

Praised be Moloch, Blessed be The Seraphim

1.

Was the time yet ripe for reckoning? Was it yet meet, now that, seated in the airline coach heading home towards the city terminal, I was again traversing familiar terrain with its wide roads, green embankments, scattered houses and storage sheds recessed at slight remove from the freeway? Could I yet make sense of all the Harveys of the world, or the Lucilles, or Josephines, Irvings, or Justines — could I? — all of them fired by such aberrations in their metabolism, as Adam called it, that the motions of tadpoles in swamps could be deemed orderly by comparison? And what of my own chemistry that had so boiled at times, so simmered at others, bubbling, bubbling, bubbling over in the reaching for. . . was it status? was it honour? the foiling of anonymity? . . . dared I say it? — fame?

And what reaching! . . . Ah, vanity! . . . What reaching; such reaching leading me, as if inevitably, to New York, both driven there and drawn, an iron-filing obedient to the stubborn laws of magnetism that shamed all notions of freedom and mocked all convictions that a man's hands and body and thoughts were the agents solely and wholly of his own untrammelled will. I may have wavered — indeed, did waver — teetering at the point where like and unlike polar forces balanced out each other, however finely, where I may still have elected to stay at home. But Adam's letter settled it all. Adam's letter was the added

charge that gave spur to action. For now I had a place to stay, and a companion, and a guide — a chaperon, as it were, who, in that Big Apple, Big A, would steer me towards that grand Eden that was home to recognition, acceptance and literary fame.

So, in accelerated, exhilarated haste, through night-hours pilfered from sleep, I completed my last assignment — an in-depth four-part analysis of poverty, unemployment and vagrancy in Melbourne's inner suburbs for *The Age* — left the headache of printable perfection to stubbled myopic "Blue Pencil" Jurgens, bought my ticket to New York; bought, too, the *Michelin* guide to that *New Colossus*, secured a list of literary agents the length of Madison Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street, packed six copies of my *In Search, the Salvation* among my shirts, and, having rung around town to farewell assorted friends, ascended on a Sunday morning into the grey cumulus clouds of Melbourne's April Autumn to descend twenty-four hours later, with the calendar date unchanged, through the smog-invested sun-tinted cirrus formations of Los Angeles' temperate Spring.

Here I lingered three days, concession to the long-jawed dismay of a native Californian, a huge, signet-ringed entrepreneur from Pasadena who had boarded the flight in Tahiti, promptly announced "The name is Brett C.Halliday, Sonny, what is yours and what is your destination?", and who, when I told him, boomed with mock-shocked incredulity, "You mean you are flyin' all o' them there thousands of miles to our mighty Americas and whiskin' across the West Coast like it weren't there, it bein' in truth a mighty repository of action and nerve and hills the envy of Grand Olympus an' bein' too a mos' glorious pantheon of movie gods and goddesses to turn your Zeus and Aphrodite of yesteryear a bilious green? O Lordie, for this, John Steinbeck, for this, King Kerouac, for this, Jimmie Dean, you spilled out your very innards? At least, see Disneyland, Sonny, or Universal! Pay homage to the golden past and the goldener future, and learn to smile, an' to breathe like your shoulders they were free, an' to reach, an' grasp, an' fulfil your every dream!"

And I did pay homage to that past and to that future, unable,

in Disneyland, to do ought *but* smile, *but* breathe freely as I visited singing bears and antediluvian creatures, as I rode on Caribbean waters and walked through haunted mansions, the while reaching — if not for dreams, then for the forgetfulness of the real — as winsome guides lavishing breezy spearminted all-American courtesy led me with a consort of polyglot, poly-chromatic, polyclad others, through quaint, multicoloured, miniature villages, squares, plazas and walkways with a bubbly confidence and prodigious optimism that ignored — or denied — under the Frontierland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland sun, those realities of circumscribed time and place, the squalor, park-benches, the commission-flats and the tenth-storey desperation I had but recently, back in Melbourne, explored.

And if, on leaving Disneyland, it was its happy buoyancy that made its clearest impact upon me, at Universal Studios, it was the awesome thrust of technology that struck me most; technology which, still in its diapered infancy back home, could here so ingeniously dispense illusion, fantasy and thrall in a cinematic sweep that spanned millennia of history from primeval Creation through present-day apocalypses to intergalactic wars centuries beyond contemporary man's allotted time. My response may have been hyperbolic, true — but as I flew on to New York across the breadth of that craggy, canyoned, sierraed, prairied and savannahed leviathan that was America three days behind schedule, an importuning notion burgeoned to the surface and gathered form, rapping at my awareness until, with the ecstasy of climax, I sealed it with indelible ball-point in my travel-notes, and therefore permanently: "If it is unthinkable, America shall think it; if it is improbable, America shall solve it; if it is impossible, yet shall America achieve it." And in the words of that folksy hail-fellow-well-met Californian, now probably creating stage and movie stars out of hopefuls back home in Pasadena, my shoulders were free and my hands prepared to reach, to grasp, and to possess whatever there was of experience that New York — New York! — in its mooted bountifulness had to offer.

2.

I had cabled Adam from Los Angeles, detailing my change of flight, but, on alighting at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport and making my way through its long white-bright illuminated tunnels to the arrival hall, Adam was nowhere in sight. Japanese, Mexicans, Polynesians, Germans and Scandinavians there were in plenty, and Southerners, mid-Westerners, Texans and Bostonians as well, but the sole Australian upon whom I depended wholly appeared to have defaulted. No message awaited me on the letter-rack nor could the uniformed clerk at the Information Counter, for all her large-eyed broad-mouthed affability, offer particular assistance, except to suggest that there had been rolling strikes and go-slows among the country's services and "your message, sir, might be a-hibernatin' or growin' hairs someplace between one gran' sea-board an' th'other."

I telephoned Adam's apartment, then the hospital where he worked, but, not yet initiated into American improvisations of Alexander Bell's contribution to ease of communication nor into its coinage jargon of quarters, dimes, nickels and cents, I suffered the line to expire three separate times before, daunted and short of silver, I retreated, and turned, to find myself confronted by the plaintive pixie-chinned face of an underfed Puerto Rican who pointed at my case and travel-bags and urged, "Take you anywheres, sir, taxi's a-waitin' at your service — Manhattan, Brooklyn, Long Island, Bronx — and direct, sir, and cheap, and on the level. . ."

"Direct" included a concluding unsolicited tour through the crowd-congested maze of downtown Manhattan with the meter ticking, ticking, ticking over, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five dollars; "cheap" was the final outlay of forty dollars, gratuity not to be denied the now-livewire driver who carried my case into the foyer of Adam's apartment-block as if favours were free; while "on the level" was, as Adam later put it, "an easy buck ripped off the hide of an Antipodean sucker".

It was the janitor who shambled to the security door when I

pressed the buzzer to Adam's apartment. A latter-day Methuselah, perhaps handsome a happy half-century before, he was now bald, bowed and bossed where bone or edge or knuckle could be bossed, and dressed, despite the twenty-six degree warmth, in two shabby hand-knitted sweaters, a frayed lumber-jacket — too massive now and too loose — and grease-stained corduroys held at the waist by cords of twisted twine.

"Huh," he said huskily when I identified myself. "The vagabond hi'self that the Doc upstairs's been waitin' for these three'em days. He said you mighta be a-comin' an' I set to thinkin' already that mebbe New York was so small a mite on the map you mighta never a-find it or you mighta blinked on your way over it."

He paused, then turned.

"Well, now that you're here, all said an' done," he said, "let's be ringin' for th'Doc in th'hospital an' tell him his buddy he's a-found his way to hell after all."

Adam arrived an hour later, lumbering up to the entrance where, returned from a circuit of the local neighbourhood streets, I waited for him, Adam, a veritable bear with a rich black Einsteinian mane, clapping my shoulder for having facilitated his deliverance from an "interminably-flatulent seminar on neuro-transmitters in the pathogenesis of schizoid disorders" or, as he put it, "what makes the banana split?", his own contribution having been a paper entitled *Behavioural changes in rats following the administration of lysergic acid diethylamide* — "LSD to the uninitiated," he added.

On entering Adam's eighth-floor apartment, Adam said, "Thought you'd never come, mate; thought you'd probably run off with some fleshy dark-haired Tahitian dream-dispensing maiden and done a Gauguin."

Once within, I yielded to his massive arm about my shoulders.

"New York, man," he said, "New York's not quite like home base, *amigo*. Melbourne, St.Kilda, Carlton, those old terrific haunts of ours. . . How I remember them still! Their aura, their taste, their smells, those odd-balls we used to know, the

girls. . . But, man, New York! New York! God, how I love it here! I love it! I love it! For a writer like yourself. . . the material! And what a massive magnificent laboratory for the scientist! Man! . . . Man! . . .”

He then released his grasp and became at once more practical.

“Now, Jules, m’boy, if you shower off the dust of travel, get yourself a nap and change, you’ll spend your first Big A evening in the company of real unadulterated authenticated genu-*ine* New Yorkers!”

I showered, napped and changed, grateful for the respite from travel; then with Adam ate a light dinner in a local smoky Third Avenue restaurant and, come eight, set off uptown along Madison Avenue which Adam called “the showcase of the eastern board” with its banks and art galleries, antique-shops and boutiques, and turned into Sixty-Seventh Street to enter a sandstone town-house with iron-lace balconies on which white flowers and pot-plants were faintly illuminated by light issuing from within.

3.

Were I now — returning to the city terminal in the airline coach — to seek reasons for my quicksilver tumbling for Josephine on that, my first, evening in New York, I had to ascribe it in goodly part to a scrambling of my chemistry. There were no two ways about it. That was certainly how Adam would have put it. The Boccherini she played on her cello was tantalising enough in its tremolos and cadenzas, stirring chill and goosepimples down the length of my spine; but more basically still, if asked, I should have had to say that I simply liked the look of her — so poised, so alluring in red, with lush black hair, puckered lips and a finely-curving nose that recalled a Venus or Aphrodite or some other Grecian goddess; though, if truth were to be honoured, I should have had to give equal due to an excess of Scotch, to the surfeit of new spirited highly mobile faces, to the high-flying conversations, the poetry read,

and the art contained within that plushly-resplendent velveted town-house to which, through Adam, through his American uncle Ziggy Levick, I had been invited to one of his regular *soirees*.

And yet, were even these explanations sufficient? As a visitor from Australia, that vestigial appendage at the nether rump of the world, I could well have sat out the evening as a mere onlooker under canvasses of Miro and Kandinsky, or moved from Mexican ceramics to Nigerian masks, or studied Peruvian tapestries and Japanese woodcuts, or simply disappeared, a faceless face in Riesman's faceless crowd, in that luxurious merry nest of mahogany and velvet and silk and faultless chrome.

But Adam, first, then Ziggy Levick, gracious host, collector, photography-buff, raconteur, dilettante sculptor, amateur flautist, patron of the arts and antique-dealer, sleek and suave in immaculate beige, presented me as a brilliant budding author from "Melborrne Ohstralia come". Like flies to honey, they approached me then, those other faces in the crowd, offered me savouries, nuts and more wine, and opened all manner of conversation with me — Harvey Farber, Justine Ledoux, Madame Zara, Bertram Braun, Mick and Elaine Persip — a pick of poets, psychologists, cartoonists, astrologers, actors and clairvoyants, each in turn asking, offering, in a vigorous procession:

"How long are you honouring these venerated shores for? . . ."

"Tell you my life story an' you'll have a rip-roarin' best-seller on your hands. . ."

"Say, have yous folks in yer own home town heard of the Maharishi an' macrobiotics an' bioenergetic analysis? . . ."

"You're a Scorpio? You don't say! What a propitious, most wonderful time for you to have shown. . ."

"Me, I'm into Gestalt, into awareness. . . Theo here, he's strictly Freudian, incorrigibly, stubbornly paleolithic, man. . ."

"You'll love our show in the Village. . . French *avant-garde*. . . Even beyond Artaud. . ."

"Here's the name of my agent, m'boy. . . Phone him about

your book tomorrow. Tell him Harvey sent you. He's a good man, Laurie P. Hoffnung. Published fifteen of my books. And not afraid to lend a hand to rising stars. . ."

"Stay clear of Harvey, Jules. Beware the man who brings his wife to a party, but clings throughout the evening to his mistress. A man like that can kill if it suits him. His own mother wouldn't be safe. . ."

"Our very own Nostradamus and Cassandra rolled into one. Don't mind Irving. Once, it was the humblest scribe who rose to be prophet. Today, it's the professor of sociology."

It was Josephine who had spoken, come nearer to Irving and myself with a bacardi in her hand.

"Laugh, Josephine, dulcet nymph of the forest," Irving returned, "but pray that your laughter doesn't sour into bitters."

He turned away then, suddenly dark with temper as he looked first at Harvey and Justine talking in a group near the bar, then at Lucille, who, thin and morose and dressed in black, stood alone in a corner.

"Lucille loves Harvey, Harvey loves Justine, Justine loves Harvey, and Irving, in a dearly paternal way, cares for Lucille. But Harvey and Lucille are man and wife; Justine is divorced; and Irving, poor Irving, suffering Irving, is still in mourning for his own dear, beloved, departed wife. Do you want me to say that again?"

The red silk blouse Josephine wore set off her earlier intensity and, away from the cello, she was freer, sprightlier, certainly gayer. Fine royal-blue veins lined her hands and a mole sprouted hairs above her wrist.

"A clue to my nature," she said then, catching my gaze. "Dark, cool and prickly."

She was, as it proved, none of these, but her remark did serve as good a gambit to conversation as any.

By evening's unwinding, I felt I had her measure. I knew the population of her hometown Utica in Upstate New York, I had established that her father was a construction engineer and her mother a librarian, while she herself played cello with the New

York Philharmonic Orchestra. She owned, also, to an incorrigible craving for cherry nougat, had soft spots for Ray Charles and Dave Brubeck, baulked before the wordiness of the nineteenth-Century Russians, and confessed to a half-baked notion to enter a commune, "the modern-day alternative to a nunnery", where, surrounded by gardens and orchards, she would just play, play, play, and make music to her heart's fullest delight.

"But there's no risk of that," she aded, momentarily mock-regretful. "I'm really too ordinary, too apple-pie for such eccentricities. Besides, my full name if it must be told is Josephine Hay Fever Lewisohn. I sneeze ten miles from the nearest blade of wildgrass."

For my part, I told her what there was to tell about Melbourne, about my book, my journalistic pieces, about Los Angeles fantasy-broking, the Kennedy Airport ecumenism, and of my impressions, however raw, of Madison Avenue cornucopia. And in the telling, I was glad, I was delighted, I was impatient to tell.

"You must give me your book to read," she had also said, "you must, unless of course, it's top-heavy Tolstoyan."

That registered deeply within me, but more resonating still and accompanying me like a refrain on my return from the soiree with Adam was Josephine's invitation to the rehearsal at the Avery Fisher Hall the next morning where she would be among the cellos with Zubin Mehta conducting and Barenboim at the piano performing Beethoven's *Emperor*.

"Of course, you may have better things to do," she said with an affecting coquettish raising of an eyebrow, "Lord knows, you have only just arrived. But. . ."

I caught that "But", a solitary word suspended like an orphaned feather floating in mid-air, and eagerly, perhaps too eagerly, declared, "I'll be there", aware, even then, that not they, those two solar and lunar luminaries Mehta and Barenboim, were exerting the greater magnetism, but rather the single humbler gentler star that would be found, shining with her own radiance, among the cellos.

"A colourful lot, those folk, certainly an accomplished crowd," I felt compelled to say to Adam on walking back.

"Yes," Adam had answered. He smiled, though it was an almost ironic smile that I caught. "But what colours would you say, mate? What shades of colours?"

"Oh?"

"Jules. You don't know it. Having but today arrived, how can you know it? But each one there, man, is in search of some private redemption. Like all New Yorkers. Some through analysis, others through Gestalt, deep breathing and primal therapy, or through psychodrama, astrology, infatuation with youth, and through yoga, pop art, Zen, health food and drugs. . . New York is full of it. . . You only have to name it. . . What you call colourful, man, dear Jules, dear babe in the wood, what you call colourful is in reality fumbling, insecurity, groping, experiment, seeking, straining, striving. . . It is also agonising, however it may seem outwardly. And if so soon after your arrival, I may take it upon myself to warn you, then remember one thing, Jules, even if you remember nothing else. . . Whatever your temptations, you are in this megapolis as a visitor, as a writer, as an observer. Don't become involved. With anyone, Jules. In anything. Anywhere. Right? Is the message clear? *C'est compris?*"

4.

I did not attend the Mehta-Barenboim rehearsal the next day. Not so much in deference to Adam's unsolicited counsel; less still, far less on account of my horoscope which I read with wry and leisurely amusement over breakfast and which cautioned me, as a Scorpio, "to rationalise and analyse situations rather than act on impulse", contrary to Madame Zara who, rouged, mascaraed, beringed and besotted, had urged me to seize at opportunity; but simply because at the hour of the rehearsal, directly cross-town from the Avery Fisher Hall, in East Sixty-Fifth Street, I was sitting opposite Laurence P. Hoffnung with briefcase in my lap, my *In Search, the Salvation* on the desk

between us, and Hoffnung himself, large, balding and double-chinned above a skewed broad polka-dot tie, cleaning his nails with the point of a letter-opener.

"So, Harvey Farber sent you," he said, looking up with almost bemused scrutiny from beneath thick daunting eyebrows. "Everyone's friend is Harvey, all heart. Every writer, every novice, every hack he tells, 'Go, see Laurence P. Now he'll pull something out of the hat for you.' And you, dear friend, you too have a book to sell, hm, something to offer America that America cannot produce itself, hm? Is that it?"

I edged the book closer to him.

"The stories here are. . .," I began; but Hoffnung, leaning back and crossing a massive leg over a massive thigh, did not permit me to finish.

"The stories, the book, I'm sure they're good. Else why bother at all to bring them to these shores? But friend, friend, have you yet visited our bookstores here — Scribner's, say, or Doubleday, or Dalton's, Barnes and Noble? Do! And then ask, where do you fit in? On which shelf? Which section — *Literature* or *Fiction*, *A to Zee*?"

The distinction had me momentarily, but only momentarily, perplexed.

"Fiction," I said. "No, literature."

Hoffnung offered me a cigar, which I declined, took one himself, and smiled; smiled, I could see, with the smile of a guardian of Hades.

"Yes," he said, pausing to light his cigar. "Yes. . . Literature with a mighty big capital 'L'."

He paused again, this time to draw still more deeply on his cigar while he looked me over.

"You're an ambitious young man, aren't you, and hankering after immortality what's more, and come to this modern Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Golgotha to find it. For, where else if not in New York in our day and in our age can a man most surely find it? . . . But, man, but friend, are you prepared to defy the maelstrom out there? That mass? Fly in the face of the fickleness out there, hm? For what the public wants, even here,

worthy friend, even here in this greatest most erudite most spectacular advanced articulate sophisticated sublimest of nations is sensationalism, the quickie, the living-by-proxy, the self-help manual, the throwaway. The most literate here has no time to think, he has no inclination to feel what others — what you, let us say — may feel. He is slave to his own sensations and needs; his is the wish for diversion and for escape from himself, which, to make it *kosher*, he calls self-discovery, through pap novels, encounter groups, mysticism, pop Hasidism, Op art, just name a few. . . And this is where Harvey comes in. He gives it all to them. He's got thirteen, fourteen, fifteen titles out there — *How to Control Depression through Zen*, *Sensitivity Training in the Kitchen*, *A Beginner's Guide to ESP*, *The Daughters of the Virgin*, *Love in Marriage*, a most lovely title, don't you think, and surely a *piece de resistance* in the light of his own. . . — how shall we say it? — of his own marital *contretemps*, perhaps? And in their way, they are all trash, *mon ami*, every goddamned word — though I trust you not to breathe a word of this to him. But if you've got suckers in the *suk*, in the market-place out there, then you must give them something to suck at, no? And Harvey, everyone's friend, everyone's sustainer, he knows what to give. He has a surefire instinct for it. So he gives. And of course — why deny facts? — on the strength of his succession of *chefs d'oeuvre*, we can both bask in the Bahamas at least three months of every year and. . .”

I must have winced, or betrayed a flitting gesture of disgust, or given him cause for pause, for he did pause, long enough to draw again on his cigar, the tip of which glowed like a cinder, and to exhale slowly a billow of smoke with renewed studied scrutiny.

“Ah, but you are an Antipodean innocent, I see, a purist, and I see too that I sorely offend your sensibilities. I ought to have known. *Mea culpa*! Because, for you — how I should have seen it! — for you, higher than anything rises the pedestal of art, of authenticity, integrity. It is these you worship! It is before these that you bend the knee. Or, even though you speak of literature in capitals, is it nonetheless something else as well? — The wish

for recognition, perhaps, the need for a name? Redemption through fame as our own good noble embattled New Yorkers seek it through God or godlessness, catharsis or marihuana, in Jews for Jesus or Hare Krishna, in baseball and astrology, in street-marches or in desperate daredevilry. Oh, man, man, man! New York, Jules, America, is too big for a book such as this and perhaps, perhaps — I dare say it even though I have not read it — not even worthy of it. Permit me, as a friend who would dearly wish you well, to tender the most well-meant advice. Listen. Stay in this city a week, two, three even, visit the Museum, the Met, the Rockefeller Center, Broadway, Liberty Island, Carnegie Hall, Central Park, even find yourself a girl to rub your back or whatever, and then go home. Be a big fish in your own home pond. For here you will be a mere snowflake; here, before you begin even to touch anyone, you will disappear."

I left Hoffnung with little warmth of charity towards the man, even though, against expectation, he, as agent, had finally taken the book, leafed through it nonchalantly, studied isolated passages, and said, "Well, let me read it at least, and if I can help. . ." Ailing to be outside, I was caught off-guard by Hoffnung's acceptance of the volume for perusal, and it was only when I stepped through the broad swivel door into the glinting morning sunlight that touched window, touched pavement, and touched car and awning in an assault of glare, that I sensed, acutely, resentfully, and not without ears burning, that the agent, the large, gross, corpulent Laurence P. Hoffnung had made easy sport of me.

But done was done, and if cursing was to cure rancour, I knew that such curses were most justly to be turned not upon Hoffnung, nor even on Harvey Farber, everyone's friend, but on myself, myself, myself alone.

5.

If my self-esteem had been rocked a little by my encounter with Hoffnung, it did regain a measure of poise as, heading, late as it

was, towards the Avery Fisher Hall, I anticipated meeting with Josephine once more. I might have had to eat humble pie for missing the rehearsal in breach of promise made, but a well-planned jest would, I held, surely offset all reproach. It was companionship I sought, another's ear and another's voice, these being a proven antidote to past disappointments and frequent enough dejections. Adam was at the hospital, Thursdays being particularly duty-laden; so I could scarcely have gone to him. But Josephine, if she was as open and reasonable as she seemed to be, would surely forgive, if indeed, such dishonour of a promise as casual as mine were anything to forgive. Besides, might she yet offer more of herself? All of herself?, as already in my nocturnal fantasies after our encounter she had wholly done, and done with what exquisiteness of submission. The resurgent image of her coquettish air, her pelvis, her thighs and crotch were tantalising enough, but the possibility of abandonment to the actuality of it all. . . Ah, the profligacy of it! . . The consummation! . . The ecstasy of conquest! . . Lordie! Lordie! Dared I fly so high? And expect? Hope? As Hoffnung had said, hope to have her rub my back or whatever? . .

Josephine did, of course, forgive, adding — with the faintest playful mockery, and, I sensed, a hint of bitterness, that she had known sinners far greater than I.

"One such misfeasant, a veritable idol while things lasted, became *bete noire*," she said. "But we really ought to leave skeletons in their cupboards, don't you agree?"

I dared to let myself believe that she was even glad to see me, first as she emerged at the tail-end of a group of musicians from the auditorium, then as we ate pastrami on rye at a deli near Columbus Circle. Again dressed in red — this time in a black-bordered dress as opposed to the ruffle-yoked blouse of the evening before — and sporting a broad crimson band around her hair, her youthfulness was all the more enhanced, although I did see the beginnings of a future angularity in her cheeks and chin.

"Just as well you didn't come to rehearsal," she said, sipping at her coffee from which hot steam was rising, then licking her

lips, "you would have heard only blunder after blunder from me. Poor Zubin, I must be the greatest bane and despair of his precious life. But what he doesn't know is that I am saving perfection for the main event, so that he'll be able to say, 'Move over, Casals, Rostropovitch, Jacqueline du Pre. Josephine Lewisohn Stradivari is here.'"

In turn, I told her of my meeting with Hoffnung, glad to unburden myself of him.

"That's Laurie P. all right," Josephine said. "People say he has a fish-tank of eels in his home. He likes to spend hours watching them wriggle and writhe. But against Harvey Farber's Mr Hyde, Laurie P. is still only a most benign Mr Jeckyll. That's what Irving calls them. Jeckyll and Hyde. You do remember Irving, don't you? Bereaved, bereft, beleaguered Irving. . ."

"And Harvey, he's so bad?"

"Harvey? Ha! I bantered Irving last night, you will also recall. Called him Nostradamus, called him Cassandra. But he really does know what's what. And as he would say, 'Beware the man who comes up too quickly in the world.' Harvey's that man. He's certainly been good news for Laurie P., has Harvey, but more than Harvey has made Laurie P., Laurie P. has made Harvey. Imagine a dish-washing street-corner SoHo poet turned into a near-millionaire simply by touching people where they are most vulnerable — in their image of themselves, their self-perceptions of inadequacy, in their drive to find 'wholeness', 'success', 'acceptance', 'self-love', 'assertiveness' — all of which are offered by our very Harv where they fail to get them from their own private analysts. So he can now trim his once-straggly mane to M.G.M. respectability; his suits, earlier bought at some Lower East Side stall for a song, he can now order custom-made from Charivari's; his shoes are the finest from Gucci's; and never mind his Jaguar and Porsche and his retreats in the Catskills and the Bahamas. While against all this. . . Over and against all this stands Lucille. . . Poor Lucille. . ."

"Oh?"

"A *magna cum laude* in English from N.Y.U., rising rungs above the very best of Harvey's other itsy-bitsy frizzle-frazzles. They have no children. Her family's in Illinois. She dresses in nothing but black, and remains stiff-neckedly unwilling, and unable, to let go of him against every effort by all of us — myself, Ziggy, the Persips, others — by all of us to have her leave. While Irving, however deep he may be in his own grieving, would take her in a blinking. . . would take her for the asking. . ."

Whatever shadows of seriousness had weighed upon her now lifted into a finer sunniness, in which she tossed her head, smiled, rose, and straightened her dress.

"Whatever must you think of me?" she said. "You've come half the world to see Paradise and all I offer is cattiness and a descent into other people's hell. . . But, you are a writer, so maybe I can be excused. For, surely, surely, there is a story in all this, is there not? Or are all these folks' agonisings and perplexities and tide-tossed lives to no purpose at all in fact, that not even a writer can serve as witness and interpreter and giver of meaning to what is otherwise seemingly meaningless mayhem? . . ."

She flicked a wrist, the better to dispel the clouds making ready to descend again.

"But now, if you will forgive me, I must run. More sonorities to punish from my hallowed *violoncello molto resonante e exquisito*. So, tell me, will I see you after the concert tonight? Yes? . . . Fine! . . . And, oh, by the way, I do still want to read your book."

I walked her back, bought two tickets for the concert, trusting that Adam, too, would come, and left Josephine at the auditorium door, turning once to see her wave with the faintest flicker of her finger-tips as she walked away.

6.

What had been behind Josephine's apparent interest and free-speaking attention invested in me? I found myself thinking as I

made my way in the direction of Fifth Avenue. A passing flirtation? Conquest over me, such as in delectable moments I fancied having over her? Something more earnest, more substantial, all practical differences — geographic, cultural, historical — notwithstanding? And how far could I go with her? What would she permit? What would I permit myself? And ought I to flout Adam's caution against involvement? And what was I to make of her allusion to skeletons in the cupboard? — If, on the previous evening, I felt that I had her measure, after this parting at the Avery Fisher Hall, I was no longer so sure; and, recalling my earlier encounter with Hoffnung, it was not on solid asphalt pavement that I walked at all, but rather on eggshells, on sand, on jelly, or sponge.

For solidity, I turned my face instead towards the skyscraper behemoth of concrete, steel, aluminium and glass, my gaze leaping high between the summits of the Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building and the Empire State. I remembered their peaks projecting in sun-repelling iridescence through the clouds as I descended upon the city on the previous day, and what seemed then like plunging canyons below were now crisscrossed ravines cordoned by soaring towers that vaulted mightily into the shimmering blue of early afternoon. There was comfort to be had in the sturdiness of the facades, and not in their sturdiness alone but in their very durability, their testimony to continuity — even eternity — their pillars and porticos, their cornices and friezes, their gargoyles and spires being the legacy of centuries that had witnessed and preserved or revived the Greek, the Tudor and the Gothic along with the colonial, Renaissance and the modern. And they were invested with Promethean force, united with might and ingenuity, which, unbound, bore witness to the power of men — or rather the accumulated power of countless men — against the hard, impassive and uncompromising challenge of nature. And here lay the miracle, if miracle were not too hyperbolic a term. Of the two — of nature and men — it was cold, stolid, obdurate nature that had proved the weaker, and man, *men* — albeit at what sacrifice of health, sanity and spirit, I thought, simul-

taneously calling to mind an image of Saturn devouring his children — who ultimately proved the mightier to be able to subdue that nature.

If I sought further evidence of human power, of human energy, of verve perhaps, it was in the streets and in the stores, in the thrust I saw around me as, in streams, in torrents, people, people, *people* — white, brown, negroid; pensive, questioning, garrulous; leisurely, exploring, pursued; and infinitely more besides — cascaded along the sidewalks, dashed on and off the buses and bustled in and out of stores where displays replete with haberdashery, jewellery and electrical goods, and with pianos, antiques and pyramids of books, sucked me in with a swirling sense of *deja vu* which made me pause every dozen paces and which, were I to find a ready ear, would have surely led me with unimpeachable conviction to declare, "I belong, I belong, I belong!"

That headiness accompanied me through the afternoon, heightened to still more exquisite fragrances by the stirrings of coffee and pastrami from the delis, by the clatter, shuffle and hum of passing traffic, by the twang and strum of sidewalk buskers, and by the unwearying cries of doomsday prophets, bagel-vendors and trinket-sellers. There had been more, many more — shop-guards, flower-sellers, mimes, a pasty lip-smacking fellow in conversation with himself, a doughy woman begging quarters for a spastic daughter, and, among others, a friz-headed child who kept yelling at passing motorists, "Hey, mister, yer' back wheels's goin' forward!", and, with the fullness of it, I was impatient to open all my exhilaration and thrall before Adam who, himself a visitor, would surely understand.

I was not prepared, however, for the gravity I encountered instead upon returning to the apartment, with Lucille — Lucille, dressed in her customary black — sitting on the couch before the darkening window, and Adam, large, stooping and biting a lip, facing her, Lucille, caught off guard, swiftly turning away and wiping at a cheek from which the moisture of tears, however, was far from wholly nullified.

Tact directed me to the small kitchen where, with no little noise aimed to secure them in the knowledge of their privacy, I cut bread, set the kettle on the stove and placed a spoon of coffee into a cup. Nonetheless, I heard Adam say, "You try to get some rest at least, Luce, I'll do what I can", and, shortly after, caught a glimpse of Lucille as she flitted past the kitchen door in hurried departure.

Adam then joined me in the kitchen. He rubbed at an earlobe as he had been wont to do back home when troubled, and heaved deep breath.

"God, what *can* I do?" he said. "What can *anyone* do? Accursed chemistry! Harvey's walked out on her. . . Took her home last night, then promptly went off with Justine. Made no bones about it. And her analyst, just at this time, is at some confounded conference in Rochester. And *incommunicado*. . . So she called me. . . Not enough that she's under treatment for anorexia nervosa about which — would you believe? — Harvey's writing a book, but she also has to contend with a collapsing. . . with a collapsed marriage as well. . ."

Adam took the coffee I had poured for him in tandem with mine, went to the living-room, and called me after him.

"Look out there, Jules!" he said, pointing through the window. "Just look. Skyscrapers. Goliaths. Facade upon facade of lights, brilliance, magnificence that still make me hold my breath. We, *homo sapiens*, possess the might of Samsons, Hercules and Atlases all in one to create all these, yet mere molecules, the minutest atoms within us hold us hostage, turn our heads, fire our glands, breed fantasies and feed illusions that, even when seeking to create, nonetheless destroy, destroy, destroy. . ."

"You mean Harvey?" I said.

"I mean everybody. And Harvey, too. Yes, even Harvey. A man with a score of books to his name. But, in his own life, childless, wanting through Justine, where Lucille has not been able to deliver, to create a living posterity otherwise denied to him. Someone to whom to hand down his wealth, his being, however high the price and however much a rogue it makes

him seem. It's all so strictly, so ineluctably biological. I might deplore his morals and what he is doing to Lucille, but the impulse behind his actions. . . The impulse, man. . . It is nothing less, nothing other than that which, from the first *Australopithecus*, has kept humanity going on earth, not to mention all the myriad other species stalking about its crust. . ."

Adam paused. He then clapped me on the shoulder.

"But that's enough *angst* for a day," he said. "What have you got to say for yourself? Any generous takers for your book?"

"Mixed blessings," I said. "Hoffnung agreed to look at it, and Josephine actually asked to read it. Oh, and which, by the way, reminds me. . . I have tickets for tonight's concert. . . Dvorak, Beethoven and Brahms. . . *Carnival*, the *Emperor*, Brahms' Fourth. . ."

I caught Adam's studied scrutiny.

"Because of Josephine?" he asked.

"*And* Zubin Mehta, and Barenboim. . .," I said.

To which he added, "*And* Grandma Moses, I daresay, and because the moon is blue and the winds blow hot, hm? . . ."

He smiled with a raising of an eyebrow and shook his head.

"Tsk, ts," he added, "you've already forgotten what I told you," then took deep breath and downed his coffee.

7.

Even now, half-way to the terminal, I could not but wonder whether the events that followed might not possibly have taken a different turn. Or, given their natures — Josephine, Harvey, Justine, Irving, Lucille; given that their needs, ambitions and responses conformed, as Adam was wont to say, to the unique configurations and motions of their molecules and, hence, their relationships, at the most reductionist, to the interactions of their separate chemistries — might not then their fates already long before have been inscribed and sealed, there being none — neither in heaven above nor on earth at their feet, nor in Hades below — to thwart the outcome?

Or — to look for other explanation: the fault was not in our stars, but in ourselves. So had said the Stratford bard. And that it was not in the stars, that had ever been easy to accept. But did it *ipso facto* follow that the fault was therefore *wholly* in ourselves, *homo sapiens* driven by the workings of the reason and the conscious will for which each man had therefore to be held accountable, or, conversely, through acts issuing from unreason and wilfulness which were the warp and weft of aberration? In the circumstances, how much was to be credited to the pre-determined, how much to choice, and how much to simple ineluctable chance or mayhem in that seething biological crucible that, on this earth, took on the human form?

We went to the concert, Adam and I, and, watching Josephine through the Dvorak, Beethoven and Brahms, and sitting with her afterwards in the Cafe Pierre where a spindle-fingered guitarist spanned the gamut from Spanish classical to modern jazz, in his way matching the buoyancy and jauntiness of our talk, I felt myself yield to a score of badgering fantasies, less sensually hedonistic now than tranquilly sober and adolescently clean, but none the less desperate or intense for being impossible, or at best ephemeral, in their attaining. If, on the previous evening, flushed by Chateaubriand and novelty and heady talk, the attachment had been tentative and pre-eminently physical, I could scarce deny the altered nature of it now — I had tumbled for her, and with that tumbling, my hands acquired a cursed and tingling tremulousness, I spilled my coffee, overturned a pepper-shaker, and dropped a serviette, leading Adam to say with unmistakable badinage, "Them that fumbles must ought by Eros or by Thanatos be smitten."

We had risen to leave, a copy of my book now in Josephine's possession, myself standing aside to let her pass and Adam settling the check, when Harvey and Justine entered. Justine, undeniably beautiful and, in the jargon of the Romantics, most statuesque, stepped back as if caught out at some misdemeanour and looked away, but Harvey, unruffled by the encounter, was master complete.

"Ah, our illustrious trio," he said jovially, holding out to us

his hands. "The cellist, the author, the doctor. What talent and accomplishment between them! Such self-realised folk!"

He patted Josephine's cheek and beamed. In an unwonted leaping of resentment, I caught sight of unmistakable creases in Harvey's skin and streaks of mercury-white in the wings of hair above his ears. If he still retained his sleekness, it was, I sensed, at the price of a struggle; for Harvey was surely nearing fifty, perhaps even fifty-five, and were he to yield even a little to laxity of discipline, he might have turned dramatically to flab and paunch and jowl. And herein lay a paradox. Harvey might have sought to preserve the appearance of youth, but against stately, long-limbed, supple Justine, an observer's awareness of his age could only be not less, but more keenly sharpened.

It was Josephine who answered, returning banter for banter.

"Ah, but Harvey," she said, letting her scrutiny play the more friskily over Justine who smiled graciously if also warily. "Is not the truth quite the reverse? For has not the very embodiment of accomplishment himself just entered these honoured precincts?"

She curtsied, mock-courtier-style, before the pair. Harvey laughed, bracing an arm about Justine. The signet-ring he wore reflected a swift and tremulous glitter.

"What *can* she mean?" he said. "My books, my success, or — woman being woman, and Josephine, young, pretty, talented, but a woman just the same — perhaps she means you, Justine, my darling sapphire, my innocent seraph? Ah, beware, beware the woman spurned!"

His mouth danced in private mirth, the folds beside his eyes flickeringly mobile, while Josephine, as if touched on a raw spot, glanced swiftly at him. He, in turn, had noticed, but played at innocent dissembling.

"You are wondering, I daresay, about Lucille, are you not, my Miss Du Pre, my venerable Casals?" he went on.

Justine laid a hand on his arm as though to stay him. Adam, having paid the cashier, joined us. I sensed an unamused stiffness in him, quite unlike the more buoyant *laissez-faire* compo-

sure to which he was more accustomed. On the platform, the guitarist played a fandango, the few diners still present chatted in steady undertones.

"Should I say perhaps," Harvey continued, "that she is back at the apartment nursing a migraine, and with two tickets to see Katharine Hepburn live on stage. . . My, the waste if left unused? Or that an uncle of hers died in Illinois or Arkansas and she left this morning to join her folks? Or that this jewel Justine and I are at this near-midnight hour of a Thursday evening discussing a future *magnum opus* of mine — is anything more natural? — she being Laurence P. Hoffnung the Great's Number One reader, the book — here's to you, Jules, seeker after the luminous lights — being *The Literary Person's Companion: A Manual, Fact-finder and Directory*, guaranteed to make most celebrated highly-feted literati of the most humble talentless Johnny Does?. . . Or should I cry on my sleeve and own, hand over heart, that Greenwich Village is too small for Lucille and myself, and that as of today, all tedious technicalities aside, we are mutually free to pursue our separate predilections?"

"At whatever the cost?" Adam said, tossing his enormous head to throw back a rebellious curl.

"The cost, my future Nobel Laureate? The cost?. . ."

"The destruction of a life. . . of happiness. . . of health. . ."

Adam, in his soft but firmly-spoken hard-jawed way, had earlier in the day been angry. "I'll do what I can", he had promised Lucille that evening, asking me, in turn, then, "God, what *can* I do?" The resurgent anger whetted by the face to face confrontation with Harvey was — how clearly I saw it! — the heir of ineffectuality in the face of urgency, and of distaste for Harvey against the need for basic civility. It was in its way kin to Irving's own embittered pronouncement, "Beware the man. . . A man like that can kill."

"*Showdown in a Cafe Doorway*," Harvey said to Justine as an aside with a deliberate simulated Southern drawl. "What do you say, my wise and perspicacious Queen of Hearts, shall we sell the title to Paramount for their next Scotties-tissue-promoting soapie?. . . Man; man! Adam! Josephine! We are

grown people. Do we not have a right. . . No, are we not under obligation, do we not have a duty to forge our own destinies and to realise unhindered our God-given gifts? I must one day give you my book, a personally-inscribed copy to each of you, and to you, too, Jules, my aspiring Flaubert, *One Life: That's All You Get*. It will show you what I mean. Lucille, for her part, is brilliant. That I must admit. She could be a professor ten times over, set the university afire with revolutionary innovations and courses of study, and could court the ear of the President of the U.S. of A. himself if only she weren't so crazy and so hung-up about her figure and her mind, and mesmerised by that quack guru of an analyst tearing off her every goddamn buck, when all she needs is to think positive or try a little Maltz psychocybernetics or, with the Persips downtown, indulge in a bit of psychodrama and act herself back to sanity."

8.

We parted ways soon after, the whole episode having, by next morning, taken on the guise of something surreal. On waking, the taste in my mouth was that of acid, a residue of the cinnamon apple strudel I had had at the Cafe Pierre, but what lingered still more acerbically, even as I brushed my teeth and rinsed my mouth, was a tight-throated sense of unreality, or rather incredulity, that anyone outside of my dreams had in swift succession said:

"She's in danger, Harvey, Lucille's never been so brittle. . .";

"Isn't a man permitted freedom? Are nuptial vows to bind a man forever?";

"Harvey, are you really such a fish?";

"Hark, she that hath herself been perfidied hath spoken";

"Justine, think of Lucille, if of no-one else";

"Glad to see that Leo Tolstoy here, he gained the ear of Laurence P., our very own and coveted Mr Big";

"Josephine, call Lucille first thing in the morning. See that

she's okay. And maybe Irving, too. She needs an anchor, and he may be it."

The last had been Adam's directive to Josephine as, on leaving the Cafe Pierre with neither Harvey nor Justine being in the slightest moved, we delivered her to her apartment door.

I had, to my chagrin, woken well after nine, long after Adam had gone to work — "Shall be back before the poppies wilt", he had written on a note — long after the time I had promised to phone Josephine who had, also at her door, offered to show me more widely around town. I phoned nonetheless, but the burring, registered uptown some twenty-five streets away, merely recurred monotonously and unrelieved, leaving me to curse myself and darkly pound the air for having yet again, as on the previous day, fallen short of promise. Having the previous night looked forward to this day, the discomfiting exchange at Pierre's notwithstanding, I was now left with a hollowness, a vacuum of my own making to be sure, but no less chafing for that.

I was, over breakfast, leafing through my travellers' guide-books, making ready to explore the Big A on my own, when the door-bell rang, and, in response to the voice coming through the intercom, I went to the elevator, there to meet Ziggy Levick, Adam's Uncle Ziggy, as, hands extended high in greeting, he emerged.

He was dapper in a seer-sucker suit, in gold cuff-links and pure-silk tie, the antique-dealer complete, quite unlike the casual open-shirted art-collector and patron I had met two nights before.

"Your good friends regret that they cannot be at your service," he said, bowing Japanese-style but with tongue patently in cheek, "and have assigned me, Zigmund Leo Levick, to be your chaperon for the day, a duty, sir, that could not please me more."

Then, laughing so that a gold tooth shone in his otherwise deeply-creviced distinguished and quick intelligent face, he again reached out his hands, grasped my own between two

strongly-caressing palms, and braced an arm about my shoulders. He smelled piquantly of after-shave and nurtured, I was certain, a clear vanity about his body.

"For Adam, I harbour a most particular fondness," he said. "His is the brightest mind, excepting that of his most modest uncle" — he bowed here yet again — "between East River and the Hudson. And by extension, for any friend for whom he feels my humble *soirees* are worthy fare, I have a quick and double fondness. So, if I give you pleasure in escorting you about this island-city tabernacle dedicated to the gods rollicking on high, then consider my own pleasure double, no, treble, quadruple yours. . ."

He paused, and caught the thought I had been thinking. I must have been inordinately transparent.

"As for that gentle good-natured sad-hearted young cherub who was to have been your hostess and guide. . . she, dear friend, regrets her indisposition, matters at Lucille Farber's having, alas, escalated mightily, that angel of the strings thereupon moving in with that gypped and bereft abandoned waif at the rising of the tide."

An Antipodean sense of propriety — an averseness to *seem* to be prying, however whetted my curiosity — held me back from asking more, and Ziggy Levick, for the moment, did not elaborate. He simply took a salted cracker from a plate on the breakfast-table, smeared it with margarine in a generous layering and engulfed it whole, saying between the crunch and crackle of every bite, "But Jules, *mon cher ami*, never fear; before night is fallen, from your celestial minstrel you shall surely hear. Meanwhile. . ." — he flourished an arm, describing a broad arc to indicate the immensity of his city — "Meanwhile, I will show you about the peaks of Olympus, I will acquaint you with this stupendous mammoth. There is magic in this city, and there is eccentricity, transcendence, art; and if this is the sort of fare that you are after, then I will give you entree to its splendour and its grandiosity, to its industry and accomplishment, to its colour and its multiformity, all of it scrambling your every sense to the delirium of discovery, the ecstasy of captivation,

the adoringly reverential worshipfulness of awe. So, stick by me, *amico mei*, and if you open your eyes to see, and to *truly* see, then, Lordie, in the blinking of a day I will uncover before you what for New Yorkers takes two generations of days to absorb it all. What the sun is to the universe, New York is to the world."

With that, he led me to his coupé parked in the street below and headed downtown towards Battery Park, from there to take a ferry across the harbour to pay homage, as he said, to Lady Liberty, mother of the American Dream.

The Mayor himself could not have been a more passionate guide. Ziggy Levick, Lower East Side-born-and-bred, the youngest child of migrant refugees come from revolutionary Russia, lived, breathed and seethed New York. He was, at sleek and natty fifty-eight, his city's unpaid advocate, apologist, protector, champion. He was also gospeller, preacher, pulpiteer and market-place rhetorician. And were he to have been nominated New York ambassador to the nations, he might have well accepted the mission — few, surely, would have been as suited — were it not for the requirement that he physically leave his city, leave his home which held him less through bonds of mere belonging, affection or fulfilment (though these were substantial and tenacious enough) than through his very dependence on the life-giving life-sustaining force that for him coursed mightily through the city as it coursed through an umbilical cord.

By evening, when Ziggy Levick delivered me as had been pre-arranged between them to Mortimer's in Lexington where Adam sat at a window-table, I was emotionally exhilarated if also physically drained. Sustaining a ceaseless spirited patter from Liberty Island through to Morningside Heights, Adam's Uncle Ziggy had led me along avenues, streets and concourses where the meanest crack or smudge or flake were known to him, had introduced me to any number of Eds, Louies and Sams in their bars, bookstores and boutiques, and subjected me to fortune-tellers, evangelists, Op Art, Pop Art, shishkebabs, pirozhkes, wurst and a dozen varieties of herbs. Outside the Wall

Street Exchange, a black gospel-singer sang songs of Jesus and her companion chanted "Holy! Holy! Holy!" in a monotonous refrain that mesmerised with its very regularity. In Chinatown, Ziggy Levick made a business-call from a pagoda-topped phone-booth; he dropped a quarter into the saxophone-case of a Gramercy Park busker; led me between the stone lions up the steps of the New York Library, bidding me listen to their roar that would indicate the nearby presence of a virgin; and steered me past the offices of scream therapists and fortune-tellers, past the shops of specialist dealers in Armenian art, and past innocuous-looking frontages where extortionists, forgers, promoters of erotica, revolutionaries in exile and collectors of Sioux mythology rubbed shoulders in the inner foyers, elevators, corridors and washrooms.

"Where else. . . Where else," he had asked, "will you find a biographer of Benjamin of Tudela at present at work on the second of a three-volume study of the man and his sojourns, or an anthologist of the music of the Aztecs, or authorities on Peter John Olivi, Jan Sniadecki and on the two-hundred-and-fifty-three ways to prepare brussel-sprouts, hm? Is there another place like it, is there, Jules Sonny-boy, is there? If, dear traveller, you can show me just one place in any way like it where to blink is to miss an epiphany while to sleep is to forfeit entry into the supernal itself — just one place that can boast a Met, a Madison, a Greenwich Village, Rockefeller, Guggenheim, Broadway, Trade Center, Times Square, SoHo, East Village, and more besides — all within a day's walk and a lifetime's inexhaustibility, then I will pack myself a backpack and in the steps of the Wandering Jew sojourn there, even if it takes every one of my God-given days. I place upon you the challenge to find me another place like this Big Apple, friend, that is Colossus, Hanging Gardens, Pyramids and all the other Wonders re-incarnated and reconstructed in our time."

Deciding that Melbourne's known and venerated experts on the sixty-seven ways to spin a cricket-ball or maim a fellow-footballer or shoe a racehorse were scarcely in the same league, I preferred to concede to him the conviction, the relish and the

thrill of peerlessness. There was scant mileage in a pygmy vying with a giant.

And so he had repeated, so urged — “Where else? . . . Where else? . . .” — as, with messianic (or auctioneer’s) fervour, he had made the Trade Center a thing unique, and Radio City and Pan Am and the Frith Museum, and the Waldorf Astoria, St Patrick’s and Central Park, in his every proverbially pregnant pause as also in his every word, intimating that if such *did* exist west of the Hudson or east of East River, then they were ersatz imitations, invented concoctions, or, likeliest of all, figments of over-ripe imaginations.

“Mighty, mighty, mighty!” he said. “Mighty the Manhattan isle of New York, the world radiating, reverberating and humming with its far-extending glory, amen!”

Whatever exhilaration had buoyed me as we entered that Lexington Avenue eating-place was promptly dissipated the moment I caught the strained greeting proffered by Adam. We didn’t, Ziggie and I, get to sit down. Instead, Adam rose, strode towards us in all his hulkiness, let his gaze flit, scarcely touching, over me, and, taking hold of Ziggie Levick’s arm, said, “I’m glad you’ve come at last. It’s been a downright abomination of a day. Lucille. . . Lucille. . . She killed herself. . . She. . .”

“Hell and holy fire!” Ziggie Levick burst out, taking hold of the knot of his tie with forefinger and thumb. “Lordie! When will Moloch be sated with the blood of our children?!”

“She. . . She threw herself from a window. . .,” Adam felt impelled to elaborate. “Josephine’d for the merest moment left the room. . .”

“And where is she now? . . . Josephine, I mean. . .,” Ziggie Levick asked.

“She went with the police to make a statement. That was hours ago. But. . . But I haven’t been able to get through to her since. . . Nor to Harvey. . . Nor to Irving. . . And there’ll be the devil to pay! Because Irving, he’ll kill Harvey. . . He’ll. . .”

Ziggie Levick, extricating his arm from Adam’s hold, in turn grasped his nephew by a shoulder. Age, experience, worldly

wisdom and probable inuring against protracted surprise, restored him to a prompter composure.

"Adam," he said. A cuff-link glinted under the light. Two diners passed us on their way out as two others entered. "Adam! Have you settled your check? . . . No? Then settle it. And take time out to think. You're a biologist, a scientist, a student of man. You, of all people, should know. Irving's no killer. His is the stuff of martyrdom. The Irvings of this world are the ones who suffer, while it's the Harveys that kill. Oh, no, not with weapons. . . . Not with guns and knives and karate chops and concrete around the ankles and 'Goodbye, Charlie' out to sea into the deep. . . . Oh, no, but none the less surely, none the less finally in their own sleezy and smiling, convivial and unmatched most sympatico ways. . . ."

Adam strode away then towards the counter to pay his bill. I was left again with Ziggy Levick. Where, for the greater part of the day, he had been the brighter side of jaunty buoyancy, the lines marking his brow, cheeks and eyes now deepened in the tautness of a grimmer gravity.

"I told you many things today, Jules, Sonny-boy," he said. "Someday, you may put pen to paper and incorporate them in a book. But one thing I didn't tell you. New York is great, New York is stupendous, New York is the modern wonder. True, all true, every bit of it true. But to remain any of these, it is a god that ravenously demands a succession of human sacrifices for continued sustenance. That was something I would rather not have had you know. But the ultimate truth cannot long be withheld. As near to the true God as we are, so near are we too to infernal Mephistopheles. Souls are bought here, sold here, liberated, enslaved, punished, consecrated, and consigned here to eternal purgatory or, more rarely, in merciful clemency redeemed. And all this at the mercy of a parlously haphazard turning of the wheel that may at any moment yield up a number signifying either a personal *gotterdammerung* or edifying beatitude. For her part, whatever the deity — though Adam would call it 'Chemistry'; he would also call it 'Chance' — Lucille was destined for perdition. We all saw it. She was an innocent, she

was a fallen angel, a seraph not truly suited to this earth and, with none able to resist that deity, the dictates of that innate annihilating chemistry, she ultimately fell from grace." — He bit a corner of his lower lip and nodded pensively. "Like so many in this city," he added, "like so many, so uncountably many in this vast insatiable megalopolis."

Adam returned, pocketing his change. The hum of conversation and clatter of cutlery on crockery surrounded us. An acute but fleeting sense of *deja vu* came over me as I recalled the smells, movement and talk in restaurants back home.

"I've decided," Adam said.

"Oh?" said Ziggy Levick.

"I'm going to Josephine's. Either she's been talking all afternoon — as likely as flying tortoises — or her phone is out of order or she's left it off the hook. She's not at Avery Fisher. My bet is that it's off the hook, and when she turns *incommunicado*, then something is rotten in this upmarket State of Denmark. . . In the meantime, Ziggy, can you find Irving? You're right. . . He won't kill Harvey. . . But if anyone needs companionship right now. . ."

Adam broke off before completing the obvious. Ziggy Levick acknowledged and consented to Adam's directive. He would have given his right arm to his nephew had Adam demanded it of him. He then turned back to me again.

"One thing more. . . One other thing I didn't tell you, Jules, which, in fairness I guess I should. Manhattan isle is residence to near two million citizens of the mighty U.S. of A. But ask each man, what hurts, what haunts above all conceivable malignities visited upon his mortal flesh, and, as sure as eggs hatch into feathered fowl, he will say it is his isolation, his primal disconnectedness, his ultimate aloneness in the world. All those Eds and Ernests and Martys I introduced to you today. As long as they're behind their counters, they're okay; or as long as they wear their white coats, aprons or other uniforms of identity and duty, then they're like the statues of martyrs and saints in their venerated niches. They have their recognised place. They know who they are, what they are, they even admit to a meas-

ure of blessedness. But take them outside; let them wear the normal mufti of the street, and they will become faceless, nameless, and ultimately alone in the congealed Riesmanian crowd that constitutes the life and pulse of this dog-tongued island. And if there is salvation to be had here, Jules, if there is such a thing as redemption at all, then it lies in this — in each man creating for himself an identifiable face, in establishing an identity, in forging for himself a meaningful name.”

9.

Adam’s surmise had proved right. Josephine had indeed rendered herself inaccessible and it was only his persistence in ringing at her downstairs bell when he traced the light burning in her window that finally brought a response, however reluctant, however grudging, even despairing, from her.

“You’ve come to see that I don’t do a Lucille as well, I suppose,” she asked, said, giped all at once at the door. In contrast to her former red, she now wore a cheerless subdued blue — a dress hastily put on, an old over-stretched sweater and fading slippers — while her hair was straggled into higgledy-piggledy strands that cared nothing for grooming, appearance, opinion. Her cheeks were drained white, her eyes were lacklustre, and her mouth and jaw were harder and sharper than I would have let myself imagine them.

Adam had on the way to her apartment forewarned me.

“You may as well come with me, Jules,” he had said. “There are sides and dimensions to this city you have not yet seen. There are sides and dimensions, too, to Josephine that it won’t harm you to see.”

But if his advance notice had also been intended as further admonition reinforcing his counsel after Ziggy Levick’s *soiree* not to become involved — neither with anyone, nor in anything — it was an admonition I could not help myself but override, *feeling* for Josephine then, *despite* all he had told me about her, or perhaps *because* of all else he had told, feeling for her all the more ardently, aching if only because *she* ached as she

stood in her doorway in her state of doleful dishabile and dourness, a far cry from that most elegantly engaging cellist who had responded so vibrantly to the baton-wielding stewardship of a livewire vivifying Zubin Mehta.

"No, Josephine," Adam said, once inside. "You think that on you alone rests the onus for what Lucille did and only yours is it to do penance, and to do so in the only way you know how — through withdrawal, solipsism and retreat into some cold and punishing nunnery of the mind? Hm?"

Josephine tugged at the inverted V-line of her sweater. I had expected she might be cowed into submission of sorts, instead of which she met vehemence with vehemence — even with heat and short-fused rancour.

"Oh, I suppose it was you who turned your back on her at that moment, it was you who took your eyes off her just then when. . ."

"If you want to put it that way," Adam cut across her, prodding the air with a hard, almost menacing finger, "then yes! . . . Yes! . . . No less than you, dear Josephine, dear self-styled, self-flagellating, self-immolating martyr. For Lucille came to me yesterday; you know that already. And if anyone failed her, then I did, I did in not recognising — no, I did recognise — in not *acting* as professionalism demanded, in not calling in another therapist while her own was away, in not steering her safely into better-qualified hands than mine. . . So, if there is any guilt attached to any of this, then perhaps we ought flagellate ourselves together. And perhaps invite Irving too into our inner agonising circle for being so helpless, and Harvey of course, and naturally Justine, and even Jules here — we shall find some reason to implicate him, too, no doubt — and the whole of this anarchic city for being so god-like indifferent to private anguish, and then the world too for being so unremittingly, unregenerately and brutally screwed up, hm?"

Josephine tossed her head and came close to sneering.

"So you salve your own conscience by attacking mine, Adam? Is that your game?"

"No, kind lady!" Adam threw back. He was himself more

impassioned than I had ever known him to be. "I've learned to live with my conscience. Medicine is a great academy for acquiring the art. I ache for Lucille, too, whatever you may think. But the writing for her was, as the saying goes, well on the wall. She was made of self-annihilating mettle. There was no way around it. If she didn't kill herself today, then she would have done so tomorrow, next week, next month, next year. As Ziggy says — we live here, all of us, only by the grace of Moloch who thirsts, and hungers, and thrives on this city's harassed innocents. Lucille was brilliant but sick; that anorexia of hers was but part of a deeper pathology that, as much as it denied bodily nutrient, denied life itself. Her demise was but a matter of time in coming. The curse is upon Harvey that he should have expedited it so and upon Justine for catalysing the whole process in the first place. . ."

"Enough!" Josephine erupted, raising her hands to cover her ears. "Let me be!"

Adam prised her hands away.

"I will not let you be!" he replied in turn. "Not until I can make you see reason!"

"All right, then," Josephine challenged him now. "Rationalise all you want, Adam, all you want, you rising star of science. But Lucille was a human being. She was flesh, blood, bone. As we all are. Would you have me deny emotion, feeling, sorrow, compassion, pain because to you she was, in her illness, but a wired programmed driven homunculus? A piece of automated engineering over which neither she, nor we, had any say? Is that forever to be your tune?"

Adam stepped towards her again. Josephine drew back.

"I want only that you should keep proper perspective, that you should understand that what drove her in the end to leap out of the window was stronger than any of us, that you should not withdraw, retreat, immolate yourself yet again in some private cop-out autistic monasticism."

Josephine had become more defiant, more fighting. Colour returned to her cheeks and animation of a more vigorous kind to her limbs. I caught — or thought I caught — a flicker of a

smile ripple along the grain of Adam's strong and ample lips.

"What is it to you? If I want to seclude myself, is that not my right? If I choose not to play tonight, and to let Maestro Zubin do without me for once, or for a week, or a month, is that, too, not my right? And if I should choose to run away away with Jules here — if he will take me with him — to Australia to disappear there, unknown, unrecognised and safely left alone, away from this. . . this. . . this malignant altar, is there anyone on earth, even you Adam, who can contest that very right? I've survived before, I shall survive again. I've gone down before, I shall surface again. But I'll do it in my own time, in my own way, with my own resources, whatever they may be."

I watched her; indeed, I could not desist, myself seeking by means of whatever invisible cables to keep her from drawing back. At least once before had she so retreated — once before, at least as far as Adam knew. That had been some four years before when, having come from Utica to Manhattan with her cello and, as Adam had said, with stars in her eyes, she had fallen for an off-Broadway actor-magician-raconteur, and become pregnant by him, consenting to an unwilling abortion — her lover's price for constancy — only to return home from the clinic to a note awaiting her. "Have fixed up a contract in Iowa," it had read. "For me to stay would mean to be owned. To be owned is to give up freedom. And to be free — as you, too, may now consider yourself free — can any prize be higher?" Adam, researching into placental hormones at the time, had met her most briefly at the clinic then, by chance meeting her again, albeit long after, at the first of his uncle Ziggy Levick's *soirees*. She had, for a full six months in the intervening period brooded within the confines of her apartment, subsisting on bread, milk and dried-out canned salmon, emerging only when her father, Marcus Lewisohn, not having heard from her for some time, came on a visit from home, was appalled by the sight of his daughter who had become a proverbial sack of bones, extracted from her her story, strode to the cupboard where Josephine had boarded up everything bound up with her past, and, on extri-

cating from it her cello, had thrust it none too forcefully into her arms, barred all avenues of escape and cowed all attempts at opposition and resistance, and insisted, bullied and cajoled, "Play! Play! Play! In this is your life! In this is your being! In this, your calling! And in this, and not in some derelict drop-out reclusiveness, your truest self, your ultimate purpose and your fullest freedom!"

Recalling this — Josephine's story as Adam had recounted it to me on the way — I made sense of his quiver of a smile. Where Josephine's father had earlier pressed and exhorted and coaxed with no mean success — she had, after all, made it to the New York Philharmonic — Adam as surrogate had now taken it upon himself to do the same. And as long as he could draw response, however vehement, from Josephine, however acerbic even if directed against himself, so long could he hope to ward off her regression. He was no fisticuff pugilist, but nor was he one to tremble in the face of confrontation.

"In your own time, you say. In your own way," Adam coaxed. "Your time is now, Josephine!"

She turned her back on us.

"Your way is through us!" he persisted.

She tossed her head and huffed. Adam went on.

"There are more ways to being nothing in this world than by leaping from a window, you know!"

He had got her to bite.

"So let me be nothing."

"Your friends. . . *We*. . . Yes, your friends, *we* want your companionship!"

"You can do without me."

"The public wants your music!"

"There are scores of other string-scrappers waiting in the wings."

"And your parents. . . Your parents, Josephine, if no-one else, surely they deserve your success and your contribution, your gifts, your endowments, your art. . ."

Through the window, I had been watching Josephine's reflection, sharp against the gathered nocturnal darkness, as

also her back and shoulders which shrugged off every thrust and sally of persuasion that Adam attempted. Clearly glutted, fed-up by it all, she raised her head in hard defiance, raised too her eyes in exasperation, and spun around with a concurrent sucking of breath and grasping of her temples between her palms.

“God Almighty! Let me be, will you? O Lord, if only I could get away from here, escape, purge it all, worm it out of my system! What do you want of me?! Is there no place where I may breathe without suffocating, no retreat which is not a chasm, a bottomless abyss walled around by cynicism such as Harvey’s, do-goodery like your own, or by criminality outside, expendability all around, and carnality, predatoriness and death which are every bit a part of this earthly hell as are its concrete, glass and cold oppressive brutal crushing steel? Against all these, what *is* art? What *is* my music in the light of this if not an aberration, a sham, a dissembling lie that would pretend with what bareface mummery to deny our contemptible John Doe paltriness in the world, our Lucille-Farber-Mary-Doe fragility, and our puff-cake evanescence and dewy, foamy evaporability?!”

Adam did not relent. Where he had failed with Lucille, to draw Josephine back seemed in that moment to have become a mission. He reached out to touch. But again Josephine backed away. Swollen pads ringed her eyes; the corners of her lips quivered; her long supple cellist’s fingers trembled; and she heaved, heavily, burdensomely, wearily with every breath. I, too, like Adam, wanted to reach out; I wanted to touch a cheek, a shoulder, her hair, a hand, all in the offering of succour. But, knowing the impossibility of it, I had to keep my distance, and to ache in private, to ache because *she* ached, to ache because I could do nothing to alleviate her ache, and to ache because, every will to the contrary notwithstanding, the crossing of our paths had necessarily to be but most transient, ephemeral, glancingly brief.

“Think about it, Josephine, my sweet,” Adam said with the

air of a closing coda. "Art, *your* art, and all the arts in all their bounteousness and multiplicity, are the leaven that make this prodigious *behemoth* of a city at least bearable to us as humans. But more, far more, Miss Lewisohn, most guileless among the seraphim: to yourself you may seem all alone and the flesh-and-blood embodiment of all that Kierkegaardian-Sartrean-Kafkan existential stuff this place would force upon you. But out there, Josephine — and even here, Josephine, in this room with you — are such who unreservedly accept, welcome, appreciate, esteem you for what you *are* and who, in ways most human, and therefore most true, offer you the most genuine and most redeeming selfless kind of love. Perhaps our animal, biological, chemical make-up in this world — forgive my incorrigible recourse to the reductionist — does not permit us choices without number, but in *this*, in such things as ultimately matter most — man and man, man in relation to man, man in relation to the world — it is for you, dear heart, as you yourself just said, it is wholly, exclusively, finally for you to choose. So — O.K. deny yourself, Josephine, deny others, and, by denying, be damned! On the other hand, though, accept, Josephine, accept, yourself, others, the world, and you may yourself, dear loveliness, dear spirit, yet come to be saved, to be redeemed!"

We left Josephine then, Adam and I. In Fifty-Seventh Street short of the turn into Third Avenue on the final stretch home, we were confronted by a glazed-eyed wino soliciting a quarter, accosted by a black with radios, calculators and electronic watches to sell, and scrutinised by a pair of over-rouged over-powdered tight-sweatered floozies ready to sell themselves. Along the thoroughfares, successions of cars and taxis hissed and hummed and chortled by, ambulance sirens in passing waxed and waned in jangling cacophony, as did police-cars and fire-trucks hurtling past, while people hurried, ambled, stood stock-still or clung to the walls, loners among them, and odd-balls and curios, variously grinning inanely or talking to themselves or addressing fictional companions, themselves, however, ignored or scorned by those who, as Adam said, still

walked tall by the grace of the fates, of God, of mysterious powers or of personal chemistries still kept in some semblance of order.

"By the time the sun rises over East River tomorrow," he also said "the city and hospital morgues will be host to hundreds more murdered, mutilated, *felo-de-séed*, diseased, mishapped, exposed or over-inebriated stiffes who are at this moment still breathing, talking, laughing, bleeding, feasting, agonising, and grieving, or who are planning, striving, expecting, dreaming, studying, thinking, contemplating, procreating, doing any of these things, and more besides, behind any of those million million windows all around us". And he said further, "There are forces within us, Jules, mightier than our conscious, willing, reasoning selves, and forces just as mighty without. We in this city — perhaps throughout the world as well, but nowhere more evident and more wholesale than here — course between the Scylla of the one and the Charybdis of the other, between the menace that lurks within and the menace that stalks without, such coursing causing innocents like Lucille, and Irving, and Josephine, and whole generations besides to be sucked into the whirlpool to Sheol every minute of every hour of every day, or alternatively to be cast upon the rocks, against them to be tested, and tried, and, so often, too often, to be irreparably broken.

"And if you ask to what end, Jules — unless, like Ziggy, you too subscribe to Moloch — then the reasons to be had may as well be your own; for there is no-one, there is no-one, neither at St Patrick's nor at Temple Emanu-El nor among the uptown Abyssinian Baptists, nor in City College, nor in Columbia, nor in any of our other portals of learning and daunting wisdom who holds any purchase on the most ultimate knowledge of whyfor, wherefor, whatfor. We are, we are, we are, and in time to come, we will have been, and will be no more. With apologies to John Keats, that is all we know on earth and all that we can ever truly know. What we are to do in the face of that knowledge, how we live our lives, becomes then a thing solely for ourselves to determine.

10.

I slept fitfully that night. Wearied by the previous day's brisk-paced peregrinations with Ziggy Levick about the powerhouse that went by the name New York, culminating in the disclosure of Lucille's death, Josephine's torturings and Adam's punishing countervailing attempts to rescue her from self-imposed perdition, I found in sleep not the full release from exhaustion I had wished for, but a demon-ridden, dream-sodden blight compounding the mish-mash of impressions, sensations, fatigue, perplexity and, ultimately, grimness that the day had left as its legacy.

Inevitably, Lucille — the Lucille in black clinging to the corner at Ziggy Levick's *soiree*, the Lucille who had visited Adam in quest of help, the Lucille, unseen but imagined, spread-eagled or pulped on some alien bloodied pavement below her window — inevitably, Lucille, evoking a once-known Gabrielle Gross back home, haunted a large part of the nocturnal darkness upon which flashing fluorescent red and green and blue and yellow lights intruded in dysrhythmic sequences; as did Irving, too, more shadowy because I had met him only once, but nonetheless real for the tyrannous ache and dolefulness that must have been his; as did Harvey and Justine whom I could only picture, despite their suaveness, with satanic horns; and Adam, too, caught in the middle of the menage; and debonair Ziggy Levick at once both peripheral yet in another sense so central to them all; not to mention Laurence P. Hoffnung, that cigar-smoking cynic who lived as a kind of pimp off Harvey's works and the works of who knew how many other willing Harveys in what he seemed to run as a decadent, public-fleeing, public-debasing literary whorehouse. But above them all loomed Josephine, Josephine, whom I contemplated delivering, salvaging, saving, redeeming from the consuming abyss that confronted her whichever way she turned.

But, in practical ways, what could I offer her? And then, what would she accept? — Would she accept Australia, for instance, even as she had hinted; and the space it had to

offer, and the room to move, and its light in profligate abundance, and its fecundity of greenery, and the possible restoration of her spirit and her soul's tranquillity? For, these I *could* offer her. And another thing, too — a hand to ease her descent from the high-tension tightrope on which she teetered in that vaulting sky-ratching concretion of a city to a steadier antipodean terrain where she might walk with unmenaced step, free there to move about with a leisurely swing of the arm, free also to pause and reflect, and free to absorb its ambient weightless suburban calm and its easy, eupeptic and contented unconcern.

But would she accept? Would I ask? And if ask, *how* would I ask, what precisely would I ask?

I let my thoughts — my writer's imagination, perhaps — run riot through a succession of scenarios, dreams, waking fancies and neither-sleeping, neither-waking will-o'-the-wisp imaginings that traversed back and forth across each other's hazily-demarcated intermelding terrains. But at the end, when morning lightened and full day began to vibrate with the loud, brisk, animated pulse of New York living against the apartment walls, I was no nearer to formed resolve, save to let circumstances dictate action, myself the while remaining ever-vigilant for opportunity to interpose an apt remark, an intimation, a suggestion, an invitation, more.

With day's progression, I came to recognise these thoughts as over-heated, hopelessly adolescent, and, in full light of reason, even quite absurd. Besides, even given that reality conformed to the promptings of an over-ripe imagination, I discovered soon enough, and with no little sense of loss already worming itself within me, that not only would such opportunity not arise but that I might not as much as see Josephine again. For, when Adam phoned her in the morning to enquire after her well-being, he met with no response, while, shortly after, when Ziggy called him in turn to relay details of Lucille's funeral to be held two days later with himself as officiant, he disclosed also that Josephine had at first light that morning returned to her parents' home in Utica. The only message she

had left was that he, Ziggy, should inform the N.Y.Phil that she had been taken ill and been ordered rest.

"And you didn't stop her, stall her?" Adam asked.

"Stop her? Stall her?" I heard Ziggy Levick say across the cables descending from uptown. "Adam! Have you ever tried hurdling Brooklyn Bridge in one bound, or, like some latter-day Samson, sought perhaps to bring down the twin pillars of the Trade Center, or attempted to snuff out all the city's lights with a breath meant for a birthday-cake? Hm? Sure I tried to hold her back, Adamchik, sure. But I could more successfully have whistled into the wind in Central Park and be heard in Houston, San Diego and Seattle. . ."

He paused, then said, "O Adam, Adam, Adam. . . You are a doctor, a biologist, a man of science. What feats of chemical magic might yet be given to you to bring about that may in turn save our children, our innocents, our sufferers from themselves, from themselves above all? Hm?"

"I'm working on it," Adam replied with a touch of leavening to match Ziggy Levick's despairingly rhetorical tone, the while brushing his free hand through his copious Einsteinian hair. "But you'll have to give me another week or two to perfect it. With what I'm feeding them, my laboratory pets have never been happier."

The conversation with Ziggy Levick over, Adam set about clearing away the breakfast-table where, on his day off from work, it being Saturday, he had eaten at leisure, with *The New York Times* splayed out before him, the radio playing in the background, and with punctuated unhurried, unpressured musings about a suitable itinerary for the next two days.

"So hath the wing'd starling fled yet again," he said, now wiping the last crumbs from the table. "And who knows when her up-State furlough in gentler clime will this time come to an end?"

He rinsed out the squeegee in the sink, then dried his hands in a tea-towel.

"But her nest won't remain unoccupied for long," he went

on, "believe me. Others will come. Beauty queens from Denver and script-writers from Milwaukee, insurance-men from St Louis and D.J.s from Salt Lake City. And others, too, Jules, and others, too. Yahoos and yuppies, yokels and yobbos, from London and Toronto, from Bloemfontein and Tel Aviv, and even from our very own down-under ink-spot Melbourne, too, all, all come to take up the gauntlet thrown down by the gods who for their amusement play with men, toy with women, trifle with children at the foot and on the escarpments of this grand, stupendous, modern-day Olympus. And as for Josephine. . . our Josephine. . . dare I say *your* Josephine?. . . Who will ever know that such a one as she was ever here?. . . Or, if truth be extended," — he swept an arm towards the window — "if truth be extended, who will ever know that *any* of us were ever here — you, I, Lucille, or Ziggy, Irving, Harvey, Justine, Laurie P., or the millions and millions and millions out there?. . . Will anyone in time to come even know of us, or know our names, or even care that there were others, *we*, who lived and breathed and hankered and ached and aspired and circled here before them? Hm, Jules? And if not. . . If we are all to disappear down the sewer of the past, what have we of hankering and aching and fretting and flagellating ourselves ourselves the way we do? Is not the indigenous New Yorker right then in paying goodly homage and obeisance and generous tithe to the earth-bound, temporal and most practical wisdom of the likes of Eros and Bacchus and Epicurus?"

He did not elaborate at the time, but by day's end, certainly more clearly by weekend's final furling, I had seen most ravenous, most bodily application of human devotedness and fealty to that vaunted wisdom — or want of it — of Adam's Eros, Bacchus and Epicurus. In Times Square, that very Saturday evening, for instance, at the heart of what Adam called variously a jungle, an Eden, Purgatory and Sheol; in Times Square, that bustling hub of mayhem, the very axle around which Manhattan swivelled, and where buses, taxis, delivery vans and cars on the one hand, and people, people, people on the other, negotiated their separate paths, all intent, it seemed,

on flirting with, teasing, inviting and, at the same time, flouting mortality.

In that Square, as much a square as a triangle was circular, Neon fluorescence vied with Mazda fluorescence, illuminated billboard rose above billboard, and car-horn resounded to the same, while smells of hamburger, pastrami, cole slaw and rye carried like some piquant condiment through the crisp and bracing air. On the hoardings, ever spangling, ever changing pattern, Coca Cola competed with Canadian Club and Dewar's, Admiral Appliances promised more than Toshiba, John Cassavetes, Elvis Presley, Gene Hackman and George C. Scott in a huddle of near-abutting cinemas respectively pledged exciting, enthralling, not-to-be-missed and heady fare, Pussycat Follies, Whirly Girly Revues and Broadway-Style Burlesks tantalised with even better, while above the *Victoria Movie House* where the movie *Lilith* was screening, a large imposing mighty signboard presaged, in gold on gold, the coming to Forty-Second Street of the most supreme among supreme, the long-awaited, long-in-the-making, unprecedented, unforgettable, magnificent, stupendous and star-studded film, *The Bible*. Across the road, *The Notorious Life of Fanny Hill* was just then also showing.

With Adam I walked along Seventh Avenue, Broadway and the cross-streets nearby, myself wholly in awe of the multitudes and expecting at any moment someone familiar to materialise out of the teeming, streaming, careening mass — Ziggy Levick perhaps, or Harvey and Justine again, or Irving, however alone and disconsolate, to whom the facelessness to be had there might under the circumstances — his circumstances — have been particularly suited, or, all improbability notwithstanding, even Josephine tripping down with a group of fellow-musicians come to the Square for supper at concert's end. Josephine did not come, of course, nor Irving, nor any of the others, but certainly there were concert and theatre people in plenty, audience and performers both, who filled the tables in every eating-place we passed in the vicinity of the Square. And others, too. How many others! What others! Outside some seedy bil-

iously lit bar where a score of rowdies hung about, a shaven knob-skulled hulk in leather jacket, leather pants and studded wrist-band approached us, saying, "Hey, you guys, you lookin' fer a pair o' chicks, mebbe?"; out of a porn-shop an arm-waving ranting indignant madcap was being goose-stepped gutterward through a swinging door; around letter-boxes and traffic-lights, clusters of gaudy over-rouged, over-lipsticked, punk-haired short-skirted girls were chewing gum, winking come-ons to whoever passed; from the shadows of a courtyard, a runt of a man hissed, "Smoke? Smoke? Smoke?"; elderly dissipated men hung about shoeshine stands looking for fraternal bum-offering companions; high-heeled transvestites swung past in hip-and-rump-swinging rhythms of their own devising; passing a doorway of some private but dilapidated set of apartments, I nearly tripped over the outstretched legs of a stuporose wino slumped against a wall; while, veering close to makeshift stalls where watches, calculators, jewellery and pocket radios were laid out in full display, I felt Adam take firm hold of my arm, saying, "The Big Apple is lush and red and polished and full of delight, Jules, but it is strictly not for plucking. In this polyglot Eden, man, the serpent speaks with many tongues, perfidy being the one he speaks the most beguilingly of all."

"Perfidy?" I said.

By the time we left Times Square and its surrounds, the hour being well past midnight, I scarcely needed answer. I had, by then, seen any number of folk, any number of flotsam and jetsam — as Adam called them — that formed the unadvertised underbelly of that otherwise much-touted, most exquisite, glossy picture-postcard colossus: derelicts and addicts, prostitutes and pimps, hustlers and bouncers, schizophrenics and piss-pots, well-heeled businessmen and unsalvageable drop-outs. I had seen any number, too, of sleazy cafes and adult bookshops, blue-movie marquees and liquor-haunts, and massage parlours and subway pansy hangouts, where, for an earned, stolen, conned, borrowed or inherited expendable buck, one could be tickled and titillated, thrilled and amused, indulged in and pampered, all of this, all of it incredibly within a stone's

throw from a brilliant Eugene O'Neill *All God's Chillun'*, a personality-studded premiering of *Evita*, a Neil Simon playlet, a clean and wholesome *Porgy and Bess*, a polished *Annie*, not to mention *Il Trovatore* with Leontyne Price and *Don Quixote* and Josephine's N.Y.Phil, and Carnegie Hall, the Juilliard, Radio City, and what more, what more, what more magnificences of the creative soul?

"When the Almighty sought not long ago to redistribute good and bad across the world," Adam said, close to home, "each to its own more fitting ground, He caught His bag on the Chrysler spire and good and bad both in a most profligate sprinkling fell upon this duodecimo pale of earth randy and oestrous and ready to receive. And so did this luxuriant jungled Babel begin to grow, all beguilements and menaces, and temptations and snares coming here too, to teem in an abundance greater than in any other single acre to be found this side either of Eden or of Hades."

All throughout the next day, whether I found myself coursing through the glistening black-marbled shop-lined concourse of the Rockefeller Center, or walking the length of Fifth Avenue, Madison or Park, or digressing through Altman's, Bergdorf Goodman's or Saks', or even leisurely absorbing the lakes, the greenery and the Sunday afternoon amusements to be had in Central Park — a band concert, a troupe of rubber-jointed black gymnasts, boating on the water — I kept seeing everywhere the perfidy that Adam had spoken of. I saw it in everything; I saw it in everyone; saw beneath the sunlit lustrous surface gloss a deeper ingrained drabber dross; kept noticing beneath the smiles and cheers and mirth-filled squeals leaden heavinesses that made shoulders droop, that made lines on the face deepen, and caused flab to gather about the arms, chins, paunch and rump that bit sooner than might have been witnessed or accepted anywhere else. Having begun to see these, I could only be the more attuned to the rest. I could not but notice then the peeling, cracking, flaking coats of paint and plaster of places day-in-day-out lived in, yet, when photographed, photographed with immaculate sheen; nor could I *not*

see, even if it was difficult to square the sights with my better wishes, the wall around the Guggenheim both urinated and spat upon, and the dry curdled vomit on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the tin-rattling eye-patched mendicant at the foot of the Empire State; not to mention the fungus, pigeon shit and rust eating into commemorative pillar, pedestal, cenotaph and statue — all the gathered mildew and blight being dispiriting witness to the corrosion of every manifestation and representation of greatness through indifference, obtuseness and insensate blindness, where not through outright mindless, vandalism-bent, even wilful despoliation.

Perhaps as visitor and tourist, I fell to appraising too quickly, to assessing too rashly, to jumping too precipitately to conclusions. But in common with novice travellers everywhere, I did want to determine for myself and encapsulate within a single formula — even if only in a telling word or epithet or phrase — that which was the unique and singular, intrinsic, irreducible essence of the place.

The reality, however, kept thwarting me at every step, and, recalling Adam's rapture with the city which he had vented within a breath of my arrival, I turned to him and said, "Tell me, Adam, you really, truly, like it here?"

Adam chose not to answer directly. Instead, he braced his massive arm about my shoulders as he had done before and said disarmingly cannily, artlessly cagily, "Why, don't you?"

He had put me on the spot.

"It's not. . .," I began. "It's not that I don't like it here. It's just that. . . How shall I say it?. . . It's just that it's. . . it's not all so. . . so. . ."

"Ah, yes," Adam cut in to make it easier for me, spreading out his arms in an all-embracing gesture. "The bride in the flesh proves not to be the bride of the fancy. She who from a distance seemed so perfect is also endowed with acne, warts, syphilis and haemorrhoids. And also herpes, scabs, scars and boils. Is that it? And having discovered this, you're beginning to hurt, hm? Is that it, Jules?"

"It does hurt," I admitted, conceding to myself that *hurt* did perhaps come nearest the truth.

"And so it ought, Jules," he said in turn, "and so it ought. Even as it hurts me at the hospital — and, believe me, the parallel is closer than you may think — to see that what was once spotless child waste away to terminal moribundity through alcohol and dope and promiscuity and pestilence, or to see a mole turned malignant on the flesh of the most resplendent girl, or to see a man, a philosopher, a mental titan in his day, reduced in some unvisited ward to inanity and gibberish, incontinence and pressure sores. . ."

He now raised a finger in the air.

"But. . .," he said. "But. . ."

He then prodded his chest, his fingers signifying his heart.

"But for all that, ought I cease to love that child, that girl, that man, human beings all, for being blemished and flawed and less than the resplendent Dulcinean ideal I should wish for? Ought I love this city less because parts of it, like some dissipated whore, betray their age, or because so many of its human brood are morbidly and pathologically warped, or because its very greatness feeds on the muscle, blood, bone, nerve and marrow of its progeny? For how many riveters have tumbled from their dizzying scaffolds way up there down those sky-scraping escarpments? How many labourers, black, Puerto Rican, white, have been crushed to pulp under falling cascading stone? How many one-time men-about-town have aged into oblivion to join the countless nevermore-remembered others in the city's scratch-houses? And how many other Lucilles have done themselves in, and Irvings been widowed, and Josephines rent apart, and Harveys and Hoffnungs thrived on cynicism? In all of this, is not New York but Melbourne, say, or London or Paris or Berlin writ large, while, viewing it from another perspective, the world itself compacted to a postage-stamp? Were I, Jules, to disown New York, would I not *ipso facto* be disowning the world? And were I to deny the world, would I not *ipso facto* then also be denying life?"

We had reached Columbus Circle where the explorer from

his high rostral column looked down upon the scene before him, and Adam, grandly drawing himself up to match the ped-estaled effigy in stone and raising an imaginary telescope before an eye, swung it in a rocking oscillating arc to and fro, and exclaimed in mock-majestic tone, "O, were he, Crisofaro Colombo, Cristobal Colon, to revisit today the gift that he bequeathed unto the world, what would he say, Jules, hm, what would he say? 'Arrived am I at the gates of Gomorrah and before me in the raw is decadent Sodom!?' Or 'How mighty art thou, O Lord of Liberty, Opportunity, Accomplishment! And how great have been your triumphs!' hm?"

And, petitioning the statue that stood mute in its garden at a breath's remove, he ran the fingers of his hands through his abundant black mane, raised his arms then as if he were weighing the world, looked heavenward as neophyte nuns looked at their celestial Lord, and added with booming pulpit-pounder's voice that made a passer-by pause mid-step, "O tell us, Christopher, O noble Columbus, do tell us, if ever you had a vision on alighting here, is this island, this continent, this nation equal to it even in the meanest way? Is it, Cristofaro, is it, Cristobal Colon?"

11.

The following day saw oratory of a different order, an address more gentle, more measured, free of pyrotechnics, and soft, a low-keyed tribute beside Lucille's grave where some twenty-five mourners, thirty perhaps, had come to pay respect. They were in the main Lucille's teaching colleagues, Adam said, though I did recognise Madame Zara, and the Persips, Mick and Eloise, and Bertram Braun, along with a handful of others who had been at Ziggy Levick's *soiree* several nights before. Irving, too, was there, none more disconsolate and hang-dog than he, not even Harvey Farber who stood two steps away, dressed in immaculate white, fastidiously groomed and bearing what seemed an air less of penitence or grief than of fulfilment of a duty that had either to be done or to be seen as done.

It was Ziggie Levick who spoke, the funeral being a wholly secular affair and representing the utmost in simplicity free of the meanest ceremony or ritual appurtenance. With the coffin resting deep in the freshly hewn-out grave, Ziggie in subdued faintly-striped ash-grey suit stood slightly stooped before it. His arms hung loosely in front of him with his fingers intertwined in the formation of a cup, and, nodding ever so lightly towards the rectangular box of white unpolished pine, he began:

"Lucille. . . Lucille. . . We who are gathered here are as at a port come together to bid you *bon voyage* to shores more suited to your gentle, your sensitive, your too sensitive nature. Your transit on this earth was troubled and — none know it as well as we — not infrequently a painful, perplexed and afflicted one. And where others seek redemption from pain, perplexity and affliction in a myriad different ways, you did so through an act that many would deem at once both hard and heroic.

"I, for one, however. . . I, for one, Lucille, when I first received the news, was not inclined to regard it so. And were you able in some way to return and beg forgiveness for what you had done, I, Lucille, should not so readily have forgiven. First, because we loved you, Lucille. We loved you, both on account of your pain, and then *despite* your pain, Lucille. And, loving you, it hurt all the more to be robbed of your continuing life and being and presence amongst us. Second, Lucille, because in acting as you did, you hurt us doubly, betraying your lack of confidence in us, Lucille, who would have done anything to ease your earthly passage. For in us, *through us*, Lucille, singly, or in pairs, or as one united whole, you would, had you but tested us, have found the strength to endure. And third. . . And third, Lucille, because while your final act may well have been a hard and heroic one, harder still and far more heroic in this world — most heroic of all, of all, Lucille — is it to live with what is, and to strive with the best of one's abilities to the best one can attain, and to do so, flying in the face of every reality, however demeaning, degenerate, ugly, troubled, bestial or deadly.

"I suspect that rationally, Lucille, intellectually, you knew all this, you understood it all. Had your *spirit*, however, or your *heart*, or whatever it is that fragments us into conflicting parts and scrambles reason but accepted the fact! Had you but accepted, and built upon it, Lucille, as a man builds success on success and rises rung on rung! Might you not thereby have raised *us* a little too and others about you, and a little of the world besides, and of this nation, and of this very city, even if only a mite? . . ."

In that moment, I nearly lost the thread of Ziggy Levick's address. For, on brushing at a fly that had homed in on my neck, I tossed my head and caught sight of Josephine — Josephine — to my right some three, four steps behind me. Wearing a loose-fitting dun-brown coat over a tawny dress, she was gazing at the ground before her and holding a crumpled handkerchief to her nose and mouth, the eyes above it ringed and blinking and fixed upon a spot that was clearly not registering upon her vision. I felt the briefest constriction of breath and a quickening of the pulse. Ziggy Levick sounded suddenly more distant.

"But . . . But having thought further on the matter," he was saying, "Having taken stock, Lucille, I do forgive, as must we all, for who are we, mere mortals in this massive, sometimes overbearing, often oppressive city, nation, world, to judge another and say 'Holier than thou are we' when, perhaps, we have not been so tested, so racked, so torn and beaten, crushed and consumed? So not only with forgiveness but with every sincerest wish do we bid you safe passage. May your battered soul be made whole again, Lucille, and may you, from whatever shore you alight upon, watch over us in turn, and protect us and speak for us that we may be granted strength to accept whatever adversity awaits us, wrest happiness out of every shabbiness, and continually salvage something precious, lasting and ennobling from whatever relationships are given to us to forge. And know, Lucille, know that, wherever you go, you go there with our love, with our human blessings, and with our most human supplications. *Bon voyage*, Lucille, farewell, Lucille, forever farewell."

What followed was formality only. Ziggy Levick stepped back. At a signal, the gathered mourners threw clods of earth upon the coffin after which the gravediggers unobtrusively standing by set to work with shovel and rake to complete the work of filling the grave.

That over, the assembled dispersed, some returning to their cars, others forming pairs or clusters of three, four or five between the graves and tombstones. Adam stepped towards Ziggy who was bracing a condoling arm about Irving's shoulder, the Persips and Madame Zara ambled slowly away, and, with everyone seeming to give wide berth to Harvey Farber, he too retreated, alone, but lofty and erect, to his own car where Justine, who must also have attended the funeral, albeit at some remove, sat waiting in white hat, white scarf and dark glasses.

Standing near to Josephine who had moved neither forward nor back, I seized at opportunity and approached her. The inner corners of her eyes were patently moist and as I came close she sniffed briefly and wiped her nose.

"Hello, Jules," she said, simply, without inflection, giving nothing away.

"I thought. . .," I said, "I heard. . . Ziggy said. . ."

She managed the faintest of smiles, albeit stiff in its having to break through the more mournful cast in which it must have been set since Lucille had immolated herself in her presence.

"Ziggy said I'd flown the nest, gone, gone back to Utica, returned to bury my face under Father's, under Mother's ever-succouring wings, is that it?"

"He. . ."

Josephine nodded, bit a lip pensively, then heaved.

"Yes," she went on. "Yes. . . That was to be so. But in the end, I didn't leave."

"Oh?"

"I reached as far as La Guardia. I even bought a ticket, checked in my suitcase and cello, went to the lounge and took to waiting for my flight. But. . ."

The heavier load of grief darkening her eyes and weighing

down her shoulders gave way to a less burdened ease. Giving vent to speech seemed to bring release to a spring that had been coiled taut within her. She permitted her gaze to fall more lightly upon me, permitting it, too, freer rein.

"Let's move from here," she said. "Away from these graves, these. . ."

She did not complete the sentence, but turned towards the path that led back to the cemetery gates, myself accompanying her but a hand-span from her side. Taking short, slow, measured steps, she now held her head bent, raising it only to throw me the swiftest of glances. I wanted to reach out, to touch, to brush a cheek, fondle her hair.

"You know something, Jules?" she said. "You want me to tell you?"

She took my unuttered answer as read.

"It may sound like a confession, I know. But when first we met at Ziggy's last week, I had a most wild, most fanciful, most shamelessly capricious notion."

"And that was?" I said, sensing a flood of heat rising to my cheeks and scalp, more than could be accounted for by the ambient warmth and sunshine glinting on everything about.

"It was so schoolgirlish, and so adolescent, so absurdly sophomoric even. I fancied I might contrive to have you take me away from here or send for me after you returned home. To your own city, that is. To Australia. For I was again, as had happened before, feeling the strain of living in New York. This place is a pressure-cooker and I wanted release. I wanted space, I wanted open greenness, and innocence and a separation from everything that is too big, and too rushed, and too fanfarish which is what New York, which is what America have become. I wanted to opt out of the centre and find a niche on an untroubled periphery which was also untrammelled and, in a quiet way, secure."

She bit into the pulp of a thumb.

"And even in the airport lounge at La Guardia when I opened my travel-bag for a comb, I entertained the thought again. Escape, I kept thinking. Escape. Like Chekhov's three sisters

hankering after Moscow. I kept repeating: escape, escape, escape; faraway, faraway, faraway. And even Utica seemed suddenly not far enough away."

What was she saying? Or perhaps she was asking? Asking that I should take her with me? That she should be with me? — Nonsense, I checked myself, it could not be. The very idea was inane. Such was the stuff of television soap-operas — the facile staple of Hollywood, Burbank, and scatter-brained look-alikes back home.

"But then. . .," she went on, tossing back her head so that her hair rose and fell like a wave, pausing the while and turning to me square-on, at the same time reaching out and touching my hand.

"It's odd how the smallest thing can be catalyst to wholly new perceptions. The very title of your book, for instance, Jules, *In Search, the Salvation*, which was also in my travel-bag when I rummaged about for my comb."

"My book?" I said, savouring the soft-skinned warmth and lightness of her hand, and tingling at its very touch, so filled with heady possibilities.

"Your book, yes. For it made me ask, consciously, deliberately, what I was seeking and where I was seeking it, whatever it was."

"And you found your answers?"

She withdrew her hand. Her accompanying gesture — a tilting of her head, a shrugging of a shoulder and raising of an eyebrow — suggested a midpoint between confirmation and negation.

"Not wholly, no. But I have discovered where to look. And it's not a question of place. I could run, escape, flee, fly, go to Utica, retire to the commune I mentioned at Ziggy's, or retreat to the Himalayas to sit at the feet of a guru, or even disappear in Australia. But. . ."

She rapped at her breastbone below the neckline of her dress.

"The true search is within, in that place that, run as one might, can never be escaped. In the self, in the soul, in those

depths of what one is, what one might be, or can attain to, or can give of oneself when called upon to give. And in a last-minute flurry, Jules, with your book in my grasp, I redeemed my suitcase, recovered my cello and came back. I returned; I came back. And since then, I've been playing, Jules, playing, playing, playing; and, at the same time, weeping, weeping, weeping, too, weeping for Lucille, for myself, for Irving, for Ziggy in a way, and for Adam, and for you, and for all humanity out there, through my music and tears, Jules, ridding myself, purging myself of all the strain and grief and entrapment and oppression that this blessed cursed city has put me through."

Adam, Ziggy and Irving were but steps away.

"I felt I owed you an explanation, Jules, after my Friday night performance when you came to me with Adam, and, in a way, gratitude as well. If I am fated to be cursed, I will be cursed anywhere; if blessed, I may as well be blessed in New York as anywhere else. Come what may, I am ready again to face and. . . and. . . as Ziggy said, to accept."

She extended her hand in farewell.

"Think of me sometimes, Jules. For my part, I should like to keep your book. I do hope dear Zubin will be pleased to see me back."

We shook hands. The sleeve of her coat had slipped upward. I caught sight again of the hairy mole above her wrist. As she had done before at Ziggy Levick's *soiree*, she followed the direction of my gaze.

"I'm not really dark, cool and prickly, am I, Jules?" she said. "Though I wonder whether everything might not be better for me if I were?"

The five of us, the last remaining of the assembled mourners — Josephine, Ziggy, Irving, Adam and myself — left the cemetery grounds together.

At the gates, Ziggy offered to drive Adam and myself back to Adam's apartment. Josephine, in turn, who, in that moment, had become to me more precious and wanted for her very un-

attainability, reached out towards Irving to straighten his tie and brush scurf from his collar.

"Come, Irving," she said. "We've had a rough ride. But still we go on, we must go on. For, when you consider the alternatives. . . Irving, will you drive me home?"

Glancing backward to watch them retreat, Josephine and Irving walking side by side at a slow discursive contemplative pace, I felt Ziggy Levick's hand on my shoulder, his other, I saw, resting equally squarely on Adam's.

"May they yet find the blessings they deserve," he said. "The gods willing, something decent, ennobling and pure may yet be saved from this agonised, accursed, unholy mess. In this world, the two of them may be small, but buoyed up, one by the other, they may yet be great. For the ultimate salvation, Adam, Jules, the ultimate salvation can only be had through one's fellow man."

12.

The coach returning me to the terminal was now off the freeway. If ever I had given the matter any thought, I became now even more conscious of the spaciousness of Melbourne. For, stretching far before me was Flemington Road, broad and neat and tree-lined; to the left, the Royal Park Gardens extending mist-ward in a lush expansive undulating sweep of green; and to the right stood an unobtrusive row of low-roofed houses, shops and factories that permitted light and colour and unpolluted clarity the fullest access into that most generous, receptive and uncluttered space. The traffic heading inward, heading outward, was thin and orderly; pedestrians were countably few; while the sight of two youngsters riding bicycles made me suddenly aware of a singular, indeed unnatural, dearth of children on Manhattan Isle which I had left the previous day.

I was returning with two of the six copies of my book, having given one each to Adam and Ziggy as well as to Josephine and Hoffnung.

Not having heard from him, I had, on the day prior to my

departure, phoned Hoffnung. As he talked a cable's distance away, I could envisage him in all his corpulent, balding, double-chinned bulk sprawled behind his massive desk and blowing thick rising smoke-rings from a monstrous cigar cavorting between his lips.

"You are a serious writer, to be sure, young man," he had said. "And from what I have read these past days of your work, a potentially mighty fine one, yes indeed, a mighty fine one. Your concerns are deep, they are searching, existential even, and full with the *angst* of living such as I did not countenance as possible or likely on your own so-distant, scarcely-known, scarcely-heard-of Antipodean soil. And there lies the difficulty, Sonny. For truth is that we here in this cauldron that answers to the name America, we too have such a bountiful cornucopia of miseries that will keep armies of wordsmiths and readers occupied till Doomsday comes without importing more of them from other parts. One day, however, when you have a name, m'boy, and a following, and wear the honoured prophet's mantle at home, then try these shores again. But for the moment, Jules, young man, for the moment, unless you can provide me with a Harvey Farber special to beat the man at his own all-problem-solving, all-answer-giving, money-spinning game, not even Laurie P. with the best of goodness, with the best of will, can do anything for you."

Adam's janitor had introduced New York to me as "hell"; through Adam, Hoffnung, Josephine and Adam's Uncle Ziggy, it had also passed at different times as Athens and Golgotha, Eden and Purgatory, jungled Babel and Olympus, Moloch and Mephistopheles. Returned to Melbourne, I did not yet know which was most true, just as I could not yet determine, in the confrontation between man and city, which was the mightier — the man who with his blood, his mind, his muscle, bone and soul created grand colossi or those colossi which could, and often did, with a stroke demolish man. That which, on the crest of vaulting exhilaration, I had written on leaving my Californian Brett C. Halliday's justly-vaunted enchanting, pure and wondrous Anaheim and Universal Studios delights, remained

true. If it was unthinkable, America would think it; if it was improbable, America would solve it; if it was impossible, yet would America achieve it. But, as Adam had asked of Harvey in another context at the *Cafe Pierre* on abandoning Lucille, at what cost, at what cost, of life, of happiness, of health?

For my own part, in relation to my private quest — the promotion of a book, the assertion of a name — I had been foiled, I had been thwarted. First time around, New York had proved too daunting. I was but a dwarf tugging at the shoelace of a giant. But prophet or not — to use Hoffnang's term — the day would dawn when I would return. Not with any Harvey Farber-Laurie P.-type panaceas in my bag, nor with transcendentalisms, supernaturalisms, or other fads and turn-ons by which humanity might achieve redemption, but with another book, or two, or three. Perhaps, if they were still left among the city's uncrushed and undevoured, I would yet again hear Josephine give to others of her music and, thereby, of the deepest gifts that were in her to give; I might yet see in Irving, too — with Josephine as his buttress, I ventured to think — the fulfilled and blessed wholeness of a reconstituted life; Ziggy, dapper, buoyant and with his livewire spring in every step would have remained as ageless and evangelical about his city to the visitor as ever; while Adam, if not the Nobel Laureate Harvey Farber had with lampooning levity presaged for him, might have attained to eminence in teasing out in that huge laboratory the chemistry that fuelled a man's passions, desires, debaucheries, harrowings and self-destructiveness, such knowledge being harnessed to save those earth-bound sacrificial seraphim known as man from being offered up to overweening Moloch which, God-like, scavenged the city to feed on the carrion fall-out of blighted human life.

That I would return, I knew. I would yet make sense of, come to terms with, even master New York. Meanwhile, however, there was work to be done. More stories; in due course, another collection; a novel perhaps; and, over time, more in-depth analyses for sub-editor Jurgens to blue-pencil into final shape.

Meanwhile, the coach eased into the parking-bay outside the terminal. I looked up at the familiar office-blocks with their neon billboards flashing on their rooftops and the late April sunlight glinting on their facades; I listened to the hum of traffic, to the oscillating wires and to other reverberations from God-knew-what other scattered surrounding sources; and smelled the no-less familiar, even homely odours of pasties, hamburgers, meat pies and fries. All around, people were walking, pacing, hurrying, dawdling, waiting; trams passed by, and cars and buses turning left, turning right; while voices called, horns sounded and in a construction-site fenced off nearby, a foreman's whistle blew. I was home again, back in an ambience once more my own. The Public Baths, the tram-shelter, the Institute of Technology and the corner coffee-shop a pedestrian crossing away confirmed it, as did the stores strung close along the length of Swanston Street, and the Library and Museum, the traffic policemen at their intersections, and the Shrine of Remembrance standing staid, standing sturdy, surrounded by the ornate parklands in St.Kilda Road beyond. Though brisk, though active, even boisterous, there was not about this central thoroughfare the pressured fury, the relentless crush and sheer raw force of that other city now half a world away. I could breathe, I could let go. And I did breathe, I did let go, feeling my shoulders lighten, my fingers loosen and the tightness wrought by travel, sleeplessness and sustained intensity ease, like a succession of garments shed, out of my eyelids, my temples, my jaw.

But as, on disembarking, I caught sight of *The Age*, *The Herald* and *The Australian* billboards which read "Man Shot Dead: Vendetta Feared", "Boy in Sewer" and "Terror in Sydney Mall"; as I saw a shaggy stubbled hobo leaning in a hotel doorway; as I saw the blue bloated face of a breathless airline cargo attendant just then drawing on a cigarette; as I took in all these and heard, then saw, a police-car, an ambulance and a tow-truck approach and pass, their sirens blaring, lights flashing and motors raucously turning over, and overheard, too, a fellow-passenger say to his wife, "Well, dear, seeing these

again proves we're truly home", I found myself wondering, wondering whether Adam would ever trouble to return, I recalled Ziggy Levick's parting dictum about the gods and where earthly salvation ultimately lay, and heard in my mind's innermost ear the tremulous reverberating goose-pimpling strains of Boccherini rising, falling, rising, falling and rising yet again from the strings of a cello over which a girl now far away, dressed in red, with lush black hair, most delicate nose and fetching bristly mole above her wrist, bowed in intense concentration and artistry sublime. I knew that I was being fanciful, but I did hope that, though an ocean and a continent separated us, she might sometimes, when playing for Zubin Mehta, for Irving, for New York, remember also that she was playing for me.

A taxi moved forward in its rank. The driver stepped out, a toothpick between his teeth, opened the boot with a grunt, and loaded my luggage into it. He was not American and I was no greenie. He made no promises about being on the level, being direct, being cheap.