Remembered Violence

A Novel

By James Michael Wilson
Remembered Violence

Who exposed to others' eyes
Into his own heart ne'er pries
Death to him's a strange surprise.

—Andrew Marvell

I

Jeremy Tyne had a wife and a two-year-old son when he came to the University of Chicago. He had received his PhD in mathematics three months earlier, in June, and this was his first academic job.

He spent the summer trying to regain his lost love of mathematics. He had come through the summer before his last year—and it was in that summer he proved the results that became his thesis—and then he had stopped. The theorem that should have been proved was not proved, and it was as if he had missed a beat; so that he limped (or slept) through his final year, like a wounded soldier. He blew a seminar. He made two mistaken claims of having proved things.

They moved to Chicago at the end of the summer. The University gave them an apartment in a red-brick block of flats about quarter of a mile from the math building. The apartment was not prepared for them: the paint on the walls was peeling; the plaster was cracking; the living room carpet was almost black with grime. Ellen, his wife, cried for an hour their first night there.

They got workmen in during the first few days to fix the place up. They had to keep the windows open because of the paint fumes. (It was a cold autumn, but there was no rain.) Jeremy worried to Ellen about their son, Tony, sleeping in a freshly-painted room. They both knew someone who had done that, and it had scarred his lungs.

Their living room had a big window that looked east, over a green vacant lot, toward the building that housed campus security. To the south and southeast were the physics labs, the Henry Moore sculpture (a monument to the first atomic reactor), Regenstein Library, and the tennis courts. The University proper began on the other side of Regenstein. It was built to look like a walled mediaeval city: a high gargoyle-encrusted arch led into the central Quadrangle.

Jeremy would go to his office in the mornings, and he would stay there until he had to teach. After his classes he would go for a walk. There were three good bookstores on 57th Street, and he liked to browse in them. He avoided the other faculty in the department as much as he could. He did not know what his references had written in his letters of recommendation, but the people at the University seemed to expect great things of him, and he did not want to disappoint them, because he was afraid of what they would do to him.

There was a graduate student in the department who was getting his degree that year, and who reminded Jeremy of himself. He was Jewish and Canadian. He would pull at his beard and talk quickly if you asked him about something he did not understand, and his voice would get higher and higher. It seemed to Jeremy that that was how he had spoken with his own advisor, Arnold Phelps, but Arnold had never taken that as a sign of incompetence.

The seminars were held in a small room on the building's eastern edge. The room was brightly-lit, but everything in it—even the panes in the windows—had been discolored with chalk dust, and the air was always dry. There was a seminar every week of the academic year. (If there was no one nearby who could speak they would fly somebody in from Argentina.) All of the analysts in the department attended it, most of the time, along with some mathematicians from nearby schools: one from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and two, Aden Dart and Bobby Stone, from Douglas College, which lay outside the city.

After working and hiding for most of the day, Jeremy would come home. Ellen was always extremely tired—not quite in tears. They had had to leave their car in California, so she would take the bus, with Tony, to do the shopping. (The store was a mile from their apartment.) She would bring the groceries up the back stairs, having carted them, with Tony on her shoulders, from the bus stop. They were over fifteen hundred dollars in debt when they came to Chicago, and it took several months for the paychecks to accumulate. Twice that fall she did not have enough money when she came to the checkout counter at the supermarket.
Jeremy, when he got home, would sit in the swivel chair and hear his wife's complaints, while he listened to All Things Considered. They would have dinner, and read, and play with Tony for awhile. Most nights—too many nights—they tried to have sex. Ellen told Jeremy that he was trying so often just in order to fail; and, in December, they did not try at all.

Jeremy solved no problems. He discovered—what nearly every young mathematician discovers—that he was ignorant of a great deal of mathematics. There were things he had covered, in his graduate and undergraduate courses—things he had taken tests on—which he did not understand. His transcripts said that he knew them, and now it was as if the gods were punishing his fraud. When he saw his research going nowhere he began to do exercises from textbooks. He was ashamed of how hard he had to work (he would close his office door when he took the books out, as if they were pornography). Over Christmas he decided that he would never do mathematical research again.

In early February, while sitting in the bathtub, he had an idea about a problem. He had worked on it in graduate school, he had not been able to solve it, but the idea he had now was not like anything he had tried then. He got out of the tub and dressed. He spent the rest of the evening tinkering, testing the idea on simple examples. It passed all the tests. He began to think that it might work.

For the next few days, he hardly spoke to Ellen or Tony, and soon he could not work at home: Tony made too much noise and demanded too much attention. Jeremy started to go to the office every night after dinner. This went on for three weeks.

His office was really the inner of two offices. He had it to himself. The outer office was shared by two other instructors. They were analysts, like him. They had all been put there together because the University wanted them to stimulate each other. But they had, mathematically, almost nothing in common. Judah Parker, who sat near the outer door, had an international reputation, while Simon Osney—who sat just outside his office—and Jeremy were relative mediocrities; and Jeremy and Simon were in different areas of analysis.

Jeremy turned on the light and closed the inner door. At night they kept Eckhart Hall just warm enough so that it would not be frigid in the morning. The closed door made his space seem warmer, and it hid the blank darkness on his right. His desk faced the outer wall. There was a window, high up, which he could look out of if he stood on the radiator. His office was on the third floor, and University Avenue was down there, streaked with snow.

He numbered the yellow pages and laid them face down in a pile as he filed them with figures. He was seldom so careful, but this time he wanted everything in order, to be checked later.

He flipped his pen and tapped his feet. He muttered to himself and drummed on the desk. He was cheering the theorem on.

He had once noticed that, when working late at night, the mathematical symbols would take on personalities. This was happening now: $x$ was male, uneducated, and common-sensical; $y$, who was female, was lazy and seductive; $f$ was like $x$, but with more experience of the world; $h$ was a cunning salesman; and $g$ was an unimaginative high school librarian.

The radiators came on. They sounded like an animal kicking at the bars of its cage. Jeremy looked at his watch: it was after 11:30. As he picked up the papers and put them in his desk, he was sure that the theorem was true. His brain was singing. He turned off the light, closed the office, and went downstairs.

The area lights were on in Hutchinson Court, and the deli was open across the way. There was a pile of junk—bricks, boards, and pipes—just outside the rear entrance to Eckhart. It was left over from some remodelling in the fall. The workmen had never cleared it away. Jeremy walked around the pile, and around the bare Court. He went out: through the covered walkway, through the high entrance arch, and onto 57th Street, where the shuttle buses were waiting in front of Regenstein. They were rumbling and steaming like unhappy cattle. People were coming out of Regenstein and down the long walk with their hands in their pockets and their collars up.

Ellen was still awake, reading, in the living room, when he walked in.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

Jeremy sat down in the entrance and took off his boots.

"It still seems true," he said.

"How do you feel?"

"Tired."
“You haven’t gotten tired doing math in a long time.”
“I know,” he said. He got up and went into the kitchen, and poured himself a glass of milk. “What did you guys do?”
“We played,” she said. “Tony missed you.”
Jeremy came out and sat down on the couch. Ellen was sitting in the swivel chair.
“I’m sorry,” he said.
“How long is this going to take?”
“I don’t know.”
“Would you have time to take him to the park tomorrow?” She waited a moment, and said, “You’re not teaching.”
“In the morning I could.”
“Tony would like that a lot.”
“All right,” Jeremy said.

It seemed to Jeremy that he had come to this park often with his son, though this was only the third time. The park lay on the north side of 57th Street, and in a way he was familiar with it, because he saw it whenever he went to browse in those three bookstores. The park had no grass or trees or earth: the ground was covered with concrete and asphalt which were, places, worn to gravel.

They had walked there—Tony had to be carried part of the way. A warm rain in the early morning had melted almost all of the snow. It was a warm day, for March. The people they had met on their way were going about with their overcoats open.

Jeremy set the Tony down. The boy ran to the swings.
“Push me!” he called.
Jeremy walked up. He buckled him into the seat and gently to pushed him.
He watched the back of Tony’s head, and he thought of when, once, he had held his sister’s hamster in his hand. He remembered: a helpless, soft thing.
“Don’t turn, Tony. You’ll go crooked.”

There were other parents in the park. Two black women were sitting together on a bench with their coats off, talking. Occasionally one of them would yell toward a handful of kids who were playing around the giant slide. Jeremy assumed that they lived in the ghetto. On another bench, a white woman was sitting by herself. She had a magazine open on the seat beside her and she was reading it. A little boy who seemed to be about four was playing on a jungle gym a few yards away from her. Now and then she would look up and see where he was.

In Hyde Park you always assumed that blacks lived in the ghetto, and whites lived near the University. The white woman would send her son to the Lab School in a couple of years. She was probably a graduate student in something; her husband, a doctor in the hospital. The black women had walked their kids up from someplace below 63rd Street. This was the school they went to on weekdays—Jeremy had seen them, or kids like them, playing basketball: tough kids.

There had been three murders in Hyde Park that winter, and dozens of muggings and burglaries, but none of them had touched him or his family. “He shall give his angels charge over thee...” The roofs of the rough houses were like waves of a violent sea, that was held back—by streetlamps, police, call boxes, and money. He wondered what those black people thought of the University (mediaeval barbarians, living in the woods outside a monastery).

“Stop me, Daddy.”
He caught the chains and walked the swing to a stop. He got Tony out, and the boy ran to the merry-go-round.

“Okay, okay.”
Tony was standing on it, holding the bars as if he were on the deck of a rolling ship. Jeremy bent down and clutched the outer arches.

“Get ready.”
He swung it around. He enjoyed the easy resistance his son’s body gave it. It was like hiking fast. Then Tony started to cry.

“Sorry.”
He slowed it down and stopped it.
"Do you want to try it again?"
Tony shook his head.
"What do you want to do?"
A moment passed. Tony got off the merry-go-round and walked to one of the smaller slides. He got to the base of the ladder and looked up at it.
"Do you think you can go up by yourself?"
Tony shook his head.
"Okay, then let's go."
Tony started to cry.
"No, I mean up the ladder. I'll be behind you. Come on."
Tony still cried. The too-fast merry-go-round, and now his father's hurt anger, frightened him.
"Okay, then we're going home."

As he carried Tony into the apartment—he had fallen asleep—Ellen said,
"Arnold called."
"Yes?"
He put took off the boy's shoes and put him to bed.
"He called about forty minutes ago. He said he'd be in Ida Noyes in about an hour."
"Okay, then I'll go meet him."
"Did you two have fun?"
"We played on the swings," he said, "and the merry-go-round."

The walk to Ida Noyes went past Eckhart, and around the backside of Rockefeller Chapel. He went into the building by the back door. The TV was on in the main lounge, and students were watching from the fat brown furniture. The bake shop was open, with a long line. On the inside, Ida Noyes looked like an Edwardian men's club. A broad double stairway of polished wood flowed upward to landings on the second and third floors, where most of the student organizations had their offices.

Jeremy walked across the foyer and into the ballroom. The windows on the south side of the ballroom had deep sills that you could sit in, and he climbed up into the one that was closest to the door. The enormous room was empty. They used it for concerts and dances, but now all of the tables, and nearly all the chairs, were folded up and stacked behind partitions at the eastern end of the room.

Sunlight was coming in through the grayish windows, and, for the first time, Jeremy noticed that the radiators were on: the air felt like hot wool. He took off his jacket—clumsy in the windowsill—and folded it on his lap.

Cars bounded over the Midway's hump, going north on University Avenue, and Jeremy felt ashamed for having taken Tony home. Down there, south of the buildings whose names he did not know... people just survived. In high school he had wondered why his friends, with their ordinary minds, had been impatient to get out into the world.

There was the airport van. It pulled up in front of Ida Noyes and stopped. The driver, who was black, got out and opened the side door for the passengers. Then he went around back to get the luggage.

Arnold stepped out. He was carrying his bike bag on his shoulder and he was wearing a light brown jacket. His hair, abundant but not thick, was blond and sandy-gray, and it was uncombed. He was over six feet tall, but he seemed to stand with a stoop, because of the way he held his head: it was as if he were trying to look ironic.

He paid the driver and picked up his suitcase. By that time Jeremy had got out of Ida Noyes and come down the steps.
"I'll take that," he said.
"Thank you."
Arnold set the suitcase down and Jeremy picked it up.
"How was your trip?"
They started to walk toward University Avenue.
"They made us wait in Salt Lake City," he said. "There was a windstorm."
"Oh."
“How’s the family?”
“Tony’s doing all right. Ellen is, well, not happy.”
“I’m sorry to hear that.” He said it as if it were an observation. “How are you doing?”
“You remember that problem about the Riesz transforms of the characteristic function of a set?”
“You think you have something?”
“I think I have a counterexample.”
“Make sure.”

They walked past the seminary, and Eckhart, and the Reynolds Club.
“You know,” Arnold said, as they reached the corner, “you’re not doing so bad.”
“I suppose.”
“No, I mean it. You work hard. A couple of years—you’ll be able to go someplace good, someplace where
you’ll be happy.”

They entered the Quadrangle Club and walked up to the front desk. Jeremy put down Arnold’s suitcase. While
Arnold was signing in, Jeremy said, “Would you like to come over this evening, after dinner sometime?”
“I would love to. What would be a good time?” He handed the clerk the card and took his key. “Have
there been any calls for me?” he asked.
“No, Mr. Phelps.”
“Around seven.”
“Then I’ll see you around seven,” he said.

“What exactly is wrong with his son?” Ellen asked, over dinner.
“I don’t know,” said Jeremy. “Arnold was having problems with him while I was there.”
“Is he psychotic?”
Jeremy shrugged.
“He wrecked his car,” he said. “And there was one year, when he was going in and out of a mental
hospital.”
“And you think Arnold blames himself.”
“Well,” said Jeremy, “he did once say how he used to take him to the park.”
“Yes?”
“And John would want him to push him on the swing, but Arnold would tell him to leave him alone,
because he wanted to work on mathematics.”
“Oh.”
Jeremy looked at Tony.
“Yeah.”
Ellen scooped the last of the corn onto her plate.
“Don’t you be like that,” she said.
“I try not to.”
“These last couple weeks, you know.”
“I know. I know,” he said. “I’m sorry. But I’ve been working on a problem.”
“How long is it going to take?”
“It shouldn’t be much longer.” He faintly sighed. “Some people work like this all the time—just to
survive.”
“You only have to work that hard if you stay in a place like this.”
“It’s only places like this that’ll take me after I’ve been here.”
“You don’t know that.”
“Well.”
“There’ll be some small place that will take you.”
“Alaska? How about Alaska?”
“We’re not going to Alaska.”
“There was the University of Petroleum and Minerals.”
“We’re not going to Saudi Arabia, either.”
“New Zealand?”
“People in New Zealand would never take you seriously.”
"I thought you said I could go to a small place."
"Not New Zealand."
"Maine."
"I want to go somewhere where it's warm."
"Brazil?"
"Not that warm," she said. "California."
"Oh, California." He looked at the clock. "It's getting close to seven. I'd better get the dishes done."
"Don't bother. Oh, what a mess." She meant Tony. "Get me a washcloth, quick."
He left the table and fetched her a wet washcloth from the bathroom.
"Thanks. Get me a clean shirt for him, too."
"Where do you keep them?"
"In his top right-hand drawer."
She was still cleaning him up when he came out with the shirt.
"Look at this—in the ears, the hair . . ."
"Maybe he should eat in a rubber suit."
"Really."
The downstairs buzzer buzzed.
"That's Arnold," said Jeremy.
"Wonderful."
Jeremy unlocked the entryway door and opened the door of their apartment. They heard Arnold come up the stairs.
"I hope I'm not too early," he said.
He carefully wiped his feet on the landing.
"No, not too early. Come on in." Jeremy shut the door behind him. "Take the swivel chair."
"Thank you."
Ellen came out of the kitchen carrying Tony by his armpits.
"Tony was a little messy at dinner," she said.
"He survived it, though," said Jeremy.
Arnold sat down in the chair. Ellen set Tony on the floor and seated herself on the couch.
"Would you like some coffee?" Jeremy asked.
"Yes, I'd like that. Black." He turned the chair. The drapes were open, and he could look down on the vacant lot and the lamplit street. "You know, it's not so bad here."
"Not too bad now," said Jeremy. He went into the kitchen. He heard the chair turn again. Arnold spoke to Ellen.
"Jeremy told me that you don't like Chicago."
"I hate it."
"You know, it isn't that bad."
"It is when you don't have a car."
"Have you ridden the buses? They have good buses here."
"Yes, I've ridden the buses. I ride the buses to go shopping," she said. She bent over and pulled a block out from under the couch for Tony.
"You can't live in Married Student Housing all your life," Arnold said.
Jeremy appeared in the kitchen doorway. Arnold was on his left and Ellen was on his right. He was sure that they would not fight as long as he was there.
"I know," she said.
"In a couple of years you'll be able to go somewhere else."
"We'll have to go someplace else."
"And then you can stay wherever it is you go."
"Maybe."
Jeremy spoke.
"Has Lesage arrived yet?"
"I haven't seen him," said Arnold. "That doesn't mean anything, though."
"Do you know what he's going to be talking about?"
“‘Degenerate elliptic problems on manifolds.’”
“I don’t know anything about that.”
“Go to his talk anyway,” said Arnold. “He’s a good lecturer.”
“You’re not speaking, are you?”
“Not this time.”
“Who is Lesage?” Ellen asked.
“Lesage is this mathematician,” said Jeremy, “who’s really famous, and—sort of a snob. That’s what Arnold’s told me.”
“He’s very arrogant,” said Arnold. He was silent for a moment.
“He enjoys humiliating people,” Arnold said. “There was once this time when he was visiting Princeton. Another mathematician, who was also visiting, came into his office and said, ‘Hello, Professor Lesage, I will be visiting here for awhile; here are some of my papers.’ Lesage took them, said ‘Thank you very much,’ and dumped them in the wastebasket.”
“He sounds like a nice man,” said Ellen.
“Tell her about what happened at Columbia.”
“That was at Cornell,” Arnold said. “There was a chance that this graduate student might flunk out, and if he did, he would be sent back to his country in Africa, where he might be shot. And Lesage said, ‘If that happens, I’ll go watch!’”
The kettle boiled. Jeremy went out to fix the coffee.
“But I don’t think he went to Africa.”
“So the student was shot?”
“I have no idea. Anyway, it may not have even happened.” Arnold paused, as if he had felt himself talking faster. “But, he’s like that. If you don’t want him to humiliate you, you have to stay on his good side.”
“How do you do that?” she asked.
“By proving theorems.”
Jeremy brought out two cups of coffee. He gave one to Arnold and sat down on the floor next to his wife.
“Do you remember that student who killed his advisor?” Jeremy asked.
“You mean at Davis?”
“What’s this?” Ellen asked.
Jeremy turned to her.
“A grad student, in mathematics, actually. He’d been one for—how long?”
“Twenty years,” Arnold said.
“Something like that. One day, he came in, and bludgeoned his advisor to death.”
“John Lake,” said Arnold. “His advisor’s name was John Lake. He didn’t deserve it.”
“Why did he do it?” asked Ellen.
“Probably because he wasn’t going to get a PhD,” Arnold said.
“No, that’s not true,” said Jeremy. “I read that he’d finished everything he had to do for his degree. He was going to graduate.”
“Then I don’t know why he did it.”
“He was divorced a little while before he killed Lake. They interviewed his wife, and she said that he’d changed while he was in grad school. He started coming home and beating her.”
“All that means—” said Arnold. He sipped his coffee, and for the first time he looked at them as if he suspected that they had lured him here only to bait him—“is that he shouldn’t have been in mathematics in the first place.”
“I think we should talk about something else.”
Tony had made a tower with the blocks.
“What’s your son making there?” Arnold asked.
“What?”
Arnold leaned forward slightly in the chair.
“It’s probably a castle,” Ellen said.
Jeremy looked at Tony.
“What is it?” he asked him.
The boy turned—his back was toward his father. All of the grown-ups were looking at him.
“What are you making?” Ellen asked. “What is it?”
They saw him prepare to cry, and then he cried. Ellen picked him up and set him on her lap.
“Too much attention,” she said.
Arnold nodded.
“I think I’d better go. Thank you for the coffee,” he said. “I suppose I’ll see you tomorrow?”
“Yes,” said Jeremy.
He walked Arnold to the door and shut it. When he returned to the living room, Ellen was comforting Tony.

II

He saw strangers in the hall the next morning as he walked back from class. Ryerson—the physics building—and Eckhart were joined like Siamese twins, by a hallway at the second floor, and the mailboxes were at the point where they met. Jeremy checked his box: it was empty. He usually checked it five or six times a day, hoping that something—a letter from an old girlfriend, or money—would appear in it which would get him out of Chicago: checking the box was like doing a rain dance.

He had come from Ryerson, and the strangers were on the math side. There were three of them. They were standing together, talking in low voices—humbly—like tourists in a convent. One of them looked up when he heard Jeremy.

Jeremy walked past them and went up to his office.
Simon Osney had gone to teach. Judah was sitting at his desk. He had his right foot propped on the handle of a steel drawer, and he was gazing upward toward a point where the wall and the ceiling joined. He was smoking a cigarette in slow, measured drags: he was doing mathematics.

Jeremy went into his own part of the office and kept the door open. The class notes got dumped into one big drawer. From another one, he carefully removed the yellow sheets from Wednesday night. He set them on the desk and began to read through them.

There was going to be an error, and he was afraid to find it, and he wanted to blunt the pain when he did find it. Therefore he read carelessly. But still it seemed true. Nothing was obviously absurd, and all the inequalities went the right way.

He had thought about his problem while he was teaching, or: he had thought about the fame its solution would bring him. Once in the fall, while the construction was going on in the Court, he had dismissed a class early. He had got lost in the lecture. Because of the noise, he had said; but, really, he had not known what he was doing. What if there had been no noise? Would his incompetence have been revealed then? If he could solve his problem, then what he knew or how he taught would not matter. He had taken bad courses from famous mathematicians before, and his solution would make him, like them, untouchable.

“I …” Judah said.
Jeremy turned. Judah had not moved.
“I … I heard it’s going to snow.”
“Really?”
Judah nodded—slowly—in the same way that he smoked.
“They said … They said tonight sometime.” He stood up.
“I’m … I’m not getting anywhere,” he said.
“What are you working on?”
“It’s this problem. Maybe you know it. Suppose you have functions, \( f_1 \) through \( f_n \), in H-infinity, of the disc; and suppose you have another function, \( g \), in H-infinity, which satisfies …”
He sketched it on the board.
“It’s true for \( g^3 \), and it’s false for \( g \). And the big problem is, is it true for \( g^2 \)? Nobody seems to have any ideas. All the proofs that work for \( g^3 \) break down when you get to 2.”
“What’s the reason for studying this question?”
“I don’t know.”
He sat down. The two of them stared at the board.
“Hm,” said Jeremy.
“Yeah.”
Jeremy returned to the yellow sheets.

A few minutes later, Judah left the office. Jeremy looked at his watch: it was 11:21. He was hungry.

Downstairs, he stepped round the junkpile and walked across toward the deli. It had cooled since early morning. The sky was a very pure blue: so blue that it could make you think that outer space was blue.
The Arctic air was moving in.

All of the deli workers were Chinese.
“Hello may I help you?”
The young man in the white apron and hat leaned forward and did not—quite—shout it.
“Polish, with everything,” said Jeremy.
He turned to the Chinese workers who were behind him.
“Polish! Everything!”
Jeremy wondered: were they all Chinese? Where had the proprietor found them? (Boat people?)
“And potato chips.”
“Get chips down there, sir. Next please may I help you?”

He got his food and went to look for an empty table. The dining area was in what used to be Hutchinson Commons. It had dark, sculpted panelling, and there were larger-than-life-size paintings of men in judge’s robes on the walls. But the tables and chairs could have come from a church basement.

The lunchtime crowd was coming in. Jeremy found a place and sat down.
The chair next to his had a copy of the Maroon on the seat. He picked up the paper and spread it out in front of him. There was an article inside about the conference. It had a long quote from the chairman of the math department. The chairman did not mention Lesage or any of the big names who would be attending.

Jeremy put the paper down. Other mathematicians were coming in. He knew a few of their names. Some he recognized from other conferences he had attended; others simply had the right look (like the strangers in the hall).

There were Aden Dart and Bobby Stone. Aden was short, not heavy, but not muscular either. He had gray temples; they reminded you that he was no longer young (he was forty-five). But he acted young: he sat in the front row during seminars and wrote down everything the speaker said, like a first-year grad student.

Bobby Stone was grinning; he always grinned. His grin was very wide and toothy: it went with his partial baldness.

They walked into the serving area like two nervous spies.
Arnold Phelps came in. He saw Jeremy and approached the table.
“Do you mind if I leave this here?” He slipped the bike bag off his shoulder.
“No,” Jeremy said. “I’ll be around for awhile.”

“Thank you.”

He put the bag down on a chair and went to get his food.

Jeremy watched the door, having no idea what Lesage looked like.

A wiry, balding man came in. The man had on a black suit, and he had bushy eyebrows that pointed out like angels’ wings. As soon as he came through the door he glanced behind him and to one side, as if the person he had been speaking to had just vanished. Then he turned and looked at the room–European disdain.

A tall man in his fifties entered. He looked like he might have taught high school once. His hair was brushed up like a country singer’s. Then a fat man came in, and then there was a woman. The woman worked in the library.

Arnold set his tray down and hung the bag on the back of his chair.
“I hope Ellen didn’t make you too upset,” Jeremy said.
“No. She didn’t make me upset. I’m sorry she’s so unhappy.” Arnold took the things off his tray and pushed it to one side. “Have you given any thought to where you want to go when you get out of here?”
“Someplace small.” Then: “How’s John?”

“Better; he’s better. He just passed his equivalency test. And next year he’s going to college.”
“I’m glad to hear that.”

The chairs around them were being taken by strangers; the sea of voices was rising. Arnold looked up.
“There’s Lesage.”
He shifted his bag to the seat next to his, and went to greet him.
Lesage was of medium height. He was overweight, but not really fat. His black hair was slicked back, close to his head, and he had a pointed nose. His jacket was open. He was smiling.
The two men shook hands. Arnold turned, pointed to their table, and said something; Lesage nodded.
Then Lesage went to the serving area, and Arnold returned to the table.
“You’ll get to meet him,” he said.
“I’ll try not to bring up Africa.”
“You’d better not.”
They ate without speaking. Jeremy thought that Lesage would probably not insult him as long as Arnold was there. A couple of tables away, Aden and Bobby were sitting down.
Then Lesage appeared. Arnold stood up; Jeremy stood up.
“Andy Lesage, I would like for you to meet Jeremy Tyne; Jeremy Tyne, I would like for you to meet Andy Lesage.”
“Very pleased,” said Lesage.
Arnold took the bag and hung it on the back of Jeremy’s chair.
“Ex-graduate student,” he said.
“Ah.”
They sat down.
“You know, Arnold—he unwrapped his sandwich—American airplanes are…”
“Less likely to blow up than yours.”
Lesage appeared to consider it.
“That’s true,” he said. “But, no: it’s not your airplanes. It’s your customs.”
“Our customs?”
“The customs you come through.”
“Oh. Those customs.”
“Really, you’re as bad as the Russians.”
“It’s part of the arms race,” said Arnold. “They do it, so we have to.”
“Aaahhh!” Lesage waved him away and turned to Jeremy. “You’re his student?”
“Yes.”
“What are you doing now?”
“I’m working on the Riesz transforms of the characteristic function of a set…”
“No, I don’t mean that,” said Lesage. “I mean, where are you now?”
“I’m here.”
“He means he’s at the University of Chicago.”
“Thank you, Arnold,” said Lesage. “How do you like it?”
“Oh…, it’s fine. A little cold.”
Lesage emitted a laugh through his nose.
“So, you’re working on the Riesz transforms problem. Do you have anything?”
“I…” He felt as if he were confessing a sin.
“He thinks he has a counterexample.”
“A counterexample? Now, that would be very interesting.”
“I have to check it still.”
Lesage smiled.
“In 1955—” he glanced at Arnold—“did Arnold ever tell you this? In 1955, I thought I had a proof of the corona theorem, twice.”
He seemed to wait for them to laugh.
“Well, this isn’t the corona theorem,” Jeremy said.
He brushed the comment away.
“You don’t worry about that. You just do mathematics. You’re going to give a talk?”
“No.”
“Maybe next time.”
For the next few minutes they ate without saying anything. Lesage finished his sandwich and wiped off his hands. He took some papers out of his coat pocket and unfolded them. They were the schedule for the conference.

He looked up at Jeremy.

"You sure you don't want to give a talk?"

It took a second for Jeremy to see that it was a joke.

"Look at this," said Lesage. He tapped the papers with his finger. "Look at this, the usual shit." He glanced around—had anyone heard?

"It isn't the best conference," said Arnold.

"It isn't bad," said Lesage. "Just . . . you know, you look in a journal—almost any journal—maybe five percent of the stuff is any good. I mean, it goes somewhere. And, maybe twenty percent of it doesn't go anywhere, but it has some entertainment value. And the rest—" he tapped the papers "—the rest is like this."

"Your talk is in there," said Jeremy.

Lesage smiled; nodded.

"Did Arnold ever tell you this? When I was at Cornell, I was sitting on a graduate committee once. There was a student. From Africa. He was . . . nothing . . . nothing. But they said that if he failed, he would be sent back to Africa, and be shot. And do you know what I said? 'If that happens, I'll go watch!'"

"What happened?"

"'What happened?'

"What happened to the student?"

"I don't know," he said. "I took a sabbatical. When I came back, he was gone."

"He didn't go to Africa," said Arnold.

Lesage looked at his watch.

"They're going to start soon."

"I think we're all done," said Arnold.

The three men got up. They dumped their trash near the exit and walked out into the Reynolds Club.

"Where is it?" asked Jeremy. "I had a class."

"The big lecture hall," said Arnold. "One-thirty-three."

The deli door opened and Aden and Bobby came out.

"Andy, have you met Aden Dart and Bob Stone?"

"No, I have not."

Arnold introduced them.

"I know your work, Professor Lesage," said Aden.

Bobby simply shook Lesage's hand.

"What do you do?" asked Lesage.

"We work in trigonometric series," said Aden.

"You're a student of Skroli?"

"Yes."

"Then I—" he looked at Jeremy "—I have seen some of your papers. You're giving a talk?"

"Yes."

"Then I will be at your talk."

"Thank you."

They walked over to Eckhart together.

As soon as they were inside, Lesage said,

"Excuse me, Arnold. I have forgotten. Where is the restroom in this building?"

"It's down there."

"Thank you."

Arnold pointed. "See it?"

"Thank you."

Aden asked, "When did you get in, Arnold?"

"I came in yesterday afternoon. How have you been?"

"Oh, fine."

"Don't you have kids in college now?"

"Two," said Aden.

"How can you manage that?"
“Night classes,” said Bobby.
They heard the toilet flush. Lesage came out of the bathroom.
“We were waiting for you,” Arnold said.
Lesage said nothing, and they went into the hall together.

It was a few minutes before one. The hall, which could seat over a hundred, was still filling up. Jeremy took a seat at the back, near the windows that looked out onto Hutchinson Court. Arnold was up toward the front; he had already flipped the desk up and was pulling a white pad out of his bag. Aden and Bobby were sitting together over on the right.

The hall did not have a rostrum. Instead, there was a long solid desk on a raised platform, down in front of the blackboards. A man whom Jeremy did not recognize was standing behind it with his hands resting quietly on the surface. He kept glancing over the heads of the audience (nearly all of them were men). He seemed to be listening, waiting for the right moment to ask for silence, as if they might revolt if he asked for it too soon.

“I think it’s about time to begin,” he said. “If you could all please be seated, now. Please.” “Our next speaker is a man who almost literally needs no introduction; and I don’t suppose there are many here who aren’t familiar with at least a small fraction of his work: Professor Andrew Lesage, of the University of Wisconsin and the Mittag-Leffler Institute. He will be speaking to us today about degenerate elliptic problems on manifolds. Professor Lesage.”

As he stepped down from the platform, Lesage got up from the front row and walked to the board.

“Thank you,” he said. “Before beginning, I should like to thank the organizers—especially Professor Losch—for their kind invitation to speak here today.

“It’s good to be back in Chicago.”
He picked up the chalk, and, turning toward the board, said,

“Degenerate elliptic problems on manifolds.

“We suppose that we are given a Riemannian manifold, $M$. He wrote the $M$. “$M$, of course, has a metric, which we shall call $g$.” He wrote the $g$. “And we shall let delta—” he wrote a $\Delta$ “—be $M$’s Laplacian operator.

“We are concerned with the following questions …”
He lectured without notes, and he made every question seem natural (Jeremy had heard great mathematicians before . . .). He made it look as if you could do it yourself, so that listening to him was like watching a ski jumper, or a trampoline artist. If you got out there, where he was, the magic of the thing would make you fly, too. But behind the insights were years of work—hard work, even for him—like an athlete’s taut muscles. And the audience followed him, from complexity to complexity, over the theory which was like an enormous rock, with handholds that Lesage had carved himself.

He listed unsolved problems at the end, and then he stopped. There was enthusiastic applause.

The man who had introduced him stood up and asked if there were any questions. There were a few; and more applause.

“Well—everybody saw him look at the clock “—it’s a little after two now. I think we’ll take a break till quarter after, and then the twenty-minute talks will begin.

“Thank you, Professor Lesage,” he said.
They applauded again. Lesage stood behind his introducer. He looked neither humble nor proud, but only intense, as he waited for it to end.

“That was a good talk,” Jeremy said.
“It was,” said Arnold.
The math department had set out coffee and doughnuts on tables in the second floor hallway. Arnold and Jeremy were the first to get there.

“I guess I’d better go check my mail again,” said Jeremy.
“Mister Phelps,” someone called.
They turned. It was Denise Epson, the chairman’s secretary.
“I am Professor Phelps.”

“Your wife just called.” She handed him a pink slip of paper. “She wants you to call back.”
Jeremy glanced at the note in Arnold’s hand. Denise had checked the “urgent” box.
“Thank you.” After reading it, he folded it and put it in his shirt pocket. “Would you mind if I used your phone?” he asked Jeremy.

“The instructors don’t have long-distance numbers,” Denise said. “You can use the chairman’s phone if you like.”

“Thank you.” He turned to Jeremy. “I’ll see you later.”

“Okay.”

Jeremy watched Arnold follow Denise to the chairman’s office.

A rumble of footsteps was coming upstairs in search of goodies.

“Our first speaker will be Allan Lyle, from the University of Alabama.”

The twenty-minute talks were being held in the large lecture hall on the second floor. The room was mainly white, with blue seats and pale blue trim; it was directly under the seminar room. On its eastern side were tall windows that looked down on University Avenue. It had become a fearsomely bright outdoors.

Allan Lyle stood up and loped to the board. He was the one who had reminded Jeremy of a high school teacher.

“This is a preliminary report on some recent work of mine with Chris MacDonald, who’s at the University of British Columbia.” He wrote “MacDonald” on the blackboard. “I’m going to let $D$ be the unit disk–,” he wrote a $D$ and a $B$ “–and $B$ is going to be the unit ball in Cee-nn. Now Chris and I have been looking at the following question: suppose we take a function in H-infinity of the ball—the usual H-infinity—and we try to estimate . . .”

Jeremy knew almost nothing about analysis in several complex variables, though he had taken a course on it (he had got an $A$). He could not tell whether the speaker’s results were tedious, or brilliant. He was sitting in the back, where he could see the heads of the others in the room. They were making quick, electric nods—signalling to one another, “Yes, I understand”—which meant that either they did understand, or else were letting off tension. But all the really good mathematicians looked bored. In front, at the far left, Steven Losch, who had introduced him, was sitting with his cheek resting on his palm. His chest expanded, as he yawned while keeping his mouth shut. Steve Losch was a first-rate mathematician.

To Jeremy, the speaker’s mathematics became what rock-and-roll had been when he was snobbish, Beethoven-loving teenager, and he felt his mind harden against it.

The talk ended. There was brief applause, a few pro forma questions, and then more applause. Allan Lyle sat down and Steve Losch stood up.

“We’ll now be taking a five-minute break. When we return our speaker will be Aden Dart of Douglas College. He will be speaking to us on–” he was reading from a sheet “‘Non-negative trigonometric series.’”

Arnold was just outside the lecture room door, getting a drink of water. The bike bag was slung over his shoulder. When he saw Jeremy, he deliberately smiled.

“Good talk?” His face became serious again.

“I didn’t follow much of it,” said Jeremy.

“That happens to everybody.”

Jeremy got a drink. He remembered that Arnold had got a phone call. When he finished, he saw that his advisor was watching him. And he thought that he wanted him to ask about the call.

They went into the lecture room together.

“I hope you don’t mind if I sit near the front,” said Arnold.

Jeremy shook his head and walked back to where he had been sitting.

The room filled up. Steve Losch announced,

“Aden Dart will now speak to us on non-negative trigonometric series.”

Aden went to the board. Jeremy noticed how short he was: he had always seemed taller before.

“We’re going to need these,” Aden said, and he wrote two elementary inequalities on the board. He drew a box around them. “So they won’t be erased.” He smiled. “We’re going to be working with trigonometric series of this form.” He wrote:

$$\frac{a_0}{2} + \sum_{\nu=1}^{\infty} (a_{\nu} \sin \nu x + b_{\nu} \cos \nu x)$$

“And we’ll say that it’s non-negative if . . .”
Everyone became bored very quickly. Even Jeremy could see that what Aden was proving was trivial. He looked down and saw that Arnold had bowed his head over his desk.

The talk went on. Aden wanted for it to last twenty minutes, but he began to talk fast. The chalk broke in his fingers. He picked up another piece.

"Here are some applications," he said.

They were trivial. For a moment Aden turned toward the audience. By now even the most polite among them could not hide their irritation. He wiped his upper lip with his index finger: and it left a chalk mark.

"Well," he said, smiling, "I could probably stop this talk right now." He turned toward the board.

"Yes, you could," Lesage’s voice said.

Aden stopped for a moment, with his arm raised. No one moved, or said anything, while one slow beat of time passed. Then it was as if the moment and that event had been excised. Aden went on with his talk. At the end there was the usual applause, but no questions. Everyone took a break.

When Jeremy got out into the hall, Arnold and Lesage were standing by the stairs, talking. Aden and Bobby walked past him from behind. Steve Losch was by the drinking fountain. He looked innocent and bored. Jeremy walked up to him.

"Well," Jeremy said.

Losch nodded: it relieved him that somebody else was talking about it.

"Does that happen often?" Jeremy asked.

"No." He said it with emphasis, but not loudly.

The hallway was full now; there was a crowd down by the donut table. Jeremy said, "I’d heard he was something of a . . ."

Losch waited a moment.

"I had, too," he said quietly. "But it wasn’t a good talk. Aden shouldn’t have spoken."

"That’s true."

Losch looked at his watch.

"Well. It’s time to go back in."

"Our next speaker will be Peter Jensen, from the University of Nebraska."

Lesage and Arnold were sitting together, in the front row, on the right. Aden and Bobby were in the center, halfway back. Jeremy was on one of the folding chairs next to the mount for the projector. He was higher than anyone else in the room.

The insult had made him dizzy, and he thought that it might have been because he—they—had said nothing. He knew that neither he nor anyone would ever say anything to Lesage about it: never confront him. They had already ratified the thing with their silence.

A crazy idea he had: if he could throw something from where he sat, hit him on the head—throw an eraser. It would get Arnold, too. He remembered the urgent call from his wife, and wondered once more what it might have been.

Then everybody was applauding. The talk was over, and he had not heard a word of it. He clapped his hands.

III

"How’d it go?" Ellen asked.

Jeremy had just come in the door and was taking off his muddy shoes.

"Oh, the talks were okay. Some were better than others. You know." As he took off his left shoe he said, "I met Lesage."

"Oh? What was he like?"

"Well, he didn’t have two heads; and he didn’t have claws. But I saw him insult someone.”

"Who?"

"Someone named Aden Dart."

"I don’t know who he is."
"He comes from a little college out in the sticks. He comes to our seminars. He isn't a very good mathematician. He was giving this talk—wasn't a very good talk, either—and at one point he said, 'I could stop this talk right here.' And then Lesage said, 'Yes, you could.'"

Jeremy stood up. "Really it wasn't a very good talk. But."

"Did anybody say anything about it?"

"No."

"Did you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," he said. "Fear. It would have been rude."

"He was rude."

"Yeah, well... I thought of saying something."

"You guys are a bunch of cowards."

"Yeah," said Jeremy. "We are. Where's Tony?"

"He's asleep."

"There's going to be a party tonight at Steve Losch's place," Jeremy said. "I've been invited."

"Are you going to go?"

"I guess so."

"Will Lesage be there?"

"Yeah. I'm sure."

"Well, I didn't have anything planned," she said. "We'll be all right here, by ourselves."

"Arnold will be there, too."

"I said it was okay for you to go."

"Right," he said. "Right."

He went into the kitchen.

"Arnold got a phone call while I was there, from his wife."

"A phone call?"

"Denise brought him the note: 'urgent.'"

"Oh," she said. "Did you ask him about it?"

"No."

Ellen stood in the kitchen doorway while he poured himself a glass of juice.

"What do you think it might be?" she asked.

"No idea."

"I hope it isn't something about his son."

At dinner she asked Jeremy,

"Why should everybody be so afraid of him?"

"Because he's a big honcho."

"So? Does he have power over you?"

"Some," Jeremy said. "He can help you get grants, or not get them."

"So it's money."

"A large part of it is."

"But if someone's not getting grants anyway, why not tell him what he is?"

"Because people will say you're just doing it out of envy. And..."

"And what?"

"Well, you might get a grant someday," he said. "It's like the gambler's compulsion: just one more roll of the dice might do it."

"Is that why you spend so much time working on your research," she said, "even when you hate it—because you're trying to impress people like Lesage?"

"Yeah."

The telephone rang a few minutes later, and Jeremy answered it.

"Hello, this is Arnold Phelps."

"Hi."
“Are you going to Steve Losch’s party?”
“Yes.”
“You know, Hyde Park can be a little dangerous at night. Your wife would probably feel better if we walked over there together.”
“That’s true.”
“When are you going over?”
“About eight-thirty.”
“Then why don’t you stop at the Quadrangle Club and ring my room when you do.”
“Okay.”
“I’ll see you then.”
“Bye.”
After Jeremy hung up he said to Ellen, “That was Arnold. He thinks we ought to walk over to Steve’s place together tonight.”
“That sounds wise,” she said.

As he walked to the Quadrangle Club he thought that Judah must have heard right: the air was like cold glass. But the sky was cloudless (although it was never really clear; the city lights smeared an orange haze on the horizon).

The desk clerk had a fat chemistry text open on the counter. Jeremy had him ring Arnold’s room.

Jeremy heard footsteps on the metal stairs and saw Arnold coming down. Arnold stooped as he descended, as if he were looking for someone; he smiled weakly. He approached the desk and stood there for a moment: he seemed to be waiting for the clerk to give him permission to go.

“You lead the way,” he said.
They stepped outside.

“Steve’s place is this way,” said Jeremy, and they went east on 57th Street.

“It got colder,” Arnold said.

“Judah said it’s going to snow.”

Arnold said, “I’m afraid that I’m going to be leaving the conference early.”

“Why?”

“John.”

Jeremy thought, He’s killed himself.

“It’s not that.” Arnold was looking at his face. “He tried to hold up a liquor store.”

“Oh no.”

“The guy shot him. I don’t blame him.” He raised his head, as if he were about to breathe out a long draught of cigarette smoke. “He’s in the hospital. Alice is with him.”

“When are you leaving?” He felt himself injecting compassion into his voice. For some reason the news excited him.

“The earliest flight I could get leaves tomorrow evening,” Arnold said.

Jeremy kept himself from saying, “Then you’ll see most of the conference.”

They reached Blackstone Avenue, and turned right. Steve Losch’s building was halfway down the block. It was flanked by Victorian houses and fronted by a walled garden.

Jeremy pushed the buzzer. A woman’s voice answered, and they were let in. They called the elevator.

The foyer looked like the lobby of a university theatre: glass doors, tall windows, black-and-white tile floor.

“How bad is he hurt?”

“He was shot in the stomach,” Arnold said.

Two elevators and three apartments opened onto the windowless eighth floor landing. The walls and carpet were two different shades of pastel orange.

Jeremy knocked on Steve Losch’s door. A slender, blond woman, who seemed to be about thirty, opened it.

“Hi, I’m Jane Darius. I’m Steve’s fiancée. Have we met?”

“I’m Jeremy Tyne.” He shook her hand. “This is Arnold Phelps. He’s here for the conference.”

“I’m pleased to meet you,” she said.
“Very pleased,” said Arnold.
They stepped into the apartment.
“Why don’t you let me take your coats.”
About a half dozen people were there. The stereo was playing a tape Respighi’s “Ancient Airs and Dances.” The two sofas in the living room were facing each other in front of a small fireplace. Lesage was sitting on one of them, holding a glass of red wine. On the other side of the room was the dining table, set with plates of food, and drinks. A sliding glass door led out to the balcony.
When Lesage saw them, he smiled.
“You’re braver than we are,” said Arnold. “We came in a pair.”
“Are the streets here that dangerous?” he asked.
“Sometimes,” Jeremy said.
The two of them went to the table. Arnold got a paper plate and started to pick out hors d’oeuvres.
Steve Losch and a graduate student were standing by the glass door, looking out over the balcony.
“Steve,” said Jeremy.
They turned around.
“And Sam. This is Arnold Phelps. He was my advisor. I know you two have met,” he said to Losch.
The grad student had red hair and was overweight. He was about ten years older than most of the other students in the department. He reminded Jeremy of his father’s bowling buddies.
“You’re in analysis?” Arnold said. They shook hands over the table.
Sam laughed.
“You’ll have to ask Dr. Losch.”
“Is he?” Arnold asked.
“Yes. Yes he is,” Losch replied, flustered.
“I trust you’ll be getting out of here soon?”
“A couple more years.” Sam smiled with a sort of sheepish bravado.
“Who else is coming?” Arnold asked.
Steve Losch was looking over their shoulders. Behind them they could hear Jane Darius admitting someone into the lobby.
“Who? Oh. Mostly people who come to the seminar.” He looked down at the table and picked up an olive.
A moment later there was a knock on the door. They all turned. Aden Dart came in.
“Is Steiner coming?” Arnold asked.
Losch was watching Aden take off his jacket.
“I invited him,” he said.
Arnold poured himself a glass of wine and went to sit with Lesage. He smiled as he left the table. Losch went to tell something to Jane, which left Jeremy and Sam when Aden walked up.
“Two more years?” Jeremy asked.
Sam shrugged, and smiled, but he did not look at Jeremy’s face.
Jeremy had heard somewhere that Sam was at Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement, and that he had been in the Army for a while. He had to be at least 34. When Jeremy had been in grad school, one of the other students had been like that. The man had been in his mid-forties, and he had not been a serious student. He had hung around for a couple of years, failed his comprehensives, and left. Jeremy remembered him as being a highly educated man: he had known a great deal about M. C. Escher, mathematical puzzles, and Brahms.
“Maybe three.”
“Hi.” It was Aden.
“Hi. Did Bobby come?” As soon as Jeremy said it he regretted it. But Aden did not seem to resent being thought of as part of a pair.
“He had to take his kids to a basketball game.” He spoke breathlessly; as if he had been waiting to say that.
“What’d they?”
“That’s what he said.”
Jeremy noticed that Aden was already holding a little plate full of food, and a beer.
“I'm going to go sit down.”

Jeremy took his stuff and went to the sofas. Arnold and Lesage were sitting next to each other. He sat down across from them, beside Jane Daix. She was leaning forward, with her hands on her knee, and her legs were crossed. The two men were talking about other conferences.

“What's the story about when you were in Poland?” Arnold asked.

Lesage had a foot propped on one knee. He tilted his head back.

“Seventy-five,” he said. “Do you know this story?” he asked Jeremy.

Jeremy opened his mouth.

“No,” Lesage said. “You don't know it. So—” he glanced at Arnold, “—let me tell you. Warsaw. Nineteen seventy-five. The Banach algebra conference. This ... other mathematician, Siegel—Polish, no relation to Siegel domains—and I, we went out drinking. Like good Poles, we drank, from bar to bar, all night (I am not Polish). Now, afterwards, after—” he pursed his lips and held his hand palm upward “—eight?—bars, I am drunk, but Siegel—” he pointed his index finger at them “—Siegel is completely drunk. And it is ... two in the morning. Three. Siegel is leaning on my shoulder. I am carrying him. We hear a car. I turn: it is a police car. I drop Siegel. He sees the car. He runs. ‘How can he run if he’s so drunk?’ He runs. Meanwhile, the police are yelling at me. (The Polish police, I should tell you, carry submachine guns in the backs of their cars.) I yell at them, ‘I don't know what you're saying! I don't speak Polish!’ And they yell back at me. (I later learn what they are saying. It is, ‘You're too drunk; get off the street!’) So. They put me into the car. They ask me questions, and I tell them, ‘I don't speak Polish, I don't understand you.’ They take me to the police station. I am put—” he spread out his hands “—in with the rest of the drunks. But, first, they take away my belt, and my shoelaces, so that I will not hang myself. Now, in Polish jails—or, in this Polish jail—the cells have no glass in the window. So, my pants are falling down, my shoes are falling off, and I am freezing to death. And there I stay, for the rest of the night.

“In the morning I am sober. I am brought out for questioning. I tell them, 'I don't understand you; I don't speak Polish.' They put me back in the cell. Then, at noon, I am suddenly taken from the cell, given my things, and put out on the street.

“'There is Siegel, waiting for me.'

“'What happened?’ I ask him.

“Here is what happened. First he told them that I was a visiting American mathematician. They were not impressed. Next, he said that I was a member of the Communist Party. Still nothing. Finally—” Lesage touched the side of his nose “—he told them, 'I'm not sure, but I think he's on the Central Committee.'” He lunged forward: “Then they let me go!”

Everyone laughed and applauded. Lesage fell back in his seat.

“So, if the FBI ever goes to Warsaw, I will be sent to Siberia.”

While Lesage was speaking, several more people had entered. There was no more room to sit on the sofas, and they were standing around them, holding their drinks. The area between the couches was like an arena.

“I know…” Jeremy said, and stopped. Lesage had taken a sip of wine: he was still enjoying the acclaim. He set down his glass and looked at Jeremy.

“I know a story about the Russians,” Jeremy continued. “A joke.” He felt the blood and alcohol rush to his head. For a moment everyone was quiet, as the focus settled on Jeremy.

“Tell it to us,” said Lesage.

“All right.” Jeremy sat up; and he noticed that he was holding his wineglass very straight. “There were these two college students, who went to Russia. Now, the Russians, you know, are very paranoid about foreigners, especially Americans. And so they like to keep track of ... well, they want to know how much you know, to know how closely they have to watch you. And all the hotel rooms are bugged, and have cameras in them.

“Well, the first night these two guys got into the hotel, the phone rang. They answered it. The guy on the other end was talking Chinese. He said a few words, and hung up. The next night, the same thing happened, but the guy was talking ... Rumanian, or something. And the next night it was the same, with the guy talking ... Polish.

“One of them said to the other, ‘Let's go for a walk.’

“So they went for a walk, and tried to figure out what was going on.
“One of them said, ‘Look, I know what this is. They want to know what foreign languages we know, so they’ll know how closely they have to watch us. That’s why they keep calling us up.’ And they agreed that was probably what was going on.

“So, they decided they’d play a little trick on the Russians. They talked it over while they were walking, and then went back to their hotel.

“When they got back to the room, one of them sat down at a table and started saying—” Jeremy shifted to a high, robot-like voice “—‘Martian agent Nine-Gamma-Three, calling Mars; agent Nine-Gamma-Three, calling Mars. Mission so far successful; Earthlings suspect nothing. Will now switch to Martian language, which is mathematics: Ma-na, ma-na, ma-na-ma-na, ma-na-ma-na, ma-na-ma-na.’ He went on like this for a few minutes and then stopped.

“They didn’t get any more phone calls. They spent the rest of their stay… wondering… if the KGB wasn’t going to round them up and send them off to the gulag. But, they got back to America okay, and then they forgot all about it.

“But a couple months later, a friend of theirs went to Russia. ‘The first night in his hotel room, the phone rang. He answered it. And the guy on the other end was going, ‘Ma-na, ma-na-ma-na, ma-na, ma-na...’”

They laughed; and even Lesage clapped.

By now nearly all the guests had arrived. Steve Losch went to turn up the volume on the stereo. Jeremy went to to the table to re-fill his glass. When he looked back, he saw that Aden Dart had taken his place.

Who was there? Not Judah–Judah was almost never at parties. He had even missed the Math Dinner, where attendance was semi-mandatory. (The chairman had asked where he was, and one of his fans–he had many–had called out, “He’s proving theorems!”) And Simon Osney was absent: the University of Chicago intimidated him even more than it did Jeremy. Jeremy assumed that this was because of some defect in himself: he did not know enough to be afraid.

Allan Steiner, whom Arnold had asked about, was there, sitting where Jane Daius had been. Jeremy wondered now, if he always wear sleeveless sweaters. And he thought of the words: math yuppies. Steiner was getting his degree that June. He was very lean, and, in a professional manner, handsome–like an MBA. His hair was thinning on top; he wore black-rimmed glasses. He was unmarried (no time: he was going to an NSF postdoc at Princeton), and he did not have a girlfriend; nor, apparently, the desire for one. (What did he do? Run it off? A great mathematician once said that sex was the sublimation of the desire to do mathematics.)

A stainless steel brain, he thought. He remembered the lectures: the eraser he had not thrown. (Already he was getting drunk.) He heard himself mumble, “I should have alcohol more often.” How loud had he said it?

The little marinated corncobs were all gone. Jeremy picked up a chunk of cauliflower between his middle finger and thumb, shoved it into the dip, and ate it. He felt like a rebellious primitive.

People laughed behind him. He turned around to face the room. Lesage had told another story. Aden Dart was still there on the couch, holding his drink with two hands, and smiling. All that Jeremy could see of Arnold were his shoulders and the back of his head.

Where was Sam? Jeremy turned back to the table. Snow was falling onto the balcony.

After an hour all the people had left the arena, though it was no longer an arena, with Lesage not there. The party had divided into groups. Lesage, Steiner, and two other graduate students were standing behind one of the sofas, a little away from the table. Sam and several other grad students, with their girlfriends, were standing near the intercom. Steve and Jane were taking turns at the table, refilling the bowls with nuts and chips, and bringing out more plastic wine cups. Aden and two grad students stayed next to the table, while they talked about sports and Chicago politics.

Jeremy was alone on the couch, looking at the ceiling. His first drunkenness was wearing off and he was terribly thirsty (he had just gone to the bathroom). He pushed himself onto his feet and walked toward the table.

“Steve—” he was still several feet away from the table when he asked it “—do you mind if I go get a glass of milk from your refrigerator?”

“Oh; sure. Go ahead. The glasses are over the sink.”

Arnold was in the kitchen, smoking a cigarette. He was leaning against the drainboard. There was a very tall glass of wine on the counter beside him.
“Do you need something?” he asked.
Jeremy opened the cupboard and got himself a glass.
“Milk.”
“You shouldn’t drink so much.”
Jeremy poured himself a glass and put the bottle back in the refrigerator.
“It’s only at parties,” he said.
The kitchen doorway looked straight out along the length of the dining room table. The corner of Arnold’s mouth turned up, and he put out the cigarette in a tin ashtray. Then he lit another one.
“That’s how it starts.” He coughed.
Jeremy glanced at the glass on the counter.
“I have an excuse,” Arnold said. He coughed again. He looked through the doorway: Lesage was still holding forth to the disciples.
“Does Lesage have any family?” Jeremy asked.
“Lesage? No.” He was still looking at them. He said, “It’s the pace.”
Arnold reached for the wine glass and brought it around. He drank from it. For a moment he leaned there, holding the glass in one hand and the cigarette in the other; then he carefully put the glass back on the counter.
“Look at Steiner,” he said. “He loves it. Who are those other two?”
“They’re . . .” Jeremy stopped.
Arnold looked at him.
“Who are they?”
Arnold stared at Jeremy for a second, and then blinked, slowly.
“I don’t know,” said Jeremy.
Arnold rested his elbows on the drainboard.
“John was doing all right.”
The babble from the living room increased, with Lesage’s voice rising over it. Neither of them turned to look.
“Last summer, we all went hiking in the Sierras.”
Somebody was laughing.
“He had a good time.”
Arnold breathed in, deeply, and coughed it out.
“Good time.”
When he was done, he stared ahead, at the burners on the stove.
“He likes the mountains,” he said.
Jeremy felt a desire to not have been where he was: if this piece of time could be cut away.
“I don’t look forward to Tony’s adolescence, either . . .”
“Your son won’t be like my son.
“Because you’re spending time with your son now.”
“Arnold, sometimes people have bad luck.”
“Not like this.” Arnold raised his head. “When we were hiking in the mountains . . .”
There was laughter from the living room.
“That doesn’t mean anything,” Jeremy said.
A whine had gradually appeared in Arnold’s voice, but in his next sentence it was gone.
“Have you ever been to San Francisco?”
“Yes.”
“Berkeley?”
“No.”
“There was a park where I used to take him, up in the hills, after I got my PhD. We were living there, house-sitting for one of the professors. It was in the summertime. Alice had to go away for a few weeks. Her mother died, back east. But we had a lot of money.
“That left the two of us alone in the house,” he said. “That was the summer that I proved my theorem on bi-harmonic means.”
“I don’t know that theorem.”
"It's about ..." The hand with the cigarette went up, as if he were about to lecture. He brought it down and took a drag. "It made me very, very famous. I wouldn't have my job without that theorem.

"And I don't think I would have proved it if Alice hadn't gone away," he said.

"What time is it?" Arnold asked.

"Almost ten."

"You'll have to excuse me."

Arnold walked past Jeremy and out to the dining room. Steve Losch was standing by the table. Arnold spoke something softly to him. Steve's eyebrows went up and he said, "Of course." Arnold followed Steve into the kitchen.

Steve took a note pad and pencil down from the little shelf next to the telephone.

"Here's the number," he said. "The key's in my bedroom." He tore off the sheet and handed it to Arnold. He walked out of the kitchen.

Arnold folded the paper and put it in his wallet. In a minute Steve returned, holding a key.

"This will open the front door," he said.

"Thank you."

"I have to warn you: it's very finicky."

"That's okay," he said. "Thank you."

Steve went back out to the table. Arnold put the key on his key-ring.

"He's lending me his long-distance number," he said.

"Oh."

"I think we should re-join the party."

Arnold carefully poured half of his wine down the sink, and the two of them walked out to the living room.

The groups had changed their places. Lesage, Aden Dart, and their graduate students had moved to the couches; Sam's group was by the table, entertaining Jane Darius with academic horror stories:

"I had this one guy who was so old, he'd be up there writing---the student held up his right hand as if he were writing on a board---and he'd come to a place where he'd go---he put on an old man's voice---"And this ... follows." He paused, slowly shook his head. "No-o-o-o-o."

"Ye-e-e-e-e-e-e."

"'Ye-e-e-e-e-e-e."

"Meanwhile we're all going out of our minds, trying to figure out what we're supposed to write."

"What did he settle on?" Jane asked.

"'No-o-o-o-o-o-o."

"Was this here?" asked Steve.

The student's face became deliberately serious.

"State secret," Sam said.

Arnold and Jeremy stood by the table and picked up more snacks. Lesage was telling another story.

"Why does he stay near him?" Arnold asked.

"Who?" asked Jeremy.

"Dart."

There was an obvious answer which Jeremy's brain refused to see: it was like when he was doing mathematics.

"I wish he wouldn't do that," Arnold said.

"Do what?"

Arnold lowered his voice. "Play the great man. Like that."

"Who? Aden?"

"No."

Aden heard his name and looked up. They moved their eyes away from the sofas.

"We should talk about something else," said Arnold.

They heard Lesage's voice, quite loud:

"No, there's too much money. That's because of the NSF. People like you---" he was speaking to Steiner "---will always get support. But there is too much money, supporting too many mediocrities, each of whom
can say, 'Look, I'm a mathematician—support me!' If it were a matter of hardship, well—but, no; there is too much money, and the NSF should cut back.

"Too much junk has been written under NSF grants."

Aden Dart kept his eyes fixed, and raised.

"This is all because of the Second World War, you know," Lesage went on. "It's because of the atomic bomb. That was when the American government began to become interested in science. The Americans could never have built the bomb without the foreign scientists, and so they were afraid of falling behind, after the war. And, that is another reason to oppose the NSF: it supports research purely for its possible military uses.

"Of course, what we do—" he spread out his hands "—could never ... But, you don't know."

"I don't think the military will ever have any use for anything I do," said Aden.

"I agree." Lesage almost laughed. "Non-negative trigonometric series will never find any useful military application."

The grad students around him were smiling.

"Neither will anything of yours!" Arnold said it loud, as if he were making a joke.

Lesage looked at him over his shoulder, and raised his wine glass.

"To uselessness!"

Aden's eyes were shooting back and forth between the two men. His lips were shut and he was not smiling: for the first time that day, he did not look weak.

"Look at the snow!" someone shouted.

Steve opened the glass door and small groups of them went out to stand, without jackets or boots, in the falling snow. It was midnight, and the temperature was just below freezing. The snow was falling, like a great school of fish, across the eastern moon. The flake was almost invisible between the apartment buildings, except for down below, where they precipitated out of the night, at the edge of the streetlight's beam.

They stood there and got their shoes wet. Everyone was sobering up (most of the people had already gone home); and when they came back inside, they felt as if they had been brave. Then Steve shut the door, and it was like the "cut" of a movie take.

The stereo was off, the bowls and bottles were empty. Steve and Jane started to gather up the cups and paper plates.

"I'll be happy to give a ride home to anybody who needs it," Steve said.

"I think I will," said Jeremy.

"Me too," Arnold said.

"I drove here. I can take anyone home who needs a ride," said Aden Dart. He was standing by the door with his coat over his arm. The unsightly look had not left his face.

"I will go with you, Professor Dart," said Lesage. He was still tipsy. "Let me get my coat. I have heard—" he turned toward Arnold "—that the streets of Chicago are dangerous."

"Does anyone else need a ride?" Aden asked, quietly.

The three remaining were grad students who had all come in one car.

Lesage looked over the room, but still had not put on his coat.


"Who? MacArthur?" Lesage put his fist over his heart. "MacArthur. I shall return." He turned to Aden, and was serious. "Shall we go?"

Aden nodded.

"Thank you for the party, Steve," said Lesage. "Good night."

"Good night," said Losch.

The two men walked out the door. The grad students left a few minutes later.

"Jane, do you think you could handle the rest of this while I get these guys home?" Steve asked.

"Sure," she called from the kitchen.

"Okay, then why don't we go."

They rode the elevator down to the parking garage.

"You're at the Quadrangle Club." Steve said it like a question.
“Yes,” said Arnold.
“And you’re . . . ?”
“In the Compound. I’ll show you where.”
“How is the Compound these days?” Steve asked. “You know, I used to live there.”
“It’s run-down,” said Jeremy.
“Oh, it’s always been that.”
The elevator opened, and they followed Steve across puddles of oil and water to his Rabbit.
“Arnold, you should sit in front,” Steve said.
“Is this the car that fell into Lake Michigan?” he asked.
“Yes.”
The engine started on the first try. They drove up onto the street.
“Will you look at it come down,” Steve said.
He turned the corner at 57th and drove at fifteen miles per hour along the unplowed street. He put on
the brakes across from the Quadrangle Club and the car slid to a stop. Arnold got out.
“Thank you for the ride.”
“No problem.”
As Arnold was crossing the street, Steve rolled down his window and called:
“Just return the key whenever it’s convenient.”
Arnold turned around.
“The key?” He stood there for a moment. Then he put his right hand on his front pants pocket. He
looked at them. “Right. Thank you; thank you again.”
Steve rolled up his window, and they drove away. When he got up to 56th he turned left, which was
the wrong way—56th was a one-way street. Jeremy pointed over his shoulder:
“The first door, right there.”
The car slushed to a stop again. Jeremy pushed the passenger seat forward and got out.
“Thanks for the ride. See you tomorrow.”
“Good night.”
The car turned around in the narrow street and swished away. Its lights made it look like a deep-sea
creature. Jeremy unlocked the lower door and walked up to his apartment. Ellen had left a light burning in
the living room.

IV

Usually so much alcohol would have kept him from dreaming; but tonight he dreamed.
It was a long way down: where? He was above the fluorescent lights in Hutch Commons. The skylights
were on all sides of him, and his shoulders were pressing against the granite arch of the ceiling. It was
comfortable there, and if only he could move the arch, he knew which way he would go.
The Commons extended ahead of him, eastward, like a long tunnel—a subway tunnel. There was a train
out there, in that darkness. It was a black train, as black as the darkness.
Then he was down in the Commons, sitting at the table and eating; or, he realized that he was sitting
and eating. There was a picture of Lesage in the Maroon, and a long story about him, with an interview.
The student interviewer asked him—Jeremy did not read this, but saw it and heard it—whether it was true
that he was an egotistical tyrant. Lesage agreed that it was so.
“I enjoy sending people to their deaths,” he said.
Then Jeremy was the interviewer.
“You shit,” he told him.
Lesage waved his hand, and Jeremy tumbled away over mountains and fields until he landed in his
apartment. Ellen and Tony were getting dressed to go out in the snow. They took no notice of him: he
might have been invisible. And in a moment they were gone.
“Then I’ll solve my problem,” he said; and he squatted down on the living room floor and doodled with
his finger on the carpet.
The green clumps of stitching were like trees seen from the air.
He was over Brookfield Zoo and came down next to the kangaroo cage. The kangaroo was as big as a blue whale. It was lying down with its feet stretched out, its pouch flat and empty against its stomach. It was a kangaroo he had seen as a child, long ago; and his father was nowhere about.

He was thirsty.

"Hi."
It was Aden Dart, next to him. He was holding a cup of Coke.
"Can I have some of that?"
"Sure."
Aden handed him the Coke, Jeremy inadvertently drank it all down (he had not intended to).
"Sorry." He handed the empty cup back.
"That's okay." Aden went on holding the cup. He turned toward the cage and said, "Big kangaroo."
"That's the one I saw when I was a kid."
"It looks dead to me."
Then he was back in the apartment again. Lesage was sitting on the couch, Arnold Phelps was in the swivel chair, and John Lake was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. In the dream, Lake looked like a music student Jeremy had known at UCLA.

"Does anyone want coffee?" Lake asked.
"I do," said Arnold. "How about you?" He meant Jeremy.
"Sure."
"And one for me," said Lesage.
Arnold swivelled back and forth in the chair.
"Where is your family now?" Lesage asked.
"I don't know; somewhere," Jeremy said.
"Good. Then you can do some mathematics. You know?" he glanced over his shoulder, toward the kitchen "I had a family once."
"He sent them to Africa," Arnold said.
"Thank you, Arnold."
"You know, I could stop this thing right now," said Jeremy.
"Yes," said Lesage. "You could."
"First come and push me," said Arnold.
Jeremy got up and walked to the swivel chair, which had become a swing. He pushed Arnold higher and higher. When he thought that Arnold was high enough he called, "Can you see Berkeley yet?"

"Jeremy. Jeremy."
Ellen was gently shaking his shoulder.
"What. Yes?"
"It's the telephone. It's for you. It's Arnold."
"Telephone."
Jeremy got out of bed and walked to the living room. The kitchen clock read a quarter to seven.
"Arnold?"
"Jeremy?"
"It's me."
Gray light was falling through the window. The swivel chair was still. Jeremy wondered why Arnold was calling from Berkeley.
"I have some bad news," Arnold said. "I just got a call from Steve Losch."
"Bad news?" Jeremy looked at the clock again.
"Bad news," he said. Silence. "Lesage has been murdered. Are you still there? Jeremy . . . ?"

The police barriers were up around the rear entrance to Eckhart. The body was covered with a black sheet, a few yards from the steps. Lesage had fallen onto the grass, but it had snowed all night, until just after dawn; and so the body was embedded in the snow. There was a pale red stain near what was either his head or his feet. Jeremy presumed it was the head.
He watched from the hallway inside Eckhart. He was there because Arnold had told him that that was where it was, because Steve Losch had told him—because the police had called Steve that morning, after the janitor had found the body. It was 7:00, and he felt crazy to be there; but he couldn't claim to have business in the building.

One of the policemen saw him. The cop came up the steps and opened the door.

"Who are you?"

"I'm on, I'm on the faculty." He reached for his wallet, and as he did so he wondered whether it would be wiser to say that he had got a phone call about the murder, or to ask, "What happened?" He got out his ID and handed it to the officer. "I heard about the murder on the phone."

The officer looked at the ID and handed it back.

"Somebody called you?"

"Another mathematician, who'd heard about it."

The cop took a pad and pen out of his breast pocket. He wrote down Jeremy's name.

"Who called you?"

"His name's Arnold Phelps."

"Could you spell 'Phelps', please."

Jeremy spelled it.

"Time? Of the call."

"Quarter to seven."

"Thank you."

The policeman put the pad and pen back in his pocket.

"Did you see any persons around here last night—suspicious persons. You know: derelicts ..."

"No." Jeremy felt his voice escape from him. "I wasn't here last night."

The policeman turned back toward the Court. The photographers were finishing up. They were getting ready to take away the body. Someone was connecting a hose to a faucet.

"Do you know anybody ..., who might have been around here last night, and, uh, seen anything?"

"Aden Dart."

"Who?"

Jeremy spelled it.

"I didn't ask you to spell it, Mr. Tyne."

"He's another mathematician.

"He teach here?"

"No, no. Out of the city."

"Why do you happen to think he might have seen something."

"He probably didn't."

"Why do you think he might have seen something?"

"He took Lesage home last night," Jeremy said. He felt like a traitor.

"Did they mention anything about going to the campus?"

"No," he said. "I don't know."

"Do you have Mr. Dart's phone number?" He pulled out the pad and pen again.

"No."

"Kindly spell his name, please."

Jeremy did so.

"He teaches at Douglas College. It's in Joliet, or somewhere."

The cop wrote it down.

"Thank you, Mr. Tyne, you've been very helpful. You look like you need some sleep," he said. "Why don't you go back to bed?"

Jeremy shook his head, and stared out at the snowy Court.

"I just can't believe it," he said.

"I know how you feel." He followed Jeremy's eyes. "Do you know anybody who'd want to do something like this to him?"

"No, not really," Jeremy said. He suppressed a swallow.

"A friend of yours?"
“A colleague. We’d met.”

The cop nodded. He went back out to the Court. Jeremy turned away and walked toward the center of the building. He went up the stairs, to the second floor, and stood by the mailboxes. He stood there for several minutes, until his legs were stiff. Then he shook himself and walked up to his office. He called Ellen.

Before she had hardly answered he said, “Yeah. They killed him. Somebody killed him. I think I’m going to come home.”

“Then why don’t you just come home?”

“Right.”

He hung up the phone and went downstairs. He went out by the front door and then walked around Eckhart by the longest way he could. In his memory, later, it seemed that he had stepped directly from the front door of Eckhart to the front door of his apartment.

He told Ellen what he had seen, and then he lay on the couch for an hour. Ellen sat in the swivel chair. At times she leaned forward, and rested her forearms on her thighs, looking as if they had been talking about something which concerned the two of them.

“You’re acting like you did it.”

“I didn’t do it.”

“I know,” she said. “Why did you go over there?”

“I had a dream,” Jeremy said. “I’ve forgotten the dream.”

“A dream?”

“It wasn’t about Lesage getting killed.”

“But you dreamed about Lesage?”

“Yes.”

“Did you dream about anything else?”

“About Arnold, and Aden Dart.”

“Who was Aden Dart again.”

“He’s the one that Lesage insulted.”

“Oh.”

“He gave Lesage a ride home last night.”

“Oh,” she said. “Ohhhh.”

Jeremy was looking at the ceiling.

“Right.”

“So you think he did it.”

A moment passed. Then she said,

“Is that why you went over there?”

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

For nearly a minute they did not say anything.

“It looked like there was blood,” Jeremy said.

“You said that already.”

“Oh.” He sat up. “What time is it? It’s almost nine. I have to go.”

“Today?”

“The conference goes on.”

“But somebody’s been murdered.”

“You don’t understand,” said Jeremy. “A lot of these guys—who come from small schools—this might be the only meeting they’ll have this year.” He even sounded crazy to himself.

“They’re not going to cancel the conference,” he said.

“Well, you can stay home.”

“No,” he said. “I’ll be all right.”

Jeremy felt his facial muscles begin to twist into a smile. He suppressed it.

“Jeremy.”

“What?”

“You’re curious.”

“No, I’m not.”
"You want to see what they’re going to do." She had just realized it. "That’s why you went over to the department."

"No," he said.

"Why don’t you stay home."

He thought.

"They’ll think I did it." For an instant the smile broke out.

"No they won’t. Jeremy, you shouldn’t go over there."

"All right, all right. I’m curious. But I’m also a mathematician. I’m supposed to be there," he said. "I think Lesage deserved what he got." He let out a breath: he had said it.

"Are you going to go over?"

"Yes."

Ellen stood up.

"You’re just as bad as they are," she said, too loudly: Tony began to cry in his crib. "Oh—can you get him a bottle ready at least."

She went into the boy’s room. Jeremy went to the kitchen and started to warm the milk.

"Why don’t you at least call Steve Losch?" she asked from the bedroom. "And see if it’s still going on."

"Okay."

Tony was screaming. Ellen carried him out and laid him down on the living room floor.

"Get that bottle ready fast. Tony, shut up. Where are the diapers?"

He brought the bottle out.

"It’s not quite warm enough, but . . ."

"Give it to me."

She shoved the nipple in Tony’s mouth; and he was quiet.

"Could you find me a Pamper, please? Then, if you want to go, you can go."

"Okay."

He brought her the diaper, and then he sat down on the couch and picked up the telephone receiver.

"What are you doing?" she asked. She was looking at Tony, sucking on his bottle.

"I’m calling Steve Losch like you asked me to."

"Right." She nodded.

There was no answer at Losch’s apartment. Jeremy dialled his office. It rang five times and then he was transferred to Denise Epson’s phone.

"Hello, University of Chicago Department of Mathematics, Denise Epson speaking."

"Hello, Denise. This is Jeremy Tyne."

"Oh, Jeremy. Something terrible."

"Yes, I heard about Lesage. It’s awful. But I want to know if the conference is still going on."

"As far as I know it is," she said.

"Okay. Thank you. Uh . . ."

"Yes?"

"Have they taken the body away yet?"

"Yes. They have, Jeremy."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

He hung up.

"Well?"

"It’s still going on," he said.

Ellen was changing Tony’s diaper.

"Well then, why don’t you go over?" she said. "We’re going to go out in the snow."

Jeremy sat there, and seemed to remember something.

"Aren’t you going to go?" she asked.

"It snowed last night."

"So?"

He got up, and he stood over his wife and son. The wet diaper lay folded on the plastic pants, next to the boy.
“I’ll put that in the pail for you,” he said.
“It’s poopy.”
“Then I’ll wash it out.”
She turned and looked at him as he picked it up and carried it into the bathroom.
“Don’t you have to go to a conference?”
“I’ll go, I’ll go.”
The diaper pail was in the bathroom. When Jeremy was done, he washed his hands and came out.
“I’ll go now.”
“Goodbye.” She stood up and kissed him.
He started to put on his boots.
“Do you think they’ll arrest that man, Aden Dart?”
“I’m sure they’ve already done it.”
He stood up and put on his coat.
“Bye,” he said.
“Bye.”

The streets had been plowed. Cars were parked in every legal spot. It was like a day in winter, except for the relative warmth of the air. When Jeremy came to the arched gateway, he walked straight ahead, to avoid passing through the Court. He came into the Quadrangle, and he stood under the arch between Ryerson and Eckhart. The flag in front of the administration building was flying at full-mast.

He turned and went in the side door.

A talk had just let out upstairs, and men were walking down to talk and smoke away from the crowd. Jeremy gasped (he had never gasped before in his life): he saw Aden and Bobby. Aden looked intimidated and nervous, but no more than was normal for him, and Bobby was smiling. They stood there and talked in the midst of other men, who acted as if there was nothing unusual about them: about him. Jeremy would not have been surprised if the they had, right there, exchanged heads, or vanished, with no one noticing.

He approached them.
“I see you got home all right last night,” he said.
“Hi, Jeremy. That was some snow.”
“How far out do you live, anyway?”
“Thirty-two miles.”
“That’s quite a drive. Through the snow.”
“It took me an hour. Have you seen Lesage?”
Jeremy glanced at the two men’s heads.
“He left one of his gloves in my car,” Aden said.
“Oh. No, I haven’t seen him.”
“You look a little ill.”
“Excuse me, I have to, I . . . . Are there donuts upstairs?”
“Yes, we just came from up there.”
“Thanks. I have to, I think I’ll get a donut.”
“Sure.”

He got to the top, and all the faces that he had recognized the day before were now the faces of strangers. He went and got a donut, and he found Steve Losch, who was looking—he was grateful—unnerved. Losch was standing before the table with his hands gripped together in front of waist. For a moment it looked as if he were praying over the choice of a donut.

Steve looked up. Jeremy opened his mouth.
“What . . .”
“You heard?” Steve did not whisper, but he spoke quietly.
“Denise told me the conference was going on anyway.”
Steve shook his head.
“I told her not to tell anybody about what happened.” He touched Jeremy’s forearm. “Come here.”
They started to walk toward the mailboxes.
“I’m not supposed to announce Lesage’s death until after they arrest him.”
“Aden?”
Steve shook his head again.
“I can’t believe that he would come. But they told me, on the phone, this morning: if he comes, don’t say anything; if he’s not there, you can announce it. They don’t want him to be lynched before they get the warrant.”
“You know, Aden isn’t acting . . .
“I know. If I were him, I’d be in—” he held his palm up “—California.”
They stood apart from the crowd and looked back at it.
“Well,” Losch said. He glanced at his watch. “It’s time to go in.”
Steve went ahead. Jeremy followed him into the lecture room and sat at the back.
Arnold was up near the front, where he had been the day before.
“Our next speaker will be Jim Felton from the University of Little Rock.”
As the talk progressed, Jeremy could see that Steve kept looking toward the lecture hall door. The door had a full-length window. When the talk was about half over, three policemen appeared outside it. Losch must have told them where he would be sitting, because one of them motioned to him. He got up and went out, quietly.
The speaker hesitated for a moment, and went on talking: interruptions like this were common at conferences. And he could not see the police from where he was standing.
The audience could see them, but there was only a brief whisper, and some muttered “Wonder what they want?” police could have had any reason to be there: an illegally parked car . . .
Steve came back in and went to Aden’s seat. He whispered in his ear, and Aden, a little surprised, got up and walked out.
The audience watched through the window while one policeman read him the charge, which they could not hear, and the other two put on the handcuffs. Then somebody asked, in a normal voice, “What the hell is going on?”

Steve stepped up to the speaker’s desk.
“Excuse me, Jim.”
He turned to the audience. Everybody was talking, or looking at the door.
“Will everybody please be quiet.”
He waited. There were beads of sweat on his forehead.
“Will everybody please be quiet, please.”
The talking stopped.
“Thank you.”
Jim Felton was still beside him, holding the chalk and eraser.
“Would you please sit down, Jim? Thank you.” Steve seemed to look to the back rows, or to heaven, for help.
“Last night,” he said, and stopped. “This morning, Andrew Lesage was murdered, outside the rear entrance to Eckhart Hall.”
It was three minutes before he could get them quiet again.
“Aden Dart has been arrested on suspicion of murder.”
Steve was about to say something, and then stopped: the crowd had remained quiet. He waited, and spoke again. He was already tired of speaking.
“There will be no more talks until two o’clock this afternoon. We’ll arrange an extra session, an evening session, for those who were scheduled to give talks this afternoon.”
He was leaning back against the speaker’s table, gripping it with both hands. It slid back six inches, and he caught himself and stood up.
Someone raised his hand.
“Yes?”
“Steve, wouldn’t it make more sense to leave afternoon talks as is and reschedule the morning talks for later?”
“Yes. Yes, it would. I hadn’t thought of that,” Losch said. “The afternoon talks will be held as scheduled and the morning talks will be given this evening. Thank you.”
His voice had lightened as he spoke: the administrative duty had been a welcome distraction. He sat on the table.

"Are there any other questions? Yes."

"I have an early flight this evening and my co-author didn’t come. How are we going to get to give our talk?"

"I don’t know. Yes."

"Is there going to be some sort of a memorial service for Lesage?"

"A memorial service. I hadn’t thought of that. I’ll ask the administration. Are there any other questions?"

No more hands went up.

"If there are no other questions, then I think we should adjourn until two, when our brains are better ordered.” He frowned: he had sounded flippant. “I’ll call the administration.”

They started to get up and leave the hall. As Jeremy walked down toward the front he heard Steve say:

“Arnold, you can make that phone call any time. Just come in.”

“Thank you.”

Bobby Stone was still sitting in his chair, as if to move now would be sacrilegious.

“Any time. Honestly.”

“I believe you.”

Jeremy walked out into the corridor and stopped and stood in front of the library doors. He was exhausted, terribly tense, and he could feel his heart beating fast. The adrenalin was making him feel like he was coming down with the flu.

Arnold came up beside him.

“You look like you need some rest.” Arnold laughed a little as he said it.

Jeremy turned to him. “That was crazy in there. Wouldn’t this be more sensible, Steve?”

“They’re never had to deal with a murder before.”

“I suppose,” said Jeremy. “When my grandmother died, I remember I felt like laughing.”

“I know the feeling.”

Jeremy laughed.

“What’s the joke?”

“‘If that happens, I’ll go watch!’” He laughed until he cried.

“You should take my advice and get some sleep.”

“That’s what the policeman said.”

“What?”

Jeremy wiped his eyes. Whatever had made him laugh was gone now, like meaning from a word spoken a thousand times.

“Y’ou’re right. I’d better go home.”

“Good.”

“I’ll see you this afternoon.”

He walked down the stairs and, out of habit, he left by the back door. The laughter had emptied his brain, and he walked through the Court without even thinking of Lesage. He did not remember him until he came to the atomic energy memorial. Then he recalled the dread with which he had walked around Eckhart that morning, simply to avoid the bodiless Court; and how he had, just now, passed through that space without thinking. It was like death.

The memorial was a smashed round thing.

He crossed the granite slab and stepped into the street. He saw the error in his proof.

He rested his hands on the trunk lid of a car. It was as if all his blood were rushing to his brain, to verify or falsify the thought. In a minute his palms were aching from the cold, and he could feel snow in his boots.

It was hopeless: one thing; another; another. He remembered the place exactly. The inequality was absurd.

He suddenly wanted to sleep—anywhere, even in the snow. He stood away from the car. He turned and walked back toward Eckhart.

He entered by the side entrance, off University Avenue. He tried to not look into the Court.
Inside, the stairwell was dark and silent. It felt like a vertical tunnel that went through time. He went up to the third floor exit, opposite his office, and saw that the door’s frosted window was dark: he would have it to himself. And he asked himself, where were Judah and Simon? For a moment he had the idea that they had murdered Lesage ... for what reason? To get research grants. They had bludgeoned him with an anvil.

He laughed.

But why would anyone murder Lesage? Aden Dart was not the killer. Jeremy tried to imagine one of the other mathematicians, outraged at the insult Aden had suffered, lying in wait for Lesage last night (knowing, somehow, that he would return to the department), and, when he did, striking him. It would have been the act of a madman. (Perhaps the student he had sent back to Africa had escaped execution, and returned to Chicago.)

Or he could have been killed by a mugger.

Jeremy turned on his light and sat down at the desk. He did not want to, and he could not, go over the yellow sheets. He knew where the error was. It was a naive mistake, and he wondered why he had come back. (Why had Lesage come back? The dead man would have known the answer to his problem.)

He spread out the papers. His head hurt.

"God."

He could not have been one of the chosen, who are both successful and virtuous. (Tony was playing in the snow.) The theorem was dead, and it was falling onto him like a great tower.

"God!"

There was the inequality: did it exist? had it existed when he was writing the notes? He copied it onto another sheet, held it up, and stared at it. He tried to remember what his great idea in February had been.

Past one side of the sheet he saw the blackboard where Judah had sketched his problem yesterday. “All the proofs seem to break down when you get to 2; nobody has any ideas.”

The inequality was stupid.

How had he used it?

The wrong-way inequality had been applied to prove Lemma (he looked for the number) 6, and Lemma 6 had been used at the end of the proof of the main theorem. But the wrong-way inequality stated that something held in all cases, which was false, and its application in the theorem was to a very special case, where it might still hold. Jeremy spent twenty minutes trying to prove that it did indeed hold, when he suddenly thought of the obvious counterexample. Therefore, Lemma 6 was false, even in the special case.

But did he need Lemma 6? (This sort of damage control almost never worked. His error revealed that he had not been thinking clearly at all, and so there was probably nothing in the proof worth saving.) What did Lemma 6 do? (It was like disconnecting spark plugs, one at a time, looking for the faulty one.) Without Lemma 6 ... without Lemma 6 ...

The proof might still work without Lemma 6.

He began to build the argument which might do— but with obvious toil—that which Lemma 6 had seemed to do with elegance.

He had no faith.

V

A long morning. A little before twelve, he called Steve Losch’s office to ask about the afternoon schedule and to learn where the memorial service would be. He hung up before the phone rang down to Denise Epson’s office.

There was still a real chance that the proof might work. Jeremy raised his eyes to the window, and as he did so, realized that he had not yet taken off his jacket.

He stared at the window. He was ashamed because he was not sad. He did not care about the man, but only about himself. The rest of them had been monsters. But he was a monster, too: no better. He did not bear a noble grief, or say wise things, but the man’s death had passed through him like a bullet through a ghost.

He called again. The phone was busy. He got up and walked down to the office.
The memorial service for Andrew Lesage will be held in Bond Chapel, from 12:45 to 1:15 this afternoon. Bond Chapel is in the main Quadrangle, due southeast of Eckhart Hall, next to the Divinity School. Denise Eppson or Steve Losch can provide directions to those who need them.

The twenty-minute talks will resume at 2:30 in room 209.

The door was shut. A memo was taped to it:
He was about to walk away and then heard a voice inside: Arnold's. He was talking on the telephone (there were pauses between his sentences):
“What did he want her to tell him?”
“Is that all?”
“Tonight?”
“I'll be coming home this evening. I can get a cab at the airport.”
A long pause.
“So am I.”
Jeremy heard him hang up the phone and push away from the desk. He stepped back from the door and walked downstairs.

His head was singing. The building had become empty. He was still thinking about his problem. Sometimes he pushed, and sometimes he was pulled, and now he was being pulled: toward an answer.

Outside, a grey cloud was reclining in the southern sky. The flag in front of the administration building was flying at half-mast. Two students were reading a notice taped at the base of the flagpole.

Jeremy walked across the Quadrangle through the alleys that had been trampled in the snow. The face of the Divinity School was in a cold shadow. There was a co-op downstairs that sold sandwiches. He walked up the steps and pulled open the high door.

Bond Chapel was in back of the Divinity School. It was attached to the School by a covered walkway, which made the two buildings look like an imitation Swiss chalet: the chapel, had it been smaller, could have been the porter's lodge. It was surrounded by trees with slender, bare trunks, which curved over it in partial parabolas.

The narthex was as dark as a ship's hold. Jeremy scraped his feet on the metal mat and stepped forward.

The chapel was brightly lit: polished, golden wood; brilliant stained glass. Electric chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The lectern was carved to look like an eagle with outstretched wings; a black cross stood on the altar.

Two other mathematicians were there already; Jeremy recognized them but did not know their names. He sat down in the third pew (which was empty), on the left, close to the wall.

A man in a cassock was sitting behind the altar rail, off to the left. He seemed to be about Jeremy's age. He wore glasses and had a narrow face.

It was a quarter to one. The door was jerked open four or five times, and clacked shut, while men found their seats. It became 12:45.

The young man straightened his robe and stood up. He went to the lectern, pulled back his long sleeve, and looked at his watch.

"We'll wait a few minutes," he said.

The back door opened and shut two more times.

"I guess we'd better begin. I hope none of you are offended by Episcopal prayers." He smiled like a nervous conjuror. "That's all I have. Let us pray.

"Remember your servant, O Lord, according to the favor which you bear unto your people, and grant that, increasing in knowledge and love of you, he may go from strength to strength, in the life of perfect service, in your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, one God, world without end. Amen.'

"I didn't know Mr. Lesage. I don't know if he was a Christian." He paused. "But death ..." He held up his hand. His sleeve fell back. For a second he stared at his bare wrist, as if something about it surprised him.

"It's easy to see something like this in terms of 'just desert.' I'm saying this, not even knowing what sort of man he was. But it's easy to look at something like this, and think, he must have got what he deserved.
This is whether or he was a good man or a bad man. But there's something in the Bible about this—pardon any offense. Once, some people came to Jesus and asked him about some others, who had suffered a violent death. They asked him, 'Why?' And he told them, 'Those people weren't any worse than anybody else.'

"When something like this happens, I think, we try to find some meaning in it, in terms of divine justice. We say, that he must have deserved it, in order to put some meaning in it. It comforts us to believe that God is looking after the world, giving people their just deserts. But Jesus said that it doesn't work that way."

Somebody yawned, loudly.

"Meaning, I think, that if anybody deserves to die like that, then we all do. We've all heard the expression, 'There but for the grace of God go I.' And we also know that saying, 'Ask not for whom the bell tolls—it tolls for thee.' It could have been any one of us out there who met that mugger, or whoever it was. And we should remember that—while we remember Mr. Lesage. All of us are under sentence of death, and someday somebody is going to be talking about us just as we are, talking about him."

He looked at his watch again. So did the people in the pews.

"Let us pray.

"'O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered; accept our prayers on behalf of the soul of your servant departed, and grant him an entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'"

"I think we should spend a few moments in silent prayer now. People can leave whenever they wish to."

He folded his hands on the lectern and closed his eyes. After about a minute, everyone started to get up.

Arnold and Steve had been sitting in the rear. The three of them walked back to Eckhart together.

"Where did they get him?" Arnold asked.

"I don't know," Steve said. "I called the dean of the Divinity School and asked him if he knew anybody who could do this. He called me back and told me he'd found a student."

"A student," said Arnold.

"We probably got a summary of his last class," said Jeremy.

"Nobody there believed that Lesage deserved to die like that," said Arnold. "Nobody."

"I think Jeremy's right," said Steve. "He was nervous."

Arnold looked at Jeremy.

"You probably are."

"Interesting, though, what he said," said Steve. "Is that in the Bible?"

"It is," said Arnold. "It's in—" he took a drag from his cigarette "—the thirteenth chapter of Luke."

"Really?" Steve said. "How do you know that?"

"I got an A in Sunday school." Arnold coughed and laughed.

"I wonder why he said it," said Jeremy.

"Who?" Arnold asked.

"Jesus."

"It was probably for the reason that fellow back there said he did," said Arnold. "He didn't like to see people pointing the finger at each other."

"I have to go ahead," said Steve.

"We'll see you at 2:30," Arnold said.

Steve stepped ahead of them. The two men were alone.

"How long are you going to be staying?" Jeremy asked.

"My van leaves at five."

"When I went by Steve's office I heard you talking on the phone."

"What did you hear me say?" His voice carried no offense.

"You said something about a gun."

Arnold was looking at the space in front of them.

"John's paralyzed."

"Oh. No."
“They didn’t find out about it until very late yesterday evening,” he stopped suddenly and looked at the ground. “When Steve called me . . . ”

“Yes?”

“He was in pieces.”

“He seems okay now.”

“He’s very resilient,” Arnold said. “Where is your son now?”

“I don’t know. With Ellen. They were going to play in the snow.”

“You were going to stick around to hear the rest of the talks, weren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“If I were you,” Arnold said. “Lesage was right. If I were you, I’d go home and play with my son. Nothing special is going to happen this afternoon.”

“You’re going to stay.”

“I might not,” Arnold said. “Lesage was right.”

“Why did he come?”

“Who? Lesage?”

“Yeah.”

“He was paid to come. You’re not paid to stay.”

“I thought a person had to keep up with . . . ”

“Not all conferences are created equal. And this one . . . You almost never learn anything, even at a good conference. No one proves theorems at meetings; no one has ideas there. Meetings are where you advertise. They’re trade fairs. The reason you go is to see the other fellow’s wares.”

“Then I ought to go see . . . ”

“Frankly the wares here aren’t very good. Lesage was right.”

“I have to work on my problem.”

“You can do that while you’re playing with your son, Jeremy.”

Arnold spoke again, and his voice was calmer.

“I’ve just learned that my son is going to be spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair. If I’d spent more time with him when he was younger, maybe, he wouldn’t be paralyzed now. You don’t have to be a famous mathematician. You don’t want that anyway, do you?”

“No. I don’t think I do.”

“You know, there was this park where I used to take John.”

“You told me. It was near Berkeley.”

“When did I tell you?”

“Last night, at Steve’s.”

“I was drinking too much.”

“That’s all right.”

“You know, I was supposed to call Alice last night.”

“You called her.”

They had reached Eckhart. Jeremy walked up the steps.

“You’re still going in.”

“For awhile,” Jeremy said. “I’ll think about it.”

Arnold said, “Where can somebody go and sit peacefully around here?”

“There’s the chapel.”

“I meant other than the chapel.”

“I don’t know.”

Arnold breathed in, breathed out.

“Thank you.”

He walked away, back toward the Divinity School. Jeremy opened the door and went inside. Jeremy walked up the stairs quickly, and heard nothing but the sound of his own breathing and footsteps.

His office door was open and the light was on.

Judah was at his desk, in the same position as the day before, wearing the same clothes, and smoking.

“I . . . I missed the morning talks.”

“Where’s Osney?”
“He said he was going home. I missed the morning talks. Were there any good ones?”
“Did you hear about Lesage?”
“No.”

“He was murdered last night.”

“‘Murdered!’? You mean, really murdered.”
“Yes, really murdered, right outside the building.”
“Wow,” Judah said. “Who did it? I mean, who do they think did it?”
“They think Aden Dart did.”
“Wow,” he said. “Why him?”
“You weren’t at the talks yesterday.”
“No.”

“Lesage insulted him while he was giving his talk.”
“Oh,” he said. “Did they arrest him?”
“They…” Judah had already turned back to his desk. He had picked up a reprint and laid it on his knee. “They arrested him this morning.”

“During the conference?”
“Yes. They just came in and got him.”
Judah laughed.

“He didn’t do it.”
“I don’t think he did, either.”
“Who do you think did it?”
“I don’t know.”
Judah laughed. “Me?”
“No. For a second.”
“I didn’t do it,” he said. “What’s going to happen to the conference?”
“It’s still going on.”
“Aden is in jail, isn’t he? Doesn’t he have to be arraigned or something?”
“I think so. I guess he’s downtown.”
“They’ll never prove that he killed Lesage.”

A minute passed. Judah was looking through the reprint.

“Do you know this problem?” He turned to the blackboard and he started to describe it.
“I’m sorry, I can’t listen,” Jeremy said. “I told Ellen—” he thought of a lie “—I’d watch Tony for her while she was out. She has to go someplace.”

“Oh.”
Jeremy went into his own office and picked up a book and some papers which he had no need of.

“If Arnold comes by, I’ll be at home.”

“Are you coming back for the talks?”
“No. Sorry. Can’t be helped. I’ll see you Monday.”

The apartment was empty when he arrived. He set the book and papers down on the little table in the entrance. He stepped to the bedroom and leaned inside—sometimes Ellen took naps in the afternoon. The bed was empty.

“Tony.”

He opened the door to their son’s room. The window cut a bright red rectangle out of the building across the courtyard. There was no one there.

Jeremy shut the apartment door behind him and started to walk downstairs. On the middle landing he stopped and looked back toward the door. Behind him the sun shone through old windows onto his back.

It was like a demon: the spirit of the place. Walk up the stairs, do your work: the words enfolded him like armor. In a moment of time he saw… the kingdoms of the world.

He saw Aden, fumbling at the board, in a room full of embarrassed faces. He read letters of rejection. He saw his family moving into a small apartment someplace where the winters were long and the summers wretched, and where he was expected to do research, but given no time. In three years Ellen would leave him, and take Tony. He saw the faces of his successful friends.
And then, the demon died, in a single, exhausted scream. Jeremy walked down two more more steps, and then another two. His fear had been like a wall of freezing glass in front of him, but he opened the bottom door and stepped onto the metal mat. He could work at another time, an acceptable time. For some reason which he could not recall, he thought of birds and lilies in a sunlit field as went to look for his family in the snow.

VI

The snowman which the three of them built in the athletic field that Saturday had started to wilt by the following afternoon. They took the bus to the Museum of Science and Industry and showed Tony the dilapidated exhibits: the mathematics display that was almost twenty years old; the real jet engine that had never worked. Around three he fell asleep in his stroller. They pushed him through the crowded halls, still sleeping, for another hour, and then they caught the bus home. They put him to bed; and made love.

In the evening, after the dishes were washed and Tony was in bed, Jeremy went to his office, crossing Hutchinson Court without thinking of Lesage. He walked up to the second floor and checked his mailbox: it was empty. He had expected a note from Arnold, perhaps reminding him to mail a preprint of his theorem. He had thought, Saturday night, that Arnold might have tried to call him before he left. To remind him of—without repeating—what he had said after the service.

He had the office to himself. It had gotten cold. As he worked on his problem he began to see that there was no chance. Still, he worked, and almost happily. His proof’s failure was an uncomfortable, though unfamilic, fact, and his continuing to work—to see that it was really dead—was to give it a decent burial.

Lesage’s death had been announced on the evening news, along with the story of Aden Dart’s arrest. The newscasters had hardly known what to say about this dead man who was in some way famous, yet not a celebrity. If his murderer had not been another mathematician, they would not have reported it at all: murders were so common in Chicago. A famous lawyer, who was noted for bringing injunctions against nuclear power plants, had said that he would defend Aden Dart at no charge.

The next story had been about the impending divorce of a game-show host.

He worked until eleven, when there were only two more things he could try. If those failed he would put the problem away for at least six months, and hope to think of a completely different approach. In the mean time, he would find other problems. But it was eleven.

Ellen was in the swivel chair, reading, when he came home.

“Get anywhere?” she asked.

“I don’t think it’s going to work.”

“Ohhh.”

“There’re a few more things I can try.”

“Well, maybe one of those . . .”

“Maybe.”

Jeremy took off his boots. He went and took a shower.

Afterwards, he came out in his bathrobe and sat down on the couch.

“Don’t you have to teach tomorrow?”

“I’ll get up in time.” The robe made him feel philosophical. “I keep thinking that Arnold’s going to call me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he’ll find out something about his son, and want to talk to someone about it.”

“He has people out there to talk to.”

“That’s right. What are you reading?” His hands were clasped together as if he were holding a cup. She held up the book: The Return of the King.

“I wonder why he called me,” he said, after a pause.

Ellen had been trying to find her place in the book.

“What did you say?”

“I wonder why Arnold called me yesterday, after Steve called him.”

“I don’t know. Did you ask him?”

Jeremy shook his head.
"When I was his student, I was always in awe of him. I remember that party we went to at his house. I saw his son there, and he was talking about a hiking trip they were all going to go on, and I remember thinking that Arnold had managed to do both: to be a good father and a good mathematician. And right then I thought that I would never be good at either."

"Live and learn," she said.
"It must be hard," he said.
He got up, and kissed her.
"Goodnight."
"Goodnight."
He went to bed, and slept without dreaming.

In the morning, in his calculus class, he resumed the lecture of Taylor series which he had begun on Friday. There were six students in the whole class, in an enormous room. There was only one girl: she was Jewish and pretty. There was a student who had been brought up by Benedictine monks. He knew French and Latin, and he could read medieval texts in their original languages. (When Jeremy had told one of the other instructors about him, the instructor had suggested that he might be taking calculus "to sharpen his mind." ) And there was an oddly-matched pair of friends: one, athletic and self-confident, with a John Astin mustache, who seemed to be preparing for his interview with IBM; and the other, skinny, nervous, and punctual (or apologetic when he was not), who would probably end joining a religious order.

He taught them, as the last of the melting snow dripped from the trees. He had not looked at his notes since Friday morning, and he even came to the end of them half-way through the class. But he went on, having the class toss out examples, and then doing them, like a jazz musician taking requests. He even made a joke.

"This presentation is somewhat artificial. All this stuff actually took years to work out. But you can't have a calculus class that lasts for twenty years. Although some of them do seem that long."
Then the bell rang, and he walked back through the exorcized halls.
Simon was at his desk, and Judah was gone.
"Judah told me you went home for the weekend."
"Not home: Cedar Rapids. There's a difference."
"You missed the conference."

"I'm aware of that. It actually didn't look like that bad of a conference, but since I'd already missed my sister's first two weddings I decided that I should try to make it to her third. Of course, I could have waited for her fourth, but she and her husband are moving out to California, and you know my opinion of California."
"It's going to fall into the ocean."
"Yes. Any day now."
"You heard about Lesage?"
"Judah told me." He gestured toward the empty desk. "I would have foregone even my sister's wedding had I known that the weekend would be so exciting. I heard they arrested Aden Dart."
"That's right."
"I'm afraid that I agree with Judah on the probability of his guilt."
"So do I."
"But unfortunately I have yet to hear a suggestion of a likelier suspect."
"It was probably a mugger."
"No," said Simon. "I read it in the paper. Lesage's wallet was untouched."
"Maybe he thought someone had seen him."
"I don't believe it. It takes no time to get a dead man's wallet."
Jeremy said, "Oh well."

"However," said Simon, "we seem to be in the minority. This morning while I was walking in the hall I heard two professors talking in an office. One said, 'This is the sort of problem you just have to beat to death,' and the other one said, 'Let's send it to Dart.'"
"They then laughed.
"Well, let's hope his jury doesn't contain any mathematicians," Jeremy said.
"Or, at least, no competent ones."
He shrugged when Jeremy glanced at him.
Jeremy spent the rest of the morning working on his problem (he did not have to teach again until Wednesday). By lunchtime he knew that one of the two possible methods had failed. The other method, it seemed, involved some geometric arcana, which Steve Losch might know something about. He decided that he would ask him for some references that afternoon.

He walked home for lunch. Tony was still down with his morning nap. Jeremy and Ellen sat at their little kitchen table, facing the wall, and Jeremy told her what he had heard.

"They wouldn't talk that way if he were a good mathematician."
"Yes they would." She said it chidingly.
"Maybe."
"They're just nervous."
"Lesage's death was some little joke."
"I wouldn't call it a joke."
"It was sort of a joke on him," Jeremy said. "He's this big famous mathematician; he can snub anybody he wants to. And it never occurs to him that the person he's snubbing might try and kill him."
"That's only if that other mathematician was the one who killed him."
"You know, in a way, it's very liberating—to realize that everyone's going to die . . ."
"Jeremy."
"Sorry. Sorry for getting philosophical."
"You weren't getting philosophical."
"That's right." He stood up from the table. "Well, I have one more trick to try with my problem, and then I give up."
"Ohhhh."
"It's very liberating, you know."
He helped her clear the table, kissed her again, and walked back toward Eckhart.
Nearly all the snow was gone from the lawn around Regenstein. The blowers were whooshing hot air up through the grates on the sides of the building. And, on a whim, he turned into the library to look for a book.

It was easy to find. Then he picked a translation: King James. He searched for Luke 13.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.
And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things?
I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.
Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?
I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

As he stuck it back on the shelf, between the other Bibles, he thought that it was a strange thing to find in such a book.

Jeremy knocked on Steve's door.
"Come in."
He pushed it open.
"Are you busy?"
"No, no. Come on in."
Steve tipped his chair back. "What do you want?" he asked. He waved his hand in front of his face.
"This weekend."
"I can come back later."
"No, no. What is it?"
"I'm working on the problem about the Riesz transforms of the characteristic function of a set."
"Yes?"
"I've run into a problem."
"Why don’t you describe it?" Steve gestured toward the board.
"Well, I think it has to do with Kakeya sets."
"Kakeya sets."
"That’s makes me think it’s the wrong idea."
"It probably is. No offense."
"Here’s the problem."
He sketched it on the board. When he was done Steve, said,
"So, you’re saying that if you can do that—" he gently touched his hands together at the fingertips “—then
you’ll have a counterexample.
"Let me see."
He tipped back in the chair again and looked at the ceiling.
"I agree," he said, after a moment. "You know, that usually means that what you want to be true
isn’t."
"I know."
"But I don’t see any reason why it shouldn’t be true . . . How could it be false?" He looked at the ceiling
again. "Wait. Suppose we took a set . . . No. I don’t know."
Jeremy shrugged. "Neither do I."
"Work on it."
Jeremy put down the chalk and dusted off his hands.
"How did it go Saturday afternoon?"
"Oh. Ohhhh. You weren’t there, were you?"
"No."
"Ohhh. It was a disaster. You didn’t miss a thing."
"What? You mean nobody talked?"
"Nobody talked. Really, I must have been crazy to think that it could go on. That memorial service
. . . Well you were there. That was supposed to calm people’s nerves." Then he added, "Poor Arnold."
"What do you mean?"
"Nobody wanted to talk. The first speaker got up—Joe What’s-his-name from Arizona State. I’d thought
that once people started talking again they would . . . forget about Lesage, at least during the conference.
This fellow got up, started to give his talk, and got lost. I couldn’t follow him at all after the first minute.
He quit halfway through, and apologized for being unprepared. We took a break. And the next speaker
wasn’t there—he must have already gone home. I asked the third speaker if he wanted to give his talk right
then. He said No. Then, I think, Arnold started shouting from the back, ‘Why don’t you call the rest of it
off?’" Steve held up his hands. "What am I supposed to do? Arnold shouted again, ‘You should call it off!
Call it off!! Why? Everybody was looking at him. And he got up and came down to the front.”
"Really?"
"I couldn’t believe it. He thought we should take a vote to end the conference. It was crazy."
"And then what happened?"
"You’re not going to believe this, but we actually took a vote, and Arnold counted the votes up on the
blackboard, and they voted to end the conference."
"And then?"
"Then Arnold walked out of the room—I don’t know where he went. And then everybody else left, too."
"Well," Jeremy said, “they were under a lot of pressure. A man was murdered."
"I must have been crazy, Jeremy, to think that you can go on with a conference after something like
that."
"Yeah. Sorry."
"That’s all right, that’s all right. But you know, Arnold really had me frightened. He looked like he
could be dangerous."
"He was under a lot of strain."
"What do you mean?"
"Did he tell you why he wanted to use your phone?"
"No."
Jeremy explained about Arnold’s son.
"No wonder that he wanted to end the conference."
"It probably didn't help for you to call him about the murder, either."
"What do you mean? I didn't call Arnold."
"You didn't call Arnold?"
"No," Steve said. "Why did you think I did?"
"Uhhhh--" Jeremy thought up an answer as he thought of what he had heard.
"I suppose because it's the sort of thing I would have done."

VII

On the night of the murder, Arnold Phelps telephoned his wife. Walking across 57th Street, with the snow falling like sleep, out of the heavy sky, he had almost forgotten about the key, when Steve called from the car window.

"Just return the key whenever it's convenient."
"The key?" He stood there for a moment, and then he felt it in his right front pants pocket. "Right. Thank you; thank you again." For some reason he lowered his head as he spoke.

Losch rolled down the window and the car moved off. The noise it made seemed unrelated to its motion. Arnold observed this: it meant that he had drunk too much.

Losch's key fitted the rear entrance door, next to the pile of rubble and pipes. He went in and stamped the snow off his tennis shoes, and brushed it out of his hair. He took off his damp jacket, and walked up the stairs to the third floor. He let himself into the office. He dropped his jacket across the desk and sat down.

The long-distance access number was in his wallet. He held the strip of paper between the thumb and index fingers of both hands, and gazed at it as if it were an interesting piece of evidence (he was Sherlock Holmes). He picked up the receiver and carefully dialed the code--incorrectly: a rapid busy signal. He got it right the second time. He dialed his home, and let it ring. He hoped it would ring forever.

"Hello?" It was Alice.
"Hello, sweetheart."
"How are you?"
"I just got out of a party. What's the news about John?"
"I just came from the hospital, and the doctor said that it looks like the bullet went deeper than they thought."
"Meaning?"
"They think he'll be paralyzed."
Then he said nothing.
"Arnold?"
"Is that all?"
"That's all they know for now."
"How is he otherwise? Was he conscious?"
"No, no. He's still under. They're not going to bring him out of it till tomorrow."
"What time?"
"They didn't say."
"Steve Losch has given me his long distance code number. I'll call you tomorrow at noon, my time."
"Let me give you the number of the hospital."
"Yes, you should."

She recited the number to him.
"He's in Room A318."
"'A318?' He copied the numbers onto Losch's notepad. "When will you be there?"
"As early I can."
"What's the time difference? Two hours?"
"I'm not sure."
"It's two hours," he said. "I'll be calling you around ten o'clock."
"They told me that if you just give the room number they can page me."
"A318."
“You sound tired.”
“I’ve had too much to drink; it’s been a long day. How did John look?”
“I didn’t get to see him.”
“Shot in the stomach. I’ve heard that’s very serious.”
“It is, but they got him in almost right away. He’ll be all right, except . . .”
“Except for the paralysis.”
“Arnie, I have to get to sleep now.”
“Goodnight. Give John my love when you see him.”
He hung up.

The wind beat snow against the window behind him, and he turned to face it. Losch’s office overlooked Hutchinson Court. The Court, below, was like the pit of a theater, and the snow was falling into it like, shreds of paper, or ticker-tape: silent applause. The empty stage needed a man to bow and declaim, and gather in the cold cheers.

He did not know how long he sat there. The building was getting colder, and suddenly he trembled. His joints were stiff as he got up. He leaned on the windowsill, pressing his hot forehead against the glass. The cold pushed backward into his brain. The snow was falling—playfully, almost laughing. He closed his eyes.

He put on his coat. He had a headache now, and he was still drunk. He wanted to climb back up into the sky and fall again, slowly: seize some second chance for himself and his son. He picked up the note with the numbers on it and put it in his pocket. He turned off the light and walked out, quietly shutting the door.

He was too drunk to want to try the stairs again. The elevator was down the hall.

He punched the DOWN button. The motor kicked in somewhere, angrily: he had wakened it (he laughed). The doors opened stiffly. He got in and punched another button. He was still keeping his head down.

The elevator jerked, stopped, and the doors opened. Arnold stepped out. It took him a moment to see that he was on the wrong floor. Had the elevator taken him sideways? But then he remembered: this was the fourth floor, with its strange colors—green and yellow—and its offices that were almost never used; it was smaller, it made you feel as if you were on a conning tower.

The doors had shut, and the elevator returned to the basement.

He did not turn around. He wondered if it was worthwhile to call the elevator again. He would probably break his neck on the stairs.

“Arnold.”

He turned. Andrew Lesage was looking at him from behind a desk in an open, lighted office. Lesage had his chair tipped back, and he had his feet on his desk. His hands were folded behind his head.

“Did you forget something?”

“I came to make a phone call,” Arnold said.

Lesage pursed his lips and nodded.

“What did you forget?”

“Nothing.” Lesage said it innocently. “I have forgotten nothing. Why don’t you sit down?”

Arnold was already standing in the doorway.

“Thank you.”

He seated himself in the only other chair in the office, directly across from Lesage. They had put Lesage in one of the empty offices. There were three books on the steel shelves: a yellow Springer-Verlag text and two fat paperbacks. A briefcase stood open on the desk, next to some papers. The dark window reflected the back of Lesage’s head.

“No, I had to work,” Lesage said, in response to no question. “I have an impatient collaborator.” He turned in his chair. “He’s young. Coming up for tenure. Do you know this problem?” He pointed to the board.

Arnold moved his head slowly. It seemed to have an inner and an outer part, which did not move together.

“No, no,” he said. “I can’t think of mathematics now. I’m sorry.”

“Of course. Still . . .”

He sighed:

“Aden Dart.”
"What about Aden Dart?"
"He’s . . . ," Lesage said. "Is he a friend of yours?"
"In a way."
"Then perhaps I should say nothing."
"Say what you want to say."
"No."
"You want to say he’s incompetent."
"No, not incompetent. Marginally competent. He can, I’m sure . . . drive himself to work; excellent family man—" Lesage smiled "—But: what is he doing in this business?"
"His advisor told him to go into it."
"Skroli? Yes, Skroli does that, doesn’t he? He encourages the minnows."
"Minnows?"
"Should I have said ‘plankton?’ Lesage asked. "The . . . scavengers."
"Scavengers?"
"You know. Once the animal has been dead for twenty years, somebody who will clean off the bones."
"Piranhas."
"No. Aden Dart is not a piranha."
"I meant this afternoon."
Lesage smiled.
"And I am the head piranha?"
Arnold did not answer.
"Do you want to know why I rode with him?"
"I can guess," said Arnold. "You wanted to see if he would do it."
"Yes. He was completely polite. And, now, he is on his way home, to his happy family."
"God."
"Is something wrong?"
Arnold stared at him, then shook his head.
Lesage slapped the desk.
"I must go. Are you done here?"
Arnold nodded and stood up. He stepped outside while Lesage turned off the light and locked the door. They walked to the elevator. Lesage called it.
"My son is paralyzed."
"I didn’t know you had a son." The doors opened and they got in. "I’m sorry to hear that."
A moment passed.
"Do you have any other children?"
"No," Arnold said.
The two men stepped out on ground floor and put on their coats. As soon as they were outside, Arnold picked up a pipe from the pile.
"Andrew," he said.
The snow was falling in dry, gentle flakes. Lesage stopped at the sound of his Christian name. He half turned. Arnold hit him on the side of the skull. He went down at once.
"Family," Arnold said, and somewhere he seemed to hear someone whisper, "I believe you, I believe you."
"Family. Family."
He clubbed him until the skull cracked, and the blood came out on the snow.
"Andrew. Family."
He was standing a few feet away from him, still holding the pipe in his hand. He thought that he could be a statue, and let the snow bury him. But he was burning hot, and he would melt everything . . .
He shook himself. He stepped back: the blood had almost reached his feet. He was standing in a lighted courtyard, holding a bloody pipe that had his fingerprints on it.
He dropped the pipe in the snow. It rang dully against the hard turf. No, he thought: can’t leave it here. He bent down, like an old man gathering fuel. Through the archway he saw a car go past on University Avenue.
He crouched, a few feet away from the body, and watched the blood flow down, in long fingers, toward the center of the Court. He tried to think of what to do with the pipe.

"Andrew."

The snow was turning wet again. He thought that he could hide it under his coat, and dump it when he got to the airport. But it was too big: he looked down at it. And it would stain his clothes. He laid it in the snow and turned it over and over until it was clean.

No: can’t take it away. (How long had he been there?) He thought of a movie, Heaven Can Wait: as soon as they discovered the body it will be all over.

Had this happened?

Faster; faster. A pipe ...; and then he had it.

He stood up quickly and went to the pile of rubble. There was another pipe, big enough to have done the job. He took the pipe he was holding and thrust it deep into the pile; he laid a board over it. (It made a noise: he glanced up.) Then he took out his handkerchief, laid it on his hand, and picked up the other pipe. He dropped it onto Lesage’s broken skull. He was dizzy as he turned away from it.

He walked south, through the archway that led into the Quadrangle. The stars were hidden. The snow would take him, like a million fingers: Medusa’s snakes. Another car went by on University, and the lights in the buildings were like watching spirits.

He ran across University; he nearly fell down. Idiot! he thought. He shook some of the snow from his hair and his clothes before he went into the Club.

The clerk was reading a fat textbook. Arnold almost asked him what time it was, but stopped himself. He tried to go up the stairs like man who had just got out of a party.

It had been many years since he had watched a room lighten gradually with the rising sun. His room was on the eastern side of the building, looking toward a gentrified tenement. He had left the light off, and he was sitting at the desk. It was like slowly rising through dark water. The sky above the tenement was a broad purple band, and everything under it was in shadow. The street was like a realm of spirits which existed at right angles to the world of the living. Someone could step off 57th Street and enter it; someone could have entered the Court ... He went into the little bathroom to use the toilet, and he thought of how he had been going to get rid of the pipe—in a rest room at O’Hare, dumped in a waste basket. It would have made a dreadful noise; people would have probably thought it was a pipe bomb. And, by then, they would be looking for Lesage’s murderer.

He got up, closed the toilet but did not flush it; he still desired silence. Everyone should think he had been asleep all night. When the snowplow came by he looked at the clock: 6:15.

Whom to tell? (No one: no one ever: fly back to California and disappear.) The sky was tightening over his head, leaving behind the black vacuum of the night, and there was no one he could tell, no one he could throw the anchor to.

Why did he need to confess? If he had been that tenement there, and let a brick fall to kill a child ... Somebody (he picked up the phone): it would kill Alice: not her.

"Hello. Who is it?"

"This is Arnold Phelps."

"Arnold?" Ellen Tyne was still waking up.

"Could you please bring Jeremy to the phone?"

She sounded puzzled.

"All right."

He heard the phone hit the coffee table.

"Arnold?"

"Jeremy?"

"It’s me."

"I have some bad news." I’ve just murdered a man. "I just got a call from Steve Losch." Stupid, stupid.

"Bad news?"

Bad news.

"Lesage has been murdered. Are you still there? Jeremy ...?"
"Shit. Shit. Where?"
"In Hutchinson Court. Somebody found the body."
"Oh my God."
"That's how I feel."

"Aden took him home last night."
He had forgotten that.
He almost said, "Someone should call him," and suppressed a giggle.

"Arnold?"
"I had to cough. Jeremy, I'm calling you to spare you a shock when you go in this morning."
"Right. Thanks. Thank you." Then Jeremy said, "Poor Aden."
"I agree," Arnold said. "Good-bye."
"Good-bye. Thank you for calling."
He hung up.

Fool!

Nine-fifteen: he had to go in. Snow everywhere, melting fast. The sidewalk leading to the entrance of the Quadrangle Club was wet, and he thought of how he had thrown his jacket across Steve Losch's desk. It had left a stain on the blotter. Would it have dried by morning? He had kept the slip with Losch's access code. Did he still have the paper where he'd written his son's room number and the number of the hospital? He stopped and opened his wallet: there it was. Then he counted his money (he was standing right outside the Club) in order not to look suspicious.

He went in the front way, deliberately. He regretted it when he saw the crowd of mathematicians. The side entrance was more natural; but no one appeared to notice him.

Aden and Bobby were standing a few yards from the western doors that led to the archway between Eckhart and Ryerson. Aden was an earnest, innocent man. He reminded Arnold of a girl he had known. Yes: his incompetence had shaped him into a feminine mold. Even with the gray hair . . .

Aden saw him and walked over.
"Good party last night."

"Steve Losch usually gives good parties," Arnold said. "I was worried about you and Lesage."
"We made it home all right."
"I can see that."
"Have you seen Lesage?"
Arnold did not dare to speak at first. He shook his head.
"I wouldn't worry about him," he said.
"Oh, I'm not worried."
"Would you please excuse me?"

He walked upstairs. He got a cup of coffee and a donut. Steve Losch was at the end of the table, just standing, as he had done last night. His fingertips were resting on the table. He noticed Arnold—nodded to him.

Arnold slowly walked toward the lecture hall. He found the chair he had had the day before, pushed down the seat, and let himself rest in it.

Then the rest of them came in. There was Jeremy. Steve adjusted the room lights toward the front (the clouds had hidden the sun).

"Our next speaker will be Jim Felton from the University of Little Rock."

The man got up to speak; Arnold did not hear any of it. When the police came to the door, he was staring at the space between his knees.

He went into Steve's office at 11:30. The stain was still there, but it was quite faint. He took out his handkerchief—that handkerchief—laid it flat over the spot, and put a book on it. Then he waited, and he thought about calling, and about what he would ask. It was a sort of an alibi. Calling on the phone now meant he had not called the evening before. Silly.

The wind shook the window behind him. He did not turn around. He dialed.
"Hello?"
"Room A318, please."
There was a pause.
"I'm sorry; I can't ring that room right now. If you could call back in half an hour ..."
"I'm his father."
"I'm sorry, sir."
"Would you please page Alice Phelps?"
"Yes, sir."
Tick, tick, tick: he was on hold.
"Arnold?"
"How is he?"
"I don't know. I'll get to see him at ten."
Arnold looked at his watch.
"He talked to one of the nurses last night."
"What did she tell you?"
"She said she was doing her rounds, and she thought he was asleep. But he wasn't, and he just started talking to her. He wouldn't let her go. He wanted her to tell him ... Wait."
The sound was muffled: she had put her hand over the receiver.
"What did he want her to tell him?"
"I can go see him now. He wanted to know if you knew."
"Is that all?"
"No. He said that he wanted you home tonight."
"Tonight?"
"As soon as you could. She told me that he sounded like a little boy."
"I'll be coming home this evening," he said. "I can get a cab at the airport."
"Come to the hospital. I'll be here. I talked to the staff. They said they'll let us in, even if it's late. I'm sure they will."
"So am I."
"I have to go. Goodbye."
He hung up the phone and pushed away from the desk. There was a shadow outside the door, but it was moving away.

Sitting in the back, hearing the words: he must have appeared very religious; and he tried to pray for his son. He had killed the man who had made him kill his son, and those opposite sins should have balanced, but they were two great weights on his shoulders.

"Let us pray."
Dear God, I'm tired; forgive me for being tired. (What have I done?) Oh dear God, make my son forgive me, but forgive me. Can time run backwards? A bad man wouldn't have called.
Please, it isn't fair that the elevator went up. Why was he there? Dear God ... (Squeeze it out: something will happen.)
It was a long dream walking back to Eckhart. And the whole afternoon and evening were a dream.

VIII

Alice met him at the airport anyway. She had called and got his flight number, and was waiting for him in the boarding area. She walked up and embraced him.
"Thank you," he said. "I could have got a cab."
She took his hand and they walked out through the crowds.
"I have very little baggage," he said. "Is something wrong?"
"No."
They passed big posters of Jamaica and Paris, and the metal detectors, and crossed over to the baggage claim area.
"No. I've just been sitting in the hospital for seven hours."
"I thought you told me they were going to let you see him."
"He's been asleep. They put him back under sedation."
"Back under sedation," Arnold said.

They were standing by the carrel. There was a sharp buzz behind the rubber curtains, and the conveyor belt started to move.

"Who’s his doctor?" he asked. Before she could answer he said, "Never mind. Why did they put him under?"

"They’ve told him he’s paralyzed."

"Why did they have to tell him that? Why now?"

"I don’t know, Arnie."

Arnold said, "He probably figured it out and then they had to tell him."

"I think that’s your bag."

Alice bent down and lifted it off the carrel.

"Thank you."

They walked out into the cool evening, hand in hand.

"Do you want to drive?" she asked.

"No."

They crossed Airport Drive and walked up the concrete steps of a parking structure. The air smelled of automobile exhaust.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"I am very tired."

She opened his door before letting herself in.

"Arnold, I think you’re sick."

He took a deep breath.

"I may be. What time is it?"

There was a clock in the car. "It’s almost nine. You don’t sound well."

Eleven in Chicago, he thought: it’s been almost twenty-four hours.

"I’m well enough to go to the hospital. I promise not to infect anybody." Then he said, "I’ll be all right."

He sat with his hands on his thighs, with his fingers splayed out, as she drove northward into the city. They parked in another structure at the hospital. He wanted to laugh—but that would make him look insane. Alice closed her door and he had yet to unbuckle his belt.

"I’m all right," he said. He rose out of the car. "Jet lag. Exhaustion."

"Maybe you shouldn’t go into the hospital."

"I’m not sick. Anyway," he said, "isn’t this where sick people are supposed to come?"

The desk clerk had their names on a list. Alice led Arnold to the "A" wing, and they took the elevator up to the third floor.

The doors opened.

"His room is down here, to the right."

"Excuse me, excuse me." A nurse was walking toward them, calling softly. "Why are you on this floor?"

"We’re the Phelpses," Alice said. "We were told we could come and see our son."

"Wait," she said.

She went into a room a few doors down—the nurse’s station. She returned a moment later.

"Okay," she said. "He’s this way."

"I know the way," said Alice.

The nurse continued to walk ahead of them.

"We had to put another patient in with him."

"Oh."

They reached the door and the nurse gently pushed it open. The room was dark. They could see the bed nearest the door in the light from the hall. The second bed was behind a curtain.

"He’s on the other side," the nurse said.

They walked past the sleeping stranger. Arnold would have felt ashamed if that person had wakened just then.

"He’s still sedated," the nurse said. She turned on a small lamp near the window.

John was lying on his back, with his head turned sideways on the pillow.
"If you need anything . . ." She held up the pager, and then let it hang next to the bed.

"How long can we stay?" Alice asked.

"As long as you like." She stepped past them to leave.

"Thank you," Arnold said.

The light of the lamp caught the silver gray of his wife’s hair, and Arnold thought that the two of them were old people now: they had finally reached old age. He pinched the loose skin above his throat, between his thumb and index finger. It was like a turkey’s skin: but, really, he was not so old.

He watched his son breathe.

"Well?" he asked.

He leaned back and sat on the broad plaster windowsill. Alice gazed at her son. Her arms were folded under her breasts. And Arnold thought, that this was what he had done.

"What’s the use?" he said.

She turned around and took him in her arms and began to cry; and he put his arms around her.

"You know it’s my fault," he said. It was the first time he had told it to her. "I should have been a father to him."

She cried for many minutes; and when she was done, they turned off the lamp, walked back through the darkened room, and drove home.

It was not until late at night, after awaking suddenly, that Arnold realized he had not told his wife about the murder, and that she would wonder why he had not, when she began to pay attention to the news again.

He always got up at six on the mornings when his eight o’clock met. Alice would sleep in till eight. As he poured his cereal, and ate it under the light that hung low over the little table, he wondered whether he should not fake illness and stay home. But that would be even more suspicious: he remembered that Raskolnikov had gotten ill. It was better to go on, and be normal: pretend that his head was so full of theorems and ideas and class preparation that the murder had just been forgotten. He could even attribute his forgetfulness to exhaustion.

But when should he “remember”? Of course, they would all know at school. He would call her from there. He could predict the conversation:

"There’s something I forgot to tell you."

"What is it?" "It’s because I was exhausted."

"What did you forget, Arnie?"

"Somebody was murdered at the conference."

He laughed out loud and choked on his juice. He would have to find another way of saying it. But it was plausible that hearing people talk about the murder at school would remind him.

He made his coffee. It was six-thirty. He turned on the radio and got the weather report. It was going to be clear, so he would take the ten-speed and leave Alice the car. He sipped his coffee and listened to the news slowly unroll, and turned it off at seven, just before the national news.

The bike was in the garage, standing by itself in the middle of the floor. He walked it out through the side door. He unlatched the gate and brought it out onto the driveway. His house was on a hill, and below him, over the tops of the trees, he could hear the distant lowing of the rush hour. The new smog, like a protective gel, was already visible on the horizon.

It was a steep ride down into the city, but he had never thought of it as dangerous until today. He told himself that it was because of his Catholic upbringing, warning him not to die in a state of mortal sin. (But how would he get out of it? No priest . . .)

He put on his brakes just before the stop sign and a car went by six inches in front of the bike. He had to keep his mind on what he was doing: he would think about absolution when he got to the office.

He walked his bike in through the engineering building and took the elevator up. He was almost the first one in (never the first: there was a graduate student in the east wing who drove in at six every morning to miss the rush hour, because he lived in Fullerton). He unlocked his office and wheeled in his bike. He left the door open and sat down at the desk.

Dr. Isei, who had taken his calculus class for him, had left a note on his chair (the desk was a mess) telling him how far he had got. Arnold opened the calculus text and took out the syllabus. Today’s new topic would be logarithms to different bases. He worked out some examples which he hoped would be motivating.
His window overlooked the broad walkway that went down toward the student union. Except for an occasional jogger it was empty now. Arnold noticed that he was about eight feet over their heads. No matter how clear the sky was, the Northeast and the northern Midwest always felt overcast at this time of year. On returning, the Southern California sunlight seemed unnaturally intense. The joggers ran in light sweatsuits, or even shorts, and the sunlight glinted on their golden hair. Arnold thought: Expensive shoes.

Did he hate them? He was a terrible lecturer, and sometimes he would find obscenities written on the blackboard or even on the wall above it in the lecture room. They hated him. Just last term he had had to cancel a test because somebody had phoned in a bomb threat. There never were any bombs—only hyperambitious pre-law students, who wanted some extra time—but you had to take them seriously. Looking at the joggers now, and a few students on their way to early labs, he wondered if the pressure to succeed was really that intense for them; because, before, he had always assumed that the bomb threats, the cheating, the drugs, and all of that, were ways to keep it from becoming intense. But perhaps they were really afraid; and he thought of the African grad student.

Africa for him was a small college in Alabama; or Cal State’ Northridge; or the University of Vermont. The presence of those places had hovered beside him, like a dark abyss, all the time that he was in graduate school, and in the years after, until he had got tenure. The worst thing was that the people who went to those places did not die (Douglas College, he thought: he had forgotten Douglas College), but continued to exist, on the sidelines of mathematics—in its dark side streets. They attended the big conferences, but were never the principal speakers; and they were published, but never in the best journals (he had always rated journals according to whom they were willing to publish).

And he had escaped Africa. His reputation was such that no one—not even a Leasure—could send him to a place like that, or to any school that was less than where he was. He had beaten them—become one of them; and without . . . without . . .

. . . cheating.
He had been working for about half an hour when somebody knocked on the door that he had left hanging open. It was a student. He remained standing on the threshold and demurely stuck out his arm to rap the door with his fist.

"Professor Phelps? I wondered if you would happen to have a minute?"
"Yes? What is it?"

"I was wondering, Professor Phelps, I was wondering . . ."
He stepped inside the office and cautiously approached the desk. He was tall, skinny, and blond-haired, and he was wearing a short-sleeved shirt. Arnold did not think he had ever seen him before.

"Yes? You need something?"
The young man looked at his feet, then brought his head up.

"You had me in calculus last term."
"I did?"

"I didn’t come to lecture very often."
"You didn’t."

"That’s probably why you don’t recognize me." His hair had been falling over his eye, and he shook it aside.

"I don’t recognize you. What’s your name?"
"Mark Allen."
Arnold rubbed the back of his neck and looked at the boy. "Wait."
He swivelled his chair around to his file cabinet, and he heard Mark Allen move toward the desk.

"You gave me a D."
Arnold turned back to him, and when he saw the young man’s face he felt afraid. He was leaning on the desk now. Arnold could see that his hands were empty.

"You don’t believe that you deserve a D?"
"No, I don’t."
"Let me get my records."
He turned around again, but kept listening for movement behind him.

"I knew the material."
Arnold nodded as he flipped through the files. He was holding the drawer open between his legs, and he was bent over it like a cobbler at his bench. He went through the folders as quietly as he could. Mark Allen was staying put.

"Found it..." He pulled it out and turned around, and let the drawer close by itself.

The boy was no longer leaning on the desk. Arnold tipped back his chair and opened the manila folder.

"Now let me see. Allen. There you are," he said. "Do you know why you got a D?"

"No."

"Your test scores were: 76, 69, and 58. Your homework average was--" he ran his finger along the page "--55. I'd say you deserved a D."

He glanced up. Mark Allen was clenching his fists.

"The trouble is I freeze up on tests."

"I can't do anything about that."

"And you said the homework didn't count."

"No. If you'll look back at the syllabus, which I handed out at the beginning of the term, you'll see that I said that the homework could not hurt you. In your case, I did not figure your homework in when computing your final grade."

He had brought his fist to his forehead, and he was leaning his face against the window.

"If I get a D it means I'll lose my scholarship."

"I'm sorry," he said. He had already closed the folder.

"Can't you make it a C minus--" he was whining "--just this once?"

"I told the whole class how I would grade them at the beginning of the term."

"But just this once?" He kept staring out at the campus.

Arnold looked at his watch: it was time to go.

"I'm very sorry about your scholarship, but I have to get to a class right now. My answer is no."

Mark Allen turned. His eyes were red. He was holding his fists in front of him, together, like a chained slave, and he was biting his lip.

"Fucker! Fucking fagot bastard! Shit-eating mother-fucking-FUCK YOU!"

He ran out of the office and down the hall, cursing. Arnold leapt up and slammed the door shut behind him. Then he stood there leaning against it, wondering if it was bullet-proof. It seemed that several minutes passed.

Somebody knocked on the door. Arnold jerked away from it.

"Dok-torr Phelps?" It was Isei, speaking through his Japanese accent.

Arnold opened the door.

"I hudd..."

"It was just a student. Didn't like his grade." Arnold had clasped his hands together to keep them from trembling.

"Student?" said Isei. "Ahh. You are oh-kay?"

"I'm fine." He looked at his watch again. "I'm late for my class." He turned to his desk and gathered up his notes.

"You are pale."

"Pale?" He stopped.

Isei said, "Ahh. No: you were pale."

"I have to go."

He walked past Isei and closed the door.

His class met in one of the lecture halls in the engineering building. He took the elevator down and entered at the front, down by the blackboards. He was seven minutes late. The rows of seats loomed up at a steep angle. It looked like there were about a hundred students present, and no Mark Allen.

He deliberately wasted a few seconds spreading his notes out on the low desk.

"Today we're going to talk about logarithms. A logarithm is..."

The lecture hall had blackboards that slid up and down, and he pulled down the middle board. It uncovered a centerfold that had been taped to the wall. The class roared.

He glared at them, pushed it back up, and went on with the lecture.
He worked in his office—with the door locked and the light off—until lunchtime. Nobody knocked or telephoned.

He was actually getting somewhere on an old problem in complex function theory on infinitely connected domains. It was the part away from the boundary—the “good” part—that was giving the trouble. He wrote down the series.

That.
No.
He wrote it down again.
No.

He opened his door and stepped out. There were students a few yards down the hall, sitting on the floor outside another professor’s office. They had textbooks open on their laps and were talking, swapping answers. They glanced at him as he came out and their voices lowered. The other professor’s door was shut: they must have been waiting for his office hour.

He had put his lunch in the refrigerator, in the kitchen off the math lounge. He told himself that it was surely not poisoned (the bag was just where he had left it), but he checked the apple and the sandwich bag for needle holes anyway. It was a quarter of noon, and the only other people in the lounge were two grad students playing go. This was fortunate because, while holding his food up, and turning it over, he looked like a person who had never seen an apple or a sandwich before in his life.

He sat there very quietly and ate. The big room and the act of eating made him feel humble. The windows of the lounge overlooked a deep courtyard . . .

He finished his lunch, but did not get up. He needed his excuse—he needed somebody to ask him about the murder, but as he thought about it he realized that it was a stupid idea, really no better than calling her up and saying it had just slipped his mind.

He heard a sudden sound, like cracking, over to the right. It was the grad students, putting the go stones back in the pots. Then they left, and he was completely alone.

Function theory . . . think about function theory. (He could not move.) It’s away from the boundary that it’s bad. But that’s where everything is smooth, so there must be . . .

Dee-bar estimates; dee-bar estimates; if only—

Andrew . . .
The noon bell rang and the refrigerator door closed simultaneously. Dr. Lathrop, from the fifth floor, was walking over to Arnold’s couch.

“Arnold—” Lathrop was from West Texas and weighed about 250 pounds “—I heard about the murder.”

“Right. There was the murder.”

“So they think old Dart did it.” He sat down in a chair on the other side of the coffee table.

“The police think he did it.”

“And you don’t?”

“No,” he said. “I don’t think he did it.” As soon as he spoke he was afraid, because he could see that his vehemence had surprised Lathrop.

“You don’t think so? Why not?”

“Aden Dart is not a murderer.”

Lathrop carefully unwrapped his sandwich.

“So?”

“Aden Dart is not a murderer.”

“I heard that old Andy insulted him pretty bad.”

“Was that part in the news?”

“Oh, let me see now. It was in the paper yesterday. It said, Lesage made fun of him while he was giving his talk.”

“Is that all that it said?”

“Oh, it said how they found his body, and how the two of them went home after the party. But there wasn’t anything in that story to make you think Dart didn’t do it. Why don’t you think he did it?”

“I know Aden Dart.”

“Maybe you don’t know him as well as you think. Sorry. Ah, forget it,” Lathrop said. “I guess it must have shaken a lot of people up.”
“It did.”
“I’m kind of surprised they didn’t call the conference off.”
“They did.”
“Oh.”

So, he thought, there was no news about his strange behavior.
“You look a little shaken up yourself, Arnold.”
“My son’s in the hospital.”
“Oh, Arnold, I’m sorry,” Lathrop said. “Let’s talk about something else.”
“Let’s.”
For the next few minutes they said nothing.
“I need to be going,” said Arnold.
He crumpled his brown bag and got up, and Lathrop raised his hand in a wave—see you later—from the armrest.

So, he was safe. Aden Dart was obviously the wrong man. They would know that soon, and then they would say that Lessage had died at the hands of a mugger—some nervous kid who had killed a man, and lost his cool, and fled without even taking the money. Safety, he thought: everyone would be safe.

He was drifting toward the mailroom. He had not checked his box that morning for the mail that had accumulated while he was away. He went in.

The secretaries had gone to lunch. The work-study girls were sitting at the desks, behind the glass windows, taking the calls.

His box had a half-dozen envelopes in it: an invitation to join the National Geographic Society (into the trashbin), a letter from a Russian mathematician (he recognized the name: they all had the same handwriting), two appeals for money from a save-the-whales group (trashbin), the student film schedule for the coming term; and a memo from the dean’s office (into the bin, unopened).

Near the back there was a telephone message that had slipped off the top of the pile as he had picked it up:

**Telephoned:** Jeremy Tyne
**Time:** 11:53
**Call back?** No
**Left message:** I know

It took him a moment to realize what it was Jeremy knew. He crumpled the note into a pink ball. It seemed that the girls were looking at him, although he had his back toward them. **Probably the girl who had taken the message…**

He turned around. One of them was talking on the phone. Another had a book open on the desk and was doing homework.

He looked at the ball in his hand. He would need to get money out of the bank—there was a branch in Westwood—to pay the cab. The plane ticket he could put on a credit card. And, his classes: Isei. He went into the office where the girl was doing homework and asked her for a piece of note paper. While she was getting it he dropped the telephone note in the wastebasket, like a magician getting rid of palmed card. She handed him the paper and went back to her work.

“Do you know who I am?” he said.
“Excuse me?”
She looked up. A girl at one of the other desks looked up, too.
He was not even touching the desk, but he could sense himself leaning over her, and his uncombed hair, more than ever, was like a lion’s mane.
The other girl had gone back to her work.
“Excuse me. Did you want something?”
“Never mind.”

He walked out of the office. He wrote the note to Isei and put it in his box. He listened for whispers behind him but there were none. The girls were not even relieved that he was gone.

He walked downstairs and out, toward the Village. There were students all around him, eating lunch on the plaza. He thought of safety. As he walked, he felt himself slowly become invisible.
He flew to Chicago and gave himself up. His trial lasted only a few days: he had confessed openly, and he had made no plea bargain.

The hardest part had been when he called his Alice—his one phone call. He had had to explain everything to her backwards.

"Arnold, why are you calling collect?"
"I'm in Chicago."
"Chicago? Arnold, what are you doing in Chicago?"
"I want you to know, I took some money out of our bank account to pay for the taxi."
"What?"
"And I had to put the plane fare on our Visa." He paused. "I'm sorry about that."
"But what are you doing in Chicago?"
"I'm being arraigned for murder."
"What?"
"I'm being arraigned for murder," he said. "I murdered someone."
"You murdered someone? What do you mean?"
"Do you remember Andy Lesage?"
"Andy Lesage ... Arnold, what does Andy Lesage have to do with ..."
"I murdered him. Killed him."
Alice did not answer.
"The police arrested the wrong man. They think somebody else did it."
"What murder ..."
"You haven't been reading the papers. Go get a newspaper. Andy Lesage was murdered."
Twenty seconds passed.
"And you killed him."
"I killed him."
"Oh, Arnold, this is too much."
"Please, get me a lawyer."

He did not remember whether they had said goodbye.

He was sentenced to four years in the minimum security section of the Men's Correctional Facility in Joliet. His lawyer had masterfully evoked his client's state of mind—and his diminished capacity—on the night of the murder: the news of his son's paralysis, the alcohol (and here he was careful to point out that, on the other hand, Arnold had not drunk excessively), Lesage's mocking, "demonic" presence. And there was the fact that, as far as the world knew, Arnold had given himself up voluntarily (neither Jeremy, nor the girl who took the message, ever divulged its existence to the press).

While the trial lasted, the newspapers made him into a symbol of outraged fatherhood revenging itself on a bloodless, unsleeping ambition. Lesage had had no family or friendships that might be strained or broken through his pursuit of mathematics; but his example, and the pace that he—and others like him—set, drove other men to abandon everything—love, family, the beauty of the world—for the sake of that phantasmal crown. Indeed, Lesage was merely an academic form of a common phenomenon. After the trial, several thoughtful essays on this topic appeared in the New Yorker magazine.

His three cellmates were white. Two of them were conventional embezzlers. The third was a computer crook. The hacker, who was lean, intense, and very young, had no mathematical interests outside code-breaking. He was Arnold's first disappointment with prison life.

The only other murderer in their wing was a physician, who had killed a patient through malpractice (a mistaken prescription, leading to kidney failure). But other than that fact—that they were murderers—the two men had nothing in common. The doctor, Arnold learned from other prisoners, had been born and brought up in Toronto, and he had spent his summers fishing in an uncle's fleet off Nova Scotia. When he spoke, it was with an accent that was a mixture of Maine and Scotland. He was red-bearded, and fat, and he was the best ping-pong player in the wing.

The prison library had about a dozen math books. All but one of them were at the high school level and below, and the exceptional one was for businessmen. In his first weeks there, Arnold put in requests for
some books that they might order; but the librarian got back to him and told him that the books that he wanted were too expensive.

There was a large paperback science fiction collection. He read those. He had not read that sort of stuff since high school; but he told himself that it was better than watching television.

Aden Dart, he learned, had been released immediately, and then had had a nervous breakdown. Douglas College kept him at full pay for the eighteen months that he missed while he was recovering; and, for some time after, his seminar talks at Chicago were unusually well-attended. Shortly before he took up teaching again, he wrote Arnold a long letter, in which he thanked him, and then rambled on about his own family, and the academic politics at Douglas College. A few weeks later he came out to visit him, and brought him a basket of fruit.

Jeremy did come out twice that first year: once in autumn, just before the quarter began, and again in spring, during the break. The autumn visit was only five minutes long, because Jeremy’s bus was late (the Tynes still had no car then), and he arrived at the very end of the visiting hour. They barely had time to exchange greetings. Jeremy noticed that Arnold had lost some weight, and that his hair was a little grayer. Arnold asked him how his family was; and then he had to go.

“Phelps, visitor.”

The guard pulled back the door. A sheriff’s deputy was standing outside, beside him. Arnold stepped out into the hall.

“This way.”

The door was pushed shut.

They walked between rows of cells. The guard, who was behind him, yawned. It was three in the afternoon. In his letter, Jeremy had said that he would arrive by three.

A covered walkway connected the cell block with the visitor center. It was the only place in the prison where there were large windows. They the prison yard and, beyond the walls, were the fields of a farm. The sun was halfway to the horizon, and its rays were making the air in the walkway dry and close: radiator air. The snow was gone. And Arnold thought, It’s been a year.

They sat him down in a hard wooden chair in front of what looked like a bank teller’s window, with a speaker at the bottom. Jeremy was sitting on the other side. Arnold briefly looked into his face, searching for some sign of discomfort. He saw Jeremy swallow; he seemed to be holding his jaw shut.

“You made it,” Arnold said.

“We have a car now.”

“Congratulations.”

Then Jeremy looked down at the speaker. He had been about to say something, but what Arnold had said had broken a kind of rhythm, and now it was the wrong thing to say.

“How’s the family?”

Jeremy looked up.

“Fine. Tony’s three and a half. He can count up to ten. Ellen’s doing okay. She has a job, part-time, doing stenography. That’s how we were able to buy a car.”

“Do you know where you’re going to go yet?”

“New Zealand.”

“That’s where you wanted to go in the first place.”

Jeremy nodded. “Yeah.”

“What’s in New Zealand?”

“It’s very beautiful.”

“New Zealand.”

“How are you?”

“I’m doing much better. I think I must have had the flu four times last year.”

“It sounds like my first year in Chicago.”

A moment later both of them laughed.

“You look better,” Jeremy said.

“They feed us very well here.”

“Are you able to do any mathematics?”
“They don’t prevent me. No, I haven’t done anything. Not for months,” Arnold said. “Whatever happened to that problem with the Riesz transforms?”

“Oh, it fell through.”

“Don’t let that discourage you.”

“I won’t.”

“Even in New Zealand.”

“I won’t,” Jeremy said.

“You know, you’re going to be isolated down there.”


“He’s doing much better. He’s going to be walking in about a month.”

“What?”

“Didn’t I tell you in the letter?”

“No.”

“What did I say?” He looked to his side. “Never mind. The damage wasn’t as bad as they thought. His spinal cord was bruised. At Christmas he was feeling his toes, and a little later he was moving his ankles; and they say he’s going to be walking by May.”

“My God.”

Arnold nodded his head rapidly.

“How long are you going to be here?” Jeremy asked.

“Three more years.”

“That’s right.” The next question was rude, but he asked it because he had not thought of it before.

“What are you going to do when you get out?”

“I don’t know.”

“Back to UCLA?”

Arnold shook his head. “Maybe I’ll join you in New Zealand.”

Then the guard walked up and touched Arnold on the shoulder. He glanced up, and turned back to Jeremy.

“It looks like our visit is over.”

Jeremy and Arnold rose from their chairs.

“Say hello to the family for me.”

“I will.”

The guard led him away, and the door to the cell block closed.

Alice visited him in the summer, and then there were no visits, from anyone, for a long time. John was walking, but with a slight limp. In the fall he started college, at a no-place school in the Bay Area. When Arnold heard that he thought of the playground they had gone to, a few times. He imagined it as still being there, though it had surely (he did not know) been built over by now—a condominium, or a parking structure. But he imagined it as it was then: the whole area, as it was then: when cars were losing their fins, and women’s two-piece swimsuits always covered their navels.

He had been a young man, and now he realized that he had been as scared as Jeremy was in Chicago. That summer, the second summer after he got his PhD, they had flown west on his grant money to house-sit for a Berkeley professor. The man was a physicist, a friend of his advisor’s, and he spent his summers with his family, in Germany, doing experiments on semiconductors.

The physicist’s study was all dark wood, and books: on physics, electronics, mathematics, chemistry. On his desk there was a small bust of Charles Darwin. The rest of the house he had given over to his wife who, judging from the decor, must have been either Japanese, or else the daughter of a missionary (the two couples never met: the Phelps received the house keys from another physicist in the department). They had a ten-year-old daughter, and John, who was three, slept in her room.

They had the use of the car, and Arnold would drive in to “Cal” four days a week. There was a summer analysis seminar which he attended. He spoke in it a couple of times. It was during one of those seminars that he got the idea for his celebrated theorem on biharmonic means.

Then Alice’s father died, and she had to take the bus to Wisconsin for his funeral. Arnold and John were left alone in the house for the week.
It had rained the last few days before Alice left, but then the weather cleared, and it remained clear all the time that she was away. There were a swingset and a treehouse in the backyard, but they were made for the girl, and John was too little to play on them. He did play something like soldiers with the girl's dolls, but he became bored easily, and that irritated Arnold, because it reminded him of the perpetually bored undergraduates he had to tutor in grad school. Sometimes when John came to the study door and knocked on it, and asked his father to retrieve a doll that had fallen behind a piece of furniture, or get down a picture book, or look at it with him, Arnold, who was painfully connecting the pieces of his biharmonic puzzle, would storm to the television set, and completely ignore his son, and he would scan through the channels (that noisy channel-changer— it thudded when you turned it) until he found something that he thought would entertain the boy: Tibetan travelogues, gameshows, cartoons hosted by a phony astronaut. But he always came back. He wanted him.

After five days, they ran out of milk, and Arnold had to go shopping. The grocery store was a few blocks down the hill, and Arnold and John walked there together. There was no sidewalk, but the traffic always went slowly up there, and they stayed near the road edge; and Arnold held John's hand.

There was a small park between the house and the store, and John asked on the way down if he could stop and play there. Arnold had told him that they had to hurry, because the store closed at six. On the way back, he asked again.

Arnold set down the grocery bag on one of the brick barbecues and gently pushed his son in the harnessed swing. It seemed like a beautiful park, surrounded by trees on three sides. Arnold was looking uphill, toward the east.

In that moment he knew that his son was only three years old, and that for him, the entire world was his mother and his father. The boy's life was in his hands, soft and helpless, like a chick. A movement could crush it, and the bird would never know that the pain it felt was death.

"We have to go now, John."

He stopped pushing, and went over to the barbecue and picked up the bag. The boy started to cry.

"We have to go home." He had not brought his watch. He had no idea what time it was. "We've been here for a long time."

"No."

"John, we have to go home."

He walked over to the swing—it had come to a stop—and he undid the harness. John bawled.

"We have to go!" He thought of biharmonic means.

"Push me!"

"No! I have work to do."

"Please push me!"

"No!"

"Please push me!"

"No!"

They had, eventually, gotten home, and the boy went to bed.

It was foolish to think that one incident could mean so much. John had probably forgotten it. No: it had not been that, but the years, of theorems and neglect. But it was a fulcrum for his guilt.

The time came when he had only one more winter in prison, and still he did not know where he was going to go. John had never visited him. When he was free, his son would be almost out of college (and walking, but with a limp). But, when he thought of him, he saw him in the hospital bed, with his head turned sideways, helpless; and then he would think of the evening, the park at sundown, and the small boy who pleaded with his father.