sensory overload." So every morning, while the rest of the city was fast asleep, Schlog listened as hard as he could. And that is why he noticed the girl. As he stepped out of his apartment and into the hall, he heard her breathing. At the end of the hall there was
an old dirty couch, and on it lay her fragile form, curled up and fast asleep. Her back was toward him, so he could not see her face. She had long, dirty blonde hair and wore jeans and a peasant blouse, and on her feet were a pair of battered ballet slippers. Schlog stood for a moment looking at her, listening to her quiet, steady breathing. Then he moved softly down the stairs and out into the grey morning.

As he jogged to the park, Schlog thought about the girl. It was possible that she was locked out of her apartment, but he was quite sure that he had never seen her before. She had been sleeping so soundly, as though she hadn't slept for days. Maybe, he thought, she's a runaway. She looked young. But what stuck in Schlog's mind most was the ballet slippers she wore. "You don't run away from home wearing ballet slippers," he told a particularly obese pigeon as he handed out breakfast. It just stared at him expectantly. "Here you go guys," he said, dumping the rest of the seeds on the ground, "every man for himself." He ran back to the apartment, anxious to get another look at the girl.

She was gone when he got back, and staring at the empty sofa. Schlog suddenly realized that he had expected her to be. On a sudden impulse he ran down to the street and looked around for her. The street was beginning to show increasing signs of life as the local merchants opened their stores and the traffic picked up. The girl was nowhere in sight. Schlog went back upstairs, showered and dressed quietly so as not to wake Larry, then walked to work.

Schlog had been in New York a little over a year, and while he was no closer to figuring out what he wanted to do with himself now than when he had arrived, he was growing to the realization that whatever it was, he did not want to do it there. He had come to the city with the vague intention of just soaking up as much cul-
ture as possible and waiting until something happened. This was his basic attitude toward life. In college, Schlog had approached each day as though it were a beer can with no pop-top. Each morning he'd wake up and look out the window, then rummage around for a can opener. If he found one, fine. If not, he'd simply roll over and go back to sleep. It was this lackadaisical attitude that had gotten him kicked out of college after his junior year. He was not overly surprised, nor was he terribly upset. In many ways he felt that college, instead of preparing him for life, was just pampering him into insensibility. He had always thought that he could teach himself anything that he wanted to know just as well as a school, and so he had moved to New York with a simple plan: straighten out his life and explore new things. Schlog figured something interesting was bound to happen sooner or later.

He was, however, beginning to get a little tired of waiting. He had very few friends besides Larry, with whom he would while away the evenings smoking and talking. Occasionally they would go out to a bar or a nightclub, but neither of them was making enough money to keep that sort of thing up regularly. On weekends Schlog liked to visit the museums and art galleries, but even that had become too routine. It was not that he was unhappy, in fact he was quite content. It was just that Schlog was afraid of losing himself among all the crowds of people he saw every day. He felt that if he let himself become too comfortable, his individuality might just fade away, and he would become a part of the amorphous mass that he referred to disdainfully as "fucking New Yorkers."

Schlog chopped for a living. "The Great Crepe" was not so great, but they had crepes (and hamburgers).
Schlog was on food preparation, and that meant chopping. He chopped everything: onions, broccoli, apples, meat, even herring. "The Great Crepe" claimed to have the most varied selection of crepes in the city, and Schlog guessed that this was probably true. He had taken the job for purely practical reasons; Schlog was a terrible cook. He had quickly made friends with the chef, a large black man named Leon who was also a small time drug dealer, and who wanted nothing more in the world than to play bass in a jazz band. Leon was a terrible bass player, but he had a gift for crepes, and every day, after the lunchtime rush was over, he and Schlog would step outside the service entrance and smoke a joint. Then they would go back in and Leon would cook them both a crepe twice the normal size. Schlog had been living on Leon's crepes almost exclusively, and Leon, who didn't know that Schlog had trouble boiling an egg, took it as a great compliment. Schlog, for his part, bought all his pot from Leon. Apart from his pigeons and Larry, Leon was about the only other person that Schlog conversed with at all.

Schlog was still thinking about the girl as he pushed through the service entrance and into the kitchen of "The Great Crepe." Leon was busy instructing the new cook's helper on the finer points of crepe making.

"Not like that man! If you flip it like that all the shit gonna fall out of the middle! Now watch me flip this next sucker... S'happening, Schlog."

Schlog said "Hey," and went to put on his apron. "The Great Crepe" was a popular place for breakfast, a fact which annoyed Leon. "Man, they think these things are pancakes!" he'd say. Schlog looked at his watch. He took a basket of washed vegetables and began chopping. As he worked he thought about the girl, the smoothe curve of her back, her long blonde hair.
"Hey Schlog!" Leon called from the stove. "You know what you need? A woman!"
Schlog dropped his knife. "A what?"
"A woman, man. You know, a nice warm white woman to go home to at night."
"Great! Find me one."
"Find you one! Man, you don't even try. All y'all do is hang around and get high. You don't get no pussy that way."
Schlog resumed chopping. "Thanks for the tip."
Leon shrugged. "It's your life, man."
"Anyway, I've been seeing a chick." Schlog fixed his eyes on the onion he was chopping.
"Yeah? Dig it man, who is she?"
"A ballet dancer." He pictured the girl's worn out slippers.
"What?"
"You know, ballet. Classical dancing."
"A dancer, man." Leon looked thoughtful for a moment.
"She got nice legs?"
"The best." Schlog looked at Leon who was standing facing him, holding his spatula up as if it were a penant and he was at a football game. He nodded approvingly.
"Beautiful," he said simply and turned back to the stove.

When Schlog got home from work that night, he found Larry cooking pancakes. Larry was an aspiring actor, and he flipped each pancake with the grand exaggerated motion of a conductor of a symphony orchestra.
"Pancakes!" Said Schlog, as though it were a personal insult.
"Hey ya Schlogger!" said Larry. As he spoke he tossed the next pancake high in the air and attempted to catch it behind his back. It missed by a good foot,
draping itself obscenely over the hot water faucet of the sink. "Shit," he said."Schlog, it's time you learned that man does not live by crepes alone. This is no iron curtain country, this is America, and here we have freedom of choice. Sure, we could eat the same thing all the time like those deprived communists, but we don't do we? Hell no! We're Americans, we exercise our freedom of choice! We eat crepes, sure. But we also eat pancakes, waffles, French toast... hell, anything we want to! And why? Because it's the American way!" Larry added the last pancake to the stack he had been building. "You wanna get the syrup out of the cupboard, buddy?"

Schlog brought the syrup to the table and sat while Larry served them both. One of the things he liked about living with Larry was his ability to speak. Schlog was not much of a talker himself, but Larry did enough talking for both of them. He was one of those people that love the sound of their own voice. Schlog figured Larry's ongoing monologue was his biggest asset as an actor. He gave the impression of always being on stage.

"I met a girl today," Schlog said.
"Alright! What's she like?"
"She's a dancer. Or, well actually she's a student. At the ballet academy down the street."
"An artiste! Well you simply must invite her to dine with us some evening. I will make my hamburger stroganoff."

"Um," said Schlog.
"Seriously, how'd you meet her?"
"Running. She's a runner."
"A runner and a dancer?"
"Sure. Lots of dancers run. It's good for their legs."

"So does this girl have nice legs?"
"Beautiful," said Schlog.
Schlog went to bed early, not because he was par-
ticularly tired, but because he wanted to be alone to think. Again he pictured the girl laying on the couch. He remembered her soft, steady breathing. As he felt himself slipping off into sleep, he wondered if she had not simply been a dream. After all, it was the surreal quality of the early morning that attracted Schlog to it. There was something, he thought, surreal about the girl. The fact that he had not seen her face. She had seemed out of place, and at the same time completely at home, as though she was a necessary complement to the old worn out sofa. He didn't know why he had told Leon and Larry about her, it had just come out. He sat up in bed and checked his alarm clock to make sure it was set. He was anxious for it to be morning. He closed his eyes and fell into a light, expectant sleep.

The next morning she was there again. She was in the same position as the day before, curled up protectively, her face towards the couch. She was wearing the same clothes as the day before. She still had on the ballet slippers. Schlog, in sweatpants and a "Great Crepe" T-shirt, stood and stared down at her. He did not know what to do. He wanted very much to wake her up and talk to her, to ask her if she was in trouble or needed help, but at the same time he felt that it was simply none of his business. Perhaps she was not a runaway at all, but a poor ballet student who was forced to sleep in hallways in order to pay for lessons. If so maybe he could help. At least he could let her know that he cared. He reached down to touch her on the shoulder, but stopped just short. He was making a fool out of himself, it was none of his business. His face flushed with indecision. He turned to go, then stopped and went back into the apartment. He reemerged with a glass of orange juice and a donut on a plate, which he placed on a small table
at the side of the sofa where she would be sure to see it. Satisfied, he went out and ran.

Schlog made his morning run in record time, only spending a short while with his pigeons, and sprinting much of the way back. He wanted to catch the girl before she left; he now felt that he could talk to her, having established the necessary link. As he rounded the corner by the American Ballet Academy, he waved at the old building, as though he were a new member.

When he got back, the girl had eaten and left. Schlog sat down on the sofa, which was still warm. He stared down at the worn wooden floor. His body was pounding from the exertion of the run, and as he looked at the empty plate and glass, he realized that he actually felt somewhat relieved. He had escaped being caught with the embarrassment of explaining his gesture, it had simply been received. The girl was no longer a stranger, but a friend. A dancer, Schlog thought, is going to need all the help she can get. As he got ready for work, Schlog felt like singing, but refrained so as not to wake up Larry.

The mysterious girl on the sofa became an integral part of Schlog's daily routine. Every morning before he went for his run he would leave her with some small breakfast, a glass of orange juice and a donut or a bagel, and every morning when he returned both the girl and the meal were gone. One time he even attempted scrambled eggs, but he burned them and ended up leaving the usual juice and donut. He considered further attempts at communication, such as leaving a note for her, or forgoing his run in order to be there when she awoke. But Schlog was, and always had been, a person who allowed things to happen to him rather than creating situations for himself. He was content with his relationship with the girl. They were both, he felt, in much the same position: individuals trying to use the city for their own benefit rather than
be absorbed by it. Although their approaches were different, Schlog felt they had a lot in common.

Schlog's friends, however, were not so content to let the matter of the new girl in Schlog's life simply drop. Schlog's passive attitude toward life had always extended to women as well, and they were curious about his reluctance to talk about her. When, on a rainy friday afternoon, Leon and Schlog huddled under the awning that sheltered the service entrance and shared their after lunch joint, Leon asked, "So man, how's the dancer?" Schlog just stared out into the gloomy afternoon.

"She's O.K."

"Naw man, that's not what I mean. I mean how is she?" Leon gave Schlog a playful poke in the ribs. Although the two were great friends, sometimes Leon played a little too rough. The poke hurt.

"She's O.K."

"Man, you never want to talk about nothin'." Leon looked hurt.

"I'm sorry," Schlog looked out at a large puddle. The heavy rain made it churn like a small sea. "I see her just about every day."

"But are you gettin' it?" Leon grinned. A piece of pot from the end of the joint clung to his front tooth.

"Sure, man." Schlog tried to smile back. "Sure."

Schlog came to feel that he knew the girl. He imagined that she worked late at night, probably as a waitress at some restaurant or club, then came for a few hours sleep on the sofa before she left for early classes at the ballet academy. Schlog marveled at her dedication. He began to take an interest in ballet; he kept up on the current performances listed in the Times, and occasionally he would wander into the public library and page through a copy of "Dance" magazine. Although
he really knew nothing about ballet, Schlog was beginning
to assimilate a few facts. He watched a television pro-
duction of Swan Lake. He began to learn the names of a
few prominent dancers. Looking at pictures of famous
ballerinas, he would try to picture her as one of them.
Schlog had not previously thought much of ballet, it had
always seemed too pompous and aristocratic. But now,
because of the girl's ambition and drive, he thought of
it in a new light. He was pleased with himself. He felt
his horizons broadening.

It was morning, and dressed in his sweatsuit, Schlog
prepared the girl's breakfast. Then he carefully stepped
out into the dim hallway. It was quiet, almost too quiet,
Schlog thought, and then he saw why. The sofa was empty.
He put down the plate he was carrying and leaned over
to touch the cushions. They were cold and showed no
signs of having been slept on. Worried, Schlog left the
breakfast anyway and went for his run. When he returned
it was still there, untouched. Perhaps she was sick.
Schlog tried to put it out of his mind as he got ready for
work. Outside the day was gloomy, threatening to rain
again. Maybe she just got tired of donuts, he joked to
himself. She'll be back tomorrow he thought.

She did not return on the next day, nor on the next
day. On the third day Schlog began to hunt. He called
Leon and told him he couldn't make it.
"What you mean you can't make it man? You sick?"
"No, not sick," Schlog mumbled into the phone.
"I just got something to do."
"Shit man, that don't float. Get your ass down
here. I need you man."
"Sorry Leon, this is for real."
"This have anything to do with that chick of yours?"
"Yeah."
"Alright man. You know you can call me if you need me."

"Thanks Leon." Schlog hung up and turned to leave. Blocking his way to the door was Larry, still in pajamas. Schlog realized that he had heard the conversation.

"Que pasa, roomie?" said Larry.
"Nothing. I'm taking off."
"You don't want to talk about it?"
"Not really." Schlog pulled on a windbreaker.

"O.K." Larry put up his hands in a gesture of defeat. "You've been getting awful quiet lately. I thought you might be getting ready to say something."

But Schlog was too preoccupied to notice his roommate's cynicism. "I'll see you later," was all he said.

Outside the sky was still grey, as it had been all week. Schlog walked to the American Ballet Academy and stood, hands in his pockets, staring up at the building. He was vaguely aware of the distant, sweet odor of bread baking. It was an old building, distinguishable from the ones around it only by the fancy sign that hung out front. He considered going in, but as he stood at the bottom of the worn stone stairs, he realized how futile that would be. He did not even know her name, there would be no point in trying to ask about her. Instead he went and sat on a small concrete bench opposite the entrance. He waited.

Schlog hung around the entrance to the ballet academy the better part of the morning. At one point a policeman who seemed to think that the young man in sweatpants and a windbreaker had been in one place for entirely too long, began to approach him, but Schlog, who was keeping his eyes on everything, noticed him in time, divined his intentions and went for a brisk walk around the block. When he returned he resumed his vigil. But with increasing restlessness. For long stretches of time no
one would enter or leave the building, then they would come in groups, mostly young women. Schlog was at a disadvantage having never seen her face, but he was some-how sure that he would know her when he saw her. And so he sat on his bench, staring intently at the passing women, most of whom, when they realized that they were being studied so blatantly, quickly averted their eyes and quickened their pace. Most of the women moved with a graceful ease that didn’t seem to fit with the street-clothes they wore. They all carried dance bags, large leather satchels within which Schlog imagined they carried the trappings of their chosen profession, the tights, the leotards, the slippers. Those were their real clothes. And yet when they left the building and reentered the streetsthey dressed themselves in baggy overalls, sneakers, and sweaters. Schlog thought about his dancer. Somehow she seemed to fit the role of ballerina better than any of the people he had seen For them it was pretending, for her it was natural. Then Schlog realized a big difference between these dancers and the girl he was searching for. They only wore ballet slippers for dancing. She wore them all the time. It was something he had never given a second thought to. She had been wearing ballet slippers, she was a dancer. She was a dancer, so she wore ballet slippers. Scholg paid careful attention to the feet of each person that left the great double doors of the Academy. He saw sneakers, boots, clogs, but not a single pair of slippers. Schlog felt a growing queasiness in the pit of his stomach. He had decided that she was a dancer solely on the basis of her slippers, and now those same slippers seemed proof that she was not. It had begun to rain slightly. On the other side of the street the same policeman began to make his way across to the loiterer, but just as he started to cross the street, the strange figure stood up, pulled the hood
of his windbreaker over his head and began to walk slowly away.

Schlog walked without any definite destination, he just put his body in gear and let it go. The rain came not in drops, but in the form of a wet mist that hovered over the streets like a soft, cold rag. With it came the smells, intensified by the moisture, drifting out of alleyways and gratings, faint, distant odors that mingled together and intertwined until they became indefinable. Schlog was not thinking, he was trying to calm the wave of emotion that he had felt, the feeling that he had somehow been betrayed. He felt the rhythm of his feet, listened to the faint slap that his sneakers made as they came down of the wet sidewalk. He was not sure where he was going, but he knew it was time for him to leave the city, to go someplace else.

He came to the corner of 14th Street and turned into the strange little park. He did it by reflex, and just as he did every morning he went and sat on one of the benches. He could feel the wet slats of the bench through his sweatpants. On the next bench over, a middle aged woman sat tossing crumbs to a small group of pigeons clustered about her feet. As she dropped them the crumbs she talked to them, scolding them and cooing over them. Schlog stared at her vacantly. Within the pocket of his windbreaker his right hand methodically curled up a matchbook.

"Aren't pigeons marvelous creatures?"

Schlog, unsure whether the comment was intended for him, or whether he had simply latched onto a segment of the woman's ongoing monologue with the birds, remained silent.

"I think they're marvelous." This time the comment was definitely intended for him. "They have remarkable
memories you know."

"Um, yes, I guess they do." Schlog wished the lady would go away.

"Of course they do." Look at homing pigeons. I read where they took a homing pigeon from the Bronx and flew him all the way over to India. And within a week that pigeon found his way all the way back to the Bronx. Now that's intelligence."

Schlog started to say something, but stopped. He wanted badly to get out of the conversation, but he realized that he had incited it by staring at the woman. He began to pull the matches out of the matchbook, one at a time.

"These are my pigeons," the woman said proudly. Perhaps, thought Schlog, the girl was a runaway after all.

"I bring these pigeons lunch every day. They know me."

Or a whore.

"Come here precious, didn't you get any?" The fat, murmuring pigeons clustered around the woman's feet made Schlog feel suddenly ill. He stood up and started to walk away. In a moment he was at the park entrance, a small rusted gate that served no purpose other than to hold a plaque that announced its official name and date. He turned and looked back at the park. In the early morning it had always seemed like a pleasant, peaceful place, a relief from the cold concrete that surrounded it. But now the small patch of grass and trees seemed to Schlog like a poor joke. The air, already thick with moisture, suddenly filled with large, heavy raindrops. Schlog looked at his watch. It was almost two, Leon would be taking his lunch break just about now. He suddenly felt a need to talk to Leon. He would tell
him the whole strange story. Schlog started to run in the familiar direction. He would tell Leon about the mysterious girl, and the two of them would have a good laugh. But as he ran to the restaurant Schlog still remembered what she had looked like that first morning by the hall light, snuggled securely on the sofa wearing her worn and faded slippers, and deep in his heart, Schlog still knew she was a dancer.
THE NEW WORLD
Harry closed the heavy glass door to his Greenwich Village antique shop and waved the Arab to a chair. The Arab was a young man about twenty, slight and dark. In the past few weeks he had come into the store a number of times: Harry recognized his face. He was dressed in an overcoat that was a bit too large for him. Cool Autumn air emanated from its folds. Harry always made a point of being particularly friendly to frequent customers.

"What can I do for you," he said genially, a fresh cigar clamped between his teeth.

"There is something you have which I am interested in." The Arab's voice was timid and nasal. He spoke with a British accent, and kept his hands in the pockets of his long coat.

Harry smiled and gestured broadly around him. The shop consisted of one long, narrow room with a partition in back that enclosed Harry's "office." The shelves were lined with all manner of objects, each with some intrinsic value that made it an antique. There were books, articles of clothing, hats, old photographs, a collection of medicinal bottles from the 18th century and, hanging on the wall next to the partition, Harry's personal prize: an autographed photo of Abraham Lincoln, faded and slightly torn, in an ornate, gilt edged frame. Harry did not deal in junk.

"Look around. Anything you want, I got it. Anything. You got something in mind?"

The Arab paused for a moment, gazing down at his shoes. Then he looked up, and with a shy sort of half smile said, "Yes, your daughter."

Harry stared at him in disbelief. He searched the stranger's face for some clue that he was joking. But the Arab said nothing, only looked back at him very seriously, as if he were inquiring about nothing more than a lamp. Harry took the cigar out of his mouth and pointed it at him.

"Get out of here! Get the hell out of here right now."
The Arab stood quickly and moved nervously to the door.

"And don't you come around here no more. Who the hell do you think you are? Get outta here and don't come around no more, understand me?"

The Arab left the shop without a word and Harry, redfaced and out of breath, eased himself into a chair.

Harry's daughter Sarah, a beautiful girl of nineteen, was in her first year at City College. Harry's wife had died when Sarah was ten, and Harry had taken over the job of raising the girl. Sometimes he felt he was too overprotective about her, but at the same time he was proud of the way she had turned out. "She had good common sense," he would tell a customer who admired the photograph of her that hung in the shop, "a rare thing in a girl these days." And yet lately Sarah had taken to staying out late at night with friends, and spending less and less time around the small apartment that the two of them shared. Harry worried about her, but he made a point of not showing it. She was almost grown up, and in spite of his fears it was time she started looking after herself.

That evening as he faced his daughter over plates of tuna casserole, Harry searched Sarah's face for some sign that she was troubled or had something on her mind. Finally he broke the silence.

"So Sarah, how were your classes today?"

"O.K. Dad, I got a test back. B plus."

"That's good kid, keep it up. What subject?"

"English."

Harry gave a grunt of approval as he put another forkful into his mouth. "Sarah?"

She looked up at him.

"You got any uh...foreign students in your school?" Harry made a vague gesture with his hand.

"Sure, lots of them."

"From where, for instance."
"From all over. France, Italy, Sweden..."
"You got Arabs?"
"Oh Dad, I don't know, probably a few."
There was nothing in her expression that said that she knew the boy who had come to the shop. Harry poked at the food on his plate. He wondered why he didn't simply tell her what had happened. The kitchen seemed full of noise: the hum of the refrigerator, the buzz of the light over the stove, the clink of Sarah's fork.

"Dad?" Sarah continued to eat as she spoke.
Harry looked up at her expectantly.
"I applied for a job in a store."
"A job? Why?"
"Because I could use the extra money."
"You're a student, not a cashier. You don't need money, I can give you money."
"But Dad..." she smiled.
"You listen to me," Harry thought of the smile on the Arab's face. "I don't want you out by yourself so much at night. Sure, you'll get a job, you'll make a little money, and then one night some hoodlum comes and holds you up with a gun. It's bad enough you go out with your friends all the time. You're a student, you should be studying." Harry felt his anger rising uncontrollably. "You gotta learn that this aint no playground, this is the big city. There's wierdo's and perverts all over, and dammit, it aint safe for you to be out all the time."

Harry threw down his fork and went into his bedroom, closed the door and tried to calm down. From the kitchen came the sound of Sarah, putting away the dishes. She sighed softly to herself. Harry listened to her carefully. He hadn't meant to get angry, but the thought of the greasy little Arab had infuriated him. He owed her an apology, he knew that, but as he tried to think of something to say he heard the door to the apartment open and shut, and suddenly he was alone.

The next day, Saturday, Harry spent the morning in the apartment. Because Harry's wife had been a religious woman she didn't like him working on the Sabbath. Instead they had worked out a
compromise. Saturday mornings Harry would accompany her to shul and sit through the service. In return she let him open his shop in the afternoon, because Saturday, he explained, was one of the best days for a business like his, when all the tourists and browsers came out looking for bargains. For almost a year after her death Harry had continued to go to temple every Saturday, simply out of a sense of duty to his wife. But his patience had soon worn thin, and now Harry took Saturday mornings off out of habit, spending the time reading the paper and watching sports on the television.

Sarah had not come back until late Friday night, and was still asleep when, slightly before noon, Harry left for the store. It was a sweet Autumn day, warm and breezy. As he walked, Harry decided to forget about the boy’s visit. Already the image of the dark little Arab in his long coat seemed to him like the memory of some vague dream. In any event, he had told the bastard off but good. Harry took a deep breath. Across the street two boys were playing with a tennis ball, using a broken piece of a two-by-four as a bat. It was a beautiful day, Harry thought, a perfect day for baseball. There was a double header that afternoon, but he had not bothered to buy a ticket. Harry rarely went to the games anymore, although he loved baseball. Maybe if someday he could convince Sarah to go with him. But he never bothered to ask her, he knew she didn’t like sports. As he rounded the last corner before the shop he decided that he would close up early and go home to catch the game on television.

When he arrived the Arab was waiting for him, leaning against the building, eating a street vendor’s hot dog, smothered in sauerkraut. As Harry approached him, the Arab quickly shoved the rest of the hot dog into his mouth.

“You again!” Harry’s face began to redden. “Look, what the hell do you want?”

The Arab swallowed, then spoke. Mr. Birnbaum, I’d like to
talk with you."

"We aint got nothing to talk about. Go away/"

Harry began unlocking the padlock that secured the metal grating over the front of the store.

"Mr. Birnbaum, your daughter is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen."

Harry looked at him suspiciously. "How do you know my daughter?"

"I see her every day."

"Look," Harry pointed one stubby finger at the Arab's chest, "You listen, and listen good. I don't know who you are, and I don't want to know. I don't want you hanging around my daughter. I don't want you hanging around my store. Now, go away."

Without waiting for a reply, Harry turned and went into the store. He made straight for the back area behind the partition and sat at his desk. He rearranged papers for a few moments, then cautiously peered around the corner. He could see through the glass door out into the street, and the Arab seemed to have left. Harry let out a deep breath and pulled out a fresh cigar, placing it calmly and carefully in his mouth, finding just the right angle for it to rest between his teeth. On an impulse he picked up the phone and started to dial his apartment, but as he came to the last digit he replaced the receiver. He could always talk to Sarah later, there was not reason to overreact. He would talk to her at dinner.

But Sarah was not at home when he got back; instead he found a note saying she was having dinner with friends and would be out late. And there was a package for him on the kitchen table. Harry knew what it was, old photographs he had bought from a dealer friend of his in Chicago. Harry brought the package into the living room and turned on the game.

As he stared at the television he found it difficult to concentrate. His mind was on the Arab. Perhaps with such a strange character hanging around the best thing would be to call the police. But there was something so innocent and straightforward in the boy's manner that Harry could not convince himself the boy was a crook. Harry took up the package from beside him and began unwrapping it.
They were old pictures, daguerrotypes, each in an antique frame and separated from the next by a layer of foam padding. Harry spread them out on the coffee table in front of him. There were eleven in all; all of them portraits, either of individuals or of families. They weren't worth much, except as examples of early photography, the subjects were unknown people, lost names. Harry picked one up, a picture of a young woman swathed in loose fitting, exotic clothing, posed absurdly, as though she might at any moment fly away, one arm and one leg awkwardly outstretched, a poorly painted Arabian Nights backdrop providing an absurd setting behind her. In another, a large family stood rigidly at attention, solemn and expressionless, staring out at the camera; the father in bowler hat and suit, weeping walrus moustache and watch chain, the mother in puffy white blouse, her hair pulled back, her round face showing stern, slavic featured.

Harry put the picture down and leaned back. His own father had come to America when he was only fourteen. Harry remembered sitting with his father when he was an old man, and listening again and again to the story, a story which had seemed to give his father more delight each succeeding year he told it. Harry's father had been apprenticed to a blacksmith, and one of the conditions had been that he could not marry until after the apprenticeship had been completed. But he had met Harry's mother, the daughter of a local fish merchant, and fallen in love. He had gone to the merchant one morning to ask for her hand, but the man had refused. In a fit of defiance he had married Harry's mother that afternoon, and the two of them set out for America that night. These days, when Harry tried to remember his father, he could only remember the way he looked to him as an adult; and old white-haired man, his high forehead spotted with age, his glass of schnapps by his hand. Harry looked down at the stern face of the unknown man and his family. Maybe that was what the boy had wanted, his daughter's hand in marriage. Harry chuckled to himself, then began to cough violently. Too many cigars today, he told himself. He stacked the photographs together neatly, turned up the sound on the T.V. and tried to concentrate on the game.

Over the next two weeks Harry did not mention the Arab, but instead let the matter drop. Sarah was spending more and more
time away from the apartment, and Harry didn't want to increase
the gap he felt growing between them by making it seem as though he
were prying into her private affairs. She took the part time job
working evenings at a department store, and Harry saw even less of
her than he had before. They only ate dinner together a few nights
a week because Sarah found it more convenient to go straight from
school to her job rather than come home. Sarah said nothing about
the Arab, and Harry saw no more of him, except once when he
was having coffee in a Chock Full O'Nuts a kid that looked just
like him walked past the window with a large portable radio
balanced on one shoulder. For a moment Harry was sure it was
the Arab, but when the kid, noticing Harry's stare, stopped and
glared back at him through the window, he saw that he was mistaken.

It was a rainy Thursday evening when Harry decided to go
to Sarah's store. The Yankees game had been called on account
of the weather, and he found he had no patience with the book
he was trying to read, a novel about a black detective.
He wandered aimlessly about the apartment neatening things up,
and was just wondering whether he ought to turn on the television
anyway, when he noticed that Sarah's purse was on the coffee
table. He opened it and checked the billfold, carefully
avoiding the other compartments. In it was $43. Harry closed
the purse and put it in his breast pocket, checked the address
of the store in the phone book, then started out the door.

As he waited in the depths of the local subway station,
Harry stamped his feet trying to shake off some of the water
that clung to him. He had left without his umbrella, and
although it was only a block to the subway, he was soaking wet.
He took off his hat and shook water off it. A little way down
the platform, three Hispanic kids stood smoking cigarettes
and joking among themselves. Harry looked at his feet and
tried to rehearse what he would say to Sarah. He imagined
himself lecturing her. "I don't want you wandering about the
city at night with no money or I.D. Think what could happen
to you." Or he could even trick her. He could ask her to loan
him some money for something, and then when she went to look
for her purse he could bring it out. No, that was not what he wanted at all. The sound of the boys speaking away in Spanish kept intruding on Harry's thought's, echoing confusingly off the concrete walls, making it impossible for him to concentrate. From out of the darkness of the tunnel came the soft rumble of an approaching train. Harry put on his hat and stepped closer to the tracks. He was being foolish, he told himself. He would just say he was worried about her not having any money with her, that was all. The train squealed, stopped, and Harry got on.

Harris' was a fairly new department store, four floors high and built with a great deal of plate glass. Harry entered, walked to the rear of the store and stood in front of the triple elevators, gazing at the list above them. He could not seem to remember what department Sarah worked in, although he was certain she had told him. "Cosmetics, lingerie and Children's clothing," seemed a likely candidate, and he pressed the "up" button. The doors opened, and after patting his breast pocket to make sure the purse was still there, Harry stepped onto the elevator.

Harry wandered about the aisles of the store looking for his daughter. One after another likely looking salesgirl turned out not to be Sarah, and Harry began to wonder if perhaps he was in the store, or worse yet, if Sarah had lied to him. Then, in a far corner of "Children's Clothing," he saw her. She was standing with her back to him, talking to someone. Harry made his way toward her. The man she was talking to began to look more and more familiar, and when he was about thirty feet from them, Harry stopped short. It was the Arab, dressed quite well, in a blue jacket and tie. Harry stood and stared for a moment, then passed his eyes intently over the rest of the department as though he were still looking for something. He turned and walked quickly up the aisle.

Harry moved as rapidly as he could toward the elevators. He did not look back. He cursed himself for having come at all,
for butting into Sarah's business. A large middle aged woman
with a little girl blocked his path. The girl, dressed in a
frilly party dress, was crying miserably, while the woman cooed
over how lovely she looked. Harry mumbled an apology as he
pushed between them, keeping his eyes moving around, as though
he were in a great hurry to find something or someone.
He thought he heard his daughter's voice, but pretended not to.
Finally he reached the elevators and pushed the button. Hands
in his pockets, he watched the little glowing button intently,
as though waiting for it to change color or shape. His back
to the rest of the store, he cursed the elevator for being so
slow.

"Dad!" Sarah's voice found Harry's back. Quickly, guiltily,
he turned around.
"I thought I saw you sneaking around. What brings you here?"
Harry stared at her questioning face for a moment, then
began patting at his pockets. He held out her purse. "You
left this..." he said.
She smiled. "Thanks dad, but you really didn't need to
come all the way down here, I could have borrowed subway fare
from someone. From Ahmed."
Harry winced. "Ahmed?"
"Oh, he's the guy I work with. He's really nice." She put
her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. "But thanks
anyway."
"Ahmed."
"What happened Dad, you're soaked. Didn't you bring an
umbrella?"
Harry put one hand under her chin and looked into her eyes.
"You love this boy?" he asked.
"Dad?"
"This Ahmed. You love him?"
"Dad! Of course not. I hardly know him. He just started
working here a few days ago."
Harry looked over at the Arab, who was helping a customer.
He looked up, and for a moment their eyes met, before the Arab, seemingly embarrassed, turned back to the customer.

Harry hugged his daughter to him, and she lay her head against his damp shoulder, like a small child. Slowly, as though somewhere within him a pressure valve had been released, he felt his emotions running together, pouring like liquid out toward his fingertips. And as he held his daughter, he seemed to see himself, framed in a dusty, yellowing daguerrotype.
DANCING WITH MR. PENROSE
At 3:00 a.m. Linc awoke, his face soaked in sweat, his throat dry and sore. As he had done almost every night for three weeks he got up and went in to the kitchen for a glass of water. Toasting his reflection in the mirror on the wall, he let the cool tap water run slowly down his parched throat. The voice rang in his ears. "I'm sorry Linc," it said. "I'm sorry Linc," over and over, maddeningly repetitive, like a skip in a record. He knew it would be a while before he could fall asleep again, if he would be able to at all.

He dressed, grabbed a sportscoat from the closet, not one of the ones furnished by the studio, but an ordinary, beat-up suede jacket he had bought at a second hand clothes shop, and locking the door carefully behind him, left the apartment.

The guys behind the counter at Al's Korner Kitchen were getting to know Linc pretty well by now, or at least as well as Linc wanted them to. Every night he would awaken from the dream and walk the two blocks from his apartment building to the seedy little all-night diner. There he would sit in total anonymity, a cup of coffee and a raspberry danish in front of him, and watch the faces of the people that drifted in out of the night. They made him feel less lonely; in their comings and goings he saw a whole different strata of life, and he found it reassuring. The place was frequented mostly by foreigners, and in fact, Linc had learned, it was owned by two Greek brothers. As far as he could tell, there was no one named Al associated with the diner at all. Al's was not just a hangout: in addition to the regulars there were new faces every night. Linc would sit quietly by the wall and observe, comforted by the thought that other people were awake besides him. They made him feel somehow more human. They made him forget his dream.

In the dream it was always the contestant's fifth game. The fifth game was critical: any contestant who won five games in a row automatically won a new Chevrolet. The contestant
would select a category and Linc would pull the correct card and begin to read the question. Suddenly the producer's voice would boom over the monitors, "I'm sorry Linc, that's the wrong question." So Linc would go on to the next question, but before he finished reading it the voice would come again. They were the right questions, Linc was sure of it, yet every time he tried to read them the voice corrected him. Every night his frustration would grow until he felt he would shout back at the voice that it was wrong, that he was right, but just as he'd open his mouth the phrase would echo again, "I'm sorry Linc." The audience would begin to laugh and Linc, frantic and shaking, would wake up.

Now, even when he was awake, the voice was beginning to stay with him. The funny thing was it was not the voice of the show's real producer, Bob Olaf. Linc had worked with Bob for a long time, and he knew his voice like he knew his own. The voice in his dream was deeper, more resonant, flat toned and deadly serious. It frightened Linc. It was the only thing in his life over which he had no control.

Linc lived alone in a modest, three room apartment. Because he spent little time there he kept no pets. In the hall closet was a roll of wallpaper he had bought when he had first moved in. He had intended to put it up in the bathroom which was painted an ugly dull yellow. But since he very rarely had visitors he had let it go. On the mantle were framed mementos of his career: his first radio operators license, his high school and college diplomas, a picture of himself and the entire production crew of his first television show, a St. Louis based show where viewer's sent in jokes and contestants read them over the air. The show had been called "You gotta laugh," and was a total failure, but it marked the real beginning of Linc's career. And then on the far right, Linc's favorite: his face on the cover of T.V. Guide.

Linc enjoyed the fame that went along with hosting a game show and being recognized wherever he went, but most of all
he enjoyed giving out the prizes. Linc hated to see anyone lose. After each game he would count out the prize money into the winner’s unbelieving hands, crisp new hundred dollar bills, while the audience counted along with him out loud. Linc loved it. It was like Christmastime every day of the year. His show was his whole life, the contestants his best and closest friends. He often received postcards from the ones who won trips, and these he kept in a drawer in his night table, occasionally taking them out to read.

But since the recurring dream, Linc found less and less pleasure in the daily tapings for the show. Each time he read a question he found himself nervously anticipating the voice in the dream. His tenseness was beginning to show: instead of the broad smile that was his trademark, his face began to take on a wrinkled, worried look. After one taping, Bob Olaf had stopped him in the hallway by the water fountain.

"Smile Linc," he had said.

After a moment's hesitation Linc managed a grin.

"Good boy. That's what I like to see. That smile sells advertising spots, and I don't have to tell you how important they are. This is a happy show Linc, remember that, we're giving away money." He patted Linc on the shoulder. "Happy," he said as he walked down the hall, "happy."

But now, as he sat at his usual table in the corner of Al's Korner Kitchen, Linc was far from happy. In fact, he was beginning to fear a nervous breakdown. He took a bite of raspberry Danish and chewed it slowly. The place was empty except for himself and an old woman who sat on the other side of the room, an untouched plate of french fries in front of her. One of the Greek brothers was busy cleaning the grill, humming to himself. A florescent bulb, one of three grouped together on the ceiling, flickered noisily, threatening to give out at any moment.

The door opened and an elderly man strode in. He wore two
sport jackets, one on top of the other. On his head a plaid cap, too large for him, barely managed to hold a shock of grey hair out of his face.

"Ballroom dancing!" he announced. "You're all invited, this Friday night at the Commerce Street lot, building number two." The man spoke as though he were addressing a large crowd instead of the three tired people in the diner.

The owner gestured with his thumb. "Get out of here," he said.

"White tie and tails are suggested, but not required. There will be a limited quantity at the door. Admission is just one dollar, a bargain these days."

"Let's not have trouble. Go on, get out."

"Yes, right, I'll do that. I'd like a cup of coffee please, cream and sugar."

The Greek rubbed his fingers together. "It costs money, you got to pay."

The man gestured toward Linc who was looking down at his coffee, trying not to appear to stare.

"My friend Mr. Dumont will pay for me."

The Greek looked at Linc questioningly. Linc, completely taken back, nodded that he would pay. The stranger seemed harmless, and he knew the owner kept a baseball bat behind the counter in case of trouble.

The man, seeming to take his offer as an invitation, sat down at Linc's table.

"Thanks," he said. "My name's Penrose. Percy Penrose. And you?"

"Linc Landon," said Linc. He wondered if he had made a mistake offering to pay.

"Linc Landon, another nice alliterative name. I'm sorry I called you Dumont, but I had to call you something, and the name Dumont just came to mind. Actually a very good friend of mine named Dumont just died. Probably what made me think of it"
Linc looked at Penrose's face. He didn't seem drunk; to the contrary, his eyes had a clear brightness to them that made him seem very wise. Linc dug into his pants pocket and pulled out two quarters.

"Look, here's fifty cents. Now why don't you take your coffee and move along, O.K. fella?"

"Sure, sure, if that's what you want. I just thought you might want to talk about it."

Linc eyed him suspiciously. "About what?"

"Whatever it is that's keeping you up until all hours of the morning." He smiled.

"Listen Mr. Penrose, that's none of your business. Just be happy I paid for your coffee."

"Of course, I'm sorry." He got up and went to the counter where his cup of coffee was waiting for him, then came back and sat down. "It's just that it's so rarely I get to talk to someone so nicely dressed as you. I sell clothes you know. Nothing special, just what I pick up here and there, I sell to the local neighborhood people. They're all dirt poor, so a pair of pants for a dollar or a shirt for fifty cents is a real bargain for them." He sipped his coffee. "Ugh, foul stuff; I never eat here."

There was silence as Penrose again sipped his coffee. He showed no signs of leaving, and Linc, feeling embarrassed by the silence, and realizing that there was no diplomatic way out of the conversation, finally spoke.

"You have a store?" he asked.

"A store? Well no, not in the usual sense of the word. I have a large empty building that I operate out of. I live at one end, and I store my clothes at the other. In between there's an awful lot of floor space. That is going to be the dance floor." He seemed to grow suddenly excited. "I've borrowed a record player for this Friday night, but I'm hoping to get live music after that. It's a good idea, don't you think? The return of ballroom dancing!" He pronounced the words slowly
and with emphasis, like the title of a movie, or a favorite novel.

Linc wondered if Penrose was drunk. More likely he was senile. "It sounds like a great idea," he said.

"You know Linc, you don't mind it if I call you Linc? There's only so much time, and there's so much I want to do. It's frustrating to think about it. Well, I have to go, I have to spread the word about the dance." He stood up and tipped his checked cap to Linc, revealing a head of long, unruly white hair. "Thanks for the coffee," he said. He turned and strode out of the diner.

Linc looked around him. The old woman sat staring at her french fries, still untouched. The Greek behind the counter caught his glance and made a circular motion with his finger around his temple.

"Crazy," he said.

Linc went back to his apartment and slept fitfully the rest of the night.

The next night Linc again woke in a sweat, the deep voice echoing in his head. That day he had made an appointment to see a psychiatrist, but it was not for another two weeks and Linc was not sure he could last that long. Wide awake yet feeling totally drained, he made his way to Al's. He had not even had a chance to order when Penrose came in.

"Linc," he said, "I thought you might be here."

"Hi," said Linc. Penrose had on three jackets and a wool cap. He looked, Linc thought, like a contestant trying to get on the show.

"Listen, I don't want you to get the impression I'm a bum or anything. Let me buy you a cup of coffee, O.K?"

Linc nodded. "O.K., sure." Although he felt that Penrose dressed and acted very strangely he found he was glad to see him. He watched as he bought them two cups of coffee, paying with a fistful of change, mostly pennies. For all his eccentricity, Linc did not think Penrose was a bum, and with the
memory of his dream still fresh in his mind, he was glad to have someone to talk to.

"So Linc," said Penrose as he slid a cup of steaming coffee over the table to him, "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm in television," said Linc. It was his usual reply, and more often than not the person to whom he spoke would recognize him. He waited for Penrose to squint up his eyes and try to remember where he had seen him before.

"Television?" he said. "I'm afraid I don't watch much, no electricity you see. Although I have recently bought a small generator. Television, that's good. I used to be in radio myself, though you're probably too young to remember me. I had a talk show, interviews, news, book reviews, just about anything you can think of.

Linc looked carefully at Penrose's creased face for a sign that he was joking. He saw none. "That's very interesting Mr. Penrose."

"Thank you." The skin around his eyes wrinkled up tightly when he spoke, making him appear to squint. An ambulance drove by outside, its flashing red light filling the little diner briefly. Linc did not really believe Penrose. But at the same time it occurred to him that Penrose might not believe him either.

"Interesting did you say? Well I suppose I am fairly interesting, if being interesting means being different."

He began coughing. Linc waited patiently until he was through.

"These damn lungs," he said when he stopped, "comes from living in a damp area."

"You should move."

Penrose drained his cup and stood up. "Oh I couldn't do that. I'm happy right where I am."

"Are you leaving?" asked Linc.

"That's right. You be sure and come to my dance. Here," he searched the pockets of his outermost jacket and produced a small card. "This is my address. I'll see you there." He placed the card on the table and left the diner.
Linc's dream did not go away. The next three nights he awoke as always, the voice echoing in his head, his body trembling. Each night he went to Al's and sat for a while over coffee. Penrose did not come in. Linc thought of asking one of the Greek brothers about him, but neither of them seemed very friendly, and they spoke very little English. He was beginning to fear for his health and his job. After one day's taping Bob Olaf came up to him:

"Linc," he said, "is there something the matter?"

For a moment, Linc had considered telling him everything, about the dream, how he couldn't sleep. But he caught himself. He smiled, "Everything's fine, Bob," he said.

"Because I notice you're having some trouble with the cards lately. Not having trouble with your eyes, are you?"

Linc shook his head.

"O.K." Bob patted Linc's shoulder. "I'll see what I can do about getting some larger print on those things, O.K."


Friday evening Linc sat up alone in his apartment watching an old movie on the television. He was tired, dead tired, he couldn't remember the last time he had slept. The fact that he had made it through another work week comforted him, but at the same time he was unnerved. He had the whole weekend to relax, to try and get some sleep. But the prospect of sleep and the recurring dream frightened him. Still he found himself drifting off, unable to concentrate on the movie. He thought he would like to call someone, but he could think of no one whom he really wanted to speak to. He needed to escape his apartment, to ward off sleep. Then he remembered Penrose's invitation. Rummaging around in his wallet he found the card. The address was about twenty blocks away. Linc put on a jacket, locked his apartment, took the elevator down and started walking.

He had no trouble finding the Commerce street lot; it took up an entire block. It was just a lot of open space with three long, warehouse-type buildings in the center. Piles of rubble and building materials were strewn around, as well as heaps of
garbage. The sound of children's voices echoed in the dimly lit street. Linc could see no sign of life from within the buildings; they seemed deserted. He put his hands in his pockets and walked to the nearest building. The entrance was boarded up, but above the doorway was a metal plate with the number "1" on it. Penrose's card said building number two. He kicked a rusted can and walked to the next building.

There were lights on in building two, and the door was open. Linc stepped inside. It was as Penrose had described it, one enormously long room with a corrugated metal roof. There was no one in sight. The room had been decorated: bright colored streamers hung from the ceiling and clusters of balloons were taped to the walls. Along the right-hand wall a small table had been set up with six or seven bottles of soda and a stack of paper cups. A large cardboard box sat directly inside the entrance. Linc looked into it and saw that it was full of clothes. He reached in and pulled out a jacket. It was the top to a tuxedo, the old fashioned kind, with tails. He put it aside and poked around some more in the box: all the clothes in it were formal.

"Hello!" called a voice from the other end of the hall. Linc looked up and saw that it was Penrose.

"Go ahead, try them on; glad you could make it!" Penrose strode the length of the hall, arm outstretched and shook Linc's hand. "I'm afraid you're the first," he said. He was dressed up very elegantly, in white tie and tails, a pair of recently polished black dancing pumps on his feet.

"Go ahead, try something on! Here," he reached into the box and pulled out a jacket, "this ought to fit you nicely. Now take off that jacket and try it on. There," he stood back and watched approvingly as Linc slipped his arms into the jacket, "like a glove. Would you like some cola?"

Linc shook his head. "No thanks. I was just passing by." The tuxedo was tight on him and made it difficult to move his
arms. "Do you expect many people?"

"Of course! No one likes to arrive early, but I imagine things will be picking up soon enough. Let me put on some music." On the floor by the left wall was a small phonograph with a cord running out the window above it. Next to the phonograph was a box of records. They were 78's. Penrose chose one and put it on.

"Glen Miller," he said as the music echoed raspily in the huge room. "I always thought he was the best." He did a few short steps in the middle of the floor, then turned to Linc. "So what do you think of my home?"

"It's nice," said Linc.

"It is, isn't it," said Penrose. "It's too bad really."

"What is?"

"They're tearing it down, all of it. They're building a convention center on this lot."

"A convention center?"

"Yes, you know, for conventions. They start work Monday."

Linc looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's all right; I don't mind." He gestured toward the far end of the room. In the corner were a desk and a small bookcase. A cot, folded up, leaned against the wall. "As long as it's just us, would you like to see my albums?" asked Penrose.

"Yes," said Linc. "I'd like that very much."

They sat together in the corner of the huge hall and paged slowly through Penrose's albums. There were newspaper clippings, yellowed with age, some about Penrose, some about friends of his, some even written by him. And there were photographs, hundreds of them. Penrose lovingly explained each clipping, each photo, and Linc listened. A small calico cat wandered into the hall and climbed into Linc's lap, where it curled up and fell asleep. Occasionally Penrose would get up and select another 78,
carefully wiping the dust off it with his handkerchief.
An hour passed and no one came to the dance.

The last and most recent album was mostly a collection of obituaries of old friends and acquaintances of Penrose. Linc was amazed that anyone could know so many people. Abruptly, Penrose closed the book and stood up.

"It's midnight, and I have a bottle of some champagne I've been saving for far too long. Would you care to join me Mr. Landon?"

Linc also stood up. The cat mewed and hopped to the floor.
"Certainly, Mr. Penrose."

"Good." He reached into the bottom drawer of the desk and brought out an old, dusty bottle. "I've had this kicking around for years now. I just hope it's still good. Paper cups all right with you?" He got up and walked to the table. His footsteps echoed noisily in the empty hall.

"Where will you go?" asked Linc.

"After they start building? Oh I don't know, I'll find someplace."

"Why don't you take an apartment, or move into a hotel?"

"Those are two rather expensive options."

"I could lend you the money."

Penrose came back with two paper cups and handed one to Linc. "I'd rather not. I'm too old to start owing money to people. I found this place, I'll find another." He peeled the foil off the bottle and, pointing it away from him, he popped the cork. It flew high in the air, banging against the metal roof. The cat jumped.

"What a wonderful sound," said Penrose. He poured champagne into both their cups. "Well," he said looking around him, "it looks as though no one came to my dance."

"I did," said Linc. He touched his cup to the old man's and drank.
"It's good stuff, isn't it?" asked Penrose.
"You wouldn't have to owe me anything," said Linc. "It could be a gift. It's no trouble for me."
He looked around, embarrassed. "I'm pretty rich."
"Mr. Landon," said Penrose, when you get to be my age, the gifts start to mean less and less. It's the people who count. It's been years since I had champagne, what do you say we finish this bottle?" He held up his cup in toast. "Mr. Landon?" he said.
"Mr. Penrose?"
As the two friends drained their cups, Linc listened gratefully to the silence.